Cheltenham Borough Homes Ltd
Minutes of Board Meeting
30 October 2013
Hester’s Way Community Resource Centre, Cheltenham, GL51 7SU
(non confidential items only)

Present:-

Directors: Stuart Hutton (SH) (Chair) Alison Foster (AF)
Suzanne Williams (SW) Barbara Driver (BD)
Amanda Oliver (AO) Duncan Smith (DS)
Graham Templeton (GT) Cheryl Whitehouse (CW)
Michael French (MF) Gerry McFall (GMc)

Co-opted Member: Not attending

Council Member Representative: Peter Jeffries (PJ)
(and Cllr Steve Jordan, Cabinet Leader)

Also Attending: Paul Stephenson (PS) Chris Williams (CWi)
Nicola Templeman (NT) Sara Bennett (SB)
Olivia Underhill (OU)

Public Attending: 4

Apologies: Mark Paddison (MP) Justine Hirst (JH) (Vice Chair)
Jane Nicholls (JN)

Absent: Colin Hay (CH) Andrew Lansley (AL)

Recording: Caroline Allen (CA)

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<tr>
<th>The meeting commenced at 5.30pm</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Declarations of Interest</strong> – none received.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Non Confidential Minutes of the last meeting held on 25.09.13</strong></td>
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<td>The minutes were unanimously agreed as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.</td>
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<td><strong>Matters Arising and Action Points</strong></td>
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<td>Members noted progress on the actions identified from previous meetings.</td>
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<td><strong>Chair’s Feedback and Any Other Business</strong></td>
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SH advised that it had been decided that the meeting of the South West ALMOs’ Board Networking Group originally proposed for January 2014 should be moved to March 2014. This meeting would be open to all Board members and a valuable opportunity to share working practices and sector initiatives. SH and PS to confirm the date.

SH reported that he had attended the Tenants’ Festival on 26 October and had found it both informative and enjoyable. His personal thanks were given to all members of staff involved in the event.

**Board Workplan**

SH noted the items on the Workplan and reminded members that the document did not define the entire agenda for each meeting and should be regarded as "living" and flexible.

**Appointment of Chair of the Board**

PS reported that he had received only nominations for SH for the position of Chair. SH accepted the nomination and was unanimously re-appointed as Chair for a further year to the Annual General Meeting in October 2014. SH thanked the Board for its vote of confidence.

**Appointment of Vice Chair**

SH reported nominations had been received for JH and CW. JH was not attending the meeting but had accepted the nomination. CW accepted the nomination and left the meeting. A vote was taken and JH received more votes than CW. CW rejoined the meeting whereupon JH was re-appointed as Vice Chair for a further year to the Annual General Meeting in October 2014.

<table>
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<th>1a. Chief Executive Officer’s Report</th>
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<td>PS presented his report which updated Board on the following areas of interest:</td>
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**National Federation of ALMOs’ (NFA) New Business Development Group**

CBH hosted the NFA national meeting in October 2013 attended by representatives of ALMOs from near and far. There was clear recognition of CBH’s successes in delivering new build and of the positive working relationship with CBC. The session also looked at the work other ALMOs were delivering or considering across a diverse range of services and opportunities. Follow up visits are to be conducted to specific ALMOs to review their activities and delivery mechanisms.

**National Federation of ALMOs’ Finance Conference – October 2013**

CBH was asked to deliver a workshop to outline its approach to new build initiatives and joint working with its host council, CBC. This was well received and recognised for the opportunities being explored and delivered enabling the further development of the CBH profile at a national level.

**South West ALMOs’ Chief Officers Group Meeting – September 2013**

This quarterly meeting of South West ALMOs covered the following topics:-
- Housemark presentation – benchmarking
- Peer reviews
- NFA manifesto – “Preparing for next general election”
- NFA Business Plan
- HCA update
- Round Robin
- SW ALMOs’ conference planning
- NFA Annual Conference 2014 – in Manchester)

Gloucestershire Credit Union
Further meetings had been held between CBH, Two Rivers Housing and Gloucester City Homes to consider potential future support mechanisms for the Credit Union. The Group is researching the ‘product’ to be offered and delivering a survey to gauge the views of potential customers. This has been an excellent example of joint working between the three landlords.

