



## RESOURCES COMMITTEE

18 November 2015

### PRESENT:

#### Directors

John Hamilton (Chair)  
Sheila Bouitieh  
Elizabeth Bird  
George Clark  
Mick Davison  
Tracy Harrison

#### Advisers

Jon Mallen-Beadle	Managing Director
Neil Bouch	Director of Customers and Communities
Natalie Porthouse	Head of Corporate Services
Jennifer Aston	Support Services Manager
Helen Watson	Involvement Officer
Stuart Gibson	Governance and Risk Officer

#### Apologies

Robert Buckley  
Kathryn Ferdinand

### 22 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

RESOLVED – That Tracy Harrison be appointed as Deputy Chair of the committee until the first meeting after the next Annual General Meeting.

### 23 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting of the committee held on 8 September 2015 were approved as a correct record.

### 24 MATTERS ARISING – HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE

- It was confirmed that risk assessments from Crowhall Towers, Tennyson Court and Newbold Court had been complete.
- It was noted that the two water hygiene inspections/treatments had not been completed by Construction Services at Wrekenton Housing Office and West Park because both buildings were closed.

- It was noted that it had not been possible to carry out the 31 outstanding fire alarm tests to multi storey blocks and sheltered house communal areas due to them all being on a bank holiday Monday.

## 25 COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Following an Internal Audit of Communications in June 2014, it was recommended that a Communications Strategy should be established and maintained to include how the Company aims to communicate with employees, customers and external stakeholders. This should link to the priorities and objectives of the TGHC Five-Year Strategic Plan.

A Communications Strategy has now been developed. It provides an ongoing framework and direction for communications to all audiences of the Company.

It aims to help all employees of the Company to effectively promote all relevant information in relation to Company activity and highlight the excellent work that is undertaken on behalf of all stakeholders.

It will help to ensure that all stakeholders receive the right information, at the right time and in the right way, to meet their diverse needs. This will protect the Company's brand and its good reputation.

In order to develop the Communications Strategy the current position has been considered and potential future opportunities and threats have been identified.

The Communications Strategy will be comprehensively reviewed every three years, with consideration of any significant changes on an annual basis in conjunction with the annual Communications Service Plan. Any changes deemed to be significant will be reported to the TGHC Board for approval as and when they emerge, to ensure that the Communications Strategy remains relevant and fit for purpose.

The committee suggested some additional elements to be included in the Strategy. It was noted that the Strategy was the overarching/fundamental document with a number of other plans underpinning this.

RESOLVED – That the Board be recommended to approve the Communications Strategy 2015-2018, which is attached at Appendix 1 to these minutes, subject to the following comments of the Board being considered: -

- Have regard to the opportunities and threats given that service standards are likely to be impacted upon as a result of the service reductions.
- Given the increasing pressures, recognition of the need to promote and support channel shift for customers – however it was stressed that there could be mixed responses to this from customers.
- Low demand pressures and links to the marketing strategy
- Signposting to financial advice.
- Publications available on pre-tenancy.

## **26 FINANCIAL REGULATIONS**

The Financial Regulations have been reviewed to ensure that they are reasonable and meet the needs of the Company.

They were found to be fit for purpose with only minor amendments made to ensure they meet current financial practices.

The amended Financial Regulations were submitted.

RESOLVED – That the Board be recommended to approve the amended financial regulations, which are attached at Appendix 2 to these minutes.

## **27 PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE STANDARDS – QUARTER 2 2015/16**

The committee received the Performance Indicators and Service Standards results for the second quarter of 2015/16.

There are currently 12 key Performance Indicators and Service Standards that will be reported to this Committee on a quarterly basis.

At the second quarter: -

- Seven indicators were traffic lighted green, which showed that the annual targets for these indicators had been achieved. This was an increase from four at the same period last year.
- No indicators were traffic lighted amber in 2015/16 and 2014/15. Amber indicators showed that target set had not been met but performance had increased on the previous year.
- No indicators were traffic lighted red. Red indicators show that the target set had not been met and performance had decreased compared to the previous year. This was a decrease from three at the same period last year.
- Five indicators were not yet measurable.

The performance results therefore indicated that at the second quarter, performance relating to seven out of the seven measureable Performance Indicators and Service Standards could be traffic lighted as on target, which related to all the indicators. This was an increase in performance compared to the same period last year, when 57% of indicators were on target or improving.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the Performance Indicators and Service Standards results at the second quarter 2015/16.

## **28 HOUSEMARK BENCHMARKING RESULTS 2014/15**

The committee received a report on cost and performance information as detailed in the HouseMark 'Summary of Benchmarking Results 2014/15' report.

A value for money and performance summary was submitted for the main business activities of the organisation.

Cost and performance data was categorised into quartiles.

The committee asked whether it should continue to be a member of this and questioned some of the information in the report.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

## **29 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS – SECOND QUARTER 2015/16**

The committee received an update on the management accounts for the second quarter of the financial year 2015/16.

The Management Accounts Revenue shows a surplus for the second quarter of £238,000. This is due to slippage on vacant posts and overhead budgets where spend will not be realised until later in the year.

The overall position for repairs at the end of the second quarter is an underspend of £649,000. Although the position would suggest that spend is on target, there are a couple of areas of concern. Mears responsive repairs and relets are both over spent, partly due to Mears completing work they received in 2014/15 for which the budget has now transferred to Construction Services. Construction Services budgets are currently underspending partly offsetting the over spend. This area will need to be monitored closely to ensure it comes in on budget by the year end.

The painting programme is currently underspent for both Mears and Construction Services. Due to ongoing negotiations over the contract extension, Construction Services didn't start their painting programme until the end of July 2015. Progress on both delivery streams will be monitored closely over the winter months, as the focus moves to internal schemes, to ensure the programme can be completed by year end.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the financial management of the Revenue and Repairs budgets for the second quarter of the 2015/16 financial year.

## **30 SICKNESS ABSENCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES UPDATE**

The committee received an update on general HR initiatives and developments from April to September 2015, including sickness absence and learning and development activity.

The total sickness absence for the period equates to 3.86 days per person, compared to 4.13 days for the same period last year, which is a decrease of 7%.

Short term absence is defined as a period of less than 15 working days in duration and long term absence is greater than 15 days in duration. Short term absence was 1.64 days per person. This compares with 1.74 days for the same period last year, a decrease of 6%. Long term absence was 2.22 days per person. This compares with 2.39 days for the same period last year, a decrease of 7%

The biggest cause of absence was stress with 260 days lost, however this was a significant improvement on the same period last year when 422 days were lost, a decrease of 38%.

Of the 260 days of stress related absence, 178 days were reported as non-work related stress. This equates to 68% as non-work related absence and 32% work related absence.

Of the 260 days lost to stress related absence, 11 employees reported non-work related stress and four employees reported work related stress

During December, two manager briefing sessions will be delivered by Danny Haplin, Occupational Health Lead Counsellor aimed at providing managers with tips and techniques in managing stress positively.

The Company has held 10 short term sickness absence review meetings with nine first written cautions being issued following these meetings. Ten long term absence review meetings were held.

The committee also received details of sickness absence benchmarking, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) Absence Management Annual Survey Report 2015, health and wellbeing, work life balance, bullying and harassment, other HR initiative and Developments and learning and development activity.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with sickness absence and human resources update for the period April to September 2015.

## **31 HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE**

The committee received an update on the following health and safety activities for the period 1 April to 30 September 2015: -

- Partners Activity
- Accident Reporting
- Asbestos Management
- Fire Safety Management
- Legionella Control
- Fire Alarm Systems and Sprinkler System
- Out of Hours
- Emergency Lighting
- Non domestic gas boilers
- Cyclical Repair and Maintenance
- Lift Maintenance
- Company Construction Related Activities
- Safety Briefing and Alerts Issued by Health and Safety Teams
- Internal Audit of Health and Safety
- Corporate Health and Safety Policies

The Committee asked whether partners were encouraging their staff to make better use of tablet devices to reduce paperwork. It was noted that Construction Services had been spoken to about doing cyclical maintenance through Northgate instead of Total which in turn would reduce the paperwork. A further update would be given to the committee in due course.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the health and safety update for her period April to September 2015.

