

FIRST CHOICE HOMES OLDHAM SADDLEWORTH & LEES LOCAL BOARD

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 22ND JUNE 2005

PRESENT:

Councillor Brian Lord, Chair; Councillor Val Sedgewick, Council Member
Jean Bradley, Tenant Board Member; Mary McCleverty, Tenant Board Member;
Edith Bentley, Tenant Board Member; Councillor John Hudson, Council Member

ABSENT:

Winifred Dillon, Independent Member; Linda Pepperell, Independent Member

IN ATTENDANCE:

Gary Walsh, Area Service Manager; Sue Walker, Board Support Officer;
Helen Bellis, Customer Service Manager, East Area; Bryan Elliot, Area Service
Manager, Failsworth & Hollinwood; Abdul Malik Ahad, Deputy Director,
Development & Finance; John Evans, Enlighten Consultant; Andy Collins, Policy &
Performance Officer; Lynn Phillips, Minute Taker

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm

1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone present to the meeting. Abdul Malik Ahad attended on behalf of Dave Smith, Director of Development & Finance who was attending another meeting. Rachel Mills sent her apologies.

2. ANY ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS INTRODUCED BY THE CHAIR

There were no items of urgent business.

3. TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 MAY 2005

Agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No members of the public present.

5. PREPARATION FOR AUDIT COMMISSION INSPECTION

Andy Collins presented. Andy gave a detailed explanation of how the Audit Commission will work and the end consequences. He explained the inspectors will be on site from 15th – 26th August 2005, although the inspectors commenced 'mystery shopping' on 1st May. Andy made the Board aware of whom the inspectors will be, and explained the importance of achieving a 3 star rating. He finished his presentation by explaining the post inspection process, with the final report being published in December.

6. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT STATISTICS

Andy Collins distributed the Saddleworth & Lees Team contract on behalf of Rachel Mills. Targets agreed at the previous Local Board meeting were discussed.

Resolved: The Chair moved that the targets have been received by the Board.

7. LOCAL BOARD FUNCTIONS AND POWERS

The Board received a presentation from John Evans from Enlighten and Sue Walker, Board Support Officer, the purpose of which was to outline the revised functions and powers of the Local Boards which had followed 3 months of intensive work and which had involved extensive consultation with Board Members.

John explained the powers of the Local Boards. Local Budgets were raised, and the Board discussed the best time of the year to start considering how the capital budget should be spent. On the subject of budgets, Abdul Malik-Ahad, in attendance at the meeting said that FCHO ploughs money back into the business when it is saved by examining expenditure and striving for best value.

Cllr Hudson commented that, previously, it had been difficult to exercise powers locally because of the influence of the Main Board and FCHO policy. However, Sue indicated that there was now a great opportunity for Members to influence change and that, the result of this piece of work would mean a lot of work in the future, both for the Board and for Lead Officers and that this would change the way the Board did things in the future.

The Chair asked Sue to identify a date for all Local Boards to gather to discuss the support that would be needed in the future exercising of the powers. After discussion, it was agreed the planned away day in October would be ideal.

Agreed: The planned away day (early October, date to be confirmed) should be used to discuss the powers and duties of the Local Boards.

8. FCHO PROGRESS

The Board received a presentation from Abdul Malik Ahad, Deputy Director which reported back on the progress that FCHO have made. Abdul discussed staff satisfaction, sickness etc. This financial year, FCHO has produced a surplus of money, and value for money together with efficiency savings have saved over £2 million. This has been done by re-organisation and streamlining of services. The future of the ALMO was also discussed.

Agreed: To note the content of the presentation.

10. DRAFT CUSTOMER CARE REPORT.

Helen Bellis presented. JH said that after reading the report, it is excellent to see one member of staff will be looking after the customer from start to finish. Individual members of staff will take ownership of contact made from customers. HB said the Customer Care Charter has been simplified. The Chair said he has knowledge of too many jobs being booked that don't reach completion. HB replied these changes have been made so that jobs will not fall into the 'black hole'. AMA added the key challenge had been to make staff accountable to customers. The benefits of ownership of each 'job' will encourage the commitment of staff.

The Chair said service at the Holt St housing office is excellent, and asked if there is a central email address for customers. EB and GW replied each office has its own dedicated email address. SW added she is in the process of organising a 'who's who' directory for Board Members.

Agreed: Helen to look at ways to advertise these email address to customers.

11. LETTINGS POLICY

Further to a request of the Board at the last meeting, Bryan Elliot presented a report on Allocations Policy that extended further the introduction of a choice-based lettings system.

Bryan explained a complete local lettings policy is not possible due to government policy, but there can be local variations. The allocations policy is the Councils policy, not that of FCHO. Requested variations may first be put to the Main Board, then if approved, to the Council.

Councillor Hudson gave an example of why he thinks Saddleworth & Lees should have a local lettings policy, stating there is need for older people to remain in their immediate community for support. The Chair added this principle also applies to younger people, who rely on family members living locally for support. JH said it seems that homeless people get priority over local residents.

The new policy is to be submitted for Cabinet approval on 4th July 2005. The Chair said he would want to see a policy to safeguard housing for communities, and therefore would like a separate meeting to draft a variation for a Saddleworth & Lees local lettings policy. JH said as part of the powers of the Local Boards, the lettings policy should be challenged, driving through a variation pertinent to Saddleworth & Lees. Priority should be given to local residents, young and old.

AGREED: Bryan to forward this request to the Council's housing strategy representative. The Chair requested and it was agreed that this summary should be shown to him before it is presented to the Council.

12. SERVICE IMPROVEMENT BUDGET

Gary Walsh presented environmental and repair work identified on the Saddleworth & Lees tour of 15th June 2005. GW discussed the report in detail. Prices on the schedule are estimates, and prices will be confirmed as soon as possible. JH asked that environmental work needed at Grove Rd and Queensway, Greenfield be considered.

Agreed: The Chair asked for agreement on proposed works as shown on the report, and any surplus money is to be spent on the areas identified above.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A special meeting to discuss PFI was agreed: 6th July 2005, at 6.30pm, at Old Mill House. The Chair suggested fliers be given to wardens for distribution to tenants, and posters put up to advertise the meeting.

14. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

3RD August 2005, at 7pm, Old Mill House

The meeting ended at 10pm.