

### Agenda Item 3

## THE RIVERSIDE GROUP

### MERSEY NORTH DIVISIONAL BOARD

A meeting of the Mersey North Divisional Board was held on Wednesday, 19 November 2014 at the Walton Road Office, Liverpool

### CONFIRMED MINUTES

- Present: Mr D Evans, Ms T Gore, Mr T McGuire, Mr W Shortall, Mr C Stuhlfelder, Ms J Williams, Ms L Wright (Chair)
- In Attendance: Ms P Allan, Ms K Ash, Mr F Burke, Mr M Burnett, Mr R Hesketh, Ms P Ledwich, Mr M Little (HSC Chair)
- Apologies: Ms L Hearne, Ms S Naylor, Mr G Wright

513 Agenda Item 2 - Declaration of Interest

There was no declaration of interest.

514 Agenda Item 3 - Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 17 September 2014

Minute 505 Agenda Item 7 – Miscellaneous Land Disposal

TM was concerned that the buyer was named within the report and although there is no rule as such typically we should anonymise in future reports. TM will speak with HSD's re the Groups view on this in future reports.

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

515 Agenda Item 4 - Matters arising from the minutes of the Board meeting held on 17 September 2014

Minutes 502 – Minute 487 Agenda Item 7 – Complaints Update

Re the impact of service failures upon complaints volume. Board noted there has been a problem producing meaningful data, which has since been rectified and this report will be presented at the January 2015 meeting.

Minute 507 – Agenda Item 9 – Whole Board Appraisal Action Plan

DE informed the Board that he had been nominated to attend the Housing Diversity Network. Following attendance at last HSC on behalf of Chair, DE

reported decision that HSC will not use paper copies of Board papers from April 2015. TM informed Board that ED's considering ensuring all Board members have electronic access to papers by April 2015 and will address the issue of the provision of IT kit in the interim. Any board member to refer any concerns to the Chair.

Minute 508 – Agenda Item 10 – Update on MOT Project

MB confirmed he will present updated re-modelled MOT report to next Board meeting.

Minute 510 – Agenda Item 12 – Information Items Universal Credit Update

Page 5 – TM clarified collection of NI numbers was legitimate within the terms of use intended by TRG, which are about assisting tenants maximise UC.

516 Agenda Item 5 - Community Engagement Structure Review

FB delivered a presentation about the CE review of 2013/14. It was agreed the review was candid and offered lessons for TRG to improve future similar operational changes, particularly in regard to impact upon staff.

The Board accepted that the change has made CE more strategic.

The Board was reassured that FB had worked hard to motivate his team, which is now upbeat and enthusiastic. The Chair thanked FB and his team.

**The Board noted the review and requested that the new processes be monitored.**

517 Agenda Item 6 – Income Management Legal Action

Following a request at the previous meeting the information provided at 1.1 now shows year-to-date and previous year's actions.

After confirming appropriate action had been taken in support of the family at case 188, the **Board approved the conditional authority to evict for all cases in appendix 1.**

**The Board endorsed the Chair's decision, made under delegated authority in between meetings, after circulating the paper to and consultation with, all Board members, to give conditional authority to evict for the cases listed in appendix 1.1.**

After confirmation appropriate actions had been applied in cases 115 and 122, the Board noted the actions taken against all cases, which had previously been approved for conditional eviction action, listed in appendix 2.

The Board discussed and noted the challenges faced by Divisional income management staff where out of 130 cases given authority to evict this year up

to the time of the last Board meeting in September; 53 or 41% had been evicted but 62 or 48% had been to court at least once and had warrants suspended by local court judges.