Gloucestershire Careers Fair – “Grow”
CBH played an active role in the above event, held at Cheltenham Racecourse on the 15 and 16 October. The event was open to school children across the county to allow them to gain information and advice about career options, including apprenticeships. Two members of staff with one of CBH’s current apprentices took turns to support a CBH stand. The event was attended by around 2,000 young adults and a comprehensive range of employers.

Cheltenham Open Door
The formal opening ceremony was held on 15 October with lunch provided by the volunteers for guests and clients. It was recognised that the work undertaken by CBH had transformed the venue and facilities available to guests. Thanks and recognition were given to all the contractors and suppliers who gave their time and goods free of charge and PS wished to make special reference to the CBH Project Team. An incredible job was co-ordinated and delivered in far from easy circumstances to enable as little disruption as possible to clients and supporters of Open Door. CBH continues to support Open Door as its staff charity for this year.

1b. Feedback from the Tenant Scrutiny Improvement Panel (TSIP)
Jim Bonner, Vice Chair of TSIP, and Trish Blain, TSIP member presented the report which outlined the key areas discussed at the Panel’s meeting held in September. Presentations were received on the progress of the personal digital assistant (PDA) implementation, transport for residents and gas certification compliance. TSIP members reported back on recent void standards and resident involvement scrutiny activities.

Gas Safety Certification and Capping
TSIP was informed about the current issues in achieving annual gas safety certification in 100% of properties and the proposal to cap gas supply to tenants who deny access so that these checks can be made. TSIP supported this proposal.

PDAs
The Panel was updated on the roll out of the PDA system to support increased efficiency in the delivery of the repairs service.
CBH Transport (for tenants and leaseholders) Review
The purpose of the review, scope of the consultation and the timescales planned were outlined. TSIP approved this approach.

Digital Inclusion
Members were informed that a survey had been sent out to all tenants and leaseholders on this subject in order to understand current levels of access and barriers to using the internet. The headline survey figures were shared and this information would form the basis of a bid to develop digital inclusion in 2014/2015.

Resident Involvement Mini Scrutiny
The Panel was updated on this ongoing scrutiny task which is at an initial stage.

Voids Mini Scrutiny
JB and TB had spent time understanding the entire void process from tenancy termination, property repair through to the letting of the new tenancy. The majority of properties visited met the stated voids standards and TSIP members were pleased to note this compliance. JB stated that many good suggestions had been received from residents with recommendations to change standards and for further investment for the future. The draft scrutiny report had been shared with the CBH teams and the outcomes had informed the CBH business planning process for 2014/15.

BD wondered whether tenants were open when being asked questions by TSIP members. JB felt that residents felt more comfortable speaking to TSIP rather than officers. BD asked if TSIP was able to offer advice and JB confirmed this was the case.

GMc asked about the recommendations for the voids process. JB reported that there had been many. Tenants felt that, in general, CBH was very good and appreciated the work completed to attain the Decent Homes Standard. Was there now room to add more items as standard, for example outside lights? TB added that there was a feeling that small items such as this could be offered to all properties and not just with voids. Tenants had been asked what they would most wish for if given the opportunity and many had listed the same items. TSIP had discussed this with Repairs.

BD commented that she would like to see the lists and SH suggested that the Senior Leadership and Management Teams should also be aware.

CWi advised that he had received the feedback from TSIP which he considered to be extremely useful. He would need to calculate the cost of providing these for all 4600 properties and then agree what was not possible.

GT stated that very often perfectly good items were stripped out of a void property before a tenant moved in and suggested a viewing of the property prior to moving in might help reduce waste. TB agreed in principle but, in practice, the idea was not practical for many reasons. CWi added that CBH was conscious of this waste and was looking at ways to reduce it but it very often came down to personal tastes. CBH was also trying to address the timescales on void turnaround but this, too, was not straightforward.

SW suggested the installation of spyholes would make a huge difference for
many residents. TB stated that she had been assured by CBH that any tenant could request for this to be done.

DS felt that it would be very helpful for Board to receive a briefing note on the recommendations received and “wish list”. Board could then prepare a response to residents on what was possible. AO added that this would become easier to achieve if it fitted in with the company’s strategic priorities eg safer estates being a priority and the associated budget.

