



BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING LIMITED

**MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 4TH NOVEMBER 2009
AT 6.00 PM, PROGRESS HOUSE**

PRESENT:

- Cllr Ron Bell
- Diane Bellinger
- Cllr Simon Blackburn
- Caroline Cook
- Cllr Joan Greenhalgh
- Cllr Jim Houldsworth
- Alan Marsh
- Bill Rogers
- Alison Stringer
- Janet Stirling
- Paul Whitehead
- Doreen Wightman (Chair)

NOT PRESENT:

- Cllr Tim Cox

IN ATTENDANCE:

- Maggie Cornall (Director of Housing Services)
- Peter Whittaker (Company Secretary)
- Peter Jefferson (Chief Executive)
- Cyril Holland (Director of Property Services)
- Neil Jack (Director of Finance & Resources)
- Pam Whitworth (Blackpool Council Representative)

PART A – OPEN SESSION

1.	<u>Apologies</u> Judith Mills, Carol Hall
2.	<u>Declarations of Interest</u> None.
3.	<u>Minutes of Board Meeting 16th September 2009</u> The Board was reminded that the full minute of Part B of the meeting of 16 th September 2009 refers to commercially confidential matters, which are exempt from publication. Agreed: That the Minutes be accepted as a true record
4.	<u>Matters Arising</u> It was reported that development of the Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme is continuing and the issue was due to be considered by Blackpool Council's Executive on the 4th November 2009. Agreed: That the current position be noted.



<p>5.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Board Strategy and Business Planning Event Outcomes</u></p> <p>Peter Whittaker explained that a number of decisions taken during the course of the event, when the Board was in informal session, now needed to be formally ratified. The issues were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board B. Strategic Priorities C. Scheme of Delegation D. Renaming of Board Sub-Committees E. BCH Annual Report <p>Arising from Item D above (Renaming of Board Sub-Committees) a brief discussion took place about the possibility of amalgamating some of the current Sub-Committees and granting delegated powers to them. The Chair explained that the two interlinked issues should more properly be considered in the context of a wider-ranging, overall review of governance that must soon be undertaken in advance of the forthcoming inspection.</p> <p>Agreed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Bill Rogers, having received eight votes, a majority of the 15 cast, be elected as Vice-Chair of the Board to serve until the Board meeting immediately following the next Annual General Meeting of the Company in 2010 B. The following four areas for action be approved for further detailed investigation and report to future meetings of the Board <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing other social housing organisations' stock • New house building • Reassurance Plus • Option appraisal C. The revised version of the Scheme of Delegation be referred to the Finance & Audit Committee for final consideration before submission to the Board for full approval D. (i) With effect from the meeting cycle beginning after the November Board Meeting all current Sub-Committees of the Board will be renamed as Committees. (ii) Changes to the Committee structure, and the issue of granting delegated powers to Committees will be considered as part of an overall Governance Review to be undertaken in 2010. E. The Annual Report for 2008-09 be approved for publication.
<p>6.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Tenant Scrutiny and Involvement Structures</u></p> <p>Maggie Cornall gave a presentation on Tenant Scrutiny and Involvement Structures and the possibilities for moving forward on these issues. It was noted that BCH has already developed new forums in line with Audit Commission KLOEs and both Elton Review and Tenant Services Authority statements.</p> <p>Simon Blackburn commented that he was under the impression that the Council no longer had a Community Development Department. It was explained that this was correct but that Community development Officers are still employed by the Council.</p>



It was explained that the Tenant Liaison Forum (TLF) would be disbanded if the structures now proposed were adopted and Joan Greenhalgh asked what would be the implications for groups, such as the Mereside Residents Association, which have a mixed tenure membership. It was noted that one effect of the new structure would be to relax membership criteria for the overall structure and the Mereside Residents Association could therefore be once again recognised as being affiliated within it.

It was, however, made clear that only tenants and leaseholders would be able to join the Service Panels or the Assembly itself. Training would be provided for panel members in order to encourage recruitment.

Blackpool Council approval would be needed to change the constitution of the TLF, which would then hand over representative responsibility to the Assembly. Maggie Cornall reported that she had discussed this with the TLF members who had said they were keen to develop this new approach and felt that tenant led scrutiny is the right way forward. Blackpool Council, as the Housing Client, had also been consulted and were happy for BCH to explore these ideas further.

Ron Bell asked about projected timescales to implement the Assembly and it was explained that a Shadow Forum could possibly be operating from April 2010 for perhaps a six month lead-in period until the TLF is formally disbanded. It was, however, noted that this timescale is not finalised and requires further discussion and refinement. .

Simon Blackburn queried the possibility for a tenant or leaseholder to sit as both an Assembly Member and a BCH Board Director and it was explained that such dual membership would not be allowed as it could lead to a conflict of interest. Scrutiny programmes, for example, would need to be agreed in partnership jointly by both the Assembly and the Board to identify common priorities. However, Simon Blackburn was of the opinion that the Assembly should be able to scrutinise their own choice of areas of BCH activity and the Board's working, regardless of the Board's agreement.

