

URH Board Minutes
14 November 2007 at 6.30pm
LG04, Lincoln House

Present:

Ann Hoad; Selena Ellis; Helen Charlesworth-May; Maya Schram; Cllr Clive Bennett; David Schwarz; John Pepin; George Pashley; Cllr Alex McKenna; Dilia ('Lia') Conceicao; Jean Slater; Cllr Clive Bennett;

URH Staff:

Damian Roche (CEO); Tim Mathias (Minutes); Phil Morris; Clara Odamo; Kevin Creed; Alexandra Asare

Observers:

Dan Howcroft (Manager – Blenheim Gardens); Mark Browne (Manager – Roupell Park);

Apologies:

Carla Pall; Anton Manickim; Edith Yembra; Mary Simpson;

1 Introductions

- 1.1.0 This was the first meeting attended by John Pepin and George Pashley, who have been nominated as independent board members.
- 1.1.1 Jean Slater, who has previously attended meetings as an observer, has now been nominated as the second resident representative for Loughborough EMB. Jean replaces Jason Wyatt who has had to step down.
- 1.1.3 Following a query from Lia Conceição, it was confirmed that Maya Schram remains as a representative for Waltham. The Chair of Waltham TMO has confirmed that they are satisfied with this nomination.

2 Declarations of Interest

- 2.1.0 There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes & Matters Arising from 10th Oct 07

- 3.1.0 The Minutes were agreed as read.
- 3.2.0 Matters arising:-
- 3.3.0 **Action Point 1**
 - 3.3.1 As agreed, a letter was sent to Lambeth Council, regarding the position of Lambeth employees seconded to Loughborough. A meeting was held with Lambeth Housing on Monday 12 November, progress seems to be being made on this issue.
- 3.4.0 **Action Point 2**
 - 3.4.1 Correspondence has been entered into with Lambeth Housing regarding the lack of repair statistics. A report on one of the two performance indicators that Lambeth are supposed to provide has been forwarded, however there are concerns about the accuracy of the figures provided. URH officers will continue to investigate this issue.
- 3.5.0 **Action Point 3**
 - 3.5.1 The planned performance sub-group had to be cancelled, as Paul Cooper had to resign his post due to a potential conflict of interest. As an alternative, the Service Improvement Plan has been presented to tonight's board meeting. Nominations for a new Performance Sub-Group will be sought, but in the meantime updates on the Service Improvement Plan will be presented to the board each month.
- 3.6.0 **Action Point 4**

3.6.1 The proposed meeting with Senior Members to discuss TMO Allowances was overtaken by events. Instead Cllr Steve Reed, the Leader of the Council, met with officers from all the TMOs involved in the dispute. Phil Morris will provide an update under item nine on the agenda.

3.7.0 **Action Point 5**

3.7.1 Damian Roche sent out confirmation details as agreed, the training session on 24th October proceeded as planned.

4 Service Improvement Plan

4.1.0 Clara Odamo introduced this report.

4.1.1 As previously detailed, the planned Performance Sub-Group was not able to go ahead. In the meantime the decision has been made to provide an update on the Service Improvement Plan for each board meeting.

4.1.2 When the papers were sent out the Leasehold Services Officer was unavailable. The completed Section 4 is included with the additional reports tabled at the meeting.

4.1.3 Damian Roche reminded the meeting that Service Reviews which encompass a number of areas around the improvement plan, are on-going.

4.1.4 There were no questions.

4.1.5 It was agreed to keep this as a regular agenda item.

5 Programme of Service Reviews

5.1.0 Damian Roche introduced this item.

5.1.1 The second page of the report lists the proposed areas for review in order of priority. Board members should pay particular attention to this list.

5.1.2 Previously, the board had agreed that two areas (i) Voids & re-lets and (ii) Rent & income management would top the list. This is because these are very important issues within estate management generally, and performance concerns had been raised within both.

