

Minutes



Minutes of BME forum meeting held on 3rd February 2010 @ Boardroom, Houndsgate

Present: Cynthia James (CJ), Jacinth Hall (JH), Afzaal Nawaz – NCH (AN), Linford Stevens (LS), Janet Storar (JS), Gill Moy – NCH (GM) Constance Hall – NCH (CH), Ethel Anderson (EA), Veronica Barnes (VB), Jenny Grant (JG), Ade Aderogba MBE (AA), Kelly John-Baptiste (KJB), George Pashley – NCH (GP), Minnie Brazil (MB), Randolph Richardson (RR),

1 **Welcome and introductions**

Apologies from Kalwant Kandola, Mr Baptiste, E Anderson, T Anderson, Carole Donnelly (NCH), Chris Langstaff (NCH), Amanda Schofield (NCH), Janet Glass (NCH)

2 **Minutes from last meeting**

Minutes were signed off as a true representation of the meeting.

3 **Employment & Training – George Pashley**

GP introduced himself as Director of Organisational Development responsible for HR, Training and Development and Health and Safety. GP advised he was reviewing the recruitment and selection process and would like this to be more transparent when appointing people.

Consultation is continuing with various organisations including Ethnic Minority Employee Forum. Priority is to make sure recruitment process is fair as possible. One option is to introduce spot checks on recruitment.

NCH is developing an outreach programme and looking at different groups to encourage them to come and work for NCH.

Panel member asked in future could we have reports in plain English without jargon.

Panel member stated young boys are struggling with role model issues. What things are in place with schools and how far down does NCH go? At careers often organisations like NCH are not involved.

GM advised there are links with Connexions. Raj Patel had

made links with Head of Connexions.

GP advised there are links with training & development with schools but not sure at what age and at what level. GP to investigate how far the links go. GP

CH advised visits to schools are done in partnership with Connexions. The EME Forum is involved in recruitment process for Construction Apprentices. Have rolled out apprentices for office staff which is running smoothly.

AA advised of his position as role model for young people which is a programme funded by the government. AA to discuss with KB because he has a contact that could assist. AA

There was a discussion on why there was no BME employees in senior positions and if BME 14% of the workforce was not applying for these positions the organisations needs to examine it self.

GP stated he accepted there are issues and want to work with the Forum to address these. Have empowered staff to look at how culture can change.

Panel member stated communication is the key and have to drop old grudges. The organisation is not perfect but they are trying. The Involvement team are asking questions and giving opportunities to be heard.

AA thanked Chair of the board for attending BME Forum meetings and that it was unprecedented. Also advised that the board now has four non whites compared to four years ago when there was only one.

There was a discussion on recruitment process for apprentices. Panel member advised was on the interview panel and did not interview many black people. There are talented people with lots of skills but they are being held back by not having a pass in English and Maths. NCH needs to get message to these children earlier enough that they need English and Maths. Also there was a view whether maths and English were really important for these jobs.

CJ advised in the past applied for Housing Patch Managers job with help from Chief Executive of Housemark but never received any feedback when asked for. Have things changed?

GP advised now there is a commitment to give feedback on interviews within forty days. When applications come to NCH no one knows who you are. All of the monitoring information is removed. If anyone would like to have a look at the process can arrange this for them.

Panel member advised of an issue with a member of staff where

a racist comment was made towards gypsy and travellers.

GM apologised on behalf of company. GM to take details of staff member to investigate and get back to Panel member. GM

4 Modernisation of Tenancy Estate Management – Gill Moy

GM advised NCH are consulting tenants on the future of cash collection at the moment. It costs £6 per transaction at a housing office compared to 16p by direct debit. There is also the expected 20% Government reduction in funding to take into consideration.

GM advised tenants should have received a letter a fortnight ago with the rent statements however when sending out the statements Ink Fish forgot to add the letters. Have been advised letters have gone out today which Ink Fish will be sending at their own expense. The deadline for consultation has been extended.

GM advised if housing offices stop providing cash collection do we still need housing offices. NCH are looking at Customer Service Contact Centre to answer a range queries such as tenancy issues, ASB etc. Also want to re define Housing patch Managers role to give them more clarity. Would like HPM's to visit tenants at their homes and be out in the estates more often.

