

**WIGAN AND LEIGH HOUSING COMPANY LIMITED**

**MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**AT WALH HQ, WIGAN**

**TUESDAY 7<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2006**

**Present:**

**Members:**

Tom Frost (Chair), Don Battersby, Sue Loudon, Pat Cummins, Geoff Roberts, Mick Baines, Marjorie Marsden (part) and Jean Garlick (part).

**In Attendance:**

Ashley Crumbley (Chief Executive), Tony Gerrard (Deputy Chief Executive), Janice Barton (Director of Housing Needs), Mike Grimes (Director of Housing Management), Edward Flanagan (Board Services and Finance Officer), Rob Platt (Tenant Auditor) (part) and Peter Purcell (Tenant Auditor) (part).

**Observers:**

Julie Bennett

**855. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:**

Apologies for absence were received from Chris Ready and Deborah Lee.

**856. MINUTES:**

The minutes of the Board meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2006 were accepted as a true and accurate record with no matters arising.

**857. URGENT BUSINESS:**

No urgent business was presented to the Board.

**858. AGENDA ORDER:**

Members agreed to move press and public excluded items to the end of the agenda.

**859. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC:**

Members agreed to exclude the press and public from the items referred to in minutes 875 to 878 as they contained commercially sensitive information.

At this point Jean Garlick joined the meeting.

**ITEMS FOR DECISION:**

**Open Items**

**860. GOVERNANCE REVIEW CONSULTATION:**

The Chief Executive presented a report (circulated) briefing the Board on feedback received from the consultation and to invite the Board to formally approve the new governance structure.

The Board discussed points raised in the consultation and questioned how to make the Area Forums representative. The Chief Executive stated that the priority of the Tenant Participation team would be to engage with hard to reach groups and those in the most deprived areas.

**Votes For:** 8  
**Against:** 0  
**Abstentions:** 0

It was **AGREED** To approve the new governance framework as set out in the report.

**861. AREA HOUSING FORUMS – CREATING BETTER NEIGHBOURHOODS:**

The Chief Executive presented a report (circulated) reporting the Governance Review Group's proposals for the Area Housing Forums. The Board noted that the proposals seem workable and that there was scope for change if needed as a review of the structure was proposed for January 2008. It was suggested that the Area Forums could have a budget of their own in time but it was agreed we should initially focus on providing tenants with more influence.

**Votes For:** 8  
**Against:** 0  
**Abstentions:** 0

It was **AGREED** (a) The Board adopts the proposals from the Governance Review Group on the operation of Area Housing Forums.

(b) The Board conducts a review of Area Housing Forums in January 2008.

(c) That the Board retains the option to suspend any Area Housing Forum.

**862. GARDENING COMPETITION:**

The Chief Executive presented a report (circulated) seeking agreement for a new format for next years competition which involves a Tenant Committee gaining the funding for the local prizes to encourage more entrants. It was agreed that the gardening competition should be part of a wider 'Better Neighbourhoods' award which may attract external funding. It was agreed that the Tenant Board Members could set up a task group to develop a proposal for the 'Better Neighbourhoods' awards. The Board Services and Finance Officer agreed to ask the Tenant Participation Team to set up a working group with Tenant Board Members and others to apply for external funding for local prizes to ensure the number of local entrants in 2007 are maximised.

**Votes For:** 8  
**Against:** 0  
**Abstentions:** 0

It was **AGREED** (a) The Board agreed to create a Better Neighbourhoods award for 2007 and a task group be established involving Tenant Board Members to develop the scheme.

#### **863. CONSTITUTION AND SCHEME OF DELEGATION:**

The Chief Executive presented a report (circulated) to amend the Constitution and Scheme of Delegations in light of the governance arrangements. It was noted that this is an initial go at this and there may need to be amendments once the system is up and running.

The Board discussed the size of the quorum for Committees and suggested it be increased from 3 to 4. It was also suggested that up to 6 Board members should be trained to sit on the appeals panel although any 3 of the 6 would sit on an appeal. The Board Services and Finance Officer recommended that the quorum for committees stays at 3 at least until the number of members on the committees is known.

