

URH Board Minutes
13 February 2008 at 6.30pm
LG04, Lincoln House

Present:

URH Board

Maya Schram, Edith Yembra, Jean Slater, Ann Hoad, Cllr Clive Bennett, Lia Conceição, Helen Charlesworth-May, Selina Ellis, Anton Manickim

URH Officers

Damian Roche, Clara Odamo, Tim Mathias (Minutes), Phil Morris

Observers

Dan Howcroft (Manager – Blenheim Gardens & Waltham TMOs), Mark Browne (Manager – Roupell Park)

Apologies

Carla Pall, John Pepin, Cllr Alex McKenna, George Pashley, David Schwarz, Mary Simpson

1 Introductions

1.1.0 Damian Roche informed the meeting that a fourth Council Representative, Nadia Okraku, had been nominated. However, after reviewing the board papers, Nadia Okraku believes that there is a potential conflict of interest with her current position at Lambeth Council, where she provides advice on employment law in respect of TMOs. Damian Roche will make contact to discuss this matter, but for the moment it can be assumed that another nomination will be required.

2 Declarations of Interest

2.1.0 There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes & Matters Arising from the last meeting

3.1.0 Minutes

3.1.1 There was one amendment to the Minutes – Selena Ellis was present for the January meeting. With this amendment the Minutes were unanimously agreed.

3.2.0 Matters Arising

3.2.1 There was one Action Point noted – ‘Produce report – different methods of procuring legal services’. This is due to be presented at the March meeting.

3.2.2 Edith Yembra queried Paragraph 4.1.4, are Lambeth sending out repair satisfaction cards? URH officers have received conflicting advice around this issue. Damian Roche was informed that these are sent out routinely but apparently returned forms are not input onto the system. Tim Mathias was

informed that reports are still compiled, and will be forwarded to URH (although nothing has been received as yet). This issue will be subject to further investigation - Tim Mathias will report back to the next meeting.

- 3.2.3 Edith Yembra queried what is meant by Paragraph 6.1.6 'Both David Schwarz and Lia Conceicao were keen to see the relationship between board and staff monitored'. Lia Conceicao stated that they were highlighting the working relationship between staff and board members - at some of the smaller TMOs board members see front line staff on a day to day basis. Damian Roche suggested that the URH Performance Management Framework could be extended to include Board members (although it would not be implemented in the same way) – it would be especially useful to look at members development needs. This should happen as part of a well governed board. Damian Roche will produce proposals.

4 Incorporation of the National Federation of ALMOs

- 4.1.0 Damian Roche introduced this item.
- 4.1.1 United Residents Housing is a member of the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA), the trade body established to represent the interests of ALMOs in the housing and political arenas, at a national level.
- 4.1.2 This paper is concerned with proposals that the NFA have put forward to establish the body as a separate legal entity. The NFA is seeking the views of all ALMO boards and would like to receive feedback before their Annual General Meeting, due to be held mid March.
- 4.2.0 There are five matters on which the NFA is seeking feedback from board members:-
- 4.2.1 Do you agree with the proposed incorporation of the NFA as a limited company?
- 4.2.2 Does the Board agree with the principles underlying the core set of values? Please note all existing and new members will be required to sign up to these values.
- 4.2.3 Do you agree with the proposals around the setting up of the company's constitution?
- 4.2.4 The Companies Act 2006 allows for a shorter notice of general meetings to be given, provided 90% of the members agree. This would mean re-drafting the constitution. What are members' views?
- 4.2.5 As from April 2009, it will not be obligatory to appoint a company secretary. The advice from Trowers & Hamlin solicitors is that it would be worthwhile keeping this post. NFA would like a steer as to whether this post should be retained.
- 4.3.0 Damian Roche invited comments from the board. Edith Yembra stated that the post of company secretary should be maintained - they have an important role in filing returns, updating statutory registers etc. This view was supported unanimously by all board members.
- 4.3.1 Damian Roche asked that any further comments be forwarded by 29 February 2008, the Email address is DRoche@urh.org.uk.