The Chair requested information about arrears cases over £2k and the Board noted that of the 342 cases greater than £2K as of 20 October 2014, 255 had this status at the beginning of the year and of these 85 have increased arrears and of these 85:

- 11 have received welfare benefits assistance and 3 now have HBD and DSS direct in place
- 1 was a transfer with high arrears payment plan in place
- 30 have new payment plans in place due to a break in work, reduced hours, (average £395 per case increase in arrears or a month's rent equivalent, but all have been to court and the warrants for eviction suspended on terms.
- 9 have been evicted
- 22 new warrant applied for due to poor payment history,
- 7 new eviction dates received,
- 2 tenancies terminated.
- 1 Account error arrears reduced to £300.00
- 1 new chambers hearing date which will be opposed

The Board was informed as at 31 October 2014 there were 16 Universal Credit cases, with claims taking 8 weeks to process and average of £800 arrears per case. 4 of 16 were over £1K in arrears already.

Of the 16 cases:

- 1 case due to terminate with over £1k arrears.
- 2 cases paying monthly with no rent arrears.
- 6 cases have a payment plan in place plus amount off the arrears.
- 2 cases did not make the monthly rent payment after UC was put into payment and an Alternative Payment Arrangement to DWP has been applied for, rent arrears increasing.
- 5 new UC claims awaiting process.

The Board noted the actions being taken in response to Universal Credit and requested regular Board meeting updates.

**The Board approved the conditional evictions at appendix 1 and 1.1.**

#### 518 Agenda Item 7 – Policy Voids & Disposals Update

The paper detailed 326 policy voids, clarifying that there remain 83 voids not yet funded, which, with funds, the Division would prefer to repair and re-let.

Board was informed that a bid to Group for additional funds had resulted in an allocation of £104K, which would repair 20 of the 83 and their repair is underway.

The remaining 63 were the subject of a visit to the Division today [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] It has now been agreed that Group will provide additional funds to the Division for the repair of all 63 voids but this funding will only be released as evidence emerged of successful lettings to voids repaired under this programme. The Board was pleased to note the programme would include additional items within each void to incentivise demand, such as higher spec decorations and new kitchens etc. where it was deemed necessary.

PL informed Board that it is proposed to have show houses in Snowbury Rd with the intention to improve 4 further properties immediately. PL suggested the Board visit the show houses once they have been done.

MB highlighted the two pieces of miscellaneous land and the proposals for these; one to be purchased by a tenant and one to be gifted to a tenant who has been maintaining the land for a number of years. MB assured Board that the land was eligible to be gifted and will be supported by covenants and conditions on the use of the land.

The Board requested information about total stock disposed, or planned for disposal in each neighbourhood. MB agreed to include this in the next report.

TM informed Board that along with [REDACTED], he is having discussions with LAs re sales strategy.

**The Board approved the disposals listed in section 3 at Appendix 1.**

519 Agenda Item 8 – Board Meeting Calendar

TM informed Board that all Divisional boards were asked to fit their meetings in between HSD and HSC, doing that and fitting in with the cycle has presented a 6 meeting scenario with a strategy day.

**The Board approved the meeting dates for 2015/16 with an additional meeting to be pencilled in for 25<sup>th</sup> February 2015 as a stand by date should one be required.**

520 Agenda Item 9 – Proposal to Reduce Office Opening Hours at the East Office

The Board noted the assurances that support for tenants was being delivered more proactively through CCV's and the community engagement team initiatives to assist tenants use 'on-line' services.

**The Board approved the reduction in hours at the East office but requested monitoring of customer satisfaction takes place following the closure.**

521 Agenda Item 10 – Update on Section 11 Disrepair Claims

MB highlighted to the Board the reduction in Section 11 disrepair claims from 71 live cases in 2011/12 to 31 live cases in 2014/15 with a [REDACTED], with 30% of these cases a result of rent arrears action counter-claims. The reduction is due to the Division tightening and improving the process via MOT's and communication between teams and tenants.

The Board was informed that Evolve has a bespoke team to deal with disrepair claims, which is working well.

**The Board noted the report.**

522 Agenda Item 11 - Summary of Health & Safety Outstanding Actions

MB referred to the 1955 fire risks outstanding and assured Board that following discussions with Arcus this number will be reduced. The Board accepted the importance of challenging the 'risk priority' designations applied by Arcus because tenants would be service charged for risk removal works but reiterated its on-going serious concern at the high number of outstanding priority actions.