## **32 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY – UPDATE**

The committee received a summary of the following equality and diversity work within the Company in the second quarter of 2015/16: -

- Knowing our Customers
- Training and Guidance
- Single Equality Scheme
- Hate Crime
- Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Equality
- Young People

The committee was informed that there weren't any plans at the moment through the partnership with Greggs to extend the breakfast clubs outside of term time. It was noted that Churches Together were piloting a scheme.

The committee asked how the Company would be encouraging more people to attend the Talent Match initiative which aimed to get young unemployed people into work or further training. The Company needed to get the message out more by going out into the community. The committee suggested approaching the Youth Council. It was also suggested asking the five young people who attended the session if any of them would talk to the Youth Council.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the progress activity relating to equality and diversity carried out in the second quarter of 2015/16.

## **33 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the committee will be held on Tuesday, 23 February 2016 at 2pm in Room S21 at Gateshead Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead.

## **34 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED – That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the remaining business in accordance with Category 1 of the Company's Access to Information Rules.

## **35 MINUTES (Category 1)**

The minutes of the last meeting of the committee held on 8 September 2015 were approved as a correct record.

## **36 MATTERS ARISING – SUPPORT INITIATIVES WITHIN THE RENT AND INCOME SERVICE**

The additional Employment Adviser to work specifically with council tenants for an initial 12 month period would start early in the New Year.

The additional Advice and Support Officer has been appointed to deal with energy queries.



# **The Gateshead Housing Company's Communications Strategy**

**2015-2018**

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## 1. Introduction

The Gateshead Housing Company's (TGHC) Communications Strategy provides an ongoing framework and direction for communications to all audiences of the Company. It aims to help all employees of the Company to effectively promote all relevant information in relation to Company activity and highlight the excellent work that is undertaken on behalf of all stakeholders.

It will help to ensure that all of our stakeholders receive the right information, at the right time and in the right way, to meet their diverse needs. This will protect the Company's brand and its good reputation.

Key Stakeholders for the company include our tenants, leaseholders, residents, Gateshead Council, partners, the media, our employees, Board Members, Tenants and Residents Associations, Councillors and local MP's.

Effective, appropriate and high quality communication is fundamental to the success of our Company. It is essential in understanding the needs of our customers and providing responsive and accessible services.

Excellent communication is everyone's responsibility and is central to everything we do. It also helps us to change and influence the behaviours of our stakeholders and capture, reflect and respond to our stakeholder experience.

The Communications Strategy will be updated to reflect changing customer perceptions, legislation, social, economic and political influences.

## 2. Background

The Gateshead Housing Company (TGHC) is an Arms-Length Management Organisation (ALMO) responsible for managing homes on behalf of Gateshead Council. We currently manage nearly 20,000 properties and provide all landlord services to council tenants across the Borough. Our responsibilities include:

- Income collection and financial inclusion
- Arrears recovery
- Repairs and maintenance
- Managing the waiting list and letting of properties
- Dealing with empty properties
- All tenancy matters
- Digital Inclusion
- Customer engagement

We were established in 2004 as an independent, not-for-profit organisation which is committed to working in partnership with Gateshead Council and our local communities to deliver high-quality housing services to the people of Gateshead.

We are wholly owned by Gateshead Council but overseen by a Board of Directors. The Board comprises of 15 directors, consisting of:

- 5 Local Tenant Directors – representing the whole Borough
- 5 Independent Directors
- 5 Local Councillors

Talking to customers, listening to their feedback and acting on their changing views is a key focus for TGHC. We have regular meetings with our Tenant and Leaseholders Independent Scrutiny Management Panel (TALSIMAN), which provides independent scrutiny of the way we deliver housing services across Gateshead.

We also work closely with our Service Improvement Groups (SIG's). They represent key areas of the business and bring officers and customers together to monitor performance against our service standards.

### **3. Our vision, aims and objectives**

TGHC's Five Year Strategic Plan 2015-2020 is based on our key challenges and incorporates feedback that has been received from our stakeholders. Our Vision and Values have been refreshed to ensure that our future objectives will get the balance right between delivering on our core responsibilities and achieving our shared ambitions.

**Our Vision** - To provide quality homes and customer-focused services in Gateshead.

**Our Mission Statement** - To be successful in the provision of quality homes and customer-focused services we must work effectively in partnership and invest in our employees.

**Our Values are**, to be:

- Fair
- Customer focused
- Open and honest
- Accountable
- Inclusive, valuing diversity
- Innovative
- Passionate about what we do.

**Our key objectives are to:**

- Invest in our employees and develop new ways of working to deliver our five year strategic plan
- Protect HRA income and investment made in the stock
- Support tenants and sustain tenancies and neighbourhoods
- Have partnership working with Gateshead Council and others to support the delivery of quality homes and customer-focused services

### **4. Purpose of Our Communications Strategy**

The Company aims to ensure that all communications reinforce the vision and the values that all TGHC, employees and partners uphold. The Communications Strategy will help us to achieve our mission and key objectives by:

- Promoting and supporting TGHC's priorities and objectives in its five year plan, as well as Gateshead Council's Vision 2030
- Identifying communications as a priority for TGHC to continue to provide an effective, innovative and co-ordinated way of communicating
- Keeping TGHC's clear identity in how it positions itself in communications activities
- Promoting the good reputation and brand of 'The Gateshead Housing Company' to all audiences
- Outlining clear goals for the disciplines that make up the communications function for the year ahead and beyond

- Providing communications guidance to Board Members and employees
- Improving customer satisfaction
- Keeping pace with the latest developments in technology and e-communications to enhance and develop our business plan

In order to develop our Communications Strategy, we have considered our current position and identified our potential future opportunities and threats:

- We have a renewed five year management agreement with Gateshead Council to manage properties across Gateshead
- We are managing more properties for other organisations
- We have a clear programme of new build and acquisition activities through Keelman Homes (KH)
- We are producing plans for activities for 2015-16 and beyond.
- We have a high level of voids, a significant proportion of which are becoming increasingly difficult to let, so we need to minimise the number of properties becoming empty and maximise the potential rental income
- The number of vulnerable customers and customers with complex issues is high. We need to work in partnership across the Borough to help support customers to sustain their tenancy
- The rollout of Welfare Reform and Universal Credit has started and will continue to have an impact on our customers.

With these in mind, our Communications Strategy will focus on outlining our:

- Communication aims
- Principles for all communication
- Audiences and customers
- Channels of communication
- Guidance on communication issues
- Action Planning for communications for 2015/16 onwards

## **5. Our communication aims**

In order to ensure the strategy is successful, we have developed some clear aims that are accessible, achievable and easily understandable to all of our stakeholders:

- To ensure that local people and stakeholders are aware of our vision, mission and values
- To ensure that local people and stakeholders are clear on our plans for the future and direction of travel
- To maintain the high level of public understanding, awareness and satisfaction with the services provided by TGHC and its partners, including Gateshead Council
- To ensure all employees are informed and have ownership of the activities of TGHC and take responsibility for effective and appropriate communications
- To maintain the clear brand identity for TGHC, both internally and externally
- To promote the good reputation of TGHC (and its partners) locally, regionally and nationally
- To promote TGHC as a company that offers opportunity and choice for all tenants, leaseholders and employees – regardless of Race, Gender, Age, Disability, Sexual Orientation, Religion, Gender Reassignment, Marriage or Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity

- To increase the involvement of our tenants and the community in the decisions making process, consult with them and listen to their needs and views
- To work effectively with partners to ensure cohesive and consistent approaches to media and branding
- To develop efficient, effective and economic communication channels which improve access to and understanding of our services
- To recognise the value of the media as a means of providing information to the public and the promotion of TGHC and its activities. To be open and proactive in our dealings with them.
- To ensure all Health and Safety requirements are communicated effectively to all relevant stakeholders

