

**URH Board Minutes
16 April 2008 at 6.30pm
LG04, Lincoln House**

Present:-

URH Board

Edith Yembra, Cllr Clive Bennett, Anton Manickim, David Schwarz, George Pashley, Cllr Alex McKenna, Ann Hoad, Lia Conceicao, Helen Charlesworth-May, Maya Schram, Jean Slater

URH Officers

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

Observers

Lloyd Lewis (Manager – Loughborough EMB)

Apologies

Mary Simpson, Carla Pall, John Pepin, Selena Ellis, Christian Jacobs

1 Introductions

1.0.0 There were no introductions to be made.

2 Declarations of Interest

2.0.0 There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 March 08

3.1.0 Minutes

3.1.1 There was one amendment recorded – in paragraph 6.1.1, the words ‘the number’ are repeated twice.

3.1.2 With that amendment, the Minutes were agreed.

3.2.0 Matters Arising

3.2.1 Action Point 1 – Repair satisfaction cards – are these sent out? Are any reports compiled?

3.2.2 Tim Mathias has been informed that sending out of repair satisfaction cards is no longer standard. However, this could change in the future. If any resident receives a repair satisfaction card, please could inform Tim on tmathias@urh.org.uk.

3.2.3 Action Point 2 – Highlight essential tasks within the Service Improvement Plan.

3.2.4 Damian Roche had completed this task, the version included with the board papers is the unedited version. Damian Roche has sent out a highlighted version to the board today.

3.2.5 Action Point 3 – E-Mail asking for volunteers for Performance Board.

3.2.6 Tim Mathias sent out an E-Mail asking for volunteers today.

- 3.2.7 Action Point 4 – Write to Lambeth Council, to request a prompt response to budget proposals.
- 3.2.8 Damian Roche has distributed a copy of letter from Ann Hoad to the board. Mustav Khan has agreed to provide a response. There has been some dispute over the Capital Programme – a proposal to halve the 2008/09 allocation as well as to deny permission to carry forward last year's funds had been tabled. This has been strongly contested by URH. It is understood that Richard Hornby has now undertaken to honour the original allocation.

4 Progress Report on Loughborough EMB

4.1.0 Introduction

- 4.1.1 Damian Roche is asking the board to support a proposal to allow URH to undertake management responsibilities at Loughborough EMB. The intention is to ensure the continued existence of LEMB as an independent Estate Management Board, to ensure that no party is exposed to any undue risk and to outline a clear plan to improve the governance, operational and financial management of LEMB.
- 4.1.2 The LEMB recovery plan has been discussed at previous meetings, this is an agreed repayment facility between Lambeth Council and Loughborough EMB. Please note that Loughborough is not asking for a cash injection from Lambeth.
- 4.1.3 It became clear in 2006 that LEMB was in serious financial difficulty, this was partly as a result of over-expenditure on Capital projects. Lambeth agreed to support Loughborough partly to facilitate the setting up of URH. A draft recovery plan was drawn up. LEMB believe that there is a moral argument that Lambeth should pay for money incurred on Capital projects, however it is accepted that there is no legal reason to do so.
- 4.1.4 The dispute over Loughborough funding was further complicated because another dispute started during December 2006 between Lambeth Council and all 15 of the TMOs, when the Authority tried to introduce drastic cuts to their budgets. This dispute was not resolved until March 08. The general background had been that Lambeth Housing has it's own funding problems.
- 4.1.5 Recently, a new investigation into the conduct of three staff members has been launched. A preliminary report is expected during May 2008.

4.2.0 Proposals

- 4.2.1 Under the new proposals Damian Roche would report to board and take on responsibility for managing LEMB staff. This would also seem to be an ideal time to revise the TMO management agreement.
- 4.2.2 It should be possible to put these proposals into practice without having to amend the URH Management Agreement. However, it would be wise to consult with a number of bodies such as the Audit Commission, GoL etc before implementation.
- 4.2.3 A number of elements would be needed, including:-
- Review of staffing situation
 - Review use of Direct Labour Organisation and use of Housing Repairs.
 - Introduce monthly performance reports to LEMB board, URH and Lambeth Council.