GM asked of review on voids which were back on track. Rents are doing well, arrears been lowest for a number of years.

Panel member asked what considerations are there for elder people who currently pay at the housing office.

GM advised will provide maps showing where they can pay; sometimes these other places are closer than the housing office. In terms of rent collection service NCH will do one-to-one consultation with them. There is a misconception with elders that if you pay at the Post Office you will get charged.

Panel member stated as an elder person don't like changes but understand by removing cash collection are making savings however need to look after people who may be confused or speak different languages etc. There may be a need to use support workers etc.

Panel member advised need to look at repairs because we are moving tenants in without repairs being complete. There should be a lettable standard and tenants should have to call out day to day repairs for lettable voids.

GM stated NCH carried out some benchmarking in terms of repairs. We spend a lot more compared to other organisations. NCH took the decision to complete Decent Homes within the programme and not one off single properties. The more

properties we get let the less we have to reduce the 20% expected decrease in government subsidy.

There is a big push at the moment but we need to get the balance right.

A panel member advised not had gas at property for a few days and no one came out as advised on Monday and Tuesday.

GM to take details and investigate.

GM

5 BME Housing Charter – Constance Hall

CH introduced herself as Head of Equality and Diversity.

CH advised the BME Housing Charter Document was brought to her attention by AA unfortunately she did not receive the document. The document seeks to get commitment on how they deliver services. National Housing Federation is an Umbrella Organisation who are putting ALMO's under the umbrella.

The charter does not include Gypsy & Travellers but Housing Organisations are including and making sure they are represented.

CH advised there are nine areas focussing on leadership, profile information, access to services, assessing impact, challenging discrimination, tackling under representation, partnership working, and championing diversity. All of these are very relevant.

CH advised have 95% target of profiling information. NCH needs to understand its customer's needs and aspirations. Need to demonstrate how we tailor our services i.e for disabled people etc.

CH stated challenging discrimination is the key need to address. Happy with zero tolerance towards racial harassment, bullying, inappropriate language and behaviour in all areas of work. In managing hate crime we could do more. There is evidence of under reporting and as a social housing provider we should be doing more.

CH stated having signed up we will have to be transparent in terms of community cohesion. Tenants will have the information so you can hold us to it and identify gaps so we could fill. The document goes 90% of the way but does not discuss choice. The BME housing enquiry will get them to give feedback.

Panel member advised they were pleased that the document has included young people and not just elderly. Young people tend to be not included.

Panel member stated other aspects of equality should not be

overlooked. Disappointed disability conference was cancelled last year. The conference needs to be re started.

CH stated could do more in terms of disabilities and that we also need to get it right internally. There should be a Disabilities and Carers Forum for employees

CH advised NCH are publishing a Newsletter with main feature on equality & diversity and community cohesion. Would like a few volunteers to sign off the contents of this newsletter.

CH handed out Customer Profiling Questionnaire to members and advised of door knocking exercise to get forms completed.

Panel raised concerns regarding what will happen with this information because have filled out a number of these forms. This information needs to be spread throughout the organisation so that repairs and HPM's etc are aware of sensitivity of tenants.

CH stated there is a responsibility to treat this information sensitively and may need to advise what NCH will do with this information. Are exploring IT systems and the role they have. North Gate which is the IT system used by NCH is good at flagging up disabilities.

Panel member wanted the second paragraph redefined to make it clear the information will be shared on a need to know basis.

Panel member wanted something to state if you need help completing the form for people who have learning disabilities etc.

6 BME Tenant Involvement – Written Report Attached

AN introduced himself as Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Officer with lead for Involvement. AN discussed initiatives to help increase involvement from BME tenants.

There was a discussion on the Carnival and that it was the Carnival Trusts responsibility to better publicise and organise the event.

7 TLC Update - Written Report Attached

8 BME Forum Budget Update – Written Report Attached

9 Date of Next Meeting

**Wednesday 10th March 2010 6.00 – 8.30pm Boardroom,
14 Hounds Gate**