## 6. Our principles of communication

Although TGHC undertakes communications through a wide variety of channels and formats, we need to ensure that all of our communication remains understandable and appropriate. To ensure consistency, we have developed a set of key principles that all communication should aim to adhere to:

- Focus on achieving our key objectives
- Honest, open and accurate
- Consistent and relevant - themes, messages, tone and style
- Accessible and user-friendly
- Timely and current
- Cost Effective and innovative
- Informative
- Impartial
- Legitimate - in accordance with current legislation, Codes of Practice and TGHC policies and procedures
- High Quality
- Reflects the corporate position
- Uses clear, simple and plain English at all times – offers alternative languages and formats when requested
- Monitored and reviewed on a regular basis

## 7. Our audience and customers

TGHC communicates with a wide variety of internal and external audiences through a range of different formats and channels. Our key audiences include:

### Internal Stakeholders

- Our employees
- The TGHC Board and Scrutiny Committee members
- Gateshead Council employees
- Gateshead Council's Cabinet and Strategy Group
- Trade Unions
- Keelman Homes employees

### External Stakeholders

- Tenants and leaseholders (including their families)
- Customers and applicants
- The TALISMAN Scrutiny Panel

- Other residents of Gateshead, and beyond
- General public
- Local Councillors and MP's
- Press and media – local, national and trade
- Community and voluntary groups
- Under represented communities - including black and ethnic minority communities, older and younger people, disabled people, travelling communities, refugees, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, faith groups and those recognised as being frequently socially excluded
- Other housing providers and associations
- Potential tenants through Tyne and Wear Homes and other surrounding areas
- Partnering contractors and agencies
- National Federation of ALMO's
- Other ALMO's
- Central Government and Government Agencies

## 8. Our communication channels

There are a wide range of channels available to TGHC through which we can communicate with both our internal and external stakeholders. We try to choose the method/s which is most appropriate to the audience and the message. We also consider which will provide the most timely and cost effective means of communication. Electronic means of communication are developing rapidly and we are adopting these alongside the more traditional methods of written and face-to-face communications.

The main methods of communication are:

- Written
- E-communications
- Tele-communications
- Face-to-Face
- Audio/Visual

The main channels of communication TGHC employs have been identified as:

- The Gateshead Housing Company News magazine – produced 4 times per year and the main source of information about TGHC
- Housing Offices/Hubs and other public spaces – regarded as the 'face' of TGHC with face to face access to officers as well as relevant printed information
- e-communications – TGHC has its own website and intranet
- Telephone – TGHC has a dedicated call centre
- The media – proactive and reactive press coverage
- Printed materials – there a comprehensive suite of materials available for customers, employees and other stakeholders
- Customer involvement – involvement plays a vital role in ensuring effective two-way communication
- Social media – TGHC has its own Facebook page and Twitter account
- Direct mailing – via customer letters particularly around rent and leaseholding
- Advertising – schemes running in the local press, radio and TV
- Public meetings and focus groups – regular meetings are held across a wide range of groups to communicate and assess impact and effectiveness
- Internal communications - including regular team meetings, training, monthly Core Brief, weekly HomeWork and Team Briefs.

- TALISMAN – the panel aims to complete up to two scrutiny reviews per year
- Board and Committee meetings – including quarterly meetings and papers available on the website

Appendix 1 provides further detail on timelines and contacts in relation to TGHC channels of communication and publications. Appendix 2 provides guidance for employees on Letter Writing. Appendix 3 outlines the Company's Press Protocol.

## **9. Communications responsibilities**

The Communications Team at TGHC consists of a Communications Manager and a Communications Officer. The Communications Manager is the owner of this strategy and responsible for its effective delivery. This is facilitated by support from the Senior Management Team, Operational Managers, employees and the Board.

A joint understanding and close working relationships between strategic decision makers, communications practitioners and stakeholders is essential to the success of the Communications Strategy. The key functions are outlined below.

### **Communications Team**

The key function of the Communications Team is to manage the Company's corporate identity (brand), image and reputation by managing and providing advice, support and guidance on:

- Website, Intranet, Facebook and Twitter – daily management and development
- Marketing
- Public relations, press releases and dealing with the media
- Direct mailings
- Design and print
- Publications
- Branding – image and identity
- Event Management
- Internal Communications
- Accessibility – providing information in different formats
- Actively seeking promotional activities from other members of staff
- Interpreting and relaying external information
- Supporting the five year business plan
- Sponsorship
- Crisis management
- Community relations
- Communications coordination
- Encouraging customer and employee engagement
- Keeping information accurate, relevant and up to date
- Ensuring staff are aware of, and use appropriately, the most accurate language, methods and channels of communication

### **Senior Management Team**

The Senior Management Team provides support to the Communications Team at a strategic level, providing a background for the strategic context of the Company and the direction of travel. Its key communications responsibilities are to:

- Make staff aware of key messages and relevant information

- Ensure direct links to achieving the key objectives within the five year business plan
- Oversee the annual events programme and Communications Service Plan and ensure its delivery
- Approve press releases and statements
- Make strategic decisions and inform the Communications Team
- Encourage all staff to take responsibility for effective communication within their service and company-wide
- Encourage participation amongst staff and Board members
- Identify future opportunities and threats
- Feedback any updates, issues or concerns

## **Operational Managers**

Operational Managers have direct responsibility for staff in their service areas and need to ensure staff are aware of all relevant information and also provide a channel for staff to feedback. They provide regular updates to the Communications team on the key activity and messages from their service areas. Their key communications responsibilities are to:

- Make staff aware of the key messages
- Direct any press enquiries to the Communications Team
- Encourage staff to appropriately promote the Company's corporate identity and their service activity
- Be aware of Company activity and events and ensure staff participation
- Identify future marketing activities or events and inform the Communications Team
- Respond promptly to any requests for information from the Communications Team
- Direct all press enquiries to the Communications Team and make staff aware of this
- Be proactive and aware of the Communication Service Plan, key objectives and events programme
- Agree communication protocols, methods and channels of communication with the Communications Team
- Identify future opportunities and threats
- Ensure consistent communications with other service areas and company-wide

## **All Employees**

All employees are required to take a proactive approach to communications. They are responsible for ensuring that communications adhere to our principles of communication at all times, facilitated by the Communications Team. Employees key responsibilities in relation to communications are to:

- Keep the Communications Team up to date with suggestions and ideas for good news stories, staff and tenants newsletters and events
- Direct all media and press enquiries to the Communications Team – employees should not speak or write to the media directly with regard to TGHC
- Seek approval from the Communications Team regarding any letters, questionnaires, surveys, publications etc.
- Help customers and other employees to communicate effectively with each other and the Company
- Keep customer profile information up to date and contact them via their preferred methods
- Encourage participation and effective communication between other employees and across service areas (cross-cutting issues)

- Keep themselves aware of the Company's key objectives and company-wide communication principles
- Communicate in a relevant, timely and accurate manner
- Provide regular feedback on service activities to the Communications Team, Managers and other employees

### **Board Members**

The TGHC Board has responsibility for approving the Communication Strategy and setting the communications budgets on an annual basis. All members also have a responsibility to uphold the key elements of this strategy in relation to corporate communications and the TGHC brand identity at all times. As part of the integrated strategy, they are required to direct any press enquiries and communication information through the Communications Team for advice, support and guidance.

### **Communications Compliance**

There are areas where it is unwise, and may even be unlawful, not to comply with certain standards and codes of practice in relation to communications. The Communications Team will ensure that all of TGHC's communications will be:

- In accordance with the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity
- Consistent and legitimate with the Communications Team providing advice, support and guidance and having ultimate responsibility for the maintenance of corporate standards
- Compliant with current Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation
- Branded appropriately and follow corporate design guidelines

## **10. Corporate Identity (Branding)**

Although we deliver services on behalf of Gateshead Council, The Gateshead Housing Company is an ALMO which has a separate identity. The TGHC brand is the way in which the Company distinguishes itself and its provision of services from other providers, companies and the Council's services.

