

# Minutes



**Minutes of Tenants and Leaseholders Congress**  
**25<sup>th</sup> March 2009, 6pm – 8pm**  
**Board Room**

Jean England (Chair) – JE Cynthia James – CJ Ina McCallum – IC Anne Coowing – AC Jill Dickens – JD Clive Thorpe – CT Kevin Butt – KB Tony Stubbings – TS Lynn Mitchell – LM Dave Bennet-Bull – DBB Chris Langstaff (NCH) – CL Amanda Schofield (NCH) – AS Greg Albiston (NCC) - GA	Alison Thorpe (Vice Chair) – AT Jackie Brown – JB Robert Morrell – RM Linford Stevens – LS John Riley – JR Ennis Peck – EP Maria Hemphill – MH Jacinth Hall – JH Sheila Thwaites – ST Janet Storar – JS Gill Moy (NCH) – GM Sue Taylor (NCH) – Sta
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<b>1</b>	<b>Apologies</b>	
	Kate Bowley	
1.1	JB queried the time of the meeting as it is usually 6.00pm to 8.00pm and the agenda stated 6.00pm to 8.30pm but other papers received showed the original time. STa apologised for any confusion and advised it was due to the length of the agenda.	
<b>2</b>	<b>Minutes from last meeting and Matters arising</b>	<b>Action</b>
2.1	CJ asked for clarification about the national rent setting announcement by Margaret Beckett, Housing Minister stating a figure of 3.1% and if this changed the Nottingham increase.	
2.2	CL advised that the Nottingham position was 5% and further clarification was being issued by the government regarding rent setting.	
2.3	CT advised that he and other tenants in his area had yet to receive the rent increase notification. CL advised that this would be investigated the following day by the Rents Manager as the 28 day notification should have been received by now.	STa
2.4	KB asked what affect the rent increase had on Housing Benefit claims and if rent arrears generally increased following the annual rent increase.	
2.5	CL advised that regular meetings and liaison was undertaken with the City's Housing Benefit team throughout the year including at the time of the rent increase but there was an annual risk to rent arrears increasing if the notifications were not received by tenants on time. The annual increase was now generally an automated and well planned process mitigating risk and providing clear communication to tenants.	

2.6	ST asked if the garage rent increase could reduce.	
2.7	CL advised that the annual planning cycle and company's business plan was proposed to the City for approval well before the new financial year. This included all charges such as rent, garage rent and service charges. Changes now could not be made as these charge increases had now been assumed in the business plan.	
2.8	ST advised that she had raised this matter before and wanted to raise again that many leaseholders are also facing financial difficulties not only due to increasing service charges but also because of increasing utility bills, food, transport, etc. and that the company needed to be mindful that many leaseholders are elderly and cannot afford any further charges as they only receive their pensions and cannot raise income from anywhere else or rely on the property market to increase the value of their home for possible sale or remortgage, due to the economic climate. Many leaseholders are anxious and fearful of the costs they will face with the decent homes programme meaning higher communal repairs and leaseholders being billed for these.	
2.9	CL advised that he and ST had spoken about this before and he fully understood the point being made. CL wanted to assure leaseholders that work was being carried out to investigate how we can help and support leaseholders. The economic recession, value of properties and pensioners having a limited income were concerns and NCH need to actively consider how we can try and address the problems being faced.	CL
<b>3</b>	<b>Audit Commission feedback</b>	
3.1	AS provided a hand out to members covering the key strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations. AS, on behalf of the company, thanked all tenants and leaseholders for their support and partnership work that helped achieve the 2* and excellent prospects. AS confirmed that progress reports on how the company was responding to the recommendations and weaknesses would be provided to the TLC at regular intervals if required.	
3.2	JE confirmed that the TLC did require future progress updates and how the company was moving toward 3*.	
3.3	Item to be placed on the TLC Forward Plan.	STa
3.4	CJ asked that it be noted that NCH didn't win the 2* on their own. Tenants played a big role in the success too. CJ also advised that NCH now have good senior managers in place and change was happening now.	
3.5	TS asked if 'quick' updates on progress could be provided to tenants in 'News' on progress. AS confirmed that this will be followed up.	AS
3.6	AS highlighted the Audit Commission's report about the positive practice at NCH.	

