

Company Number 05564649
A Company Limited by Guarantee
Registered in England

St. Leger Homes of Doncaster Limited
BOARD MEETING

2nd April 2008

Present

Sid Hall, James Parkin, Lyn Ralph, Frank Protheroe, Brian Naughton, Cllr George Beck, Cllr Bill Mordue, Peter Chapman (Chair), Kate Radovanovic, John Young, Michael Hardy, Philip Jackson

In Attendance

Gary Wells (DMBC)

Also In Attendance

Martin Musgrave (Chief Executive), Judith Jones (Director of Customer Services), Paul Hopkinson (Director of Property Services), Trevor Lincoln (Director of Business Planning), Linda Milan (Company Secretary), Leandra Graham-Hibling (Board Support Officer), Janet Clarke (Assistant Director – Customer Services), James Turner (Head of Communications).

1. Apologies and Quorum

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Pat Haith, Cllr Stuart Exelby and Asma Hassan
- 1.2 It was noted that a quorum was present.

2. Declarations of Interest by Board Members

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2008 and matters arising

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2008 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

3.2 Matters Arising

- 3.2.1 The following matters were discussed:-

From item 6b – Decent Homes – Specification Review Report -

A Member noted that any changes to the Decency Standard would have to be formally approved by DMBC.

The Director of Property Services confirmed that this is correct and that he had already held discussions with DMBC officers. He confirmed that he would report back to the Board following the Council's decision.

ACTION

PH

4. Chief Executives Report – Agenda Item 4

4.1 Stores / Depots

The Chief Executive reported to the Board that SLHD were still awaiting a decision from DMBC concerning the potential relocation of the four existing depots to one large depot and that the Executive Team were working closely with officers from DMBC to move this forward.

He also informed Members that it has been identified that over £0.5 million of improvements are required to bring the Depots to meet current Health and Safety legislation. The Chief Executive advised the Board that SLHD will be formally writing to the Managing Director of the Council on this issue.

MM

4.2 National Federation of ALMO's (NFA) Annual Conference & AFM 2008

The Chief Executive advised the Board of the National Federations of Almo's (NFA) annual conference & AGM which was taking place on Tuesday 13th and Wednesday 14th May, in York.

The Chief Executive asked if any Board Members wished to attend, that they contact his Personal Assistant, Leandra Graham-Hibling to arrange the booking.

ALL

4.3 Customer Satisfaction Questionnaires

The Chief Executive reported on the positive work carried out by the teams within the Customer Services Directorate as part of gathering information from the Customer Satisfaction Questionnaires. As well as the previously reported £70k of saving to customers in the take up of Housing Benefits the questionnaires have assisted the company identify those tenants who suffer from a mental health problem. To ensure that their homes remain in a good state of repair a new initiative will be launched to ensure regular visits are made to the properties to identify outstanding repairs or other issues.

This pilot is being developed with a close working relationship with the Doncaster PCT.

4.4 Website

The Chief Executive provided the Board with details of the number of visits to the SLHD website. He detailed 187,000 hits, some of which were from outside of Europe. The majority of these were viewing information on Decent Homes investment work and the HomeChoice system.

4.5 Decent Homes Work

The Chief Executive reported to the Board that the final Decent Homes spend confirmed by DMBC's financial ledger system was £56,035,000 against the targeted minimum spend of £54,700,000

The Chair asked the Board to pass on their thanks and congratulations with him to the teams within St Leger Homes for the work that had been undertaken in the Decency programme.

MM

4.6 **Main Board / Area Board Team Building Event**

The Chief Executive reminded the Board of the Team Building event that had been arranged for 9th April 2008 at Wheatley Golf Club, which will be an excellent opportunity for Board Members, Area Board Members and SLHD Officers to become more acquainted and improve communication.

He asked if any Board Members wished to attend, that they contact his Personal Assistant, Leandra Graham-Hibling to confirm attendance.

LGH

4.7 **Main Board Forward Plan 2008**

The forward plan was reviewed.

The Chair asked that the May and June agendas are reviewed to give a more balance across the two meetings.

The Board noted the forward plan

MM/LM

5. **Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey – Agenda Item 5**

5.1 The Director of Business Planning introduced this report on the contents of the 2007 “Mini Status” Survey and the service implications arising from it

5.2 He highlighted the positive changes in satisfaction levels from 2004 to date which were detailed in the body of the report including:-

- *Contact with their landlord – usage of telephone to make contact increased from 81% to 89%.*

He reported that this increase from previous years provided a helpful insight for teams looking at options for improving telephone reception services.