The corporate identity or 'brand' of TGHC is critical in establishing the company's key messages and plays a big part in how we are perceived by customers, partners, the housing industry and the general public.

The Company needs to ensure that its visual identity is professional, consistent, vibrant and engaging and that this helps to maintain its positive reputation. The Communications Team will be able to advise on:

- The TGHC Logo and correct usage
- Use of colours and fonts
- Display banners
- Presentation templates
- Photography
- Print and design
- Advertising
- Publications
- Letter writing

Appendix 3 Corporate Identity (Branding) Guidance provides further detailed advice on the main branding issues and compliance.

To ensure that our company values are communicated effectively and communication is in keeping with our corporate identity:

- Key messages must be consistent and have a high profile
- All published and electronic material must be easily recognisable as being originally from TGHC in terms of visual identity and content
- The TGHC logo and strapline 'Providing quality homes and customer focused services in Gateshead' must be used to reflect our corporate identity and brand
- Services are made accessible to our customers
- The Communications Team monitor the corporate identity guidelines and advise all employees on related matters

## **11. Partnership Working**

TGHC works in partnership with a wide range of organisations, from large established contractors to smaller community based organisations. Our key partners are Gateshead Council, contractors and TALISMAN.

Partnership working is one of our four key objectives:

**'Partnership working with Gateshead Council and others to support the delivery of quality homes and customer-focused services'**

It is vital that the partnerships we are involved in communicate in an effective way, which is consistent with our own aims and principles. Their communications should also reflect and acknowledge our involvement appropriately, as should any partnership branding. Development of an agreed and standardised approach to communication and branding should be a key focus at the start of any partnership to ensure a co-ordinated message. The Communications Team will be able to provide advice, support and guidance in this area to ensure that corporate identity is managed appropriately.

## **12. Critical Success Factors**

In order to be effective, communications activity needs to be in line with this strategy and requires adequate resourcing and high priority status company-wide. Our aim is to achieve a fully integrated approach to managing communications which is embedded across all areas of the business. Our critical success factors have been identified as:

- The Communications Strategy underpins the five year business plan and achievement of our four key objectives
- Communication is incorporated into the early stages of any planning and management processes
- The Communications Team is consulted at an early stage in relation all communications activity to ensure a consistent approach and to provide relevant advice
- All employees are aware of their role in relation to communications and actively participate
- Methods and channels of communication are regularly reviewed to keep pace with changing technology, customer perceptions and the operating environment and new methods are considered and implemented, where appropriate

- TGHC messages are consistent, appropriate and add value to our customers and service provision
- Excellent communication is achieved both internally and externally and acknowledged as the key to enhance awareness and corporate learning

### **13. Evaluation and Assessment**

TGHC recognises the importance of continuously assessing and evaluating the methods and channels of communication in order to ensure that we communicate in the best way possible and achieve our key objectives. This success of our Communication Strategy is assessed via:

- Bi-annual tenant and annual employee surveys – customer and employee satisfaction
- Measuring free press coverage (both in terms of advertising value and sentiment)
- Online influence and sentiment
- The quality and usefulness of the company's website and digital communications
- Attendance at the National Federation of ALMO Communications Group
- Working with Tyne and Wear Homes partners
- Levels of access to the company's websites (external and intranet)
- Progress with the Communications Action Plan
- Uptake of direct mail and email campaigns
- Internal communications surveys
- Compliments and complaints
- Customer and employee feedback
- Value for Money and efficiencies are achieved
- Economic pressures are managed effectively

The results will be co-ordinated on an annual basis in order to inform the annual Communications Service Plan.

### **14. Monitoring and Review**

The Communications Manager will be responsible for ensuring that the Communications Strategy is implemented and delivered, and all employees and Board Members are aware of their roles and responsibilities.

The Communications Strategy will be comprehensively reviewed every three years, with consideration of any significant changes on an annual basis in conjunction with the annual Communications Service Plan. Any changes deemed to be significant will be reported to the TGHC Board for approval as and when they emerge, to ensure that the Communications Strategy remains relevant and fit for purpose.

### **15. Linked Documents**

To ensure that communication is effective and meets the principles of communication outlined in section 6, a range of complimentary guidance and corporate assistance is available to officers involved in any communication processes. The Communications Strategy should be delivered in conjunction with:

- TGHC Five Year Strategic Plan 2015-2020
- Communications Service Plan
- Employee Handbook
- Letter Writing Guide
- Employee Behavioural Framework

- Social Media Policy
- Governance Handbook for Employees and Board Members
- Press protocol
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Health and Safety Handbook
- Inclusion Plan 2015-2018
- Data Protection Statement
- Freedom of Information Publication Scheme

## **16. Contact Details**

For more information on the Communications Strategy or for advice, support and guidance in relation to communications activity, please contact Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager, The Gateshead Housing Company

- Email: [ianclarkin@gatesheadhousing.co.uk](mailto:ianclarkin@gatesheadhousing.co.uk)
- Tel: 0191 433 5382.

## Communications Channels – Timelines and Contact Details

### Annual

#### **Annual review**

Contact Officer: Helen Watson, Involvement Officer and Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager

Tel No: (0191) 433 5376/5382

Distribution Date: October (along with rent statement)

Distribution List: All tenants and leaseholders

Format: A5 litho printed magazine (along with online content)

#### **Moving Forward programme production**

Contact Officer: Helen Watson, Involvement Officer and Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager

Tel No: (0191) 433 5376/5382

Distribution Date: February (along with rent review letter)

Distribution List: All tenants and leaseholders

Format: A5 litho printed magazine (along with online content)

#### **Guide to your new home**

Contact Officer: Various officers and Kerrie Slavin, Communications Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5386

Distribution Date: December onwards (as part of void pack)

Distribution List: All new tenants and leaseholders

Format: A5 litho printed magazine (along with online content)

#### **Dampness and condensation guide**

Contact Officer: Barry Chippindale, Senior Customer Care Officer and Kerrie Slavin, Communications Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5386

Distribution Date: December onwards (as part of void pack)

Distribution List: All new tenants and leaseholders

Format: A5 litho printed magazine (along with online content)

#### **Residents' guide to water hygiene**

Contact Officer: Christine McFarlane, Cyclical Maintenance Manager; Janice Adams, Leasehold Manager; and Kerrie Slavin, Communications Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5377/5396/5386

Distribution Date: December onwards (as part of void pack)

Distribution List: All new tenants and leaseholders

Format: A5 litho printed magazine (along with online content)

### Weekly

#### **HomeWork**

Contact Officer: Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager/Kerrie Slavin, Communications Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5382/5386

Distribution Date: Every Friday

Distribution List: All employees

Format: Intranet update by Communications Team

### **Tyne and Wear Homes properties to let**

Contact Officer: Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager/Kerrie Slavin, Communications Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5382/5386

Distribution Date: Every Thursday and Monday

Distribution List: All Tyne and Wear Homes scheme members

Format: Website updates and e-newsletter by Communications Team

### **Monthly**

#### **Core Brief**

Contact Officer: Neil Bouch, Director of Customers and Communities and Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager/Kerrie Slavin, Communications Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5303/5382/5386

Distribution Date: 1<sup>st</sup> of each month

Distribution List: All employees

Format: Intranet update by Communications Team

### **Quarterly/Bi-annual**

#### **TGHC news magazine**

Contact Officer: Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager/Kerrie Slavin, Communications Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5382/5386

Distribution Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> week of April, July, October and January with rent statements

Distribution List: All tenants and leaseholders

Format: A5 litho printed magazine (along with online content)

#### **Here&now news magazine for over 50s**

Contact Officer: Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager/Kerrie Slavin, Communications Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5382/5386

