

Minutes



Minutes of Tenants and Leaseholders Congress 25th November 2009, 6pm – 8pm Boardroom

Present:

Jean England – **JE**
Jacinth Hall – **JH**
Maria Hemphill – **MH**
Ruth Haywood - **RH**
Linford Stevens – **LS**
John Riley – **JR**
Roy Lawson – **RL**
Robert Morrell – **RM**
Kevin Butt – **KB**

Sue Stevenson – **SS**
Kate Bowley – **KBO**
Clive Thorpe – **CT**
Alison Thorpe – **AT**
Sheila Thwaites – **ST**
Ina McCallum – **I Mc**
Dave Bennett-Bull - **DBB**
Lyn Mitchell - **LM**
Cynthia James (**CJ**)

NCH

Carole Donnelly - **CD**
Gill Moy – **GM**
Sue Taylor – **Sta**

Apologies: Amanda Schofield –**AS** Janet Storar – **JS** Chris Langstaff –**CL**
Margret Pugsley – **MP** Alison Mapp - **AM**

	Action
<u>1.0</u> Welcome, Introduction and Apologies The Chair Welcomed everyone to the meeting, mentioned the apologies and started the meeting	
<u>2.0</u> Minutes of Previous Meeting The Chair ran through the page numbers, no objections. The Minutes were signed off by the chair	
<u>3.0</u> Matters Arising ST commented on the new decorating scheme and wanted to know if vouchers were being distributed as well as points. SS confirmed that the during the pilot only points were awarded CD confirmed that Tricia Quinn will report back to the Jan meeting the success rates when NCH takes someone to court for ASB , as well as providing a 1/4ly report to the Jan meeting. CD confirmed that the TSA did not cover Leaseholders in their remit and this has been raised as an area of concern with the TSA via a number of forums/debates. GM confirmed that NCH are the first ALMO to achieve 'accreditation' for their ASB	

services. GM wanted to thank those who had taken part in the process with special thanks going to Kathy Mason ASB coordinator for NCH

4.0 Casual Board Vacancy

CD introduced the process of nominating/supporting a candidate to go forward for the selection process for the casual board vacancy via a briefing note. There is a 6 step process and the TLC were in a position to propose/support a candidate to go forward.

2 Candidates had currently put themselves forward for consideration. Kevin Butt read out a statement on his qualities and what he could bring to the position and Cynthia James gave a verbal response to why TLC members should support her going forward for the vacancy. GM confirm that the TLC members could support both candidates and that the Board would then make the final decision on who would be eligible. JH suggested that she would like both candidates to go through and this was supported by the majority of TLC members present. Two options were then put to the vote, option one to vote for one candidate and option two for both candidates to go forward from the TLC for the board to consider. Option two was carried by a majority of 10

CD to notify AM of the TLC decision to support both candidates going forward.

5.0 Modernisation of Tenancy and Estate Management (TEM) Gill Moy Director

GM confirmed that housing management was much wider than the remit of TEM, due to economic/financial pressures there is likely to be a 20% saving over the next 3 years to our current budgets/expenditure. NCH have carried out extensive benchmarking exercises with a number of our key operating areas coming out in the high cost bracket. GM noted that this had been a deliberate approach in some areas to enable NCH to obtain the two stars, excellent prospects that released the decent homes funding. Of the £13.7million budget for housing management, tenant participation, voids and support services we are looking for a £2.7million efficiency savings. This will mean major cuts in some areas and a need to work more effectively in all areas. NCH need to create new business opportunities.

GM was due to take a report to the Board on the 26th November to request a formal consultation period with the tenants and leaseholders on the cessation of cash collection in the area housing offices. The aim is to consolidate our call centres into a 'one stop shop' approach where tenants can report repairs and anti social behaviour at the same time.

GM went to say that cash collection is not only expensive but poses additional risks to our staff and tenants alike, it is open to fraud and other financial irregularities as well as being very expensive to maintain. Rent transactions cost between £1.23 and £5.87 to collect at the local offices, with direct debits costing 16p and 45p for collection at a post office. The paper to the Board outlines a potential cost saving of £300k per year if we were to cease cash collections at the local offices. It has been noted that the Bullwell office has a higher cash collection rate than most of the other offices and because of this attracts the lowest operating cost. It has been noted that this office due to its location and preferred payment method coupled with the lower collection cost will remain open for rent collection. GM also noted that the larger 'Hub' or LIFT offices at Clifton and Mary Potter will also remain open for collection following further consultation with the tenants and Nottingham City Council.

GM also confirmed that research has been completed with other ALMO's/Local Authorities and it was noted that rent collection rates did not dramatically decrease once cash collection had been withdrawn as additional support was offered coupled

Paper
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CD

with alternative payment methods.

GM also confirmed that an exercise to scope the customer service centre will be established and a 'focus group' which will include tenants will be established and a report brought back to the TLC at a future date.

RL raised an issues that he thought in-house collection was cheaper and GM explained how the overall costs were obtained with the majority of overhead costs like staffing for post offices were already taken into account before being passed on to the consumer. GM confirmed that the decision to remove cash collection has not been taken lightly and that all alternatives have been considered and costed and if this isn't approved cost cuts will be considered in other business areas.

