

MINUTES: PLYMOUTH COMMUNITY HOMES BOARD

Item

Action To Be Taken By

Present: Board Members: Sue Dann, Peter Ebsworth (Chair), Zilpah Leahy, William Lean, Sue McDonald, Elaine Pellow, Jack Thompson, Nigel Warn, Joan Watkins, Christine Watts, Jim Webster

Staff/Advisors : Nick Jackson, Georgina Savill, Gary Seabourne, Martin Snell, Clive Turner, Colin Walker

Tenant Services Authority: Steve Fox

Apologies: Alan Clifford

1 **Declarations of interest**

JW was present as an independent Board member and not as a police officer.

2 **Minutes of Meeting 2 June 2009**

Agreed

3 **Matters Arising from 2 June 2009**

None

4 **Appointment of Independent Board Members**

JW left the room for this item.

The Board resolved, in accordance with the recommendation of the recruitment panel: **to approve the appointment of Alan Clifford and Chief Superintendent Jim Webster as independent Board members.**

In addition, the Board also resolved, in accordance with the recommendation of the recruitment panel: **to co-opt Ian Byworth to the Customer Focus Committee.**

JW rejoined the meeting.

5 Committee Feedback

Audit and Risk (23 June 2009)

- The 3 firms shortlisted for the external audit role had been interviewed on 23 June 2009.
- The committee had resolved to appoint KPMG as PCH's external auditors.
- The next task would be to appoint internal auditors.

Finance (25 June 2009)

- The committee had resolved that assets would be carried forward at cost (in the case of PCH the housing stock would be a nil cost item).
- The Funding Prospectus had been distributed.
- PCH would seek £70 million from EIB and a further £70 million from UK banks.
- PCH would apply to the HCA for £118 million of gap funding.
- The HCA had indicated that PCH could make use of an early draw down facility, provided the organization was prepared to accept some reduction in the overall grant.
- The committee had resolved to approve the Procurement Policy and Service Charge Strategy.

Board Discussion on Finance Feedback

The kitchen and bathroom programme would constitute the bulk of PCH's procurement programme over the next 5 years. There were significant potential savings in sourcing this contract from a single supplier.

PCH was conscious of the need to strike a balance between securing value for money and the expectation that it would provide local employment opportunities.

PCH could not contravene European procurement regulations, but within these constraints the organization had developed a series of performance indicators and a scoring matrix that would test the contractors' commitment to the use of local labour.

CT would inform the Board of the background to the next stage of the procurement process.

CT

HR and Staffing (29 June 2009)

- Sue Dann had been welcomed to the meeting.
- TUPE workshops would start on 13 July 2009.
- The committee had resolved to seek additional proposals for

the Board appraisal process.

6 Project Update:

In addition to the written report circulated with the Board papers, CT gave a verbal update on the latest developments.

Registration and Negotiations with Plymouth City Council

- The negotiations with PCC were moving forward in a constructive manner.
- PCH was well prepared for the registration assessment visit.

Human Resources

- CT had received the initial 'in scope' list as had been promised on 30 June 2009.
- PCC and PCH were committed to finalizing the list by the end of July 2009.
- The first round interviews for the Corporate Services Director would be held on 1 July 2009.
- A report on pensions should be available for discussion at the Board meeting on 28 July 2009.
- The Terms of Reference had been agreed for a consultative group that would have monthly meetings with the Trade Unions. A document to formalize the relationship sought with the Trade Unions was expected in July or August 2009.
- The first day of staff training sessions in advance of the transfer had been held on 26 June 2009.

ICT

- PCH had selected the 'Open' finance system supplied and supported by Orchard.
- Implementation/installation of the finance system would be discussed on 7 July 2009.
- An interim IT Manager with a strong housing association background would begin work on 2 July 2009.

Assets

- Adam Broome would ensure consistent application of the 50% principle.
- PCH continued to receive the agreed daily number of plans.
- The flats and the residents above the shops on the estates would transfer to PCH. The flats and the tenants above the shops in Colin Campbell Court would also transfer to PCH, but the council position on the shops themselves remained to be determined.

- PCH would not wish to disadvantage charitable organizations in PCC premises that transferred to PCH.

Accommodation

- PCC had recently indicated that it would prefer to see the Housing Records and Capital Programmes teams leave Windsor House by the end of the current financial year, although AB might be prepared to revisit this position if PCH faced real difficulties in finding alternative accommodation.
- PCC had proposed charges for PCH to lease the depots at Prince Rock and Fort Austin. PCH had requested additional information on the justification for these figures.

