

**EASTENDHOMES BOARD MEETING
Tuesday 29th September 2009, 7PM
The Centre, Merchant Street**

MINUTES

**Present:
Board Members**

Residents Members

Bernard Cameron (Vice Chair)
Tom Madden
Colin Antoine
Syed Milon
Spencer Butler
Laura Driscoll
Les Eldon

Council Members

Cllr Motin Uz-Zaman
Cllr Rachael Saunders

Independent Members

Martin Young (Chair)
Tuuli Lindberg
Janet Seward
Amjad Rahi

Officers

Paul Bloss – Chief Executive
Peter Gibbs – Director of Finance & Resources
Steve Inkpen - Director of Regeneration & Strategy
Debbie Davies – Policy Manager

In attendance

Alex Bailey (Minutes)

Apologies:

Resident Members

Mary Nepstad

Council Members

Independent Members

Neil McAree
Lesley Johnson

ACTION

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Lesley Johnson, Mary Nepstad and Neil McAree.

2. Declarations of interest

Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman noted that he represents the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

3. Minutes of the meeting held 28th July 2009

3.1 Amjad Rahi noted that the minutes suggested that Cllr Rachael

Saunders had been both absent and present. She was present at the meeting.

- 3.2 Tom Madden asked who 'Paul' was as referred to in Items 7, 8 & 9. Martin Young answered that the minutes should be amended to say Paul Bloss. **PB**
- 3.3 Tom Madden felt that Martin Young's comment regarding burglaries was phrased confusingly in the minutes. Martin clarified that he had had been questioning whether residents' desire to install security grilles would be reduced if they knew that they did not prevent burglaries. Steve Inkpen apologised for not having looked into the matter raised in this section of the minutes. Syed Milon asked for further information on the use of restrictors, particularly on high rise buildings. Steve Inkpen responded that he has been working with the Council and other RSLs following the Camberwell fire and will report back shortly on the information gather and actions identified. **SI**
- 3.4 Tom Madden stated that he felt all forms of noise nuisance should be dealt with not just that arising from hard floors, as had been discussed at the meeting.

Following the amendments and clarifications above, the minutes were **APPROVED** as an accurate record.

4. **Annual Report 2009**

- 4.1 Martin Young introduced the report and clarified that it relates to the financial year ending 31st March 2009. Martin noted that the achievements were reflected in the success of the regeneration programmes, demonstrated by The Centre at British estate hosting the AGM. Successes are driven by the work of local boards and the Board must ensure that EastendHomes continues to support its local boards. Martin referred to the improved satisfaction of residents set out in the Annual Report, and that the collection of service charge arrears has improved – it was stressed that EastendHomes hope to work with leaseholders to continue to collect these and to deal with any anomalies and issues. Martin highlighted the increase in the percentage of properties attaining Decent Homes standards – this is important as every 1% means more individuals and families living in homes of better quality. This is why EastendHomes will take proper, calculated risks to provide Decent Homes and to provide more affordable homes, and will defend itself against criticism in working towards these objectives. Work has commenced where planning consents have been obtained, and the Homes & Communities Agency grant will provide for over 250 new houses over 5 years, especially important in tough economic times. Martin also noted that the film East End Lives was premièred this year and is “a celebration of people's lives” on our estates in the east end.

4.2 Amjad Rahi asked about information-gathering from vulnerable adults, which was referred to last year. Debbie Davies explained the profiling strategy, which currently has provided detail on 67% of tenants, and that where vulnerabilities are identified EastendHomes can refer individuals to partner organisations for additional support. She also explained the Safe & Well scheme which provides for regular contact with vulnerable residents who request it. Tuuli Lindberg queried whether this should be the role of EeH. Debbie Davies noted that EastendHomes does not have Supporting People functionality and that this rests with the Council, although the Council is due to transfer Tenancy Support functionality to Look Ahead Housing Association. Tom Madden commented that there is a group on the Isle of Dogs which organises outings etc for the elderly, and also fortnightly meetings at the George Green café. Bernard Cameron added that Social Services have sessions at The Centre, including coffee mornings, and he felt that it was important not to tell OAPs what they should be doing. Martin Young suggested that local boards should be given an update on profiling, and that the Board should consider forming an Elders or social group to support activities such as those mentioned above. Paul Bloss explained that the progress with profiling has been reported to the Service Review Board and Debbie Davies added that the data has been used to inform performance reports on ASB occurrence and repairs service usage when these have been reported to local boards.

4.3 Tom Madden noted that he was not in Tower Hamlets in 1953, as his biography states, and that indeed Tower Hamlets did not exist then. Bernard Cameron queried whether his photograph should again appear in the report.

PB

Given the amendments noted above, the Board **APPROVED** the circulation of the Annual Report for circulation to residents.