Distribution Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> week of July and January with rent statements

Distribution List: All tenants and leaseholders

Format: A5 litho printed magazine (along with online content)

#### **Quarterly rent statements/rent increase letter**

Contact Officer: Jonathan Graham/Andrew Curtis and Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager/Kerrie Slavin, Communications Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5836/5401/5382/5386

Distribution Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> week of April, July, October and January (along with rent increase letter in late February)

Distribution List: All non-direct debit paying customers (homes and garages)

Format: Printed letter posted with TGHC news magazine

#### **Leasehold Statements**

Contact Officer: Janice Adams, Leasehold Manager and Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager/Kerrie Slavin, Communications Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5396/5382/5386

Distribution Date: June and January

Distribution List: All leaseholders

Format: Printed letters and publications

## **Daily/Ad-hoc**

### **Publications/materials (see list below for current publications)**

Contact Officer: Various (depending on content) and Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager/Kerrie Slavin, Communications Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5382/5386

Distribution Date: Throughout year – as changes and/or reprints needed

Distribution List: Relevant tenants and leaseholders

Format: A5 litho printed magazines (along with online content)

### **Team Brief**

Contact Officer: Relevant officer (depending on content) and Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager/Kerrie Slavin, Communications Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5382/5386

Distribution Date: Various

Distribution List: All relevant employees

Format: Intranet updates by Communications Team

### **TGHC websites, Intranet, Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms**

Contact Officer: Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager/Kerrie Slavin, Communications Officer (plus Stuart Gibson, Governance and Risk Officer for agendas and decisions)

Tel No: (0191) 433 5382/5386/5308

Distribution Date: Daily

Format: Updates to websites and social media

### **Tyne and Wear Homes materials (for whole scheme/partners)**

Contact Officer: Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager and relevant officer(s) at The Gateshead Housing Company, North/South Tyneside Homes and Your Homes Newcastle

Tel No: (0191) 433 5386

Distribution Date: As needed

Distribution List: All relevant Tyne and Wear Homes partners

Format: Printed and online materials

### **Direct mailings/letters**

Contact Officer: Relevant officer (depending on mailing) and Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager/Kerrie Slavin, Communications Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5382/5386

Distribution Date: Various

Distribution List: Relevant tenants and leaseholders

Format: Printed materials (including letters, postcards and publications)

### **Surveys**

Contact Officer: Helen Watson, Involvement Officer and Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager

Tel No: (0191) 433 5376/5382

Distribution Date: Throughout year (as needed)

Distribution List: Relevant tenant and leaseholders

Format: Printed and electronic surveys

### **TALISMAN**

Contact Officer: Stuart Gibson, Governance and Risk Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5308

Distribution Date: Throughout year (as needed)

Distribution List: Members of TALISMAN

Format: Updates to TALISMAN website and meeting agendas/papers

### **TGHC Board Meetings**

Contact Officer: Stuart Gibson, Governance and Risk Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5308

Distribution Date: Quarterly

Distribution List: Board and committee members

Format: Updates to website and meeting agendas/papers

### **Service Improvement Groups**

Contact Officer: Martin Poulter, Involvement Manager

Tel No: (0191) 433 5376

Distribution Date: Throughout year

Distribution List: SIG members

Format: Meeting agendas and papers

### **Tea Time Talks**

Contact Officer: Support Officer to the Managing Director and Ian Clarkin,  
Communications Manager/Kerrie Slavin, Communications Officer

Tel No: (0191) 433 5300/5382/5386

Distribution Date: Throughout year

Distribution List: All employees

Format: Drop-in sessions

### **Current publications (in addition to those outlined above)**

- Investment Guides – Fire
- Investment Guides – Bathrooms
- Investment Guides – Kitchens
- Investment Guides – Doors
- Investment Guides – Electrics
- Investment Guides – Insulation
- Investment Guides – Kitchens FAQs
- Investment Guides – Bathroom FAQs
- Guide to the Company
- Guide to Repairs
- Guide to Rent and Benefits
- Guide to Payment Options (x 5)
- Guide to Estate Tours
- Guide to types of Tenancies
- Guide to ending your Tenancy
- Guide to Gas Servicing
- Guide to the Lettable Standard
- Guide to Furnished Tenancies
- Guide to Antisocial Behaviour
- Guide to Noise Nuisance
- Guide to Getting Involved
- Guide to Compliments
- Guide to Opening Hours
- Guide to Contacting Us
- Guides to Sheltered Schemes (by 30 plus)
- Guide to Caretaking
- Guide to Concierge
- Guide to Fire Safety in Multi-Storey Blocks
- Guide to Tyne and Wear Homes

- Guide to Mutual Exchanges
- Guide to being a Board Member
- Guide to the Gardening Service – plus other materials
- HomeStyle Guide and Price Guide
- Health and Wellbeing Materials.

## **TGHC Letter Writing Guidance**

This document sets out The Gateshead Housing Company house-style of letter writing. All employees must follow this style of letter writing to ensure our communication is consistent and to promote the corporate identity of TGHC.

If you have any questions or require any clarification, please contact Ian Clarkin, Communications Manager on 0191 433 5382.

### **Layout**

- Use Arial font size 12. If you are writing to someone who you know has reading difficulties, use font size 14.
- Use single line spacing
- Separate paragraphs with double line spacing
- To emphasise a word use **bold**. Do not underline or use capitals.
- Avoid the use of italics.
- Use a left-aligned format
- Use black type on a white background
- Use headings to split longer letters into logical sections

### **Dates**

- Dates should always be in the format 13 October 2015

### **Details of the person you are writing to**

- In the address block, give the full name and title, including the initials, of the person you are writing to. For example, Mr J M Brown

### **Writing to a company or organisation**

- In the address block, give the full name and title, including initials, followed by the persons' job title. For example:

Mr J M Brown  
Assistant Manager  
Happy Housing Association

### **Punctuation**

Do not use punctuation when typing:

- Names;
- Addresses;
- Titles;
- Greetings; or
- Goodbyes.

### **Greetings**

- If you know the name of the person, use it.
- If you don't their name, use:
  - Dear Sir
  - Dear Madam
  - Dear Sir or Madam
  - Dear Sirs

- **Do not** write 'Dear Tenant' or Dear Customer'. We know the names of our tenants. Please contact the Communications Team for guidance on sending a standard letter to a large number of tenants or customers. They will arrange a mail merge from our database.

If a woman signs her letter Julie Smith, you can respond with either:

- Dear Jane Smith; or
- Dear Ms Smith

**But not:**

- Dear Ms J Smith

### **Headings**

Headings are not always essential. Avoid the use of:

- **Re: Repairs**

Only use heading where you want to highlight some specific information.

### **Endings**

- If you begin the letter with 'Dear (Name)', you need to end the letter with 'Yours sincerely'.
- If you begin the letter in any other way, you need to end the letter with 'Yours faithfully'.

### **Signatures**

- The person writing the letter should sign it and list their job title. For example:

Yours sincerely

Ian Clarkin  
Communications Manager

- Some of our standard letters will go out in the name of the Managing Director, where they are printed automatically off the database.

### **Copies**

- If you want to make the reader aware that you are sending copies to other people, list their names at the foot of the letter, under the heading 'Copies to'. Do not use 'cc'.

### **Enclosures**

- If you mention enclosures in your document, you do not have to list them all separately, just enclose the documents.

### **References**

- The standard TGHC letterheads have spaces for 'Our Reference' and Your Reference'. Please ensure that these are accurately completed to allow for accurate filing and follow-up where necessary.