- *Top 3 issues impacting on local neighbourhoods – Litter & Rubbish / Drug Dealing / Vandalism.*

He reported that these issues remain of priority importance to tenants, but did show improvements. SLHD could not impact on these issues alone and needed partnership working with related agencies to make further improvements.

5.3 The report identifies further action to be taken by introducing measures to address issues of dissatisfaction changes and for these to be included within individual service plans across the whole of the organisation.

- 5.4 The Director of Business Planning informed the Board that the results place SLHD into the top quartile of national performance.
- 5.5 The Chief Executive expressed his view that the report confirms that SLHD are making improvements to customer services across the whole business and not only within the area of Decent Homes investment.
- 5.6 A member asked if we shared the findings of the report with partner organisations. The Director of Business Planning confirmed that the report was fed into local forums, but he will ensure that this will be circulated to partner agencies for information.
- 5.7 The Chair agreed that being in the top quartile across the board was great news and SLHD were showing consistently improved results over the past 3 years.
- 5.8 The Chair enquired if any further work was being undertaken to address the results from the 16-34 age group, since it is this group may remain tenants for a considerable period.

The Director of Customer Services reported that the work to engaging young people is reviewed on a regular basis. A Doncaster Young Tenants Action Group (DYTAG) has been recently established and this forum will be used to work with young people and to encourage their participation.

- 5.9 **The Chair summarised the report as being an excellent outcome.**

The Board received the report and agreed the recommendations for officers to develop solutions to the issues raised.

6. Communications Strategy

- 6.1 The Chief Executive presented a report setting out a framework and Communications strategy for the Boards approval. The report sets out planned activities for 2008.

It was noted that the Strategy proposes 'top-level' messages for the Company's communication function with a 12 month action plan to support them and suggests targets which can be measured.

- 6.2 A member commented that the information detailed in the appendix seems to set out an action plan rather than a strategy, and would like to see a more strategic view with detailed background information.
- 6.3 A member asked if this strategy had been reviewed by DMBC communications team. The Chief Executive confirmed that it had.
- 6.4 The Board confirmed that they were happy with the work currently undertaken by the Communications Team as detailed in the Appendix to the report, but requested a more detailed strategy to be developed including purposes, what SLHD can do and how the

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actions can be measured.

The Board requested that the new strategy is submitted to the June 2008 meeting.

MM/JT

A member asked if 'Unique visitors to the website' could be added to the information rather than 'hits' as this would show how many people are interacting rather than just viewing pages of the SLHD website.

This was acknowledged

7. Tenant Participation Strategy

7.1 The Assistant Director of Customer Services updated the Board on the revised Tenants Participation Strategy Action Plan and asked the Board to note this monitoring report on the delivery of the Tenant Participation Action Plan and to agree follow on actions contained in Appendix A.

7.2 She explained that the draft strategy had originally been approved by Board in May 2006 and confirmed that it was due to be revised in early 2009 to ensure it was fit for purpose.

In the meantime, this report updates the Board on completion of the action plan and detailed the continued improvements and actions that are being carried out.

7.3 A member asked if SLHD were working in partnership with Neighbourhood Managers and DMBC as it would be a crucial to ensure that both bodies develop strategies together.

It was confirmed that SLHD is represented on various multi agency groups, including Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT's) and the Safer Doncaster Partnership (SDP), but SLHD will continue to improve partnership working.

7.4 The Director of Business Planning reported that information detailed in the status survey shows that overall satisfaction for tenant involvement and consultation has improved but that this should not lead to complacency and there was further potential for improving information distribution and supporting tenant involvement.

7.5 The Board agreed that a clear link must be identified with the communication strategy to ensure information is fed back down to Tenants and Residents Associations.

7.6 The Vice Chair asked the Assistant Director of Customer Services to attend the Standing Joint Committee meeting at her earliest convenience to review tenant participation in more detail.