5. **Business Plan**

5.1 Peter Gibbs introduced this item and explained that there have been further changes since the last report to the Board. The previous iteration of the Plan envisaged £16m of land sales, of that, £9m had already been achieved. Barclays had required no sales to be included in the plan unless they were more or less guaranteed to take place (eg planning consent and contracts in place). Since then, planning approval for the regeneration of the Holland estate have led to projected land sales income to increase to £28.3m. This allows the overall works costs in the plan to rise to £91m. The peak debt will increase by £5m but the repayment period for the debt will remain the same. Janet Seward asked how payback would be achieved in the same year, and Peter Gibbs explained that increased revenue from the land sales allows for increased works costs.

- 5.2 Paul Bloss explained that EastendHomes reviews the Business Plan annually, and that as funders, Barclays have an effective veto, and therefore planned expenditure and expected revenue must pass the tests of financial prudence expected by the bank. Paul noted that the bank are rigorous in only approving realistic figures. Tuuli Lindberg commented that at present Barclays will be taking a fairly cautious and pessimistic view.

The revised Business Plan was **APPROVED** by the Board.

6. **National Housing Federation – Code of Governance Review**

- 6.1 Paul Bloss introduced this report. He explained that EastendHomes is a member of the NHF and that the Board previously agreed to adopt the Code of Governance. EastendHomes has carried out an audit check to monitor its compliance with the Code, and the report gives details on this, with comments regarding EastendHomes' position compared to the recommended action. The Code is not compulsory, but it is Good Practice to comply wherever possible.

The report was **NOTED** by the Board.

7. **Corporate Plan 2009/14**

- 7.1 Paul Bloss introduced the draft of EastendHomes new Corporate Plan. He explained that this is the third plan to be produced, and is largely an update on previous editions to take it forward to 2014. An Audit Commission recommendation was to address long-term strategic planning, although it was recognised by the Audit Commission inspectors that it had previously been an effective organisation priority to focus on the core business of improving estate management services and implementing estate improvement schemes post-transfer. The draft plan incorporates feedback gained from events including the residents conference, board away day and staff service planning days. The draft version of the Plan will now be submitted to the Service Review Board and local estate boards for consideration.
- 7.2 Amjad Rahi asked if considering the Business Plan is regularly revised, the Corporate Plan would also function as a 'live' document and be updated. Paul Bloss responded that the Corporate Plan focuses on organisational strategy rather than detail, but that each year there will be a service planning day with staff and if there were an identified need to review and significantly update the Corporate Plan before 2014 then this would be done.
- 7.3 Martin Young asked if the biographies could be checked prior to the document being finalised as he could see a couple of errors in his, and other anomalies had previously been noted when looking at the Annual **PB**

Report.

- 7.4 Although it was not made reference to in the Corporate Plan, Martin Young suggested that local boards should consider the possibility of sharing premises with other RSLs. He emphasised that support for this would have to come from the grass roots. Tom Madden asked how EastendHomes would benefit from sharing with Island Homes on the Isle of Dogs. Martin Young clarified that it was simply a matter he suggested should be considered, to ensure that the decisions taken to maintain a local office-based structure would be fully justifiable to investors, funders, and residents who meet EastendHomes' costs. Motin Uz-Zaman made it clear that he would not want the quality of service provided being jeopardised.

The Board **APPROVED** the draft Corporate Plan.

8. **Single Equality Scheme**

- 8.1 Paul Bloss explained that to date EastendHomes has had a BME Strategy, a Disability Equality Scheme, a Gender Equality Scheme, a Race Equality Scheme and other diversity strategies designed to ensure compliance with the TSA's six strands of equality focus. Debbie Davies explained that the Action Plan in the new Single Equality Scheme, which draws all of the previous plans together into one document, has been amalgamated and also updated where appropriate. Rachael Saunders asked about the consultation that would be carried out with residents on this important matter. Paul Bloss clarified that local boards would be invited to consider and make comment on the Scheme, as would the Service Review Board, and that EastendHomes participates with several diversity and equality focus groups, including one specialising in disability, which had been working with Dito. Debbie Davies added that equality schemes are also promoted to residents through articles in the corporate newsletter.

Amjad Rahi thanked the officers for the explanations and complimented those involved on the thoroughness of the report. The Board **APPROVED** the adoption of the Scheme.

9. **Board Member Attendance**

- 9.1 Martin Young introduced the report and noted that attendance levels were generally high, and paid tribute to Bernard Cameron for his example. Amjad Rahi raised that the report does not record attendance at Complaints Panels, which can be a time-consuming process for those involved. Paul Bloss noted that although complaints panels are not a formal committee and are constituted on an *ad hoc* basis, they require a significant commitment from Board members and he is happy for these to be included in future, in addition to the Service Review Board which was also omitted from the report. **PB**

- 9.2 Motin Uz-Zaman was slightly surprised by some of the figures given and asked for an attendance book (rather than attendance sheet) to be supplied for all future meetings. It was agreed that this would be supplied.

PB

The Board **NOTED** the report.

