



**SIX TOWN HOUSING BOARD MEETING**

**25 MARCH 2009**

**5.00PM GLOBAL BUILDING**

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

**Board Members:**

John Smith (Chair)  
Andy McGiffin (Vice-Chair)  
John Anderson  
John Ball  
Ivy Bolton  
Roger Brown  
Wilf Davison  
Peter Dawson  
Brenda Headley  
C Pathinige  
Larry Patrick  
Sharif Salim  
Michelle Wiseman

**Officers:**

Susan Jordan (Chief Executive)  
John Merrick (Director of Neighbourhood Services)  
Vicki Haslam (Acting Director of Corporate Services)  
Julia Shepherd (Board Support Officer/Minutes)  
Julie Heywood (Customer Contact Manager)  
Viv Simon (Team Leader, Community Involvement)

**APOLOGIES:**

Janette Taylor  
Lindsey Stafford-Scott (Head of HR & Organisational Development)  
John Bowker (Director of Technical Services)

**GUEST:**

Stewart Jones

		<b>ACTION</b>
	<p>The Chair opened the meeting, and welcomed Stewart Jones, tenant attending as an observer.</p> <p>Viv Simon delivered a detailed presentation to the Board on Tenant Led Self Regulation and the vision of how this model, if accepted by the Board, would help shape and raise the standard of services for STH tenants.</p> <p>Following the presentation, Board Members raised a number of questions and concerns on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Cost involved for implementation of tenant led self regulation and subsequent budget necessary to support the function of the group;</li> <li>● Scenario if there was a change of Government;</li> <li>● No other ALMO as yet has adopted this model;</li> <li>● Future Board Member involvement in the group / Mentor role.</li> </ul> <p>The Board were advised of the resource of a dedicated number of STH Officers for initial development of the group. It is expected that STH will support the group financially. RLSR in social housing is a national agenda and it is anticipated that a change in Government would not impact in any way on its delivery. STH Officers have held meetings with the group, and both parties see this as a valuable way to shape the services for our customers needs. The remit and purpose of RLSR highlighted a conflict of interest with Board Member participation in the group, however tenant Board Members will be able to get involved in Phase 2. It isn't envisaged that a STH Tenant Board member could have a mentor role in the group, but the possibility of a Tenant Board Member from another ALMO can be looked at.</p> <p>Feedback from an All Parliamentary Group meeting in London on 24 March was very positive for tenants to get more involved.</p> <p><b>Board were asked to give support for the formal development of RLSR.</b></p> <p><b>Board were happy to support the formal development of the group.</b></p>	
<b>1.0</b>	<b>APOLOGIES</b>	
1.1	As detailed on page 1.	
	<p>The Chair welcomed John Merrick as Acting Chief Executive, and Vicki Haslam as Acting Director of Corporate Services. Board also asked for congratulations to be passed to Lindsey Stafford Scott on her recent marriage.</p>	

