



BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING LIMITED

**MINUTES OF THE SERVICE DELIVERY COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY 1ST MARCH 2011 AT 6.00PM
IN THE BOARDROOM AT COASTAL HOUSE**

Present:
Cllr Jim Houldsworth
Alan Marsh
Judith Mills
Janet Stirling
Alison Stringer

In Attendance
Maggie Cornall (Director of Housing Services)
Cyril Holland (Director of Property Services)
Peter Whittaker (Company Secretary)
Andrew Walker (Area Housing Manager)

ITEM	
1.	<p>Apologies Carol Hall, Cllr Fred Jackson</p>
2.	<p>Declarations of Interest There were no declarations of interest.</p>
3.	<p>Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising The minutes were agreed as a true record and there were no matters arising.</p>
4.	<p>Terms of Reference Cyril Holland presented the Terms of Reference, which he explained were the result of updating and amalgamating those of the previous Asset Management and Operations Committees. In response to a query it was confirmed that the quorum would be four. It was, however, further explained that, in accordance with the Board's decision at its February meeting, if it became clear in advance that a meeting was likely to be inquorate a Director or Directors who sit on the Finance, Audit & Corporate Services Committee would be asked to attend. It had been felt that this was a better approach than reducing the quorum number. Agreed That the Terms of Reference be approved.</p>
5.	<p>Repair & Maintenance (R&M) Strategy Cyril Holland presented the strategy, which was an updated version of that originally approved in 2007. He explained that the document:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies future strategic direction and considers issues of sustainability. • Links to the BCH Asset Management Strategy and the Council's aims and objectives. • Sets out the legal framework for R&M, including Gas Safety, Health & Safety etc.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies the work elements of R&M and the teams who carry them out. • Deals with customer satisfaction information and how it is used to improve services. • Innovations such as increased use of ICT and changes to materials supply arrangements. • Target setting, action planning and performance management and reporting. <p>Committee members raised and received answers to a number of issues and questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced routine repair response timing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ would not contravene any statutory repairing obligations ○ was not expected to affect customer satisfaction as the service is still better than national ALMO upper quartile performance. ○ did not reflect any lack of ability to fund a full and proper R&M service ○ would be supported by a more proactive, targeted and cost effective approach to meeting needs through the use of “Property MoT’s” • It was not currently possible to say with certainty whether or not BCH could gain access to “Green Funding” but discussions with grant funding organisations were underway. • Levels of overall local employment might well be affected by changes in the Decent Homes Programme would be monitored with attention given to the question of apprenticeships. • Favourable comment was made about the reduction in average relet times. <p>Agreed: That the BCH board be recommended to approve the Repair & Maintenance Strategy.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Direct Labour Organisation Of The Year Award</p> <p>Cyril Holland reported that BCH had recently won the national Direct Labour Organisation Of The Year Award. The award had been received at the award ceremony by Doreen Wightman, as Chair of the Board, and Ian Butterworth, Operations Manager.</p> <p>Agreed: That all BCH staff whose efforts had been recognised by winning the award should be thanked and congratulated on their success.</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>Environmental Contracts Re-Tendering</p> <p>Cyril Holland reminded the Committee that the current contract will come to an end on 31st march 2011. He explained that the re-tendering exercise was well under way with the Pre-Tender Qualification stage having been completed and short-listing of contractors against bidding categories in hand. Identification of companies to be interviewed and upon whom reality checks would be carried was expected shortly.</p> <p>In response to questions he explained that the work carried out at Queens Park was essentially the provision of a caretaking Service including a minor Handyperson role. The Residents Association there had withdrawn from its initial interest in carrying out the work but was instead playing an active role in the procurement process.</p> <p>Agreed: That the position be noted and further information awaited.</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p>Decent Homes Progress</p> <p>Cyril Holland presented an update to 7th February 2011, providing a range of information::</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of achievements against work streams and spending targets.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The revised funding allocation from Government, giving guaranteed levels of £5.15M for 2011-12 and £7.0M for 2012-13. A further £8.5M had been provisionally allocated to cover the following two years up to 2014-15. • Customer satisfaction levels of 95% had been achieved and the survey information would help to decide which contractors would be used in future. Assessment of overhead and profit was also part of that process. • Negotiations with Lovell and KPMG were still in hand to resolve the financial issues arising from the failure of Connaught PLC and a settlement was expected shortly. • All the contractors had supported the Customer Involvement Awards. <p>In response to questions he confirmed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So far as possible work programmes would be arranged to flatten expenditure profiles. • As with all funding recipients the funding allocation provides sufficient monies for only 90% of non-decent properties to be made decent. The development of programmes to complete the work will have to include consideration of issues such as value for money and sustainability. • If it eventually became necessary to remove any dwellings from the housing stock the intention wherever possible would be to provide family houses in replacement. <p>Agreed: That the position be noted and development of further work programmes awaited.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>Former Tenant Arrears (FTA) Policy</p> <p>Maggie Cornall presented the policy, explaining that it was a fairly recent development as previously priority had been given to the collection of current tenant arrears. However, in response to the Board's expressed views on the writing off of uncollectable debt the policy had been produced in partnership with the Council. Their involvement was not only valuable but necessary as the arrears were the Council's debt and their write-off its responsibility. She noted that was currently very much a manual process but the new Housing Management Computer system would partly automate and speed the process.</p> <p>In discussion it was noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a balance to be struck between the time, energy and expense of debt chasing and the success rate. It was the fact that collection rates for FTA are notoriously low that had led to the concentration on current arrears recovery in order to prevent FTA arising. • The work of Tenancy Support Officers in assisting tenants with difficulties had contributed to reduction in individual arrears levels, thus helping to successfully maintain tenancies. <p>Agreed: That the BCH board be recommended to approve the Former Tenant Arrears Policy.</p>