5 Performance Indicators – targets

- 5.1.0 Damian Roche introduced this item, and apologised if the report was challenging to read. The targets proposed should be based around performance indicators - it appears that Lambeth have not been collecting performance information around certain Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI's).
- 5.1.1 Last month the board considered a report on Performance Indicators, which looked at what Performance Indicators the board should record, this was passed with a few minor amendments. This report is a follow up which proposes targets for each of the TMOs. This is a work in progress, targets will be subject to constant review and proposals to amend will be brought to the Board where appropriate..
- 5.1.2 It is important to realise that performance varies significantly across the various offices. Damian Roche is keen to see that the targets are set for each of the TMOs and agreed by the relevant Boards. (Please note this report is in the process of being presented to each of the TMOs.)
- 5.1.3 Where possible the upper quartile figures are quoted, that is the average figure for the top performing quarter of ALMOs. In many cases two figures are outlined – national and London figures. Rather than go through every PI individually, proposals are laid out within the report.
- 5.1.4 Data is not yet available for three Performance Indicators – Non-decency local authority dwellings (BV184a) (%), Non-decent local authority dwellings (change) (%) and Energy efficiency of stock (SAP rating) (BV63). These will need further work.
- 5.1.5 Selina Ellis asked whether the Audit Commission be happy with these targets. Damian Roche replied that the Audit Commission would expect a suite of indicators similar to the one proposed. Whether the AC would be completely satisfied with the targets is a subject open to interpretation. URH faces a number of challenges, for instance, there are high levels of historic arrears at both Loughborough and Roupell Park. The Audit Commission would understand that it is important to set realistic targets, but would want to see figures in the top quartile bracket. Direction of travel is also important i.e. if you can show that you regained significant ground in the last two years, this would be looked on favourably.
- 5.1.6 There were no further questions. Damian Roche asked the TMO members to ensure that this paper is presented to their Estate Board.

6 Performance Report

- 6.1.0 Tim Mathias introduced this report.
- 6.1.1 There are still pressing concerns regarding performance.
- 6.2.0 **Rent Collection**
- 6.2.1 Although there has been a slight improvement this month, Loughborough and Roupell Park are still behind target. A number of initiatives have been launched to address performance.
- 6.2.2 All tenants with arrears who have made a transfer application are in the process of being de-authorised.
- 6.2.3 Roupell Park are employing private solicitors to process legal applications and URH is leading on consideration of joint procurement on behalf of all RMOs.

- 6.2.4 Regular meetings are being timetabled with Loughborough staff.
- 6.2.5 Both Loughborough and Roupell Park are looking to enforce parking regulations more thoroughly.
- 6.2.6 Pay.net, a web based system that will allow Rent Officers to take payments directly from tenants, is close to be installed at three out of four offices. Further preparatory work is needed at Loughborough.
- 6.2.7 Direct Debit is being introduced across all offices next month.
- 6.3.0 **Service Charge Collection Rate**
- 6.3.1 A blitz at Loughborough is planned as soon as pay.net has been installed.
- 6.3.2 Further assistance will be provided to Waltham TMO.
- 6.4.0 **% Right to Repair jobs complete on time**
- 6.4.1 There remains a significant problem with jobs raised by the Out of Hours service, without informing the TMOs. TMOs are trying to identify the jobs raised using Business Objects, a software system that draws down data from SX3, the system which is used to raise repair jobs.
- 6.5.0 **Gas Services Completed**
- 6.5.1 The recent HQN inspection brought up a number of concerns around how Lambeth offices records Gas Services. URH is currently working through the recommendations. A report on a manual audit of Loughborough EMB will follow next month.
- 6.6.0 **Average Re-let time for Routine Voids**
- 6.6.1 This is only a problem at Loughborough, but remains significant. Loughborough's turnaround rate has been improving, but progress is slow as there has been a decline in the number of properties becoming void .
- 6.7.0 **Customer Care**
- 6.7.1 Another column with year to date to the figures has been added to the tables. This shows that for both complaints and member's enquiries response rates have been decreasing. RESPOND software is due to be installed, which will make it easier to monitor responses.
- 7 **Audit Commission inspection preparation**
- 7.1.0 Damian Roche introduced this item. Please note that the issues raised in the report are very sensitive.
- 7.1.2 A mock inspection was carried out recently by the Housing Quality Network (HQN). This was commissioned to assess the prospects of getting two stars at an Audit Commission Inspection. This brought up a number of significant issues.
- 7.1.3 Among the concerns that the inspectors highlighted were performance on key BVPI indicators and the continuing TMO allowance dispute. All of the RMOs were significantly challenged during the inspection (although it is important to note that 'mock' inspections can often be more challenging than the real thing). Blenheim Gdns and Roupell Park came out more favourably, however they still face a number of challenges.