## **Language and Content**

In line with our principles of communication (see Section 6 of the Communications Strategy), we need to ensure that all of our communication remains understandable, appropriate and consistent. You must ensure that the language used in the letter and the content of the letter is:

- Accurate
- Relevant
- Clear, simple and in plain English
- Readable
- Timely
- Factual
- Impartial – does not represent a personal opinion
- Legitimate – in line with current legislation, Codes of Practice and TGHC policies and procedures
- Reflects the corporate position
- Alternative formats and languages are offered where requested and available

When writing a letter (or in any other written communication) you should use the following points in order to communicate more clearly:

### **Use short, simple sentences and make every word count**

- A good guide is between 15-20 words per sentence
- Keep your sentence to one, clear idea
- Try not to give too much information or explanation, stick to the main points

### **Write as though you are talking to your reader**

- Try to imagine talking to your reader
- Say 'I' or 'me'
- Call your service 'we'
- Call your reader 'you'

### **Use active, rather than passive, verbs**

- Active verbs make a letter sound more clear and natural
- Active verbs put the main point at the start of the sentence
- You should try to make 80-90% of your verbs active

For example – 'Neil paid the rent' is active, 'The rent was paid by Neil' is passive.

'We will consider your housing application shortly' is active, 'The housing application will shortly be considered by us' is passive.

### **Use everyday words**

- Try to keep your language simple
- Help your reader to understand what you are trying to communicate to them
- Help your reader to follow the text
- Help your reader to keep focused on the main points

For example say - 'help' instead of 'assist'  
'end' instead of 'terminate'  
'about' instead of 'concerning'  
'often' instead of 'frequently'

## **Check the accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar**

- Use the spelling and grammar tool in Word to check your document
- Use the readability feature in Word to check the reading level of your document

## **Avoid using jargon or technical language**

- Avoid using words or expressions that may be difficult for others to understand
- Avoid using jargon that may be specific to your particular occupation that others may not understand e.g. technical, financial, trade
- If usage is unavoidable, try to provide a short explanation of what difficult or specific words mean

## **Use lists to explain complex scenarios**

- Break down long and complicated sentences into bulleted lists
- Use to explain a logical sequence of events
- Use to address a number of points that need to be made or in response to a point someone else has raised

There are three lists you can consider using:

- A list where each point is a complete sentence, for example:

You can contact TGHC In the following ways:

- Email us at [TGHC@gatesheadhousing.co.uk](mailto:TGHC@gatesheadhousing.co.uk)
- Contact us through our website at [www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk](http://www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk)
- Fill in and return the attached form
- Telephone us on 0191 433 5300

- A list which is a continuous sentence, for example:

This information leaflet tells you how:

- to pay a compliment;
- to make a complaint; and
- to make a suggestion.

- A list which is made up of short points, for example:

When you attend ICT training, please bring with you:

a pen;  
a ruler; and  
a note pad.

## **Get someone else to check it, where possible**

- Get a colleague to check your letter when you have written it
- Make sure they understand it correctly
- Ask for help if you are unsure of anything, don't guess to fill in any gaps in factual information

## **Other points to consider**

- Think about the reader and ask yourself:
  - How much do they know about the subject you are writing about?
  - What information do you need to write the letter?
  - What information do you need to give them in the letter?
  - What do you want the outcomes of the letter to be?
  - Will you or the reader need to take further action?

- Read your letter out loud and consider:
  - Is the main point at the start of the letter?
  - Does it sound clear?
  - Will the reader understand?
  - Is the letter simple and easy to read?
  - Is the letter polite, correct and complete?
  
- Do a final check for correct spelling and punctuation

## **The Gateshead Housing Company - Press protocol**

It is important that when information is given out to the public or other groups of people it must be in a relevant style and contain accurate information.

This protocol applies to any media of information including electronic, radio broadcasts, videos, written material etc.

The Communications Manager (and in their absence the Communications Officer) is responsible for giving information to the press.

The Managing Director, Director of Customers and Communities and/or relevant Head of Service must check all articles, press releases, advertisements and any other written material.

If the press approaches any employee of the housing company (either in person or by telephone or email etc.) then they must redirect them to the Communications Manager immediately.

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### **Boilerplate for media releases**

The following information (aka the 'boilerplate') will be attached to all media releases.

**Notes to editors: Please call Ian Clarkin on 0191 433 5382, 0782 583 3603 or email [ianclarkin@gatesheadhousing.co.uk](mailto:ianclarkin@gatesheadhousing.co.uk) for more information.**

**Our registered company name is 'The Gateshead Housing Company'. Please use in full on first usage and then 'the housing company' or 'the company' thereafter.**

**The Gateshead Housing Company manages nearly 20,000 homes in the North East of England on behalf of Gateshead Council.**

**We work with residents and the wider community to provide quality homes and customer-focused services in Gateshead.**

**Regular updates can be found at [www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk](http://www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk), [www.facebook.com/gatesheadhousingcompany](https://www.facebook.com/gatesheadhousingcompany), and [www.twitter.com/gatesheadhc](https://www.twitter.com/gatesheadhc)**



# The Gateshead Housing Company

Working with Gateshead Council

## FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

### Contents

#### Section

1	Financial Administration
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3	Accounting
4	<b>Audit</b>
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6	Imprest Accounts
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14	<b>Security</b>
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18	<b>Fixed Assets</b>
19	<b>Taxation</b>
20	Revision of Financial Procedure Rules

## Introduction

These regulations control the way the company manages its finances and safeguards its assets.

All employees are responsible for ensuring that these financial regulations are complied with.

By complying with these regulations, employees responsible for financial matters will gain assurance that they have followed the appropriate financial procedures.

Relevant employees in the Finance Team will provide any additional advice and guidance that employees may require.

These Financial Regulations should be read in conjunction with the Company's other relevant policies and procedures, which underpin these regulations, including the:

- Code of Conduct for Employees
- Probity Policy
- Information and Communication Technology Security Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Fraud and Corruption Policy

### 1. Financial Administration

- 1.1. The Head of Corporate Services is responsible for the proper administration of the Company's financial affairs and is Chief Financial Adviser to the Company and the Board.
- 1.2. The Head of Corporate Services is responsible for the production of financial management information and will keep the Company and the Board informed of the financial implications of all new policies and changes to policies.
- 1.3. Each employee must consult the Head of Corporate Services on any matter within his/her view which is liable to materially affect the finances of the Company before any provisional or other commitment is incurred or before reporting to the Board on the matter.
- 1.4. Each employee is responsible for establishing internal control so that the activities under his/her control are dealt with efficiently and effectively. Internal control covers financial and other measures, which are established to:
  - (i) safeguard the company's assets;
  - (ii) ensure reliability of records; and
  - (iii) monitor adherence to policies and directives.
- 1.5. The Head of Corporate Services may regulate the day to day financial administration of the company by the issue of more detailed administrative and accounting instructions to supplement these regulations.

## **2. Revenue and Repairs Budgets and Investment Programme**

- 2.1 The annual revenue and repairs budget and investment programme will be subject to the approval of the Board.
- 2.2 The Head of Corporate Services will keep under review, and (after consultation with the Managing Director) report to the Board on:
- (i) the company's long-term financial position
  - (ii) the availability of revenue, repair and capital resources
  - (iii) performance against the annual revenue and repair budget and investment programme.
- 2.3 All proposals to the Board involving expenditure must be by the Head of Corporate Services and indicate the financial position in relation to the budget or programme.
- 2.4 Where it appears that there may be a significant variation in either approved expenditure or approved income the employee concerned, after consultation with the Head of Corporate Services, must inform the Board as soon as it is realised that the significant variation may occur.

## **3. Accounting**

- 3.1. The Head of Corporate Services is responsible for keeping the financial accounts of the Company. All accounting procedures and records will be determined by the Head of Corporate Services.
- 3.2. All accounts and accounting records of the Company will be compiled by the Head of Corporate Services or under his/her direction. The following principles are to be observed in the operation of accounting systems: -
- (i) The duties of providing information regarding sums due to or from the Company and of calculating, checking and recording those sums must be separated as completely as possible from the duties of collecting or disbursing them.
  - (ii) Employees responsible for examining and checking the accounts of financial transactions must not themselves be involved in any of these transactions.