**Votes For:** 8  
**Against:** 0  
**Abstentions:** 0

It was **AGREED** To approve the revised scheme of delegations.

#### **864. SCHEDULE OF BOARD MEETINGS:**

The Board Services and Finance Officer presented a report (circulated) proposing a schedule of meetings for the year ahead. In reply to questions raised, the Board Services and Finance Officer stated that the meeting rooms at Unity House are the only ones big enough to accommodate the larger Board. Officers agreed to identify options for holding Board meetings elsewhere in the Borough so they were more accessible to tenants.

**Votes For:** 6  
**Against:** 0  
**Abstentions:** 0

It was **AGREED** (a) To approve the proposed schedule of Board meetings for 2007.  
(b) All Board meetings to take place at Unity House with the option to consider alternative venues around the Borough at a later date.

#### **865. PROTOCOL FOR HANDLING APPEALS, CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK:**

The Chief Executive presented a report (circulated) to propose changes to the protocol for handling appeals and complaints. The main change involves replacing the stage 4 investigation by the Council's Community Protection Department with an appeals hearing process for exceptional matters heard by the Board's Appeal Panel.

The Board requested the Chief Executive inform the Board at their next meeting of any complaints reaching stage 4 that the Chief Executive decides to uphold rather than put to the Appeals Panel.

In reply to questions raised, the Chief Executive advised that the new policy will be put on the website and made available as a leaflet. He also advised that the Appeals Panel will be made up of 3 Board Members not up to 3 Board Members as written in the procedure.

**Votes For:** 8

**Against:** 0

**Abstentions:** 0

It was **AGREED** That the Board adopt the revised protocol for handling appeals, customer complaints and feedback.

**866. WIGAN AND LEIGH HOUSING RISK MANAGEMENT REGISTER:**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report (circulated) asking the Board to agree the updated Risk Management Register.

**Votes For:** 8

**Against:** 0

**Abstentions:** 0

It was **AGREED** That the Board approve the updated Risk Management Register.

**867. REVIEW OF ALLOCATIONS POLICY:**

The Director of Housing Needs presented a report (circulated) to update Board on the proposed changes to Wigan Council's Allocations Policy and the timetable for implementation. The Board were informed of concerns raised at the Leigh Homes Board regarding the proposed change in the amount of equity an applicant can have before being excluded from the housing waiting list. Members requested that this is updated annually to reflect local house prices.

A Board Member commented that it did seem pointless to advertise properties in the local press when demand is outstripping supply.

The Chair thanked the Director of Housing Needs and her team on behalf of the Board.

**Votes For:** 8

**Against:** 0

**Abstentions:** 0

It was **AGREED** That the Board accepted the proposed changes to the Council's Allocations Policy.

**868. PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS ON PRIORITIES AT 30<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2006:**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report (circulated) providing details of half year performance in 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 Deputy Chief Executive informed Members that the biggest outstanding priority was in value for money although progress has been made in establishing a clear financial position and Service Improvement Teams had been introduced.

Members questioned the Chief Executive on the increase in the level of sickness absence and were informed of proposals to move away from the Council's sickness absence procedure to something firmer but still fair and caring.

**Votes For:** 8

**Against:** 0

**Abstentions:** 0

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

**869. FINANCIAL MONITORING AND BUDGET MONITORING:**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report (circulated) to provide an update on the financial position of the Company and the housing service. In reply to a question raised, Members were advised that supplies and services appear under spent as charges from the Council appear at the end of the financial year.

Members were advised that the number of Right to Buy applications had increased during the last month although the number of completed sales has remained much lower than in previous years and that this follows the national trend. The Board were further advised that the workload in the Right to Buy section remains high due to the number of applications to process regardless of whether these applications result in sales.

**Votes For:** 8

**Against:** 0

**Abstentions:** 0

It was **AGREED** To accept the report and that a regular reporting framework be established for financial monitoring.