GMc commented that it was good to see that Digital Inclusion was on the TSIP’s agenda. Many other organisations were planning to do this and there could be an opportunity to work in partnership.

SH thanked JB and TB for the report.

1c. **Presentation: Housing Options Team (HOT)**

Sara Bennett (SB), Housing Services Manager, updated the Board on progress with the transfer of the Housing Options Team from CBC. This had been agreed at Cabinet in May of this year with a target date for transfer of 1 December.

SB noted that there had been a marked shift in service delivery for the homeless from when she had first managed homelessness 15-20 years ago. These days the service was about minimising homelessness but not about minimising choices or failing to tackle problems. Homelessness is governed by some specific pieces of legislation which meant there were occasions when the Council has a legal duty to assist some applicants. But, importantly, there were still over 3,000 people actively seeking accommodation in Cheltenham who may not qualify under the terms of the Homeless legislation but were still seeking more suitable accommodation. The HOT has been very successful in managing this to date and it will benefit even further by transferring to CBH. CBH can add value with joined up services and by offering a single point of contact in various locations for all housing advice and assistance. CBH is also top performing and already a trusted brand in Cheltenham with a good reputation.

SB highlighted the key areas from the project management work.

The HOT has ten members of staff and is currently sharing the Cheltenham 1st Stop premises in Cheltenham with County Community Projects (CCP). The staff have been consulted fully throughout the transfer process so that they are comfortable with the transition and can recommend changes to improve the service. The staff will be transferred in line with TUPE regulations but with the additional benefit of more favourable terms and conditions than they are currently on. They have met many CBH staff with personal visits from the CEO and Directors of Service and attended the staff conference in September. Every effort is being made to ensure the team can be fully integrated into CBH by 1 December.

SB advised that a revised 12 month licence for the accommodation in Cheltenham First Stop had been drafted although the premises was not considered to be of the standard expected for CBH staff. Alternative premises are being investigated.

BD asked how CBH would ensure that private landlords offered the same standards as CBH. SB advised that the expected standard would be explained and tenancy agreements examined very carefully. BD warned that if the private...
landlords fell below, this could have serious reputational issues for CBH.

GMc asked whether there was insurance cover for dilapidations in place. SB responded that the licence was very basic and she was in discussion with OneLegal regarding all aspects of the lease. OneLegal was not anticipating any issues and she was confident there was no risk to CBH.

MF enquired about the IT systems and whether they would be of a sufficient standard. SB explained that the HOT currently used the same IT systems as CBH (as part of the Council’s network) but it was the intention to enhance this with the addition of mobile phones, tablets etc. This had been agreed with CBC and would not incur any extra expenditure for CBH.

PS thanked SB for the presentation but also for her hard work in managing the transfer project. He felt this was an excellent example of partnership working in action.

SH also thanked SB and suggested it would be useful for Board to receive a briefing following the 1 December transfer date which highlighted any issues which had arisen during the project. This could help with any future passporting of services into CBH.

2. Compliments, Comments and Complaint Policy (CCC) – annual review

Olivia Underhill (OU), Customer Relations Manager, presented the report and explained the purpose of the review and proposed amendments.

OU noted that the CCC Policy was reviewed annually. It was essential that CBH was committed to an approach when dealing with comments and complaints that was honest, thorough and transparent. The Policy sought to ensure that any comments or complaints raised were handled without delay and with the aim of satisfying the individual whilst being fair and open with all those concerned.

The CBH complaints procedure is built around a 3 stage process with the aim to investigate and close complaints within 10 working days for those at Stage 1 & 2, and a 6 week deadline for Stage 3 complaints. Stage 1 complaints were investigated by the relevant Team Leader, Supervisor, senior staff member who is not a member of the Management Team, while Stage 2 complaints were investigated by the Manager responsible for the service area concerned. Stage 3 complaints were dealt with by a Panel consisting of the following:

- Chief Executive or one of the Directors (the Director will not be for the service area relating to the complaint);
- Chair of the Board of CBH or, in their absence, the Vice Chair of the Board;
- An appropriately trained Board Member.

Consultation

OU reported that consultation on the amendments had been carried out with the following sources:

- Feedback from satisfaction surveys from customers who have been through the CCC process;
- Staff feedback from those directly involved in investigating complaints;
- Staff and tenants attending the Complaints Learning Group meetings on a 6 weekly basis.
All the changes that were recommended from version 7 of the CCC policy were highlighted in a separate appendix.

