

# Minutes



## **Minutes of BME forum meeting held on 10th March 2010 @ Boardroom, Houndsgate**

**Present:** Jacinth Hall (JH), Cynthia James, Jenny Grant, Ade Aderogba MBE (AA), Asha Kalia (AK), T Anderson (TA), A Smith (AS), Gloria Powell (GP), Afzaal Nawaz – NCH (AN), Linford Stevens (LS), Constance Hall – NCH (CH), Veronica Barnes (VB), Minnie Brazil (MB), Randolph Richardson (RR), Amanda Jameson (AJ), Chris Raynor – NCH (CR), Kalwant Kandola (KK), Halivia Wilkes (HW), Gary Rackstraw – NCH (GR), Andrew Riley – NCH (AR), Jackie Brown (JB)

### **1 Welcome and introductions**

Apologies from Mr Baptiste, Kelly John-Baptiste, Ethel Anderson, Carole Donnelly (NCH), Amanda Schofield (NCH), Janet Glass (NCH), Gill Moy (NCH)

### **2 Minutes and Matters Arising from last meeting**

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

CH advised of Diversity Champions Group meeting which highlighted a series of initiatives to help increase BME representation at senior management level. CH raised BME Forum issues at the meeting. The group will investigate further.

AR introduced himself as chairperson of Ethnic Minority Employees (EME) Forum and advised they provide support to EME and assist NCH to promote equality and diversity. Would like to work with BME Forum to identify what gaps there are both internally and externally.

AR advised sent survey to BME employees, which led to the mentoring scheme. This scheme involves BME employees being mentored by senior managers to help develop and prepare them for more senior positions.

AR explained why they chose EME rather than BME for their employee's forum. They felt EME incorporated every ethnic minority employee.

LS asked how many members the EME Forum had.

AR advised every BME employee is a member unless they opt

out. The forum has five committee members.

AA stated the Carnival is work in progress which is supported by Tuntum Housing. NCH had a big presence with the carnival in the past. However last year the contribution was a lot less due to financial restrictions.

CH stated there is a commitment to make a contribution and it will be more than £500 which as contributed last year.

CH to confirm the contribution NCH will make to this years carnival. CH

CH advised had arranged for NCH to participate with the BME summit event at Leicester. NCH was not member of the national organisation but have made arrangements for NCH to become a core member. CH also advised Janet Storar chairperson of the board played important role in getting NCH to become a member.

### **3 Lettable Standard – Chris Raynor**

CR introduced himself as Senior Improvement Manager. CR advised last year were spending on average £4,500 on vacant properties and if continued would have spent money in the budget. NCH had to review the money being spent but make sure the vacant properties still had a good standard.

NCH did a benchmarking exercise to compare spending compared to other housing authorities. The results showed NCH were spending a lot more. Properties were being done to a very a high standard and the decent homes work was being carried out also.

To make sure there was enough money in the budget decided the decent homes money was not be used for voids process.

CR advised reviewed the lettable standard and decided that health & safety was a priority.

CR advised this time last year NCH had 550 voids which has been reduced to 308. The target for the financial year end is 300. This has resulted in NCH receiving rent for an extra 250 properties.

CR stated when NCH were fitting new bathrooms, kitchens and doors to vacant properties the average cost was £4,500 this has now been reduced to £1,200 and there has been very little change to the take up of properties.

A forum member stated get a lot of complaints from tenants who are saying properties are not in good condition. They are being advised to ring day to day repairs to get completed. Tenants should be given a checklist so that they can check also.

CR stated NCH want to deliver an excellent service. There is checklist in place which Tenant Service Inspectors (TSI) use and have had training regarding this. BME Forum members can be

involved with the TSI regarding the checklist. Tenants and staff need to work and progress together. Would like examples where tenants are saying they would not move in. The key is getting feedback from tenants.

A forum member advised as a support worker had a case where housing officer provided wrong details. The property had damp and asbestos was found in the floor which is dangerous.

CR

CR stated it was bad practice and will investigate the case further.

A new panel member advised of the ASB and racial harassment suffered for 4 years. Would like support from NCH and advised written to Chris Langstaff and Gill Moy.

AA

AA to investigate further.

CH stated need to ensure BME residents are not being discriminated against. Information being received suggests NCH needs to be more pro active in terms race harassment.

There was a general discussion on letting policy. A panel member asked when over 40's criteria was changed because was not informed.

CH advised had a meeting arranged with Kim De Vergori and would discuss with her. Also could invite her to a future meeting. CH advised of an internal diversity and cohesion group meeting which was attended by Chris Langstaff. At the meeting was presented with a report regarding complaints however it did not include the nature of complaints. The statistics do not show discrimination as a category. There needs to be an analysis of BME tenant's complaints and what is being done.

CH

CH to bring more information to the next meeting.

A panel member reported that access to their property was not safe due to poor lighting and was advised NCH do not install security lighting.

CR advised currently NCH are not installing alarm lighting systems however if there are special circumstances then will make arrangements.

CR advised have a requirement to review the lettable standard which everyone is invited to sign at the repairs forum.

CH stated that NCH should have nominated people at the repairs call centre to help build up relationships and trust with BME tenants.

CR

CR stated he agreed that the repairs call centre needed a nominated person.

CH advised the Decent Homes group (SWM) are sending a survey to every tenant that has decent homes work done rather than just sending out a sample. It is vital that BME tenants fill these out. The statistics are currently showing that BME tenants are more satisfied with repairs and decent homes work.

A forum member advised had received calls for feedback from NCH when had work carried out and the work has always been done to a good standard.

#### **4 Equality & Diversity – Constance Hall**

CH thanked members for their input on the diversity newsletter. Chair person has said it was one of the best to date.

CH advised two of issues regarding newsletter:

- Cynthia was not the first chairperson of the BME forum, it was Mr Anderson. CH to make apology and correction.
- At editorial meeting decided to include photo of CJ and JG to represent BME forum and Homes 4 us. Then decided to include Clive's photo because Cynthia's photo was included and also as a boost for Clive. The article clearly stated the comments were made by JG. CH to attend next editorial meeting.

CH

CH advised NCH are having Diversity Week to help increase collection rate of diversity monitoring forms.

A panel member asked if the monitoring information collected would be secure.

CH advised had received assurances from IT systems department that it is safe and that staff have had data protection training.

A panel member asked what support tenants are getting to complete monitoring forms.

CH stated working closely with tenancy estate management and property services staff to do some door knocking to help tenants complete the forms. There is a resource issue with housing staff at the moment and will be meeting with Kim De Vergori to discuss further.

GR advised will give tenants other options to complete the forms during the diversity week. Will need to reach out to tenants by going to community organisations etc. There will also be an insert in the next newsletter.

**5 Any Other Business**

CH advised E&D team were starting their review during May 2010.

CH advised Vincent Bryce will be working CH and GR to help progress equality & diversity work further.

**6 Date of Next Meeting**

**Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2010 6.00 – 8.30pm Boardroom, 14 Hounds Gate**