<b>2.0</b>	<b>MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING: 22 January 2009</b>									
2.1	Noted that a correction to be made to the 2.1 of the minutes –WD is Chair of St John with St Marks Primary School Moorside Wood.  The minutes were then agreed as a correct record.									
<b>3.0</b>	<b>MATTERS ARISING</b>									
3.1	Page 3 – Average Relet Time re payment of Council Tax on empty sheltered properties empty over six month period. JM discussed with Bury Council’s Revenues & Benefits Section who confirmed that currently STH pays Council Tax for sheltered housing properties empty over six month period. However there is discretion for discounts (usually hardship or class). Empty properties still call on essential services i.e. the Police and Fire Service. If the Council is happy to proceed with this arrangement, this will considered by the Council’s Executive and need to go in the forward plan as a proposal for the future (2010/2011). The action is too late for the 2009/2010 forward plan.	JM								
<b>4.0</b>	<b>DECLARATION OF INTEREST</b>									
4.1	None declared.									
<b>5.0</b>	<b>PERFORMANCE UPDATE (February 2009)</b>									
5.1	The performance information for February was presented to Board by John Merrick Director of Neighbourhood Services and Vicki Haslam, Acting Director of Corporate Services.  <table border="1" data-bbox="252 1189 1278 2018"> <thead> <tr> <th>Indicator Description</th> <th>Comment</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Proportion of Rent Collected</td> <td>Cumulative = 98.04%   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slight dip in performance over last month.</li> <li>Year end calculation is based on arrears at last year end.</li> <li>Noted pre-payments taken out of performance which impacts on figures</li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>Amount of Rent Arrears of Current Tenants</td> <td>2.85%   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rent arrears reduced to lowest level since the ALMO was set up.</li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>FTA’s</td> <td>£687,360   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Down by £240K in last 3 years</li> <li>Approx £4,000 written off in February / approx 25,000 to be written off in March.</li> </ul> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Indicator Description	Comment	Proportion of Rent Collected	Cumulative = 98.04%  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slight dip in performance over last month.</li> <li>Year end calculation is based on arrears at last year end.</li> <li>Noted pre-payments taken out of performance which impacts on figures</li> </ul>	Amount of Rent Arrears of Current Tenants	2.85%  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rent arrears reduced to lowest level since the ALMO was set up.</li> </ul>	FTA’s	£687,360  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Down by £240K in last 3 years</li> <li>Approx £4,000 written off in February / approx 25,000 to be written off in March.</li> </ul>	
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	% of FTA's collected	9.14% at the end of February <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target of 13% is in place. Good practice suggests a target of 10%.</li> <li>• Agreed to hold performance clinics for FTAs.</li> </ul>	
	Average Relet Time	Cumulative = 48 days As at end of February = 36 days <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No longer using sub-contractors;</li> <li>• R &amp; M prioritising voids which have been provisionally accepted.</li> <li>• Neighbourhood Services Committee received a report re empty properties at their February 2009 meeting.</li> <li>• Identified working group review refusal reasons.</li> </ul>	
	Rent Loss on vacant dwellings	Cumulative = 2.97%	
	Urgent Repairs completed within Government timescales	Cumulative = 94% As at end of February = 89% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New repair timescales to be introduced from 1 April 2009.</li> </ul>	
	Average number of days taken to complete non-urgent repairs	Cumulative = 23 days (as at February).	
<b>6.0</b>	<b>HR UPDATE</b>		
6.1	The Board were advised that there is no quarterly information available until the end of March 2009.		
6.2	Sickness absence cumulative performance is recorded at 8.66 days. The HR team continue to run well-being initiatives. A recent survey to ascertain the effectiveness of the well-being initiatives has been undertaken with staff; feedback shows that staff feel valued as a result of these initiatives.		
6.3	There has been an improvement in performance with the integration of the Repairs & Maintenance Service.		
6.4	Board Members were advised there are currently 2 disciplinary investigations and no grievances.		
6.5	Job Evaluation: the Steering Group and Project Groups have held their first meeting and established Terms of Reference.		

6.6	Work is continuing on the re-alignment process and job descriptions. Hays are working to support STH through the Job Evaluation process.	
6.7	Two Board Members gave positive feedback on the Recruitment and Selection Training – both advised they found the exercise invaluable and have asked for thanks to be forwarded to the HR Team.	
<b>7.0</b>	<b>EQUALITY &amp; DIVERSITY UPDATE</b>	
7.1	The organisation is currently working with the Fair Play Partnership who have been invited to work with STH and facilitate a diversity driver assessment workshop. A report will be produced on the findings. The assessment is a result of feedback from the Audit Commission Inspectors to ensure equality and diversity is embedded across all service areas.	
7.2	<u>Equality Impact Assessments</u> - All new procedures adopted by STH will have an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). All EIA's will be reported to the Equality Action Group.	
7.3	<u>Domestic Abuse</u> – Continuing to work with Bury Council through Local Area Agreements. Temporary respite accommodation will be available for families who are subjected to domestic abuse to offer an interim place of safety.	
7.4	<u>Diversity Corporate Action Plan</u> – The 2009/10 Action Plan needs to be developed. The Action Plan will be brought to a future Board Meeting.	Future Agenda item
7.5	<u>Equality Action Group</u> – To commence Annual Report on equality and diversity.	
7.6	<u>Stonewall</u> – Confirmed the organisation is formally signed up to Stonewall. Stonewall logo will be displayed on STH literature.	
<b>8.0</b>	<b>COMMUNITY HOUSE PROJECT</b>	
8.1	<p>Requests from TRA groups for a base to use for meetings, led to the proposal to introduce a Policy to deal with these enquiries. The Policy also extends to Third Sector Group (i.e. Re Build etc).</p> <p>The community groups were asked to look at long term void properties and maybe small one bedroom properties for their use. Consultation has taken place regarding this.</p> <p>It was advised that if any properties were used for community groups that they should only be removed from the housing stock on a temporary basis, as permanent removal could have an adverse effect on the HRA (Housing Revenue Account). STH would not have any responsibility for health and safety of the properties while leased as the group(s) concerned would be responsible for this. STH would be responsible for the external of the building and any improvements. The</p>	