3.7	CJ advised that she had been invited to London at a recent conference because of NCHs Tenant Services Inspection team work. CJ stated we need to do more promotion and keep a record of what we are doing with others. AS to ensure this is captured.	AS
3.8	AT advised that the East Midlands Tenant Participation Forum had asked for NCH tenants to visit Leicester to advise as tenants how NCH was involving tenants and leaseholders in service delivery.	
3.9	GM advised that officers too were being called on to visit other authorities or ALMOs to share good practice. In response to an Audit Commission Inspector advising York of NCH good practice, Kim Devergori and Kathy Mason had visited to discuss our ASB work. Impact Housing had also been referred to NCH by one of our Inspectors and GM had recently met with them and discussed our self assessment process, KLOE work shops, VMS and Tenant Services Inspectors. Impact Housing had found what NCH had done and were doing as inspirational.	
<b>3.10</b>	<b>Proposed company priorities for 09/10</b>	
3.11	AS proposed the 7 company priorities for 2009/10 as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deliver &amp; maximise the impact of decent homes</li> <li>- A major push on equality and diversity</li> <li>- Modernise the repairs service</li> <li>- Streamline voids, allocations and lettings</li> <li>- New customer service centre and reinforced local delivery</li> <li>- 'Needs led' supported housing service</li> <li>- Winning new business</li> </ul>	
<b>3.12</b>	<b>Decent Homes Programme</b>	
3.13	KB advised about a recent SWARM presentation at Area Panel 1. Yorkshire Windows arrived on an estate without prior notification and seemed to be second guessing measurements in the Bulwell area. Elderly tenants are being asked for names and telephone no.s and this raises concerns because of their vulnerability. CL to raise these matters to Mark Johnson.	CL with Mark Johnson
3.14	DBB asked how TLC would be involved in the Decent Homes Programme. AS advised that tenant and leaseholder involvement would be through the Tenant Services Inspection team, VMS, the Repairs and Maintenance and Customer Care Forums. Progress reports would be brought to TLC. Board to monitor regularly.	MJ to be advised
3.15	EP asked that as part of the Performance Management Review that we benchmark our performance with more 3* ALMOs. AS confirmed that this is to be included and emphasised more.	AS
<b>3.16</b>	<b>Equality and Diversity</b>	
3.17	CJ asked what was being done to address the need to increase the number of BME in the senior management and front line teams. CL advised that the NCH position as of now was the baseline and targets would be set across the 6 pillars of diversity to address the imbalance and ensure the workforce was more representative of the community. Stepped targets would be in	

	place so that a gradual increase across the 6 pillars could be achieved; it couldn't be an immediate fix and would take time to improve the position. CL also advised that recruitment of a number of vacancies was now taking place and there would be an emphasis on representation.	
3.18	DBB asked if the same approach would be taken with the Board in terms of their representativeness. AS advised that it would and Board had also received specialist training on equality and diversity from a leading UK trainer. DBB asked is this would be provided to TLC too? AS confirmed that this would be arranged.	AS
3.19	JS advised that the recent Equality Impact Assessment consultation events had provided an opportunity for learning, input and had been very well run.	
<b>3.20</b>	<b>Modernising the repairs service</b>	
3.21	CL advised that this will involve substantial changes and negotiation. Working practices are outdated, new IT is needed, a new pay structure, a robust appointments system, etc. These changes are complex and would take approximately 2 years to complete.	
3.22	TS advised that he had seen improvements in the service over the last few years but a lot needed to improve and a more effective quality checking system for each job was needed to improve standards. CL advised that quality assurance was required but for each individual order this would prove costly to check as we receive approx 3,000 responsive repair orders per month.	
3.23	ST asked about the out of hours service and if this was a volunteering service. CL advised that this too would need re-negotiation.	
3.24	JB asked how equipped craft teams were in multi skilling and had training been identified for this. CL advised that part of modernising the service would look at multi skilling and that NCH are a long way from this, in comparison to other organisations.	
<b>3.25</b>	<b>Voids, lettings and allocations</b>	
3.26	GM advised that although there had been a significant reduction in the number of void properties, performance remained bottom quartile in comparison to other ALMOs. Performance had reached a plateau and further reductions were needed including average relet times needing to improve and the standard of properties being relet. The Housing Register had recently had a fundamental review and the number of applicants awaiting rehousing had reduced from 16,000+ to just over 12,500. An annual review programme of the register would now take place monthly from April ensuring that more accurate and up to date information was being captured; this included a greater identification of those with support needs. The whole service was to receive a LEAN systems rethinking analysis and all processes are to be reviewed to ensure a more	