## **4. Audit**

- 4.1. There will be a continuous internal audit under the independent control of an internal auditor appointed by the Board which will review, appraise and report upon:
- (i) the soundness, adequacy and application of internal controls;
  - (ii) the extent to which the assets and interests of the Council and the Company are accounted for and safeguarded from losses of all kinds arising from:-

- a. fraud and other offences,
  - b. waste, extravagance, inefficient administration, poor value for money or other cause;
- (iii) the suitability, reliability and effectiveness of financial and other management data developed within the Company.

**4.2. There will also be an annual external audit under the independent control of an external auditor appointed by the Board.**

4.3. Any member of the internal or external audit service will, when acting within these financial regulations, have authority to:

- (i) enter at all reasonable times on any company premises or land;
- (ii) have access to all records, documents and correspondence and any other sources of relevant information relating to any financial and other transactions of the Company;
- (iii) require such explanations as he/she believes to be necessary concerning any matter; and
- (iv) require any person to produce cash, stores or any other company property.

4.4. The internal and external auditor will report directly to the Audit Committee and will have access to the Audit Committee Chair at any time necessary without the interference of officers.

## **5. Banking Arrangements, Cheques and Credit Cards**

- 5.1 All banking arrangements are to be made by the Strategic Director, Corporate Resources of Gateshead Council in consultation with the company's Head of Corporate Services. A service level agreement is in place which covers this function.
- 5.2 All cheques are to be ordered only on the authority of the Strategic Director, Corporate Resources of Gateshead Council who will make proper arrangements for their safe custody.
- 5.3 Cheques on Gateshead Council's main bank accounts on behalf of the Company must bear the facsimile signature of Gateshead Council's Strategic Director, Corporate Resources or be signed by Gateshead Council's Strategic Director, Corporate Resources or other employee authorised by him/her to do so.
- 5.4 A bank account is held for a credit card in the name of the Managing Director. This bank account is linked to Gateshead Council's main bank account and is paid for through a monthly invoice received from the bank. This invoice details all transactions. All receipts must be provided to evidence the payments made with the credit card. All transactions undertaken with this credit card must be signed for by the Managing Director.

5.5 A further credit card is also held under the name of the Managing Director and this card is held securely by the Finance Team. This credit card is paid via a monthly invoice received from the credit card company. This invoice details all transactions. All receipts must be provided to evidence the payments made with the credit card. All transactions undertaken with this credit card must be signed for by the Managing Director or Head of Corporate Services.

## 6. **Imprest Accounts**

6.1 The Head of Corporate Services will provide such accounts as he/she considers appropriate for employees of the company who may need them for the purpose of defraying petty cash and other expenses. These accounts are to be maintained in the imprest system.

6.2 Where he/she considers it appropriate, the Head of Corporate Services will by arrangement with Gateshead Council's Strategic Director, Corporate Resources open an account with Gateshead Council's bankers for use by the imprest holder who must not allow the account to be overdrawn, except with the Head of Corporate Service's express permission.

6.3 Income must not be paid into an imprest account but must be banked in accordance with Financial Regulation 8.6.

6.4 Payments are limited to minor items of expenditure and to such other items as the Head of Corporate Services may approve and must be supported by a receipted voucher wherever possible. Proper vouchers will be required for all payments which include VAT.

6.5 When requested by the Head of Corporate Services, an employee responsible for an imprest account must provide a certificate indicating the state of the account.

6.6 On leaving the employment of the company, or otherwise ceasing to be entitled to hold an imprest account, an employee must account to the Head of Corporate Services for the amount advanced.

## 7. **Petty Cash**

7.1 The Head of Corporate Services will provide such accounts as he/she considers appropriate for employees of the company who may need them for the purpose of defraying petty cash and other expenses. These amounts are to be held within the safe on the premises in which they are provided.

7.2 Income must not be paid into petty cash but must be banked in accordance with Financial Regulation 8.6.

7.3 Payments are limited to minor items of expenditure for the premises (personal items of expenditure such as car parking tickets must be reclaimed through the expenses system) and to such other items as the Head of Corporate Services may approve and must be supported by a receipted voucher wherever possible. Proper vouchers will be required for all payments which include VAT.

- 7.4 When requested by the Head of Corporate Services, an employee responsible for petty cash must provide a certificate indicating the state of the account.
- 7.5 On leaving the employment of the company, or otherwise ceasing to be entitled to hold petty cash, an employee must account to the Head of Corporate Services for the amount advanced.

## **8. Income**

- 8.1 The collection of all sums due to the Company, either in its own right or as agent to Gateshead Council will be supervised by the Head of Corporate Services who will make and maintain adequate arrangements for prompt and proper accounting for all cash, including its collection, recovery, custody, control and deposit.
- 8.2 Particulars of all charges to be made for work done, services rendered, or goods supplied by the Company and particulars of all other amounts due, including grants, must be promptly notified by all employees to the Head of Corporate Services in a form approved by him/her; and all accounts for income due to the Company are to be rendered promptly by or in a manner approved by the Head of Corporate Services.
- 8.3 The Head of Corporate Services must be notified immediately of all money due to the Company and of contracts, leases, grants and other agreements and arrangements entered into which involve the receipt of money by the Company, and the Head of Corporate Services may inspect any documents or other evidence in this connection as he/she may decide.
- 8.4 The Head of Corporate Services must be consulted on any proposals for the introduction of, or a variation in, a scale of charges prior to submission to the Board.
- 8.5 Arrangements for the supply and control of all receipt books, tickets and other such items must be approved by the Head of Corporate Services.
- 8.6 All money received by an employee on behalf of the Company must without delay be paid to the Head of Corporate Services or, as he/she may direct, to the Council's designated bank account or transmitted directly to any other body or person entitled to it. No deduction may be made from such money unless specifically authorised by the Head of Corporate Services. Any person who banks money must enter, on the paying-in slip, a reference to the related debt (such as the receipt number or the name of the debtor or otherwise indicate the origin of the cheque). The name of the office or establishment must be shown on the reverse of each cheque.
- 8.7 Income received by a cashier or other authorised employee of the Company must be immediately acknowledged by the issue of a receipt or ticket or by other method agreed by the Head of Corporate Services. Every transfer of official money from one employee to another must be recorded in writing by the signature of the employee who has received it.

- 8.8 Personal cheques must not be cashed out of any money held on behalf of the Company.
- 8.9 The Head of Corporate Services may advance such sums as may be necessary for the purpose of change money, and the existence of these sums will be regularly verified.

## 9. **Orders for Work, Goods and Services**

- 9.1 Official orders, including those produced electronically, are to be in a form approved by the Head of Corporate Services and the Company Secretary and are to be signed or electronically transmitted only by nominated employees authorised by nominated employees. Copies of all orders, including electronic media, must be available to the Head of Corporate Services. The order, supply and control of official orders, including the use of electronic signatures, is supervised by the Head of Corporate Services.
- 9.2 Official orders must be issued for all work, goods or services to be supplied to the Company except for supplies of utility services, for periodical payments such as rent or rates, for petty cash purchases or any other exceptions approved by the Head of Corporate Services.
- 9.3 Verbal orders may only be given in cases of extreme urgency. All such orders must be confirmed in writing and the official order must be clearly marked "confirmation order".
- 9.4 The printed instructions of the Head of Corporate Services must be complied with and, wherever practicable, the duties of ordering and receiving goods and certifying the respective invoices for payment, are not to be performed by the same employee.