proposal supports community development and meets some of STH Strategic Objectives.

The Board were advised of a potential project identified in conjunction with active TRA's and CIT which would utilise void properties/shops to enable projects, events and activities organised by TRA's and external agencies for the benefit of the community. Currently STH has no policy, procedure or guidance in place for offering community buildings to TRA's or external agencies. The report makes reference to opportunity for real opportunities for successful projects and activities which would result in greater independence for the community with better access to facilities that respond to the needs of the community.

The Community Involvement Team will carry out reviews at 6 and 12 months to monitor and evaluate the impact the community building has had on the community, whether the activities run by the group from the facility are making a difference, and how far the project is achieving its stated outcomes and objectives.

Questions were answered regarding; Risk Management, cost benefit analysis, subletting (if approval given), refusal of application and appeals. Board Members were unhappy to use long term void properties for this purpose which could be used for families on the housing waiting list.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 Board are asked for their views on the proposed policy, prior to it being considered by the Executive of Bury Council, who will make the final decision. Board were asked to consider the following options and make a recommendation on how to proceed:- It is recommended that Option 1 is adopted.**
- 4.2 Option 1 – STH adopts a policy which would enable TRA's and third sector agencies under the agreed criteria to lease a void property or shop premises for the purpose of a community house and to deliver services at a local level.**
- 4.3 Option 2 – STH adopts a policy which would enable TRA's and third sector agencies under the agreed criteria to lease shop premises only for the purpose of a community house and to deliver services at a local level.**
- 4.4 Option 3 – STH remains as it is and does not adopt a policy for TRA's or third sector agencies to lease void properties or shop premises.**

**Board rejected the recommendation to approve Option 1, but agreed to adopt Option 2. Viv Simon will take the recommendation**

	<b>forward to Bury Council.</b>	
<b>9.0</b>	<b>RATIFICATION OF DECISION: GAS CONTRACT</b>	
9.1	<p>Board were asked for approval by email on 20 February 2009, as approved by the Technical Services Committee on Thursday, 19 February 2009 to accept PH Jones as the successful contractor in line with STH standing orders. This is a key decision with a value of over £200,000.</p> <p><b>BOARD RATIFIED THIS DECISION.</b></p>	
<b>10.0</b>	<b>RATIFICATION OF DECISION: PROCESS FOR RECRUITMENT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE</b>	
	<p>Board were asked for approval of the recruitment process for the new Chief Executive by email on 12 February 2009.</p> <p>The approval was to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Engage an “executive search” recruitment specialist to undertake and support the process.</li> <li>ii. That Mark Sanders and Guy Berry sit on the selection panel as observers/advisors.</li> <li>iii. That a selection panel comprising John Smith, Andy McGiffin, Brenda Headley, Janette Taylor and Wilf Davison be established. This proposal is based on needing to have a selection panel that is representative of the Board. This proposal gives: gender balance, established representation of all constituencies – tenant, independent and elected member, and representation of all Committees.</li> <li>iv. That all Board Members be given the opportunity to meet the short listed candidates over lunch prior to their final interview.</li> <li>v. Board were also asked for approval for John Merrick to act up as Chief Executive until the new Chief Executive is appointed and in post.</li> </ul> <p><b>BOARD RATIFIED THIS DECISION.</b></p> <p><b>Note: Iain Gartside Executive Member for Learning Skills and Employment has since been asked to join the panel.</b></p>	
<b>11.0</b>	<b>RATIFICATION OF DECISION: APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITORS</b>	
11.1	<p>The Audit &amp; Standard Committee have been leading on the selection of external auditors for STH following agreement by Board at the AGM on 13 August 2008, to tender the external Audit function. A transparent and rigorous process was undertaken in which four tenderers were considered. Following this process Board were asked by email on 3 February 2009 to approve the following recommendation: “Following the recent evaluation of tenderers for the provision of external audit services, the Audit &amp; Standard Committee recommendation to appoint</p>	