10. **Minutes of Finance & Audit Committee – 17th September 2009**

- 10.1 Tuuli Lindberg summarised key points from the reports to the Committee. She explained that EastendHomes has been liaising very closely with Barclays. No RTB sales are budgeted, which is a pessimistic but prudent measure. Figures used for land sales are also conservative, and risk management is closely monitored.
- 10.2 A decision has been taken to investigate calculating and apportioning services charges by floor area rather than by Gross Rateable Value. Paul Bloss explained that this had been decided as there were anomalies in the current system, some of which were due to the failure to amend property GVs following knockthroughs in the 1990s. It was possible to change to a system based on floor area without amending the leases. The Council have now sent information to EeH giving the floor area of properties transferred which can be used for these calculations.
- 10.3 Tuuli Lindberg noted that the Committee had also discussed property insurance premiums for leaseholders. EastendHomes premiums have almost doubled due to a significant case of fire damage and also due to the number of claims from our residents. Peter Gibbs explained that the premiums consist of the base premium which covers “Acts of God” and areas which are EeH’s responsibility, an extra premium for those living in tower blocks over 6 floors with a value of more than £6m, and a third element for the cost of claims made. At present insurance is charged evenly regardless of where the property is, or what claims have been made. Peter stated that it needs to be decided whether premiums should be ‘loaded’ dependent on where the property is, and what claims have been made. Tuuli stated that the F&A Committee had had concerns that to do this would not discriminate between those who were negligent and instances where it was not their responsibility. Motin Uz-Zaman was concerned that it would not be fair to inflict increased costs on those who had not claimed, and that distinction should be made on responsibility for damage caused. Rachael Saunders felt that there was a conflation of two issues: responsibility for damage caused and the size of premiums due. She felt that those who live in tower blocks should not be penalised. She also thought that such a system could encourage residents to dispute responsibility more often – which could cause more inconvenience and time lost for EeH officers. Syed Milon felt that those who have claimed more than once should be made aware of the consequences to premiums for

everyone, and he also stated that he believed some residents were not aware of how to make claims. Paul Bloss noted that a decision is needed by the time that the next set of service charge estimates are calculated and distributed ie 1st April 2010. Martin Young commented that insurance is inherently a way of spreading risk, so on that basis the costs should be spread. He suggested that it may be useful to incentivise the maintenance of properties and appliances by offering a 'no claims' discount – a 'carrot' rather than a 'stick' approach. He also suggested that it may be possible to negotiate a discount with insurers for those allowing checks to be made annually. Laura Driscoll commented that in two cases tenants from her estate had been flooded due to the negligence of freeholders. A decision on this matter was deferred by the Finance & Audit Committee.

- 10.4 Tom Madden asked about tenants with leaking roofs. Paul Bloss clarified that in this case EastendHomes would be responsible for the repair, with certain provisos.
- 10.5 Rachael Saunders asked for details of leaseholders making multiple claims. Paul Bloss agreed to supply this.
- 10.6 Martin Young noted that contrary to the minutes, he had not been present to thank those who had worked on the audited accounts.

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The Board **RATIFIED** the minutes of the committee, and **AGREED** to further consider the issue of leaseholder property insurance premiums in due course.

11. **Minutes of Personnel Committee – 10th September 2009**

The Board **NOTED** the minutes of this committee.

12. **Minutes of the Service Review Board – 21st July 2009**

- 12.1 Janet Seward introduced the minutes and summarised the discussions which took place. With regards to performance against the KPIs, the SRB had noted that repairs performance was slightly below target but improving, and also that collection of rent arrears needs to be watched. The report on the costs of local housing centres was very interesting and was being circulated to local boards.

- 12.2 The SRB had also received notification of the sub-tenancy strategy. Rachael Saunders requested a copy of this document. Tom Madden asked if any representations have been made to the Council regarding problems with NSTs and others placed in leasehold properties on the Isle of Dogs. Paul Bloss and Martin Young responded that EastendHomes would deal with these on a case-by-case basis. Paul Bloss commented that we work with the Homeless Persons Unit to deal with any identified problem cases. Martin Young noted that in the worst

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case scenario a freeholder will sublet, over which EastendHomes will have no jurisdiction at all.

The Board **NOTED** the minutes of the Service Review Board.

13. **Any Other Business**

- 13.1 Martin Young asked about actions with EastendHomes and within the Borough of Tower Hamlets more generally in relation to fire safety. Steve Inkpen responded that he understood EeH to be compliant with the recommended precautions, and explained that John Henderson has been working with the Council and other RSLs, with a report due on appropriate actions shortly. Colin Antoine asked if once this report is completed, residents could be made aware of how safe they are and how they should react in an emergency. Steve Inkpen replied that they do not wish to pre-empt the final report into the Camberwell fire, but that advice will be issued as swiftly as possible.

SI

- 13.2 1-12 Redcastle Close enfranchisement: Peter Gibbs introduced this report and explained the background to the report and how the process is proceeding. The bank have supplied an authority and a proposed minute for the Board.

The Board **APPROVED** the minute to enable proposed enfranchisement to be completed.

- 13.3 Martin Young asked all board members to return the competencies and skills audits as swiftly as possible, if they had not already done so.

All Board

15. **Date of next meeting**

The next Board meeting is on Thursday 28th January 2010.

The meeting closed at 8.55pm.