

Northwards Housing – HR and Equality Sub-Committee Meeting

Hexagon Tower
Tuesday 24th July 2007 at 7.00pm

Chair: Martin McKeivitt

Present:

Fatima Adamjee (FA)	Board Member
Ade Alao (AA)	Board Member
Joan Fitzgerald (JF)	Board Member
June Hitchen (JH)	Board Member
Martin McKeivitt (MM)	Board Member
Sue Pemberton (SP)	Board Member

In Attendance:

Steve Wood (SW)	Director of Business Services
Tara Kelly (TK)	Equality and Diversity Officer

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
1	Welcome and Introductions The meeting was confirmed as quorate.	
2	Apologies for Absence Apologies had been received from Rachel Christie. SW explained to Sub-Committee Lisa McBurnie's absence and Sub-Committee asked for their best wishes to be passed on.	
3	Declaration of Interests / Confidential Matters / Equality & Diversity Matters Arising There were no matters for noting under this item. Equality and Diversity implications were noted on particular reports.	
4	Minutes of the Last Meeting – 26th June 2007 With a correction to minute 16 Regeneration Officer confirming that the grade for this post was SO1/2, the minutes were approved and signed by the chair.	
5	Matters Arising a) Gender Equality Duty TK confirmed that this work was on going and it was the officers' intention to produce a General Equality Scheme rather than separate ones. An update would be provided in due course. b) Equality Standard	

	<p>TK confirmed to Sub-Committee that plans were coming together in respect of working towards Level 3.</p> <p>c) Risk Management Strategy</p> <p>SW confirmed that Sub-Committee's comments had been incorporated into the updated strategy.</p> <p>d) Smoke Free Workplace</p> <p>SW confirmed that work on support for employees who wished to give up smoking was being undertaken and that a report would be prepared for Sub-Committee as requested.</p>	SW
6	<p>The Disability Symbol</p> <p>TK introduced a paper outlining the intentions to be able to use the Disability Symbol in recruitment. The process to be followed was done through the Job Centre and would make a positive statement about the organisation's commitment to the recruitment and retention of disabled people.</p> <p>There are five commitments but it did not appear that Northwards would need to do very much that was new. An application pack had been received and meetings were being set up with an advisor. There was no charge/cost for the scheme.</p> <p>Sub-Committee asked a couple of questions and discussed the need for a wheelchair or evacuation chair at Hexagon Tower. The officers agreed to look into this.</p> <p>Sub-Committee approved the application for the Disability Symbol scheme and asked for further updates each quarter.</p>	SW
7	<p>Our Shared Futures: Report by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion</p> <p>TK introduced a paper and summary of the 'Our Shared Futures' report that had been recently published by the I & DEA on behalf of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.</p> <p>There are four key principles recommending a local approach, a nationally sponsored community week and the continuing promotion of citizenship. The key was building on what people had in common rather than differences.</p> <p>MM asked about what Northwards could do to get involved in GSCE work in schools as this was something where we could use present links to build upon.</p>	

	<p>Sub-Committee discussed the fact that cohesion was not just about race, but was a wider issue about how and the way people are placed in communities. JH shared some positive examples of communities weeks in local primary schools and the establishment of a group to support French Ghanans. However, often there was no proper support and this did not seem to be reflected in the report.</p> <p>TK explained that Northwards was starting to develop an implementation plan and was starting to look at a focus group to explore support issues. It may be just a signposting exercise to other agencies or may result in other pieces of work.</p> <p>JH explained the need for Tenancy Support at the time of sign up and how this could make such a difference, although it was recognised that not everyone wanted groups and the community visiting immediately after moving in.</p> <p>Sub-Committee discussed the difficulties of getting people involved in the community, but agreed that building links and positive relationships was a long-term process.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted the summary and report and asked that it be shared with Area Panels to see which parts were priorities for them and what more Northwards could do.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted the report and requested an update report back in November.</p>	<p>TK</p> <p>TK</p>
<p>8</p>	<p>The Work and Families Act 2006 – Caring for the Carers</p> <p>SW presented a legislation update that Northwards was hoping to positively promote allowing staff some flexibility in their working arrangements when they need to act as carers.</p> <p>Sub-Committee discussed the trust element around requests against the wish to verify the need.</p> <p>JH asked about the flexibility of the scheme and hoped that Northwards would respond more quickly than 42 days. SW agreed to take these comments on board in developing the internal policy for communication to staff.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted that there was a review of flexible working intended, but were please that Northwards is adopting a positive attitude.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted the report.</p>	
<p>9</p>	<p>Absence Report – June 2007</p> <p>The Absence Report for June 2007 had been circulated with the</p>	

	<p>agenda.</p> <p>As requested, some further details of the long-term absences had been put in the report and SW explained the current position in relation to a couple of cases.</p> <p>In reviewing the short-term absence, Sub-Committee were concerned with the current performance and asked for a full report for the next meeting including performance on home visits, letters and details of reasons for absence by Manager.</p> <p>It was noted that most absence appeared to correlate with those staff who had the most contact with the public, but it was agreed that reasons for absence should be analysed before reaching conclusions.</p> <p>Sub-Committee discussed asking Managers to attend the next meeting to explain their actions, but decided to leave the officers to prepare the report in the first instance as requested. SW confirmed he would raise the matter and Sub-Committee's comments at the Senior Managers meeting later in the week.</p> <p>Sub-Committee also asked for work to be done on looking at rewards for attendance and SW agreed to put something together for the next meeting.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted the report and requested a further, more detailed report to its next meeting.</p>	<p>SW</p> <p>SW</p> <p>SW</p>
10	<p>Training</p> <p>There were no training issues identified from the meeting.</p>	
11	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>a) Payment of Bills at Post Offices</p> <p>JH raised the issue of tenants being charged administration fees when paying bills at Post Offices where the utility supplier did not have an agreement with the Post Office. The result was tenants thinking they were paying the correct amount when in fact they were having part of the payment deducted in fees.</p> <p>It was agreed that this issue should be explained to tenants and that officers should look into it in terms of who are their utility suppliers and the promotion of alternative payment methods. JH confirmed that she was raising it as an issue with the Council.</p>	
12	<p>Dates of Next Meeting</p> <p>It was confirmed that the Sub-Committee would not meet in</p>	

	August and therefore the next meeting would be Tuesday 25 th September at 7.00pm at Hexagon Tower.	
	With thanks to everyone, the Chair closed the meeting at 8.15pm.	