	Baker Tiller UK Audit LLP as auditors of the company.”  <b>BOARD RATIFIED THIS DECISION.</b>	
<b>13.0</b>	<b>STAKEHOLDER SURVEY:</b>	
13.1	<p>The external Governance Review undertaken in January 2008, recommended carrying out a Stakeholder Survey to find out what the perceptions are of the impact that Six Town Housing has made, and how other agencies would like to receive information about and from the ALMO.</p> <p>Board Members and Service Managers were asked to complete a Stakeholder Survey audit form to ascertain the stakeholders we engage with. A Task and Finish Group of Board Members were asked to develop questions for the survey. The questions were then reviewed by the Governance Working party Group, and it was agreed to send the questionnaire out in the format of the Vision Management System.</p> <p>The survey was sent out 9 January with a return date of 23 January. A total of 77 survey forms were sent out, with 20 completed forms returned. This is a response rate of 25.97%. While this may seem a low return rate, it compares well with the return rates of VMS Surveys for: Customer Service ( 13%), Housing Repairs (21.71%), Leaseholders (15.69%), and New Tenants Post Let Surveys (24.73%).</p> <p>The results from the survey show that our Stakeholders are reporting a good response from their clients on the service they receive from Six Town Housing. Out of the 20 completed surveys, five stakeholders scored parts of our service with an average score of 6. The Governance Working Party asked for this to be followed up by contacting the stakeholders concerned to ask if they usually score low on surveys they complete, or if there was a particular reason for that score.</p>	
	<p>Agenda Item Numbers 14 / 15 / 16 and 17 are for information and were not discussed as no prior request to discuss was received.</p> <p>Comment re Capital Programme Report Agenda item 14:</p> <p>Board asked for their appreciation to be recorded for outturn this year, and asked for the latest customer satisfaction information to be included on future reports. The team were thanked for getting the programme back on track.</p> <p>Clarification re 5.3 Re vacant post Programme Manager:</p> <p>The team are currently reviewing this position to determine whether to recruit to the post permanently. <b>This is a change to the information detailed in the report.</b></p>	<b>JB</b>
<b>18.0</b>	<b>PRESENTATION – Status Survey including Leaseholder and</b>	

	<b>Sheltered Housing Surveys</b>	
18.1	<p>Julie Heywood delivered a presentation to the Board on the above.</p> <p>The presentation included details of:  Overall satisfaction with service  Most important priority  Neighbourhoods as a place to live  Method of contact  Reason for contact  Getting hold of the right person  Helpfulness of staff</p>	
<b>19.0</b>	<b>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</b>	
19.1	<p>The Chair acknowledged the Chief Executives impending departure to take up her new role as Chief Executive at Doncaster. He presented a gift and flowers on behalf of the Board. He acknowledged that she has set the standard for STH, and has been a respected friend to staff, along with being approachable to any tenant with a problem.</p> <p>There was no other business raised and the meeting was closed at 8.00pm.</p>	
<b>20.0</b>	<b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b>	
	17 June 2009 at 5.00pm at Global.	