Communications

- CT had circulated a briefing note to staff. Briefing notes would now be circulated monthly.
- The role profile for a communications manager had been prepared. CT believed that it was important to appoint to this position pre-transfer to ensure that PCH had a communications plan ready for both the immediate future and the post transfer period.

The Board resolved : **to note the progress described in the project update report and verbal update.**

7 Section 25 Budget

- A £130,000 underspend was predicted as a result of deferring payment for the finance system.
- The underspend projection would be valid for up to 5 weeks after the anticipated transfer date.
- The council was examining measures to make sure that the rent free week did not adversely affect tenants' entitlement to benefits.

8 Registration Assessment Process

- Steve Fox (Tenant Services Authority) considered that PCH's preparations for the assessment visit were on schedule.
- The TSA had prepared a set of draft standards and these were out for consultation.
- The TSA envisaged that the regulatory framework might comprise a set of national standards, which would apply to all landlords, plus a set of local indicators that would recognize local issues.

SF would update the Board on feedback from Devon tenants at the Board meeting on 28 July 2009.

SF

9 Company Seal

- The Board resolved: **to adopt the seal as the common seal of Plymouth Community Homes.**
- CT signed to attest to the adoption of the seal.

10 North Prospect Update

- Confidential minute.
- The funding gap that remained (£10.9 million) could be bridged by bringing forward some of the gap funding and the use of the VAT shelter.
- The Levitt-Bernstein proposals would not produce any net loss of social housing.
- CT was keen to progress communication with residents and the presence of the Stock Transfer trailer at the North Prospect event on 11 July 2009 would mark the start of this process.
- Although visits to householders were likely to begin in autumn 2009, it would probably require another 6 months of in depth work post transfer before the detailed proposals for individual properties were available.
- The proposals would provide owner occupiers with as much choice as possible e.g. the release of properties from PCH stock or an equity stake in a new build property etc.
- The Board recognized the need to develop a response for those in negative equity.
- CT would bring a proposal for the appointment of a Project Director for North Prospect to the Board on 28 July 2009.

The Board resolved: **to note the North Prospect Update.**

CT

11 DSO Health Check and Business Plan Report

The High Level DSO Review and Benchmarking Exercise

- The High Level DSO Review and Benchmarking Exercise was a continuation of the work to ensure that the DSO would be fit for purpose.
- The DSO had made considerable progress since 2008 and much of the action plan had already been delivered. The service had achieved a 33% reduction in costs and a 58% increase in productivity.
- The kitchens and bathrooms programmes programme should not affect the satisfaction level for the repairs service because the DSO would not be involved in this work to any great extent.
- The customer satisfaction levels in the report were taken from the Status Survey, rather than residents with direct recent experience of the DSO. The satisfaction level among residents contacted by PCC Customer Services immediately after a

- repair was appreciably higher.
- There had also been a marked increase in customer satisfaction over the last 2 years.
 - Residents were being trained to join the Continuous Improvement Groups (CIGS) that would become operational in September 2009. These groups would continue the drive to improve service levels.
 - Residents would judge PCH by its performance on repairs. It was vital that the repairs teams understood the significance of the transfer. The days/weeks after transfer gave them the chance to prove that the creation of PCH marked a distinct and immediate break with the past.
 - PCH had begun staff training sessions to underline this message and provide employees with an introduction to working in a housing association.

Business Plan

- The DSO Business Plan referred solely to the DSO and not to the Manufacturing Division.
- The DSO intended to focus on its strengths and build on its existing expertise. It was not aiming to be involved in the decent homes programme because of the time limited nature of this work.
- Asbestos removal and gas servicing were due to feature in productivity discussions with the Trade Unions.
- The undergoing multi-skill training would produce further productivity increases.

The Board resolved: **to note the High Level DSO Review and Benchmarking Exercise and to approve the DSO Business Plan.**

12 Equality and Diversity Strategy and Action Plan

- The plan had been devised to begin embedding equality and diversity into PCH's organizational culture from the outset.
- The report laid down the foundations for equality and diversity work over the next 18 months.
- One of the first initiatives would be the establishment of a Diversity Board which would take the lead in monitoring progress.

The Board resolved to: approve **the Equality and Diversity Action Plan.**

13 Any Other Business

- The timescale for the PCH website would become clearer after

- a meeting with an IT consultant in 10 days.
- SF considered that it would be appropriate for the Board to offer guidance (based on a schedule) on the choice of funder(s) to the Finance Committee

14 Date of Next Meeting

5.00pm, Tuesday 28 July 2009, Boardroom, Princess Court

Signature.....

Name.....

Date.....