- 7.1.4 On a more strategic level, HQN had concerns about the efficiency of the URH structure – evidencing Value for Money (VFM) was a significant issue.
- 7.1.5 Finance and resources were identified as a central problem. The TMOs have been caught in an allowance dispute with Lambeth Council for over a year now- this must be resolved before URH and the TMOs are able to move forward.
- 7.1.6 Another concern highlighted was the lack of a Capital Programme. Board members will be aware that securing any funding whatsoever from Lambeth has been a long process. A draft programme has just been agreed with Lambeth, but has yet to be formally signed off and implemented.
- 7.1.7 The URH TMOs are believed to be close to agreeing a settlement regarding the TMO allowance dispute. One major point, Blenheim Gardens gas allowance remains to be decided. However, Lambeth Housing still has to give formal approval to the offer made and Lambeth Council as a whole continues to have significant financial issues.
- 7.1.8 The settlement proposed would be for this financial year, with the proviso that the first quarter of next year be settled along with the same lines (although a lower inflationary increase may have to be accepted, a measure that affects all government bodies). As a forward plan, an independent panel would be set up, Chaired by a Councillor, to review TMO allowances for 2008/09 onwards and make recommendations.
- 7.1.9 Damian Roche has met with the Audit Commission and they are happy to allow a deferral. Damian Roche stated at the meeting that he would prefer a year after the TMO allowance dispute has been settled before embarking on an inspection.
- 7.1.10 Lia Conceicao asked what would happen if Lambeth underwent an inspection and obtained a two star rating before URH? Damian Roche replied that it was extremely unlikely that this would happen – the Government has already delayed approval of the proposed Lambeth ALMO, and after they went live Lambeth Living would still have an extraordinary amount of work to do before an inspection could take place. One of the reasons why the TMOs did poorly during the inspection is that they are still following Lambeth procedures that URH has not had time to update yet.
- 7.1.11 Selina Ellis wanted to point out that agreeing to consider a withdrawal from the joint action group was a difficult decision for Blenheim Gardens RMO. Both staff and board members can understand the other TMOs involved in the action feeling disappointed at the proposal to withdraw. The URH board should not underestimate how high emotions are running over the issue of allowances.
- 7.1.12 Helen Charlesworth-May stated that they agreed that a deferral would be best course of action at the moment, it is important that the URH Board takes ownership of the action plan. There is an awful lot of work to do. A performance sub-committee was supposed to be set up sometime before Christmas, but this never came to pass. URH seems to have been defined in a negative way (don't want to be part of Lambeth), we must now seek to define the organisation in a positive light.
- 7.1.13 Selina Ellis added that URH must explain to residents why the inspection is being deferred – they are the people who are waiting for improvements to their homes. It is also important to realise that front line staff at the TMOs are the people who

will have to face pressure from tenants regarding major repairs that have yet to be timetabled.

- 7.1.14 The Action Plan was agreed unanimously. Damian Roche will consider whether any amendments are necessary. An up to date Action Plan can be obtained at any time by E-mailing AAsare@urh.org.uk.