**870. TENANT AUDITOR GROUP – VOID MANAGEMENT SERVICE REVIEW:**

The Tenant Auditors presented a report (circulated) and gave a presentation giving an overview of the work and progress made by the Tenant Auditor Group following their second service review on Voids Management. They outlined their methods of working and gave a list of recommendations which they felt would improve the service to the customer and/or reduce re-let times.

**Votes For:** 8

**Against:** 0

**Abstentions: 0**

It was **AGREED** (a) To accept the report on Voids Management from the Tenant Auditor Group and the Voids Service Improvement Team be requested to consider the requirements.

(b) That the Tenant Auditor Group be thanked for producing the report and advised that their recommendations will be addressed by the Voids Service Improvement Team.

(c) That the Chief Executive respond and act were appropriate within 30 days. The response to be circulated to the Board at its next meeting.

(d) The Board welcomes the start of the next audit.

**871. MINUTES:**

(a) **Minutes – Equality and Diversity Committee 18<sup>th</sup> September 2006**

These were endorsed and there were no matters arising.

(b) **Minutes – Finance Committee 26<sup>th</sup> September 2006**

These were endorsed and there were no matters arising.

(c) **Minutes – Human Resources Committee 27<sup>th</sup> September 2006**

These were endorsed and there were no matters arising.

(d) **Minutes – Wigan Homes Board 4<sup>th</sup> October 2006**

These were endorsed and there were no matters arising.

(e) **Minutes – Leigh Homes Board 11<sup>th</sup> October 2006**

These were endorsed and there were no matters arising.

**ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION:**

**Open Items**

**872. NATIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS:**

The Chief Executive presented a report (circulated) to brief the Board on major national policy developments.

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

**ITEMS FOR INFORMATION:**

**Open Items**

**873. FROM DECENT HOMES TO SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES:**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report (circulated) sharing with Members responses from WALH and the National Federation of ALMO's to the discussion paper 'From Decent Homes to Sustainable Communities'. Members commented that the WALH response was very clear.

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

**874. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING:**

The Board Services and Finance Officer presented a report (circulated) advising the Board of the revised arrangements for the 2006 Annual General Meeting. The Chief Executive suggested having drinks with the retired Chair, John Roe, after the meeting.

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

At this point Rob Platt, Peter Purcell and Janet Bennett left the meeting.

**ITEMS FOR DECISION:**

**Press and Public Excluded Items**

**875. BOARD MEMBER RETIREMENT:**

The Board Services and Finance Officer asked Members what arrangements they would like to make to mark the approaching retirement of Board Members.

It was **AGREED** to delegate to the Independent Board Member selection panel to decide what arrangements should be made to mark the retirement of Board Members.

**ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION:**

**Press and Public Excluded Items**

**876. PROGRAMMED WORKS PROGRESS:**

The Chief Executive presented a report (circulated) updating the Board with the progress on the 2006/07 programmes of work and on expenditure on responsive repairs.

It was **AGREED** to note the report.

**877. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BRIEFING AND QUESTION TIME:**

The Chief Executive presented a report (circulated) briefing the Board on progress on the Chief Executive's priorities and major issues.

It was **AGREED** to note the report.

At this point Jean Garlick and Marjorie Marsden left the meeting.

**ITEMS FOR INFORMATION:**  
**Press and Public Excluded Items**

**878. SUSPENSION OF SUPPORT TO SCHOLES MULTI'S TENANTS AND RESIDENTS GROUP:**

The Director of Housing Management and the Chief Executive presented a report (circulated) advising the Board of the action taken to suspend WALH's support to and involvement with Scholes Multi-Storey Tenants and Residents Group.

In reply to questions raised, it was explained that Dave Herschell would be the support officer to the Panel and that Dave is a very fair, competent and honourable person.

It was **AGREED** To note the actions of the Director of Housing Management in suspending contact with and support to the Scholes SMS Group pending an appeal to the Chief Executive.

**879. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:** 6.20pm on Tuesday, 19<sup>th</sup> December 2006 at WALH HQ, Unity House, Westwood Park Drive, Wigan.

**CHAIR**