	fit for purpose and efficient service is implemented during 2009/10. This will include improved IT to support the changes needed.	
	MH advised that the HomeLink website was not customer friendly and it was difficult to find information. STa to consider this with tenants so that the website is improved.	STa
3.27	TS asked if the process around reletting properties when tenants had died could be re-considered. Some flats near to him appeared to have been let within a matter of weeks. GM advised that these circumstances are dealt with compassionately and in discussion with the next of kin, however, this has to be balanced against full rent being due, housing benefit cover ceasing and rent loss to the company.	
<b>3.28</b>	<b>New customer service centre and local service delivery</b>	
3.29	GM advised that to become a 3* company NCH needed to improve customer care, reduce high management costs and improve performance. An area of high cost is the delivery of services through the local housing offices. Footfall analyses had been carried out at offices and other providers had been contacted about how they were delivering services. The proposal is to introduce a new Customer Contact Centre that is open 24/7. There will be greater ownership of queries, an improved appointment system, more presence on estates and home visits offered instead of servicing offices and employees behind desks. The Accommodation Plan proposals will deliver a fundamental change to the way we deliver services with the priority being the customer experience. Plans intend to manage resources more smartly and reduce costs such as rent payment transactions. Southglade is to close and consultation has been carried out with the closure plans taking place. Consultation is to commence for Lenton, Bilborough and the Victoria Centre. The new approach will be to deliver services through surgeries at community centres, libraries, partners such as Sure Start, the LIFTs such as the Clifton and Mary Potter Centres and increased access through touch screens and free phones.	
3.30	JD advised if the ownership of queries extended to current problems that are not being addressed. JD explained about repairs to doors in her area (Tim Shirley is following up as part of the environmental schemes), and a gang of 'druggies' causing problems. The HPM and Area Housing Manager are both aware but not yet resolved. (Wigman Road) GM to follow up.	GM
3.31	KB asked if the high turnover of HPMs will reduce as Bulwell has had so many changes over the last 4 years and currently they are borrowing HPMs from other offices to cover. GM advised of the budget constraints due to the current climate but that NCH had been in a better position to other authorities and ALMOs where significant numbers of employees were being made redundant but we had held a number of vacancies creating savings. Priority posts have now been advertised to cover key services and other vacancies would continue to be held where possible, potentially reducing management costs over time. Recruitment will assess ability to do the job but also those with the right attitudes. KB	

	stated that the HPM role cannot be underestimated and is a critical role for tenants.	
3.32	CJ advised that she and others were not opposed to office closures and she for a long time has been in favour of the Victoria Centre housing office closing so that resources can be more fairly served to the wider community. Whilst the Victoria Centre housing office is being manned the St Ann's housing office has shortages and it is not a good use of resources or fair to employees who are being stretched too thinly. If there was a threat of the Victoria Centre becoming a Tenant Management Organisation then this needed to be faced but not an office being kept open just to favour some and not others if it was not justified.	
<b>3.33</b>	<b>Needs led supported housing service</b>	
3.34	GM advised that the Audit Commission had said that the current service was good but is old fashioned. This could put the company at risk of losing future supporting people funding and contracts. A fundamental review of the service was underway.	
3.35	CJ advised that we needed to better promote the sheltered service because the complexes were of good condition and well looked after.	
3.36	GM advised that the intention was to liaise more widely with community groups and encourage more culturally diverse access. The idea is to introduce schemes as a 'hub' for community activities.	
3.37	IM asked that schemes made guest rooms available for family members in the future or there were more 2 bedroom units.	
3.38	CL advised that the current sheltered schemes were not fit for purpose as the housing market for the future was finding that elderly tenants have higher housing aspirations around more independent living.	
<b>3.39</b>	<b>Winning new business</b>	
	This is to be discussed in more detail at a future TLC. STa to put on forward plan.	STa
<b>3.40</b>	<b>Performance Management Review</b>	
3.41	AS advised that NCH would like a session with TLC members to look at how tenants can be involved in the performance management review – what tenants want, how future reporting will be carried out. Session proposed for April.	AS
<b>3.42</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	
	AS was aware that tenants and leaseholders wanted to be more informed about strategies, policies and the developments in the housing sector and their implications and how this information can be relayed more widely to tenants and tenant groups more simply. AS to ensure this is an area that is developed with tenants and further discussion will take place with the TLC on this.	AS
<b>4</b>	<b>Board update</b>	
4.1	JS was invited to attend to present an update from Board of	

	recent issues and decisions. Due to the lack of time JS handed out an overview. JE apologised for cutting short this item.	
<b>5</b>	<b>Allocations Policy review</b>	
5.1	Pat Greenwell, Interim Policy Officer, Nottingham City Council presented an overview and update on the Allocations Policy review.	
5.2	IM asked if people would be forced out of their homes if they under occupied. IM also asked if a person offered to downsize from a 3 bedroom house but didn't want a one bedroom flat could this be considered too?	
5.3	PG advised that people would be given priority to downsize but that 2 bedrooms would still be required by families.	
5.4	CJ asked why the City Council were directing the policy review. The HomeLink review last year identified these changes described by PG and could have been implemented by now. When would NCH be in a position to take over the Allocations Policy and 'hold its own purse strings and be directly in control?'	
5.5	PG advised that the policy was a local authority duty and the City was required to set the policy. PG offered to attend a future TLC and distribute a copy of the latest draft to members for more feedback.	PG
<b>6</b>	<b>Any other business</b>	
6.1	DBB suggested that as the meeting had extended to gone 8.30pm this evening and it was apparent that there was so much taking place, it be proposed that TLC is held monthly, 6-8pm with shorter agendas. TLC unanimously agreed. STa to set up.	STa
6.2	EP asked if impact assessments would be carried out where there were office closures and these are fed back to TLC. GM agreed.	GM

Meeting ended 8.40pm

Suggestion sheets handed in to STa to provide responses to individually or at next meeting, as appropriate.