

WIGAN AND LEIGH HOUSING COMPANY LIMITED

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

AT WALH HQ, WIGAN

TUESDAY 6th MARCH 2007

Present:

Members:

Geoff Roberts (Chair), Fiona Whistlecroft, Pat Cummins, Jacqui Farrington, Jean Garlick, Mick Baines, Fred Walker, Marjorie Marsden and Chris Ready.

In Attendance:

Ashley Crumbley (Chief Executive), Tony Gerrard (Deputy Chief Executive), Janice Barton (Director of Housing Needs), Mike Grimes (Director of Housing Management) and Edward Flanagan (Board Services and Finance Officer).

916. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Apologies for absence were received from Dorothy Abbott.

917. MINUTES:

The minutes of the Board meeting held on 6th February 2007 were accepted as a true and accurate record.

Matters Arising

Recruitment of a Tenant Board Member (Minute 912 refers). The Board Services and Finance Officer advised that the Company Secretary would undertake the outstanding inductions for new Board Members, in the form of a one to one, the first to take place on Friday 9th March 2007.

918. URGENT BUSINESS:

Programmed Works Schemes

With the Council having just approved the HRA budget for 2007/08 the Chief Executive submitted a report (circulated at the meeting) setting out programmed works schemes for the forthcoming year. Members agreed to discuss the report at the end of the open part of the agenda.

919. AGENDA ORDER:

The Board agreed to receive the agenda as presented.

OPEN ITEMS

920. STRATEGIC BOARD MEETINGS 2007:

The Chief Executive presented a report proposing a work plan for strategic Board meetings as suggested by the Board at its first strategic Board meeting on 6th February 2007. Members were invited to direct any questions to the relevant lead Director as outlined in the report.

It was **AGREED** The report be approved.

921. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BRIEFING AND PRIORITIES FOR 2007/08:

The Chief Executive presented a report providing the Board with an end of year review in order to consider priorities for the 2007/08 Business Plan.

The Chair expressed concern that the organisation needed to improve further on absence management and the recovery of rent arrears and expressed a wish to see these progressed. The Chair requested reports on both issues within one cycle.

The Chair informed Members that he would be visiting all offices to meet staff and introduce himself.

A discussion followed on staff morale and how it could be improved. A key issue was a prolonged period of change and restructuring. The Board and the Chief Executive agreed there is a need to complete outstanding changes as soon as possible and move to a period of stability. The Chief Executive added that management style also has a big impact on staff morale and this would be included as a priority for 2007/08.

It was **AGREED:** That the recommended priorities be adopted for 2007/08 with the addition outlined above.

Votes For: 9
Against: 0
Abstentions: 0

922. COMPANIES ACT 2006:

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report summarising the main legislative changes proposed within the Companies Act 2006 which would impact on Wigan and Leigh Housing Company. The Board were asked to consider if they would wish to adopt some of the proposals.

It was **AGREED:**

- (a) To note the proposed legislative changes contained in the Companies Act 2006.
- (b) To request the Company Secretary to review the Company's Memorandum of Association, Articles of Association and Board Member Code of Conduct in light of the legislation and report back to Board.
- (c) To permit the use of written resolutions by email only in

- exceptional circumstances and for single issue items only.
- (d) To retain a designated Company Secretary.
 - (e) To continue to hold an Annual General Meeting.
 - (f) To refer the new statement of Directors' duties to the Governance, Standards and Audit Committee to examine whether any additional duties should also be adopted.

Votes For: 9
Against: 0
Abstentions: 0

923. PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS ON PRIORITIES AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2006:

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report providing Members with details of performance as at 31st December 2006. The report covered key service areas and progress against priorities in the Delivery and Business Plan and the Improvement Plan arising from the 2005 re-inspection by the Audit Commission.

The Board requested that the issue of value for money should be given a higher priority. It also requested update reports on the percentage of letters being responded to within the target of ten days.

The Board also debated performance management and whether or not performance should be measured by team rather than by individual. The Board agreed that it was for the Chief Executive to decide how to manage the organisation but fully supported a team approach recognising that individual target setting for front line staff would be bureaucratic and a team working culture would ensure the better delivery of the vision. However, managers would remain accountable for the performance of their teams.

