

Northwards Housing – Resource & Audit Sub-Committee Meeting

Hexagon Tower
Tuesday 28th October 2008 at 5:30pm

Chair: Michelle Carmichael

Present: Michelle Carmichael (MC) Board Member
Rachel Christie (RC) Board Member
Mark Hackett (MH) Board Member
Martin McKeivitt (MM) Board Member
Paul Seymour (PS) Board Member

In Attendance: Steve Wood (SW) Director of Business Services
Steve Finegan (SF) Head of Business Improvement

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
1	Welcome and Introductions It was confirmed that the meeting was quorate.	
2	Apologies for Absence Apologies for absence had been received from David Leah.	
3	Declaration of Interests / Confidential Matters / Equality & Diversity Matters Arising MC declared an interest in respect of item 5e – Manchester Tenants Insurance Scheme. Item 5d – Premises Review was a confidential item. Equality and Diversity implications were noted on particular reports.	
4	Minutes of Last Meeting The minutes and confidential minutes from the last meeting held on 23 rd September were approved and signed by the Chair.	
5	Matters Arising a) Business Rates SW reported that he was still awaiting a response from the City Treasurer. b) Manchester Working meeting	

	<p>others. Particular areas where Northwards was bottom quartile ie higher cost were empty properties and responsive repairs.</p> <p>In looking at the figures Sub-Committee discussed the needs of the areas in which Northwards operated and confirmed that being top quartile performers was not necessarily where we wanted to be. The issue with being higher than average cost was how the resource was being used and on what the money was being spent.</p> <p>The pleasing feature of the information was that Northwards was a low cost performer in relation to overheads giving evidence of the work that had been done to drive costs away from the back office and onto tenant-facing services.</p> <p>PS asked about the quarterly Performance Indicator information that was also provided by Housemark. SW confirmed that it was hoped to build the quarterly quartile performance information into the Covalent system in the future so this could form part of all the performance reports.</p> <p>SW explained the further work that had been carried out by Northwards to understand our own costs with the use of the Financial Model and explained some of the data that had been produced for Sub-Committee. In particular this highlighted the current cost of the On-Call service and how this fed through into the overall cost per unit. The work done also allowed for a full analysis of central costs to see how particular lines in the accounts fed through into the Housemark figures. Now the model was completed, this was available for Accounts Forecast information as well as the Budget process.</p> <p>After some further discussion, Sub-Committee noted the report.</p>	
7	<p>Rent Collection Performance</p> <p>SF presented a report to Sub-Committee on current performance around rent collection and on proposals to increase targets with a view to achieving top quartile performance in due course.</p> <p>As previously reported, there had been an immediate impact from Operation Col with an improvement in performance in August of 4.2% in collection. This figure had been maintained in September. It was hoped that the performance trend would continue.</p> <p>In relation to target setting there was an aim to achieve upper quartile rent collection (NHL701) in the next twelve months with a proposed target of 100.5% for the fourth quarter 2009-10.</p> <p>For the indicators including arrears, this would take longer to turn around and therefore short-term targets were being set with a</p>	

	<p>view to reviewing the plan in April 2009 once the arrears position at 31 March 2009 was known.</p> <p>MH asked about the effect of the current economic situation on the rent collection rates and SF explained some of the impact that was being seen by the team. Work was required to ensure the Money Advisors were being effective and to promote the Credit Union.</p> <p>PS asked about the levels of Housing Benefit and information on payment methods. SW confirmed that Housing Benefit accounted for 67% of the collection methods and this had been a static figure over the past two years.</p> <p>In relation to the future working of the Rent Recovery Team, SF explained some of the thinking that had been done to date with a view to learning the lessons of Operation Col and make sure that these were embedded in the work going forward. As a given it had been concluded that patch based working should continue.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted the progress made in improving rent collection and improved the step targets for NHL701 to achieve top quartile performance.</p> <p>Sub-Committee asked for their thanks to be passed onto the Rent Recovery Team.</p>	SW
8	<p>Policies</p> <p>a) Data Protection Policy</p> <p>SF presented the Data Protection Policy for consideration by Sub-Committee. To date, Northwards had been operating within the Council's scheme but it had been concluded that it would make sense for Northwards to have its own.</p> <p>There was nothing really new in the policy which would have an accompanying note as Guidance for employees.</p> <p>SF confirmed that Northwards has had very few requests and those received to date tended to be on the back of complaints. Further work was required in some areas to strengthen procedures to ensure that the confidentiality of information remained secure.</p> <p>MH asked about the accidental loss of data and noted the sections in the policy on encryption of data taken off site. SF confirmed that to date there had been no examples of any loss with discs or memory sticks. As part of the policy roll out, checks would be made to ensure the policy was being adhered to.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted the policy and Northwards' legal obligations under the Data Protection Act.</p>	

	<p>SF left the meeting at this point.</p> <p>b) ICT Strategy</p> <p>SW presented an update report on the ICT Strategy on behalf of the Head of ICT. The original Strategy had been formulated in 2006 for three years and it was appropriate to wait until 2009 before rewriting the Strategy given all the changes that were imminent. However, it was useful to provide Sub-Committee with an update on progress.</p> <p>SW talked Sub-Committee through the key changes and things that had been implemented. He also referred to some of the items that had not been fully completed including Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) for the phone systems and full ICT access for Scheme Managers.</p> <p>MC asked about what happened with PCs that were replaced and SW confirmed that they were generally given to Tenant Groups.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted the report.</p>	
9	<p>Monthly Accounts – September 2008</p> <p>SW presented the Monthly Accounts for period six of the year which showed a continued picture of costs slightly ahead of budget. In the month, further work had been done to review the outturn position and budget discussions with Managers were continuing.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted the Accounts.</p>	
10	<p>Inspection Action Plan (2006)</p> <p>The one remaining outstanding item continued to be the completion of the profiling of rent arrears. Progress on this was assessed at 50% but whilst there was continuing work the information was now being used, there would always be still more to do and therefore the action would not be 100% complete before Inspection.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted the report.</p>	
11	<p>Fraud Register</p> <p>SW presented the Fraud Register to Sub-Committee.</p> <p>The Chair asked about the item raised last time in relation to some missing decorating vouchers and SW reported that this matter was now closed and was being seen as a genuine</p>	

	<p>mistake.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted the report.</p>	
12	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>a) Internal Audit</p> <p>SW raised a matter for consideration by Sub-Committee. KPMG, Internal Auditors, had been appointed in 2006 for a three year programme. He therefore asked Sub-Committee's views over approaches for retendering the service or for continuing the current contract.</p> <p>Sub-Committee confirmed they were happy with the current arrangement which had been very detailed and provided a number of good suggestions. However, this was the opportunity to review, test what else might be available and ensure Value for Money was demonstrated.</p> <p>After some further discussion, Sub-Committee asked SW to come back to the next meeting with a retendering proposal which would balance quality and price and which might also take account of Shared Services opportunities.</p>	SW
13	<p>Date of next meeting</p> <p>The next meeting would be on Tuesday 25th November at 5:30pm at Hexagon Tower.</p> <p>With thanks to everyone, the Chair closed the meeting at 6.55pm.</p>	