5.1.3 A Voids & re-lets action plan will be presented to the next board meeting.

5.1.4 Damian Roche is also asking each of the TMO managers to present the Voids & re-lets action plan to each of their boards for agreement.

5.1.5 Cllr Alex McKenna stated that the brief as presented was good, but how does URH overcome any deficiencies when they are encountered?

5.1.6 Damian Roche replied that URH is aiming to bring all the TMOs up to a minimum standard. Part of this will be promoting good practice across the TMOs. Areas of concern are already being tackled. For instance, Voids & relets has been placed top of the list, because of concerns about performance at Loughborough. Significant improvements are being made at Loughborough EMB. URH is committed to hitting hot spots within poor performance.

5.1.7 Cllr Alex McKenna asked, how is a plan of action tracked after it is set out?

5.1.8 Damian Roche stated that this will be monitored through the Service Improvement Plan. Damian Roche will also present highlight & exception reports on each of the service review areas. Performance Indicators are also used to measure progress.

5.1.9 In response to a question tabled by John Pepin, Damian Roche confirmed that the proposed series of reviews will not be completed before the inspection begins. URH needs to demonstrate that an on-going series of reviews are in place. Between six and eight reviews should be complete before the inspection begins. A significant number of the remaining reviews should overlap in any case. Areas such as Tenancy Services are important, but performance seems reasonable. Stock Investment has only just been taken on by URH, processes are still being developed.

5.1.10 Cllr Clive Bennett stated that he was still not convinced that a 2-star rating was possible.

5.1.11 Damian Roche stated that it was up to URH to present the very real achievements positively. Areas of concern, such as Loughborough void turnaround, are improving. It is a matter of looking at what the TMOs and URH have done and how performance has been sustained during challenging times e.g. during the introduction of SX3. It is important to realise that different inspectors will interpret performance in different ways. However, there is no doubt that performance has to improve significantly.

5.1.12 Finally, Damian Roche asked the board whether they are able to accept and endorse:-

- I. Priority areas for review
- II. Project Brief – Rent Income Collection Review

5.1.13 It was agreed to endorse both of these unanimously.

6 Feedback on Staff Conference

6.1.1 Alexandra Asare introduced this item.

6.1.2 The first URH staff conference was held on 26th Sept. This appeared to be very successful. Feedback from staff was very positive.

6.1.3 Alistair McIntosh appeared as a guest speaker, he was warmly received and congratulated on being a great motivational speaker.

6.1.4 As a result of the Staff Conference it has been agreed to hold cross estate inspections. A draft of an inspection sheet is attached to the report.

6.1.5 Damian Roche added that they were extremely encouraged by the attitude of TMO staff. Feedback from two of the workshops was provided by caretakers, who were very confident in their role.

6.1.6 Damian Roche reminded the meeting that the mock inspection will take place during January 2008. The director of HQN will feedback the results during early February 2008. An evening session will also be arranged for URH & TMO board members.

7 Performance Report

7.1.0 Tim Mathias presented this report.

7.2.0 Rent Collection BV66a/ DHS16

7.2.1 Tim Mathias stated that there has only been a slight improvement in Rent Collection rates. It is also noticeable that Lambeth Housing are beginning to catch up with URH.

7.2.2 Lambeth Council are directly employing a Housing Benefit Officer to check through accounts to see whether any further benefit is payable. URH has been informed that this service could be made available to the URH TMOs. This will be considered.

7.2.3 Ann Hoad stated that under the original management agreement Loughborough had the right to request the services Housing Benefit Officer, however Lambeth subsequently stated that they would not provide this service.

7.3.0 Service Charge DHS16

7.3.1 David Schwarz asked where these targets came from? Tim Mathias replied that they are based on the performance of upper quartile Councils, or Lambeth's target, whichever is the most challenging.