It was noted that the Assembly would need its own devolved budget of a sufficient size to enable it to operate effectively. Alan Marsh was concerned about the way in which the Assembly would be seen to be publicly accountable and it was explained that they would be accountable to the customers of BCH as a whole, both tenants and leaseholders. Bill Rogers commented that the Assembly could manage the £100,000 Tenant Fund but it was noted that a range of options for that process need to be explored before decisions can be made.

Diane Bellinger made a number of points:

Tenant led Scrutiny is the right approach to take but that it is vital to make fully clear to the Assembly that ultimate responsibility for the governance and management of BCH will still lie with the Board and its Director members. It was suggested that the Assembly could form part of Blackpool Council's involvement structure, in much the same way that TLF does now, and in that way ensure a clear identification and separation of responsibilities and interests.



	<p>What were the lines of accountability within the structure of the Assembly and its Service Panels where customers are involved with staff in the groups? Maggie Cornall stated that Service Managers for each area of activity would be accountable to the panels and report back to them on service performance.</p> <p>How does the fact of an individual Tenant with a specific interest sitting on a Service Panel reflect the views of the larger group? It was noted that if people need to develop specialist knowledge there may be a difficulty with the assembly having the right range and mix of skills. It was reported that this issue had already been identified and that recruitment arrangements and subsequent training need to be developed.</p> <p>Ron Bell asked about the tenure for membership of the Assembly and it was noted that three years appears to be the period most models are adopting. Salix Homes in Salford are leading the way with this model but it is still too soon to draw absolute conclusions about its effectiveness.</p> <p>Simon Blackburn commented that he saw benefit in the Council's Cabinet Member for Housing being involved in the new structure, in much the same way that they currently are with TLF. He went on to say that he felt some provision for reward or recognition of the commitment of people involved with the Assembly should be made and that there were no doubt imaginative ways in which this could be done. Maggie Cornall stated that this could be explored and good practice examples identified.</p> <p>Given the likely time commitment required of Assembly members, Jim Houldsworth stated that he would like to see how working people could best be supported if they wish to become involved in the Assembly.</p> <p>Simon Blackburn commented that having the opportunity for a broad discussion on the principles involved at an early stage, and prior to a formal report being brought to the Board, had been a very positive process.</p> <p>He then proposed that a detailed report be brought to a future Board Meeting for further discussion and decision. Ron Bell seconded this and it was agreed unanimously.</p> <p>Agreed: That a detailed report is brought to a future Board meeting.</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p><u>Board and Committee Meeting Dates 2010-2011</u></p> <p>Peter Whittaker explained that the meeting dates offered reflect the Board's previous decision to change the arrangement of Committee Meeting dates within each Board Meeting cycle. Dates were set out through to March 2011, but some dates after May 2010 may have to be changed to avoid a clash with the dates of full Council Meetings when they are known.</p> <p>Directors were asked to accept the first cycle of Committee meeting dates and then amend any future dates by mutual agreement whilst keeping within the timing limits for meeting cycles already agreed by the Board.</p>



	<p>Agreed: That</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Subject to re-arrangement of the meetings for April and May 2010, and the possibility of change when the 2010-11 Council Meeting calendar is published, the proposed meeting dates be approved. 2. At its meeting in the November to December cycle each Board Committee will consider its proposed future meeting dates and amend them as necessary within previously agreed meeting cycle limits for use starting in the meeting cycle that begins after the December 2009 Board Meeting
<p>8.</p>	<p><u>Financial Performance</u></p> <p>A: 2009-10 Quarter 2 BCH Budget Monitoring Report</p> <p>Neil Jack presented his report and explained that the main financial pressure relates to void property management and repair issues. There has, by contrast, been a continued reduction in responsive maintenance costs, probably resulting from the effect of Decent Homes work. Some savings have also arisen due to the nationally agreed annual pay award, which was less than the budget provision made for it. These savings will be moved from individual team or section budgets and consolidated centrally in the Contingencies area of the budget in order to maximise the effect of their eventual use.</p> <p>There had also been savings in the cost of Hostels management. With only one now fully open, and Central Drive temporarily closed, cleaning and security contracts have been reduced accordingly. BCH is in discussion with Blackpool Council regarding operations through the rest of the financial year and Hostel staff are being consulted. It was noted that Blackpool Council may rent the Buchanan Street Hostel to Street Life.</p> <p>The question of where people who had previously used the Hostels are now accommodated was raised. Maggie Cornall stated that the Emergency Housing Service Provision is being reviewed and the main reason for the reduction in the use of the Hostels is the preventative work by Blackpool Council. The time families spend in Hostels has significantly decreased with some finding property to live in by themselves.</p> <p>A further query was raised on the extent to which tree and shrub work is included in the Grounds Maintenance Contract because it was reported that there are trees on Layton Playground that appear to be dead. Cyril Holland explained there is an element in the contract for this type of work, which he expected will start in the winter schedule. He undertook to investigate the particular issues raised.</p> <p>Agreed: That:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The 2009-10 Quarter 2 BCH financial position be noted. 2. Pay award savings of £65,00 be moved to the central Contingencies budget. <p>B: 2009-10 Quarter 2 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Monitoring Report</p> <p>Neil Jack presented his report and Alan Marsh asked about the costs of the Housing Client's creation of two new posts. Peter Jefferson reminded the Board that the HRA is Blackpool Council's account but BCH provides the management service for it. Spending decisions about HRA funding are purely the responsibility of Blackpool Council.</p>