MB assured Board that all 881 high priority fire risk actions would be removed within 7 weeks.

MB also explained that because the KPI is measuring different risks this year than last, it is difficult to identify how many risks had been carried into this year from last year but confirmed that all high risks that were identified last year were completed straight away. However, on-going communal area weekly inspections continue to find and address new identified risks.

**The Board noted the report and requested that there is a Health & Safety update at each board meeting.**

523 Agenda Item 12 – Disposal to a Staff Member of Property via Sale

The Board noted the decision by the Executive Directors of TRGL, which had needed to be enacted urgently in between Mersey North Board meetings, to approve a sale to a staff member of [REDACTED]. It was also noted that telephone calls to 3 MN Board members, made in advance of the decision, had confirmed support for this action.

**The Board supported the decision to sell [REDACTED] to a staff member.**

524 Agenda item 13 – Executive Dashboard

**I&E**

The Board noted year end forecast excluding depreciation (which is centrally managed) operating surplus £135k adverse. This is mainly down to an adverse variance on rents, offset by a favourable bad debts variance.

The Board further noted repairs and maintenance is showing a significant adverse variance driven by accelerated spend on MOT's and Cyclical Painting, due to phasing of programmes, which will be returned to budget by year end. However, responsive repairs is showing an adverse variance, which is being mitigated by underspend on gas repairs. This though will be challenged by possible increased gas repair spending as winter use of heating systems take effect.

The Board noted the significant reduction of security expenditure and the role the Your Place team has taken managing void stock.

**KPI's**

The Board noted a good to-date performance but expressed concern that arrears remain high, even before any impact from UC.

**The Board noted the report.**

525 Agenda Item 14 – Budget & Business Plan Assumptions

The Board expressed concern at the relatively lower rate of CPI compared to RPI, where many of the costs experienced by tenants are in excess of the CPI rises year on year.

**The Board noted the paper.**

526 Agenda Item 15 – Star Action Plan

The Board noted it will receive a report detailing progress against the plan at its April meeting.

**The Board noted the action plan.**

527 Agenda Item 16 – Directors Report

The Board acknowledged the reference to the role it and the Division had played in regard to MOT and CCV piloting and recorded how pleasing it was to see how far the MOT and CCV proactive working had begun to influence the Think Forward agenda.

The Board sadly noted that 4 neighbourhood wardens remain formally 'at risk' and accepted that unless they were successful securing alternate posts, they will be redundant as of April 2015.

**The Board noted the report.**

528 Agenda Item 17 – Feedback and Discussion on Key Themes from Membership Conference

The Board members who had attended recorded their endorsement of the recent Board conference at the Titanic Hotel. David Orr's call to Boards to take responsibility for shaping policy and action in the very challenging period ahead, was well received, as was the contribution from the Chair Max Steinberg CBE FRSA.

**The Board noted this item**

529 Agenda Item 18 – Information Items

- a) Mersey North Resident Involvement & Scrutiny Structure  
Noted.
- b) HSC Minutes 26 June 2014  
Noted.
- c) Community Engagement Quarterly Performance April – June 2014  
Noted.
- d) Community Engagement Quarterly Performance July – Sept 2014  
Noted.
- e) Mersey North East Forum Meeting September 2014  
Noted.
- f) Mersey North West Forum Meeting October 2014  
Noted.

530 Agenda Item 19 – Any Other Business

a). **Review Group Rent Policy**

The report presented a draft rent policy and identify the scope of an accompanying framework for its delivery. This policy has a review date of February 2015. The Board expressed concern at the late issue of this paper, which had been sent to Board member just in advance of

the meeting and offered insufficient time for the Board to engage in appropriate discussion. Individual members were asked for any comments to be sent direct to the Chair or Director.

**The Board noted the report.**

- b). Meal to be arranged in January for the retirement of Joe Curran and Ken Wilson from the Board.
- c). Divisional Board Christmas Meal booked for 3<sup>rd</sup> December at 30 St James Street.

531 Date and Time of Next Meeting

**Wednesday 22 January 2015 at 5pm Walton Road.**