It was **AGREED:** To note the contents of the report.

924. COUNCIL BOARD MEMBERS AND CO-OPTED TENANT BOARD MEMBER:

The Chief Executive informed the Board that the recruitment of Council nominated Board Members is progressing and an interview panel has been formed to include the Leader of the Council - Cllr Peter Smith and the Leader of Independent Councillors - Cllr Brian Merry.

Members were advised that it is hoped to bring to the Board a nominee for the post of Co-Opted Tenant Board Member, who will also act as the Chair of the Pemberton Forum, at the Board's April meeting.

It was **AGREED:** To note the update

925. SERVICE IMPROVEMENT TEAM – VOID MANAGEMENT:

The Director of Housing Management presented a report on the findings of the Service Improvement Team's review into void management. Members noted the huge improvement in void turnaround times from 51 days to 32 days and that it should be possible to achieve a top quartile performance in the future. The Board requested that future performance reports should include a breakdown of turnaround times by area, property type and contractor with reports to the Business and Performance Committee on a quarterly basis.

The Board welcomed the honesty of the report recognising the need for significant improvements. The Board commended staff for the significant improvements already made.

It was **AGREED:** (a) To adopt the Service Improvement Team's recommendations as set out in the report.
(b) That the Director of Housing Management submits a report to the Business and Performance Committee setting out the challenges, performance targets and an Improvement Plan which secures continuous improvement.

Votes For: 9
Against: 0
Abstentions: 0

926. DCLG CONSULTATION DOCUMENT – 'ALLOCATION OF ACCOMMODATION - CHOICE BASED LETTINGS – JANUARY 2007':

The Director of Housing Needs presented a report containing a consultation document from the Department of Communities and Local Government on new proposals in allocations policy and best practice. Members were asked to consider and approve the proposed draft response from Wigan and Leigh Housing.

The Chief Executive offered to circulate new 'myth busting' literature about the allocation policy to Board Members and to circulate a copy of the weekly property sheet. A Board Member suggested a scenario playing session with the Board to act out the difficulties of allocating properties.

It was **AGREED:** To approve the response to the DCLG.

927. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY TASKS, HANDOVER AND INTERIM POSITION REPORT:

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report detailing recommendations from the former Equality and Diversity Committee as to how the Committee's responsibilities could be taken forward in the new governance structure. The report also provided an overview of the current position in regard to the 2006/07 Equality and Diversity Service Plan tasks.

Members commented on the good work done and experience gained by the committee and in particular by the co-opted members representing hard to reach groups.

It was **AGREED**: (a) That the principal aims of the former Equality & Diversity Committee be incorporated in the Board's Terms of Reference at the earliest opportunity.

The principal aims being:

- i. To champion and drive forward the diversity and equality agenda for Wigan & Leigh Housing as a service provider and employer.
 - ii. To ensure that Wigan and Leigh Housing fully comply with relevant legislation, guidance and codes of practice and deliver continuous improvement on the basis of a clearly focused Action Plan.
- (b) That the Board agrees the Business & Performance Committee will:
- i. Take over progress monitoring of the Company's Equality & Diversity Service Plan tasks.
 - ii. Agree the priority Equality & Diversity Tasks at the commencement of each new financial year.
 - iii. Receive the Company's collection of Equality & Diversity Monitoring reports.
 - iv. Receive future Equality & Diversity improvement reports.
- (c) That the Governance, Standards and Audit Committee monitor and where appropriate challenge the Board's progress on Equality & Diversity.
- (d) To refer the following proposal to the Governance, Standards and Audit Committee for consideration. – 'That should the Board agree to designate a co-opted member for Equality & Diversity on the main Board and its Committees; when appointing to those positions, the value and contribution of the co-opted Members from the former Equality & Diversity Committee be taken into account'.

Votes For: 9
Against: 0
Abstentions: 0

928. HARD TO REACH STRATEGY:

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report providing the Board with a final draft of the Company's 'Hard to Reach Customers' strategy. Members requested updates on this issue.