JC

7.7 **The Board noted the monitoring report of delivery and the Tenant Participation Strategy and agreed the follow on actions.**

8. Race, Equality, Equality & Diversity Strategy & BME Housing Strategy Update

8.1 The Director of Customer Services introduced this report and asked the Board to note progress and future work required on each of the Strategies

8.2 She reported that the various action plans showed detailed progression and pointed out the red actions, including the action relating to Hate Crime and reported that SLHD is working with the Interim Director for Housing and DMBC to progress further. It was agreed that the action plans would be combined in further reports

8.3 A member asked if the Diversity Manager regularly attended Cllr Glyn Jones' portfolio meetings. This was confirmed.

8.4 The Chair reminded the Board about the Audit Commissions views on proportionality and that we ensure that our actions reflect all of our tenant requirements. The Director for Customer Services confirmed we are mindful of this and referred to ongoing activities, including young people and those with mental health issues.

8.5 The Chair thanked the Director of Customer Services and the Diversity team for the work that has been carried out.

The Board agreed the report and noted the work undertaken and proposed

9. Annual Efficiency Statement and Forward Look

9.1 The Director of Business Planning reported on the planned efficiencies for 2008/9 and asked the Board to note them, together with predicted cashable efficiency savings for capital and revenue.

9.2 He explained that the covering report identifies all requirements to establish savings, and that a new National Indicator (NI 179) will soon replace the Annual Efficiency Statement.

9.3 Appendix A was reviewed which sets out a challenging target of £679,000 for revenue expenditure which equates to 2.18% of the management fee and £900.000 target for the capital programme which will be achieved in the main via procurement of kitchens and boilers.

9.4 Chair re-confirmed that the savings detailed in the report are cash savings and asked for a detailed outturn on efficiencies for 2007/8 to the June or July Board meeting.

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The Board Agreed the Report

10. Business Delivery Plan

10.1 The Directors of Business Planning provided the Board with the opportunity to comment on the Company's draft Business Plan for 2008/13 and asked the Board to agree the proposed revised review timescales.

10.2 He explained that SLHD currently had a obligation within the Management Agreement with DMBC to review the plan on an annual basis, which historically has been in October of each year. Following discussion it was agreed with DMBC that the Delivery plan and the Performance plan would now be combined and reviewed in February each year before being formally adopted by DMBC in April each year

Section 7 in the report shows the main priorities for improvement for the coming year together with a programme to achieve them including Performance targets.

Sections 9 and 10 sets out the financial position with a newly negotiated management fee and confirmed Capital funding for 2 years from the Government.

The Director of Business Planning stressed that Appendix 7 of the performance plan, was a working document and will be reviewed throughout the year. He asked the Board to adopt the report prior to its consideration by the Council during May.

10.3 The Chair stressed the importance of such a document and asked that any issues with DMBC would be brought back to Board for information.

He asked for details of the big risks and what SLHD were doing to address them. The Director of Business Planning referred the Board to the summarised section of risks detailed in the report.

The Chair asked for the Risk Register to be circulated with the agenda for the next meeting as an information document only.

TL/LM

10.4 The Director of Business Planning offered to spend more time with Board Members as a specific briefing to go through the SLHD Business Delivery Plan in more detail

A member asked that a specific meeting is held to discuss this further and was agreed by the Board.

TL/LM

10.5 A member enquired as to the feedback from the Board Appraisal exercise that was conducted in Anthony Collins Solicitors at the end of 2007.

The Company Secretary confirmed that she had received the Solicitors' final report and that it was due to be discussed as an

TL/LM

agenda item at the next Board meeting.

The Board Agreed the Report

11. Finance and Performance Information

11.1 The Director of Business Planning presented this report and gave a summary of the revenue and capital report and confirmed that the accounts team was currently closing 2007/8 accounts and will take 2 months to get final picture.

11.2 The final outturn figures on the Revenue budget will demonstrate a surplus of between £600k-£800K and discussion are being held with the Council as to how the surplus will be used.

The overall Capital budget for public sector housing may show a minor underspend.

11.3 Gary Wells commented that additional pressures for 2008/9 can be funded from the under spend which would need to be identified at a further meeting outside of the Board meeting, but confirmed that one area for consideration might be that of the Super Depot.

11.4 The Director of Business Planning commented briefly on Performance against agreed indicators. The majority were predicting to be on target at the year end and where this was not the case corrective actions was in place to support improvements next year

11.5 **Sickness** – Members were advised that following Board Members concerns, raised in December, performance in this area has continued to improve. Sickness levels are now at the lowest they have been since summer 2007.