GMc asked that for all future documents, the changes could be shown alongside the original wording but in bold italics.

PJ queried the reference to CBC in the “key terms” section when he was unable to find any mention of CBC within the document. OU to check.

AO asked why a complainant was able to contact either an MP or councillor following the Stage 3 procedure had taken place. OU explained that this was related to the provisions of the Localism Bill where complainants could contact a Designated Person if they wished to pursue their complaint further. The Designated Person was defined as an MP, councillor, or a Designated Tenants’ Panel. CBH had a Designated Tenants’ Panel in place as this was the residents’ preferred choice. The Designated Person was not able to overturn the decision of the Stage 3 Panel but was able to refer it to the Housing Ombudsman on behalf of the complainant to help speed up the process.

DS felt that an analysis of the compliments, comments and complaints received over the year would be a useful additional appendix to the annual review report. Agreed.

SH advised that refresher training in how to conduct a Stage 3 Review would be arranged for all Board members.

The Board unanimously approved the new CCC Policy (v8).

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<th>3. Board Members’ IT – electronic communication</th>
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<td>SH stated that at the Board Away Day in June this year, and during individual development reviews, Board members had expressed the view that Board would operate more efficiently and effectively if it moved entirely from paper to electronic communication with mobile access. GMc volunteered to be the Board’s representative to work with officers to achieve this outcome and a project plan was created by the Governance and IT Service managers which had been circulated to Board prior to this meeting.</td>
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<td>SH reported that the IT Team and Governance Manager had started to develop a Board members’ “Portal” where all Board documents and information would be stored. As well as agendas and associated documents for meetings, calendars and address books, the Board Members’ Handbook, external briefings and reports would be stored for Board member access. A Board Members’ Forum would be included where members (and the SLT) could share ideas and ask questions etc. All information would be channelled via the Portal. Alternatively, the Board could purchase a specific application such as “Boardpad2”. The cost of this application would be £14,575 for the first year including set up with an ongoing annual charge of £13,625.</td>
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<td>In order to access the Portal, Board members would be required to use their CBH email address and a “Vasco” token. The Vasco token generates a secure code each time it is used and is linked to the individual’s corporate email address. The tokens were purchased for all Board members (except councillors who have been issued with them via CBC) earlier this year in preparation for electronic access. All PCs, laptops and/or tablet devices used to access the Portal would require the installation of a Citrix receiver and the Airwatch security software for mobile</td>
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devices.

SH and GMc had viewed the initial work carried out to create the Portal and, taking into account current business commitments, it was anticipated that it would be ready for trialling in November 2013 (by SH and GMc) with a presentation to Board at its meeting on 27 November.

Mandatory training sessions for all Board members would be scheduled from January through to March 2014.

SH advised that it was proposed that hard copies of documents would be phased out gradually from January to April, 2014, with equipment purchased in the new financial year from 1 April, 2014. Any Board member wishing to use their own equipment to access the Portal could elect to go “paperless” as soon as the Citrix receiver and Airwatch security software was installed on their device.

The Board members present unanimously agreed that it could become more effective and efficient by switching entirely to electronic communication. It was recognised that there were significant security risks relating to the management of hard copy information which would be mitigated by electronic transfer. However, PS reminded the Board that CBH was a local authority owned company and, therefore, must comply with Government security regulations unlike housing associations which had more freedom to choose providers for IT solutions. The cost of equipping Board with the required software and hardware was significant and a staged approach was recommended.

GT felt that members could operate as efficiently with laptops brought to meetings and purchasing tablets would be an unnecessary expense. GMc explained that tablets were much faster than laptops and much easier to carry around from meeting to meeting. SH further confirmed that each CBH office had a wireless broadband connection and, therefore, the tablet devices would not need to be 3G/4G enabled.

PS gave his personal thanks to the IT Team and CA for their hard work relating to this project.

**Board unanimously approved the project timeline for the implementation of a mobile working solution for Board members. Board further unanimously agreed that the IT team and Governance Manager should continue to create a Board Members’ Portal and Forum in-house and that the purchase of an external application would not be necessary.**

Board members were then requested to complete an individual hardware requirement form so that the IT Team could accurately predict future costs.