## 10. **Payment of Accounts**

- 10.1 Apart from petty cash and other payments from authorised imprest accounts, the normal method of payment of money due from the company will be by BACS or other electronic means from the Council's designated bank account or, by exception, cheque.
- 10.2 The authorised employee issuing an order is responsible for examining, verifying and certifying the related invoice(s). Such certification is to be in manuscript. The names of employees authorised to sign such records will be notified by authorised employees and be held by the Head of Corporate Services, together with specimen signatures, and must be amended in the event of any change.
- 10.3 Before approving an account, the authorised employee must have complied with the detailed printed instructions of the Head of Corporate Services in relation particularly to the following: -
- (i) the work, goods or services to which the account relates must have been received, carried out, examined and approved; and be in accordance with specification;

- (ii) the prices, trade discounts, other allowances, credits and value added tax must be correct;
  - (iii) the relevant expenditure must have been properly incurred and be within the relevant estimate provision;
  - (iv) appropriate entries must have been made in inventories, stores records or stock books as required; and
  - (v) the account must not have been previously passed for payment and must be a proper liability of the company, either in its own right or as an agent of Gateshead Council.
- 10.4 Duly authorised accounts must be passed without delay to the Head of Corporate Services who may make such enquiries and request such information and explanations as he/she considers necessary.
- 10.5 Invoices subject to discount for prompt payment must be passed to the Head of Corporate Services in sufficient time to be paid before the discount date.
- 10.6 Any amendment to an account must be made in ink and be initialled by the employee making it, stating briefly the reasons where they are not self-evident.

## 11. **Salaries, Wages and Pensions**

- 11.1 The payment of all salaries, wages, pensions, compensation and other emoluments to all employees or former employees of the Company is to be made by the payroll section at Gateshead Council as approved by the Head of Corporate Services and controlled by a Service Level Agreement.
- 11.2 The payroll section at Gateshead Council must be notified, within the agreed timetable and in the form prescribed, of all matters affecting the payment of such emoluments and in particular: -
- (i) appointments, resignations, dismissals, suspensions, secondments and transfers;
  - (ii) absences from duty for sickness or other reason, apart from approved paid leave;
  - (iii) changes in remuneration other than normal increments and pay awards and agreements of general application; and
  - (iv) information necessary to maintain records of service for pensions, income tax, national insurance and the like.
- 11.3 Appointments of all employees must be made in accordance with the regulations of the Company and the approved establishments, grades and rates of pay.
- 11.4 All time-records or other pay documents must be in a form approved by the Head of Corporate Services and be certified in manuscript by an authorised

employee. The names of employees authorised to sign such records must be provided to the Head of Corporate Services by each Head of Service together with specimen signatures and must be amended in the event of any change.

- 11.5 Ad hoc payments to individuals who provide services to the Company but who are not directly employed by the Company must only be made using procedures agreed by the Head of Corporate Services.

## **12. Travelling, Subsistence and Hospitality**

- 12.1 All claims by employees for payment of car allowances must be submitted at monthly intervals to the Human Resources and Administration Section within the agreed timetable and in a form agreed by the Head of Corporate Services duly approved by the authorised employee.

- 12.2 Payment of other travelling expenses, subsistence allowances and incidental expenses must be submitted to the Head of Corporate Services at monthly intervals and in a form agreed by him/her duly approved by the authorised employee. Payment will be made through the creditors system upon receipt of the appropriate form duly approved. The names of employees authorised to approve such claims will be notified by strategic employees and be held by the Head of Corporate Services together with specimen signatures and must be amended in the event of any change.

- 12.3 Approval by the authorised employee will be taken to mean that the approving employee is satisfied that the journeys were authorised, the expenses properly and necessarily incurred and that the allowances are properly payable by the Company.

- 12.4 All employees must record details of all offers of gifts and hospitality in the register to be held by the Governance Officer. The register is to be in a form agreed by the Head of Corporate Services and the Company Secretary and in accordance with the guidelines set out in paragraph 3 of the company's Code of Conduct for Employees.

## **13. Insurance and Risk Management**

- 13.1 The Head of Corporate Services, in consultation with the Managing Director, will be responsible for advising the Board on insurance and risk management and will effect all insurance cover and negotiate all claims in consultation with other employees, where necessary.

- 13.2 Employees must promptly notify the Head of Corporate Services of all new risks, properties, or vehicles and of any alterations affecting existing insurances.

- 13.3 Employees must immediately notify the Head of Corporate Services in writing of any loss, liability or damage or any event likely to lead to a claim and must promptly supply the necessary information to the Head of Corporate Services, to enable the claim to be handled.

- 13.4 All monies due and received from insurers must be paid to the Head of Corporate Services. The Head of Corporate Services will notify the appropriate employee of the outcome of such claims.
- 13.5 The Head of Corporate Services will review all insurances annually, or at such other period as he/she may consider necessary.
- 13.6 Employees must consult with the Head of Corporate Services and the Company Secretary on the terms of any indemnity which the Company is requested to give.

#### 14. **Security**

- 14.1 Each employee is responsible for maintaining proper security at all times for all buildings, stocks, stores, furniture, equipment, cash etc. under his/her control. He/she must consult the Head of Corporate Services in any case where security is thought to be defective or where it is considered that special security arrangements may be needed.
- 14.2 Maximum limits for cash holdings are to be agreed with the Head of Corporate Services and must not be exceeded without his/her express permission.
- 14.3 Keys to safes and similar receptacles are to be carried on the person of those responsible at all times; the loss of any such keys must be reported to the Head of Corporate Services immediately.
- 14.4 Where company safes, or other security devices, are accessed using security codes this information should be limited to responsible officers. Security codes should be changed on a timely basis and as a matter of urgency where an individual with access to the safe leaves the Company's employment.

#### 15. **Inventories**

- 15.1 Inventories must be maintained and kept up to date. They must contain an adequate description of furniture, fittings and equipment, plant, machinery, vehicles and other property held by the Company. The extent of the record and the form of the inventory is to be determined by the Head of Corporate Services.
- 15.2 Employees are responsible for making evidenced checks of their inventories at least once a year. Records must be retained for inspection.
- 15.3 Property held by the Company must not be removed otherwise than in accordance with the ordinary course of the Company's business or used otherwise than for the Company's purposes except with specific directions issued by Management Team.

#### 16. **Reporting of Thefts and Financial Irregularities**

- 16.1 Whenever any matter arises which involves or is thought to involve theft, fraud or financial irregularity, including breaches of any of these financial regulations, or bribery or corruption which involve the Company's interest, the

employee concerned must immediately, and before proceeding with any further investigation, notify the Head of Corporate Services of that matter.

16.2 The Head of Corporate Services in consultation with the appointed internal auditors will take such steps as he/she considers necessary by way of investigation and report or by advising the relevant employee about any further action to be taken.

16.3 Employees should review the Company's' Whistleblowing Policy and Probity Policy for further guidance.

## 17. Computer Systems

17.1 Information and communication technology supplies and services must be procured in accordance with procedures determined by the Head of Corporate Services following consultation with the Company Secretary.

17.2 Systems holding personal data must be notified to the Head of Corporate Services for registration under the Data Protection Act in force prior to the implementation of such systems.

## 18. Fixed Assets

18.1 The minimum capitalisation level is £1,000. Any items costing below this amount will be expensed to the revenue budget in the year that they are purchased.

18.2 Items to be capitalised should be deemed to have a minimum useful life of 12 months.

18.3 A fixed asset register will be maintained, listing the details of all of the assets that have been capitalised

18.4 Tangible fixed assets are initially recorded as cost on the date of purchase. These should be depreciated so as to write down the cost, less estimated residual value, on a straight-line basis, over the estimated useful life.

18.5 The estimated useful life of each asset category is as follows:

Asset	Useful Life (Years)
Buildings	50
Fixtures & Fittings	2-4
IT	4

18.6 All assets are reviewed annually for impairment and when it is deemed that they have suffered a permanent reduction in value, the fall in value is recognised.

## 19. Taxation

19.1 The Head of Corporate Services is responsible for ensuring compliance with all relevant tax legislation, tax registrations of the Company are appropriate to

its activities and any appropriate returns are accurate and submitted on time to HM Revenue & Customs.

20. **Revision**

- 20.1 The Head of Corporate Services will keep these financial regulations under review and after appropriate consultation may make any recommendations to the Board that he/she considers necessary.