<p>10.</p>	<p>Financial Inclusion Policy and Action Plan</p> <p>Maggie Cornall presented this new policy and explained that it had been developed over a period of time, working with a range of partner agencies in order to help meet the Council's goals in relation to the local economy.</p> <p>In discussion it was noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although furniture recycling schemes were used to help tenants they did not cover "white goods" because of the electrical safety issues involved but a number of grant support arrangements did exist to help in those circumstances.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BCH staff are not allowed to carry out full benefit entitlement checks or give specific advice but are sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to “signpost” tenants to agencies who can give full and direct advice. • The position with regards to future changes in benefit levels and entitlement was still unclear, as was the question of continued direct payment of Housing Benefit to social landlords. Developments were being closely monitored. <p>Agreed: That the BCH board be recommended to approve the Financial Inclusion Policy.</p>
<p>11.</p>	<p>Rents Satisfaction Survey</p> <p>Maggie Cornall presented the report on the outcome of recent research into the views of customers about the service provided by the BCH Rents Team and some of its partner agencies. Satisfaction with the service provided by BCH itself was at 83% but was somewhat lower for other, third party, providers. Areas for further investigation had been identified and in some cases actions had been built into Team Plans.</p> <p>Agreed: That the survey results and actions arising from them be noted.</p>
<p>12.</p>	<p>Current Arrears Performance - 2010-11 3rd Quarter Report</p> <p>Maggie Cornall introduced the performance report and referred to the issue of fluctuating arrears levels that had been highlighted at the February Board meeting. Whilst stressing that neither she nor the Rents Team staff were in any way complacent, she commented that improvement on the Quarter 3 position had been made.</p> <p>In dealing with the details of performance, Andrew Walker drew attention to the effect of the simultaneous replacement of the Council’s Housing Benefit and the BCH Housing Management computer systems. This had created a situation in which effective chasing of arrears had been rendered impossible for a period of some eight weeks. There were still some “teething troubles” but work was in hand to resolve them.</p> <p>It was further explained that a number of relevant actions had taken place or were in hand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance issues had been explored with the Service Improvement Panel (SIP), which had been generally very valuable in helping to develop the rent service • Mystery Shopping exercise findings had been actioned. • The use of text messaging, as used by other housing organisations, was being explored. • Links to the Local Offers, which reflected views identified from almost 600 consultation responses, and to the Financial Inclusion Policy were being established. <p>In the following discussion various points were raised and responded to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some tenants in arrears do actually clear all their rent debt but by no means all of them. • As note under Item 10, above the position with regard to Housing Benefit changes was unclear and there was concern about a future move of HB administration from the Council to DWP. This would break a long-standing and effective relationship between BCH and the Council’s HB Team. • Implementation of the new Housing management Computer System would bring working improvements and generate greater consistency of arrears recovery action.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council's HB Team had stated that all outstanding claims should be resolved by the end of Quarter 4 at the end of March 2011. However, it might take a further nine months to get back to the arrears position before implementation started. It was noted that it had taken two years to recover from the last change of HB computer system. <p>Agreed: That the position be noted.</p>
<p>13.</p>	<p>Supported Housing Update</p> <p>Maggie Cornall provided a verbal report on what was seen as very much a "live" issue. She explained that there were continuing discussions with Vitaline in relation to their role in the service provision and the means of providing funding support to them to be able to continue to operate. There was a related effect on BCH's own structures but the position could not yet be finalised.</p> <p>With regard to the Emergency Housing Service it had not been possible to finalise the budget position and discussions with the Council were in hand. It was hoped that a clearer picture would emerge by the end of the week.</p> <p>Agreed: That the position be noted.</p>
<p>14.</p>	<p>Forward Plan</p> <p>Maggie Cornall presented the Committee's Forward Plan for information and comment.</p> <p>Agreed: That the plan be approved subject to the Void management Performance Report due on 12th April 2011 being expanded to include consideration of under-occupation issues.</p>
<p>15.</p>	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>15A. Alison Stringer requested that any items such as policy documents should be included in the agenda papers in such a way as to allow them to be easily extracted for filing and future reference. Peter Whittaker stated that he would try to find the best way to do that.</p> <p>15B. Judith Mills asked if all Committee members had completed their online Equality and Diversity Training. This appeared not to be the case and she encouraged them to do so as she had found the process to be not only informative but enjoyable.</p> <p>15C. Jim Houldsworth gave his apologies for the next meeting of the Committee.</p>
<p>16.</p>	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 12th April 2011 at 6pm at Coastal House.</p>
	<p>The Meeting Closed at 7-30 pm</p>