	<p>Agreed: That the 2009-10 Quarter 2 HRA financial position be noted.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p><u>Operational Performance</u></p> <p>A. 2009-10 Quarter 2 Balanced Scorecard and Commentary Concern was expressed about BUS01 (Gas Servicing) as there were 130 properties currently without a gas safety certificate. Cyril Holland stated that there is a robust procedure in place to obtain access to properties and the Gas Service team know where each property is up to within it. Diane Bellinger proposed that if at any time there are properties without a gas certificate, performance on this issue should always be regarded as unsatisfactory and a comment always made,</p> <p>With regard to FIN05 (Current Tenant Arrears) it was explained that only uncollectable Former Tenant arrears can be written off. It was also noted that the number of rent weeks within each reporting quarter can vary, depending upon the number of Mondays within it (the day when the weekly Rent Debit is raised) apparent discrepancies can arise.</p> <p>The effect of the recession on rent arrears levels was questioned and Maggie Cornall stated that the arrears are stable at the moment. Peter Jefferson commented that a comparison of year on year statistics shows that the recurrent annual peaks and troughs are very similar. Maggie Cornall also explained that the effect of moving off and onto benefits can be confusing for tenants and this is often a time when arrears arise. It was noted that unemployment has risen by 46% so tenants on Housing Benefit effectively have their rent paid directly but get into arrears when they gain employment, often low-paid, and have to manage rent payments themselves</p> <p>The number of Notices of Seeking Possession served (FIN09), and the potential for increasing it was queried. Maggie Cornall explained that BCH tries to have more contact in the early stages of arrears recovery as this proves to be more effective.</p> <p>The Board noted that, in an organisation of the relatively small size of BCH, it is very difficult to achieve high performance on such issues as ORG08 (Percentage of top 5% of earners that are women). Peter Jefferson commented that external inspectors would expect to see data for this type of KPI for BCH and that targets reflect representative local data wherever possible.</p> <p>With regard to ORG01 (Sickness absence) it was noted that there have been some cases of long term sickness affecting the figures but there have been very few Swine Flu cases.</p> <p>Agreed: That the report be noted</p> <p>B. 2009-10 Quarter 2 Decent Homes Progress Report Cyril Holland gave an overview of progress with the second year of the Decent Homes Programme.</p> <p>It was noted that there appeared to be an error in the numbers of decent and non-decent properties because the two categories together did not add up to the total stock in management. It was explained that the apparent discrepancy arises from the fact that</p>



	<p>there is a third category of dwelling that is “Potentially Non-Decent ” that needs to be added in to reach the correct total. Future reporting will remove this discrepancy.</p> <p>Cyril Holland explained that the Partnering Contractors Reviews have taken place and lower allocations of work may be given for those not hitting targets.</p> <p>The community gardens at Bostonway and Edmonton Place have been recently completed.</p> <p>Cyril Holland explained that the Customer Satisfaction Surveys have a good return rate. Connaught are currently lower with there returns and this will be brought to the next Asset Management Committee Meeting.</p> <p>Agreed: That the report on the second quarter of the 2nd year progress of the Decent Homes Programme be noted.</p>
<p>10.</p>	<p><u>Office Accommodation Progress Report</u></p> <p>Peter Jefferson gave an overview of the progress for the office accommodation. Blackpool Council had not yet purchased the Harvey’s building and Peter Jefferson asked for the Board's support in expressing concern to the Council in writing. It was noted that BCH has not been given notice to leave Progress House.</p> <p>Agreed : That if no resolution of the problem occurs within the immediate future Peter Jefferson is to write to the Council to express the Board's concern.</p>
<p>11.</p>	<p><u>New Council House Building Update Report</u></p> <p>Peter Jefferson gave an update on the progress of new council house building and explained that BCH is currently in discussion with the architects about their design, particularly taking into consideration the future maintenance of the properties. The second bid was submitted last week and the Council will hear the outcome in December.</p> <p>Agreed: That the position be noted</p>
<p>12.</p>	<p><u>Minutes of the Sub-Committee and Matters Arising</u></p> <p>A. Asset Management Sub-Committee Meeting – 6th October 2009</p> <p>B. Finance and Audit Sub-Committee Meeting – 14th October 2009</p> <p>C. Operations Sub-Committee Meeting – 20th October 2009</p> <p>D. Human Resources Sub-Committee Meeting Meeting deferred to the 10th November 2009.</p> <p>Agreed: That the Minutes of the Sub-Committees be accepted</p>



13.	<u>Any Other Business</u> There were no items of business.
<u>PART B CLOSED SESSION</u> There were no Part B items of business	
	Date and Time of Next Meeting Wednesday 16 th December 2009 in Conference Room 1 at Progress House at 6.00pm
	The Meeting closed at 8-10pm