

Northwards Housing – HR & Equality Sub-Committee Meeting

Hexagon Tower
Tuesday 26th June 2007 at 7.00pm

Chair: Martin McKevitt

Present: Martin McKevitt (MMcK) Board Member
Fatima Adamjee (FA) Board Member
Ade Alao (AA) Board Member
Rachel Christie (RC) Board Member
Sue Pemberton (SP) Board Co-optee

In Attendance: Robin Lawler (RL) Chief Executive
Steve Wood (SW) Director of Business Services
Tara Kelly (TK) E&D Officer

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
1	Welcome and Introductions The meeting was confirmed as quorate.	
2	Apologies for Absence Apologies had been received from June Hitchen & Joan Fitzgerald. Lisa McBurnie was unable to attend because of illness.	
3	Declarations of Interest / Confidential Matters / Equality & Diversity Matters Arising There were no confidential matters or declarations of interest to note. Equality & Diversity matters were noted on specific reports.	
4	Minutes of Last Meeting held on 22nd May 2007 The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a correct & accurate record & duly signed by the Chair.	
5	Matters Arising Item 9 -Northwards Experience SP gave a verbal update on this scheme. She advised that she is in discussion with Job Centre Plus about support for the scheme. Item 13- Equality & Diversity Action Plan TK advised that she will bring quarterly progress reports to Sub-	

	Committee. The first report for Quarter 1 will come to July meeting.	
6	<p>Gender Equality Duty (GED) TK gave a powerpoint presentation explaining the 3 current duties for Race, Disability &, most recently, Gender. She advised on the general duties under GED falling upon Northwards, but suggested that best practice is to also meet the specific duties, although there is no legal requirement to do so.</p> <p>AA asked whether it was the intention to consolidate the 3 duties into a single policy & practice. RL responded that this was his intention & that TK is looking at Equality Schemes from Gateshead ALMO & the Audit Commission. TK stated that the creation of the new Commission for Equality & Human Rights was an incentive to do so.</p> <p>In response to AA's question on monitoring progress against the GED, RL & TK advised that this would be part of the E&D Action Plan & through focus groups.</p> <p>The presentation was noted.</p>	TK
7	<p>Equalities Review: Final Report TK explained her report which summarised the main findings from a review of the Equalities Review "Fairness & Freedom" undertaken by Trevor Phillips at the request of the Prime Minister. This is a useful review leading into the work of the new Commission for Equality & Human Rights (CEHR) which Mr Phillips will chair.</p> <p>RL advised that this report should be read in conjunction with the report of the Integration & Cohesion Commission which was published on 14th June. A paper explaining this report will be brought to July Sub-Committee. Cohesion issues are particularly relevant given the share of the vote by the BNP in recent local elections.</p> <p>AA asked about the proposal for an Equality Scorecard. SP advised that this is an idea without any detail at this stage.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted the report.</p>	TK
8	<p>Equality Standard Level 2 TK reported that Northwards had been independently assessed on 30th May & had achieved Equality Standard Level 2. TK highlighted the positive feedback from the assessor & areas for further development.</p> <p>Northwards is committed to achieving Level 3 & a further report will be brought to Sub-Committee in due course setting out the project plan. AA suggested that it would be helpful to achieve Level 3 in advance of Re-Inspection. RL concurred & advised that using the Audit Commission's Diversity Key Line of Enquiry (KLOE) would assist with Level 3 attainment.</p>	TK

	Sub-Committee noted the report & congratulated TK on a good achievement in attaining Level 2.	
9	<p>Internal Audit Action Plan</p> <p>SW presented the component of the Internal Audit action Plan relevant to this Sub-Committee. He advised upon progress with Health & Safety issues in which he would wish to involve Board Members.</p> <p>The Sub-Committee noted the outstanding actions with regards to Health & Safety & asked to receive further progress reports in due course.</p>	
10	<p>Risk Management Strategy</p> <p>SW introduced the report to which was appended those elements of the Risk Management Strategy relevant to this Sub-Committee. He asked Members to consider the risks listed & to suggest any amendments, additions or deletions.</p> <p>In discussion, the following points were raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is "large amount of initial work" still relevant? - should it read "Lack of training & development"? - compliance with the Equality Duties should be added - where will potential loss of external funding (i.e. for Neighbourhood Wardens) be included? <p>SW undertook to review the list taking account of those comments.</p>	SW
11	<p>Pre-Retirement Employee Forum</p> <p>RL advised that, in order to address the revised retirement rules under Age Discrimination Legislation, a Pre-Retirement Employee Forum is to be set up for Northwards' employees.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted the report.</p>	
12	<p>Absence Performance</p> <p>RL explained the report which provided sickness absence performance to 31st March. He advised that if absence levels for first 2 months of 2007/8 continue, Northwards will exit the year at 12 days per employee compared to the target of 9.5 days. He advised that work will continue to bring performance back on target, particularly with long term absence.</p> <p>Sub-Committee asked to receive an explanation of long term absence as part of the Performance report for June.</p> <p>SP asked for confirmation as to how disability related absence is dealt with in these figures & in providing references to disabled employees. This explanation will be included in June performance report.</p> <p>AA asked if line managers are receiving sufficient training & support</p>	LMcB

	<p>to properly manage absence in their teams. SW advised that the HR Team provide support, but that further actions are being considered to improve management of absence by line managers.</p> <p>The absence report was noted.</p>	
13	<p>Training Needs Survey & Analysis RL introduced the report which set out the four categories of training provided broken down by Directorate, with a further breakdown by Team. Training provided is prioritised within the budget available & to meet Northwards' objectives. Needs are identified through annual staff appraisals, supervision meetings & 360 degree appraisals.</p> <p>MMcK asked if failing to meet all training requests can demotivate staff. RL agreed that this could be the case, but that additional resources had been put into the training budget & HR Team is looking at ways to maximise participation. SW mentioned the role of mentoring.</p> <p>RL advised that the intention is to move from a training programme to a learning programme, since the latter requires staff taking responsibility for their personal development. Training implies a passive process.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted the report.</p>	
14	<p>Birthday Holiday Entitlement RL advised that, in line with the decision to grant an extra day's leave in recognition of achieving 2 Stars; cards are to be sent to every member of staff on their birthday.</p> <p>This was acknowledged as a nice touch by the Sub-Committee.</p>	
15	<p>No Smoking Policy SW explained that the report seeks to ensure that Northwards meets its legal obligations in respect of the smoking ban from 1st July & to introduce consistent arrangements between the 6 offices. If approved, the intention is to advise all staff of the new arrangements prior to 1st July. This will include a total ban on smoking in premises & company vehicles.</p> <p>A further report will be brought to Sub-Committee as to how Northwards will support staff to manage their craving & to quit smoking.</p> <p>Sub-Committee approved the policy, but asked that it to be re-named "Smoke Free Workplace".</p>	LMcB
16	<p>Regeneration Officer Post See confidential minute.</p>	

17	Training RL advised that the feedback from Board Members on recent Value for Money training had been very positive. AA concurred.	
18	Any Other Business a) Sub-Committee to consider at next meeting whether to meet in August.	
19	Date & Time of Next Meeting: Tuesday 24TH July at 7.00pm in the Boardroom, Hexagon Tower.	