It was **AGREED:** To approve the strategy, published on the Company's website, and its implementation be included as a key task in the Company's Equality and Diversity plans for 2007/08.

Votes For: 9
Against: 0
Abstentions: 0

929. ANTI RACISM PLEDGE:

The Board was invited to sign up to the anti-racism pledge from Wigan and Leigh United Against Racism.

It was **AGREED:** That the anti-racism pledge be supported.

Votes For: 9
Against: 0
Abstentions: 0

930. LETTING OF A PROPERTY FOR THE 'HOME FROM HOME' PROJECT AT HAG FOLD, ATHERTON:

The Director of Housing Management presented a report describing the 'Home from Home' project and of Hesketh Fletcher High School's proposal to expand the project. The Chief Executive informed the Board of other ideas that may help young people living on Council estates and advised that proposals would be worked up and brought back to Board.

In reply to a question, the Director of Housing Management advised there were no reported problems with neighbours.

It was **AGREED:** That the Board supports the decision to provide a second two bedroom flat on Hag Fold at nil rent to Genesis for an extended school project on the basis of the work being done at 6 Coronation Avenue. Both schemes to be for the period up to 31st March 2010, by which time Wigan & Leigh Housing would wish to receive rental income as the costs should not be a long term commitment borne by Council tenants.

Votes For: 9
Against: 0
Abstentions: 0

931. NOMINATIONS FOR RESIDENTIAL AND DAY DELEGATE PLACES AT THE CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF HOUSING CONFERENCE:

The Board Services and Finance Officer informed the Board that two Members had expressed an interest in attending the Chartered Institute of Housing Annual Conference in Harrogate as residential delegates. He also reminded Members that they are welcome to attend the conference as a day delegate if they wish.

It was **AGREED:** That Pat Cummins and Fiona Whistlecroft attend the 2007 Chartered Institute of Housing Conference as residential delegates.

Votes For: 9
Against: 0
Abstentions: 0

932. MINUTES:

- (a) **Minutes – Equality and Diversity Committee 22nd January 2007**
These were endorsed and there were no matters arising.
- (b) **Minutes – Stock Investment Task Group 23rd January 2007**
These were endorsed and there were no matters arising.
- (c) **Minutes – Wigan and Leigh Housing Board 20th February 2007**
These were endorsed and there were no matters arising.

933. PROGRAMMED WORKS SCHEMES:

The Chief Executive presented a report (circulated at the meeting) which provided the Board with an update on schemes started and/or completed in 2006/07 and proposed schemes to commence in 2007/08 which had been requested by Board Members

It was **AGREED:** To note the report

PRESS AND PUBLIC EXCLUDED ITEMS:

934. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC:

The Board agreed to exclude the press and public from the items referred to in minutes 935 and 936 of this meeting because they contained sensitive business information.

935. EXTENSION OF ELDERCARE CONTRACT FOR THE PROVISION OF THE OUT OF HOURS SERVICE IN SHELTERED HOUSING:

The Director of Housing Needs presented a report seeking permission to extend the current contract with Eldercare Ltd, for twelve months pending the review of the sheltered housing service. Jean Garlick declared an interest in the item.

It was **AGREED**: To extend the sheltered out of hours contract with Eldercare until 31st March 2008.

Votes For: 8
Against: 0
Abstentions: 1

936. PROGRAMMED WORKS PROGRESS AND DAY TO DAY REPAIRS EXPENDITURE:

The Chief Executive presented a report providing the Board with an update on progress on the 2006/07 programmes of work and a summary of day to day repairs expenditure against budget allocation.

The Chief Executive advised the Board that Wigan and Leigh Housing had come 4th out of 149 social housing organisations for tenant satisfaction and 5th for tenant participation. Board Members request a letter be sent to all staff thanking them for their hard work which led to these results.

It was **AGREED** To note the contents of the report.

937. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 6.00pm on Tuesday, 3rd April 2007 at WALH HQ, Unity House, Westwood Park Drive, Wigan.

CHAIR