DBB raised an issue regarding former tenant and current tenant rent arrears and the need to ensure rent collection. He also advised that as a tenant board member they will have a difficult decision to make and wants the TLC to have a voice in that process. GM confirmed that NCH were making inroads into the rent arrears debt and in year rent collection has increased to over 100% as a result of the good work being carried out to reduce former tenant debt.

MH noted that it can often take longer for a rent credit paid at the post office or via payment point to show up on the rent statement and that this raises concern for a number of our tenants who don't like to be in arrears. GM confirmed that NCH are looking into this and a communication plan will be put into place to ensure everyone understands the process.

LS confirmed that the Government have been closing local post offices and the remaining ones have long queues, has this been taken into account? Plus raised the position of NCH making a loss. GM confirmed that NCH made a surplus of £138k last financial year and that this is put back into NCC housing revenue account, and that all options to 'work smarter' are being consider. NCH are currently holding a number of vacancies to minimise the threat of redundancies.

IMc wanted to know if the cash collections at local offices cease will this then mean the local office will close. GM confirmed that this will be included in the review of services currently underway, with the investment in new IT it will give us an opportunity to get the services out to where the customer needs them, for example 'drop in surgeries' but there is a lot of work to be undertaken before any decisions are made regarding the housing management service.

CJ raised concerns about the security of bank details, worries about paying the rent and other housing management issues especially around empty properties being boarded up for a number of months. (Dane Court)

LM wanted to know if NCH were going to be working more closely with the benefit agency to ensure that direct debits didn't take too much money from a tenants bank account due to Housing Benefit not being assessed quickly enough. GM confirmed that she will ask Richard Holland (Rents Manager) to provide a report on HB slippage.

GM/RH

It was also noted that the current void and allocation process was not as effective as it could be. STa is currently working extremely hard to bring the void process back in line with Board targets of 360 by the year end, as of the 25th Nov voids were 43. It has been noted that there has been problems with non lettable voids increasing and incurring additional costs including council tax which hadn't been budgeted for. The Executive management Team are reviewing this on a weekly basis to ensure performance improves. It was also noted that an 'allocation review' is underway with Sue Lomax working on a draft policy, which will need to go to area panels and TLC at a future date.

It was further noted that a full review of supporting people is required our current approach is 'old fashioned' and NCH are currently gathering data and looking at all

alternative options. A report will be going to Board to consider a 'hub and spoke' approach with a working party to be established in the near future.

RL commented that the issue of void standards had been raised at the recent Repairs panel with concern about a 'liveable standard' not being achieved before the property is let. STa confirmed that changes had been made to the lettable standard and work had been undertaken with Gary Whitaker to ensure properties are brought back into use as soon as possible but with the standard being maintained. LM & CJ raised concerns over the supporting housing review and GM confirmed that consultation will be undertaken and that a report will be taken to the Sheltered Forum in the near future.

The TLC were then asked by GM if they could support the need for changes to cash collection and the members present confirmed that they understood the need for the changes.

6.0 TLC/Compact Review Carole Donnelly

CD introduced a paper on the current proposals to review the Tenant Compact. A review group has been established following a number of requests at previous TLC meetings for volunteers to come forward, the group consists of the following tenants and Board members:

- Janet Storar, Chair of NCH
- Jean England, Chair of TLC
- Val Schneider, Tenant Board Member
- Alison Thorpe, Vice Chair of TLC
- Clive Thorpe, Chair of Homes 4 Us
- Plus Councillor, board members and staff at NCH

The role of the group was to look at more effective ways of consulting and involving tenants and leaseholders in the process, especially in light of the new TSA approach to 'empowerment'.

CD agreed to bring a further paper back to the TLC/Board event in February 2010 the debate was cut short due to the lack of time to get through the remaining items.

CD
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7.0 Tenant Services Authority (TSA) feedback Carole Donnelly

CD gave a verbal report on the next stage of the TSA consultation stating that an event for the final consultation on the new regulatory framework will be organised for January 2010 as consultation finishes on the 5th February 2010 with the new regulations coming into force from April 2010.

CD

8.0 National Tenant Voice update Carole Donnelly

CD presented a written report on the recruitment process undertaken for the 30 places on the National Council. Confirmed that NCH were lucky to have 3 people go through to the final stages with Alison Thorpe getting through to the final stages and being placed on a reserve shortlist. It was also confirmed that CD had been appointed to the NTV national council and will be reporting back on a regular basis as to the progress made for tenants nationally.

CD

9.0 Any other business

CJ raised an issue regarding a march by the BNP in the city centre, she had been advised by the police to make all groups aware that a counter protest will take place in the city centre and that it will cause disruption on a busy Christmas shopping Saturday and the local police will be out in force as there is also a football match between Nottingham Forest and Leicester taking place on the same Saturday.

AT had received an email from ED Jacobs, public affairs company & NATFED ALMO's regarding a petition to number 10 to release funding for the ALMO's affected by the withholding of decent homes money, it was noted that this currently doesn't affect NCH decent homes money.

Concern was raised regarding a 'rouge tradesman' operating in the St Anns area if anyone is concerned please contact the local police, NCH tradesmen always carry ID and this should be checked before allowing any workmen into measure windows or other decent homes related works. A message will be sent to Nottingham on Call to advise of this and SWARM team to be made aware of this.

RL stated that he had the opportunity to meet with the Cabinet last Friday to raise concern about the lack of provision in his area, for play schemes and the elderly, RL advised to raise with local councillors.

Date of Next meeting to be confirmed as no meeting in December