- 4.2.4 It is important to note that in the last quarter of the 2007/08 financial year, Loughborough suffered a significant overspend on their repairs budget. It is clear that policies and protocols were not being followed. It is important to realise that the bottom line for Lambeth will be reducing risk and minimising any monies lost.
- 4.2.5 Page 18 of the report outlines a number of controls and checks on the budget. Lambeth housing will be looking to receive a number of reassurances.
- 4.2.6 Page 20 lists the benefits of this proposal. Primary amongst this would be the continued existence of Loughborough EMB as a separate entity. If LEMB were to cease trading there would be significant financial implications. The proposed time-scale for this arrangement would be at least 12 months – but would potentially take place over a much longer period of time. A minimum of two years was suggested, this will need to be discussed with LEMB.
- 4.2.7 Lia Conceicao stated that they believed that this arrangement goes against the spirit in which Tenant Management Organisations were set up. Surely, the best approach would be to appoint a strong manager and support them in their role? Also, shouldn't there be more separation of duties? 'The Council and URH need to support LEMB but not in this way'.
- 4.2.8 In reply, Damian Roche reminded the meeting that LEMB had asked for assistance and URH cannot bring in Decent Homes money unless the TMOs perform to a certain level. There will be a very definite separation of budgets between URH and Loughborough, to assure the board that there will be effective separation of duties.
- 4.2.9 Cllr Alex McKenna congratulated Damain Roche on a very well thought out paper. The board should realise that this is a lifeboat, not a threat. The Estate is in difficulties, and there is a need for all parties to work together to support the TMOs. This proposal would support LEMB and it will be a good experience for URH. It is not possible to run away from the present situation - this is public money, and must be protected. The issues involved are unique to LEMB, and has taken many years to reach this stage, similar sanctions would not be required at any other TMOs. The future of URH depends on this proposal. The proposal seems fairly clear on rights and responsibilities. If Loughborough were not within URH, it is doubtful whether it would survive.
- 4.2.10 Lia Concaicao repeated their concerns – that it should be possible to guide LEMB without taking the office under direct control.
- 4.2.11 Damian Roche reminded the meeting that LEMB was established under Right to Manage regulations – which are sacrosanct.
- 4.2.12 Jean Slater was keen to ensure that the current manager at LEMB did not have to shoulder responsibility for any of the problems that have surfaced since their appointment. Everybody at the meeting agreed that none of the these operating difficulties can be attributed to Lloyd Lewis, please note there is no suggestion of this in the report.
- 4.2.13 Ann Hoad, who serves as both the Chair of URH and LEMB, was keen to emphasise that LEMB has been brought to this point by Lambeth Council. Admittedly, there has been a problem with the repairs budget recently. LEMB feel that they have had a number of mixed signals from Lambeth Housing. At one meeting Ann Hoad attended with senior officers from Lambeth Housing, they got the impression that the Council was keen to wind up LEMB. Ann Hoad also has concerns that Lambeth Councillors were holding informal

meetings regarding the future of the estate, without inviting any Loughborough Council members to participate in the debate.

- 4.2.14 Damian Roche apologised to Ann Hoad for any confusion his earlier comments had made. To clarify the original idea for this structure came from URH, however the driver for change came from Lambeth Council, who have indicated that they are not satisfied with current arrangements.
- 4.2.15 Ann Hoad stated that members of LEMB have been concerned about comments Lambeth officers have made about 'propping Loughborough up'. LEMB take the view that in many cases the opposite is true. LEMB have had to fund many Capital Schemes on the estate and have not received funding even when this had previously been agreed with Lambeth.
- 4.2.16 Maya Schram stated that they had concerns about how much time managing Loughborough could take out of the Chief Executive's time.
- 4.2.17 Damian Roche replied during the initial phase of setting up policies and a management structures would be a significant commitment but this would reduce over time. Additionally, a new Finance Officer is due to be appointed who will work closely with three of the TMOs (Blenheim Gdns have made their own arrangements), which will relieve the Chief executive of some of their workload.
- 4.2.18 Helen Charlesworth-May wanted to receive assurances that there would be no conflict of interest between the two roles – managing Loughborough and running URH. Damian Roche stated that the funding arrangements for the two organisations are totally different.
- 4.2.19 Cllr Clive Bennett was keen to ensure that Loughborough does not get hemmed in by continuing investigation. It is important to ensure that the credibility of LEMB is preserved.
- 4.2.20 Ann Hoad stated that although the LEMB board was broadly happy with the initial proposals from URH, they were deeply concerned about the attitude exhibited by Lambeth Council. Some members of the board are also worried about financial liability.
- 4.2.21 Edith Yembra stated that this proposal could slow down progress on the improvement plan and would like assurances that Phil Morris and Damian Roche will not be over stretched. Additionally, are there any proposals as regards to what happens after the first two years? Have residents been briefed on the proposals?
- 4.2.22 Damian Roche replied that URH would have to monitor the workload of senior officers after this proposal is put into practice. In terms of operational management, would aim to make much better use of reviews, may bring in specialist consultants.
- 4.2.23 Under these proposals LEMB would continue to manage the estate, so the consultation requirements for residents would be minimal. This subject has been discussed extensively by the LEMB board, which any residents can attend.
- 4.2.24 A vote was finally taken on this proposal, the final tally was ten members in favour of the proposal, one against. There were no abstentions. The proposal was carried.
- 4.2.25 David Schwarz, Cllr Clive Bennett and Edith Yembra stated that although they were satisfied with the proposal in principle, they were keen to see further detail on these proposals provided to future meetings.

- 5 Service Improvement Plan – Update
 - 5.1.1 Damian Roche introduced this report. An update/ exception report will be provided at each board meeting. There were no questions.
- 6 URH Performance Indicators
 - 6.1.0 Tim Mathias introduced this topic.
 - 6.1.2 There has been some improvement in performance, particularly around rent arrears. However, there remains substantial work to be completed.
 - 6.1.3 We still need to do some work on the urgent repairs indicator, BPSA E5. This is in progress.
 - 6.1.4 As far more data is available to URH, we have changed the way that data is presented – comments to TMathias@urh.org.uk are welcome.
- 7 URH Financial Monitoring - confidential
- 8 Any Other Business
 - 8.1.0 Damian Roche
 - 8.1.1 URH will be moving offices on 18th April 08.
 - 8.2.0 Ann Hoad
 - 8.2.1 Wished to reiterate how much they had enjoyed the role of URH Chair.