7.3.2 An extensive discussion was held regarding how targets are set, and how the board can establish confidence in them. Damian Roche pointed out that Performance Indicators are looked at a local basis – inner city boroughs deal with a higher level of deprivation. Against this 'the bar is always rising', the Audit Commission expects all Local Authorities to be continually improving performance.

7.3.3 John Pepin requested that a paper regarding target setting, be brought back to the board at later date. This was agreed, and will be timetabled for the January meeting.

Action Point 1	By whom	When
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Present paper – issues around target setting	Damian Roche	9 Jan 2008
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- 7.3.4 Cllr Alex McKenna stated that he was keen to see new innovations adapted. URH cannot offer discounts on rents or service charges, but perhaps other initiatives can be undertaken. Dan Howcroft stated that Blenheim Gardens already offers incentives. Tenants who keep their account in credit for a year are eligible to have one room re-decorated.
- 7.3.5 Damian Roche suggested that 'blitz' days, which would focus on a particular issue, could be undertaken. URH should also look to work in partnership with charities and community organisations wherever possible.
- 7.3.6 John Pepin stated that he was keen to see more rationality being brought to the system, the board should be taking a more strategic approach. Damian Roche stated that the board would, under normal circumstances adopt an strategic approach, however at this stage, only several months away from an inspection, it is inevitable that operational matters will be foremost amongst considerations

7.4.0 **BPSA E5 % Urgent Repairs completed in time**

- 7.4.1 The repairs module was the last part of SX3 to be switched on, many months after the rest of the system had gone live. As a result URH has not been provided with any repairs statistics for many months, and wrote to Lambeth Housing last month. As a result, Lambeth have provided one of the two reports that they have to provide. URH had concerns about the validity of the figures provided, and asked Lambeth to run the report again.
- 7.4.2 Tim Mathias stated that the revised figures still do not look correct. We will bring up these concerns with Lambeth. Hopefully, we will have more reliable figures next month.

7.5.0 **BV212 – Re-let Time for Routine Void**

- 7.5.1 This was discussed, at some length, earlier in the meeting.

7.6.0 **DHS21 - Gas Services Completed**

- 7.6.1 This is proceedings according to plan. Quarterly reports should start in December 07.

7.7.0 **Telephone Response - % of all calls answered within 15 seconds**

- 7.7.1 Blenheim Gardens continue to hit targets. Roupell Park & Waltham have seen significant improvement in the telephone response rates, although there is still some way to go. Loughborough figures have fallen again.
- 7.7.2 Lambeth have recently installed a new telephone system. As a result, some TMO staff are, through no fault of their own, having great difficulty getting connected to the new system. Lambeth IT currently have 1,000 outstanding calls regarding set-up on the new lines, from all parts of Lambeth Council, to be dealt with.
- 7.7.3 Maya Schram pointed out that that as TMOs are based locally, they are not so dependent on telephone services. Residents can visit them easily.
- 7.7.4 Maya Schram was also keen to encourage use of E-Mail. Currently, officers list their E-Mail addresses on correspondence, need to check that each web-site carries contacts for each TMO.

8 Capital Programme

- 8.1.1 Phil Morris introduced this topic.
- 8.1.2 A report was tabled at this meeting.
- 8.1.3 Progress with Lambeth Housing is still slow, a new set of staff have now been appointed at Lambeth Housing. Capital proposals have been re-submitted.
- 8.1.4 Two TMOs have already committed funds, that they would want refunded at some point.
- 8.1.5 Phil Morris will provide an update to the December meeting.

9 Any Other Business

- 9.1 **Damian Roche**

9.1.1 Damian will be on honeymoon until 11th December. In his absence you can contact Clara Odamo.

9.2 **Clara Odamo**

9.2.1 URH is looking to re-schedule the training session arranged for the 19th December. An E-Mail will be sent out to confirm tomorrow.

9.3 **Cllr Alex McKenna & Selena Ellis**

9.3.1 Both offered their apologies for the next board meeting.