11.6 **Gas Servicing** - The Director of Property Services explained that we had adopted more stringent measures regarding the acceptance of information provided by our gas servicing contractor and as a result the number of outstanding properties had increased from 32 in January to 102 at the end of February. Members were informed that the figure at the time of the meeting is 43 and that the appropriate procedures are being followed in each case.

The Board agreed the Report

12. Overarching repairs and Maintenance Policy

12.1 The Director of Property Services presented the report asking the Board to agree the revision of the Overarching Repairs and Maintenance Policy following consultation with relevant parties.

12.2 He advised the Board that the Policy was first established in March 2006 and the paper represented a robust review. The policy main aims were:-

- Setting a strategic, long term approach to maintaining decent, sustainable homes.
- Engaging efficiently with residents about their homes.
- Managing effective planned and capital programmes.
- Running an effective responsive repairs service.
- Improving performance management systems and competition that will give its customer a value for money service.

12.3 A member enquired why stair treads and handrails were not being classed as emergency repairs since these issues could be a risk to life and limb.

The Director of Property Services stressed that the Repairs Contact Centre have the training and authority to reclassify requests in accordance with the circumstances.

12.4 The Chair thanked the Director of Property Services for detailing the changes as a separate list for easier identification.

The Board agreed the report

13. Property Standards Review – Lettable Standards

13.1 The Director of Property Services introduced a report asking for the Board to agree the revision of the Property Standard following consultation with relevant parties.

13.2 Following outcomes of the consultation, he detailed some of the primary amendments to the standard.

- Install lever taps on new fixtures and fittings on senior citizens or adapted dwellings
- Re-washer all taps that have not been renewed
- Offer incoming customer an appointment for heating engineer to visit to explain the operation of their heating system - Gas fitter, Solid Fuel Service Team, Electrical Engineer or District Heating,
- When replacing toilet cisterns – renew plastic cisterns with porcelain type with low volume flush

13.3 A Member asked if simplified controls for heating systems could be installed into the properties as part of the programme. It was reported that this could be considered in the properties designated for older persons and that this is included in the Decent Homes investment works.

The Director of Property Services went on to add that as part of this review a Greener and Safer theme has been incorporated with external partnerships (subject to funding) including the following; -

- South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue (SYFR) – to supply battery

operated smoke alarms supplied free of charge to be fitted in those vacant units where a mains fed alarm has not been fitted.

- PowerGen – to supply 4 energy efficient light bulbs free of charge to all new tenancies and to supply power down energy devices to those customers who have computers or music systems.

13.4 A Member asks if tenants can be shown how to use fuse boxes as part of the visits to explain the operation of the heating systems. This was agreed as a good idea and will be taken up. **PH**

13.5 The Vice Chair thanked the Director of Property Services for arranging to install the lever handles rather than the push buttons on new fixtures and fittings, and asked if there were any plans to install 'Surestop', to turn off the water supply as this would be particularly beneficial in homes designated for elderly persons.

The Director of Property Services explained that we were not currently using this system but would be happy to investigate the system with Boards approval.

Board agreed the Report

14 Any Other Business

14.1 There was no any other business report.

15. Date of next Board meeting

- Wednesday 7 May 2008

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, on the grounds that exempt information as amended defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule A to the Act is likely to be disclosed.

16. Repairs and Maintenance Market Testing

16.1 The Director of Property Services provided an update on progress with the project to Market Test the Repairs and Maintenance service for the period June to December 2007.

16.2 Board Members considered the report in detail.

Board Members agreed the report

For Information Only

Confidential Item – Not open to the Press or Public

17. Urgent Action taken by the Chief Executive

17.1 The Chief Executive advised the Board of urgent action he undertook under Standing Order section 2.7.21 regarding Former Tenant Arrears Write Off's to the value of £41,122.23

17.2 **The Board noted the Chief Executives decision.**

18. Approved Minutes from the Area Boards and Committees

18.1 The Board noted the following minutes:

- Finance and Performance committee meeting 16 Jan 2008

18.2 The Board were asked to note and ratify the following minutes:

- Finance and Performance committee meeting 5 March 2008

The Board ratified the minutes to the meeting.

Non Confidential Item

19. Approved Minutes from Area Boards and Committees

The Board noted the following minutes:

East, Joint and West Area Board 14 January 2008

The meeting ended at 7.29 pm