4. **Neighbourhood Management Strategy – annual review**

SB presented the report which updated Board on the progress of the Action Plan following its approval of the Strategy in November 2012.

SB highlighted significant areas:

**NM01: Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Neighbourhood Sustainability**
### Project
- Attendance at CIH Project
- New Neighbourhood Plans that reflect local tenant concerns as well as the ability to tailor individual services in a neighbourhood based way dependant on need.
- Best Practice – Speaking at Torquay CIH Conference as a trailblazer for CBH on 14<sup>th</sup> November.

Update: On Target. Progressed with Neighbourhoods project to move to produce Neighbourhood Handbooks giving local information and an action plan of how to deal with the main issues in the area as identified by residents, staff and partners.

SH suggested CBH prepare a media release to maximise the public relations opportunity of the CIH Conference on 14 November.

#### NM02: Investigate and address tenancy fraud
- Introduce procedures and policy for identifying and dealing with tenancy fraud
- Ensure all properties occupied by lawful tenants
- Work with other local landlords to combat fraud by sharing good practice

Update: On Target. Membership of Glos. Tenancy Fraud Forum – actions include publicity campaign on radio/buses, Tenancy Fraud Awareness Week, (Oct 2013) and training for staff. Currently working on standard countywide policies and procedures. All post letting visits carried out within 42 days of tenancy start dates. CBH had obtained £27k in funding towards the Forum and, to date, had received over 40 reports of possible tenancy fraud.

SB advised that a presentation on CBH’s management of tenancy fraud was scheduled for the November Board meeting.

#### NM09: Implement Tenancy Support initiatives
- Look at wide reaching and cross sectional support; identify gaps that CBH can assist with

Update: Complete. Tenancy Liaison officers in place.

#### EC01: Review Grounds Maintenance Service including implementation of new Grounds Maintenance SLA
- VFM
- Explore other options; involve residents in decision process; introduce pro-active management of SLA
- Map HRA land and responsibilities - costs, efficiencies and savings

Update: On Hold. Individual gardening services being investigated by Community Involvement Team with survey undertaken in September 2013. Currently considering complete Grounds Maintenance Service rather than just the SLA – full project to be undertaken in 2014/15.

SH noted that this issue was attracting a lot of attention from residents and via the TSIP. If anything was discovered which affected it or had an impact either in a positive or negative manner, he would wish Board to be informed.
EH01: Continue the implementation of the “My Move” Priority Transfer scheme
- Better use of stock
- Reducing impacts of Welfare Reform Bill

Update: Complete. SB advised that this action had now been extended to help address Welfare Reform implications.

Board discussed the Action Plan. BD wondered whether CBH could partner with the Vision 21 garden scheme. SB to investigate.

DS queried NM03 “Introduce pre-tenancy visits to prospective tenants prior to offer of accommodation” which was currently on hold due to the imminent transfer of the Housing Options Team. When would this be back on the agenda? SB stated that it was her intention to embed the HOT first but would expect this action to be restarted within the next 6 months.

DS further queried EH06 “Reintroduction of tenant inspection for empty homes”. Why had the original completion date of June 2013 been moved to March 2014? SB advised that the Community Involvement Team was reviewing local offers which may address this and the voids issues.

CW asked whether many tenants had downsized as a result of Welfare Reform. Did CBH have enough suitable properties? SB replied that she did not have the data to hand but that it was an issue. The Neighbourhood Performance Manager had requested extra budget to help tenants to move. PS suggested the NP Manager would welcome direct contact from CW and asked SB to forward his contact details to CW.

5. Any Other Competent Business
None.

6. Scheduled Board meetings and other events
- 27 November, 2013 (Corporate – Cheltenham House)
- 11 December, 2013 – Board Away Day (venue and timings to be confirmed)
- 29 January, 2014 (Community – Oakley Community Resource Centre)
- 26 February, 2014 (Corporate – Cheltenham House)
- 26 March, 2014 (Strategic – Cheltenham House)

Unless otherwise stated, Board meetings will be held at Cheltenham House, 5.30- 8.00pm
The remainder of the agenda contained confidential items – please refer to the confidential minutes.

Signed ………………………………………………………
Chair of Cheltenham Borough Homes Date ………………………………