

September 2020 AGM – Questions & Answers

Q1. Can you explain why from the first of April 2019 until the 29 February 2020 (omitting March 2020 due to the Covid 19 impact) that there was an acute lack of letters informing residents of important changes and to include important reminders of certain accepted rules - the written word is still the most valid way of imparting vital information.

A1. Communicating effectively with residents and stakeholders is really important to us and we try always to use our residents' preferred communication methods, where it is known.

We are always looking at ways in which we can improve on our approach and support this with a range of different communication methods to ensure that residents are informed in advance of any changes to service delivery or any responsibilities relating to their tenancies. These range from the publication of our tenant newsletter, Bridge Brief, on-site posters highlighting key information, individual letters sent to residents, or where current restrictions allow, face-to-face meetings.

As a result of the pandemic, we have targeted our efforts to engage with residents in different ways, eg well-being calls to vulnerable residents, and providing alternative ways to engage through digital involvement, eg the virtual AGM, virtual meetings for engaged residents, resident portal, web-chat and social media. This is in addition to our telephone service if residents wish to contact us.

Q2. When the city centre presence was first mooted in 2010 the intention was to open on Saturday mornings, virus aside is this likely to happen?

A2. We are committed to providing a range of contact methods that meet service demand from our residents. Our service offer was improved when the @195 office opened in 2018:

- opening hours were extended until 6:30 pm for two evenings a week, for residents who were unable to attend an appointment within normal office hours
- a resident portal was launched for residents to contact us by digital means
- a new webchat facility was launched to improve speed of response for less complex enquiries

Outside of these arrangements, emergency repairs can be reported to us over the telephone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

There are no current plans to extend opening hours as there is currently no evidence of customer contact demand outside of the arrangements highlighted above.

We are always looking to improve our service offer and anticipate our response to Covid 19 may change the way services are provided in the future and would welcome resident views on improvements that could be made to meet their future needs.

Q3. I only have one question - does our presence at the AGM really make a difference? Either by asking certain relevant questions about any topic or bringing up an interesting and valid point. Or is our presence allowed merely as a token gesture, so involved residents can feel like they are making a difference in NCH?

A3. As a society registered under the Cooperative & Community Benefits Society Act 2014, we are required to have share members. Many of our share members are residents and their role is defined within the NCH 2017 rules. The rules for share membership cover the approval of any changes to the rules or any constitutional matters relating to the association and the appointment of the external auditors. Share members do not receive any dividends or any other remuneration for their role. Residents can never truly be at the heart of what we do if they do not have the opportunity to hold the board to account.

Share membership is only one of many ways in which residents can influence strategic decisions taken by the board, eg by applying to join our Scrutiny Partnership, giving their views through a new on line community 'NCH Connected', attending a community Talkabout event (when Coronavirus restrictions allow them to resume), joining our Unity Forum for younger residents or SAS (Seasoned and Supported) for older people or those who have a disability. Residents can also share their views by

completing their annual resident satisfaction questionnaire and engaging on specific matters such as our approach to affordability and rent setting consultation exercise.

Q4. Under the 2020-2025 Vision, what action is being taken to ensure that every one of all ages with specific needs and requirements are being heard and that their housing aspirations will be met. Giving them The Right to Choose Where they live and which in?

A4. We have an ambition to play a major role in addressing the housing crisis in Newport and will do this by maintaining our existing homes to high standards, adapting them as required through our capital investment programme, which has a specific element focused on providing tailored adaptations with a budget of circa £1m per year. Residents can request adaptations to their home by contacting Newport City Council's Occupational Therapist team who will assess their needs and develop a suitable solution based upon individual circumstances and requirements.

We are also building up to 250 new homes per year that will meet the needs of residents across the city. These will form a diverse range of mixed tenure homes that will demonstrate our long-term commitment to creating great places to live and provide appropriate housing solutions for our residents as their needs change through their lives as well as the changing needs of our communities.

Our homes are allocated through the Common Housing Register which is maintained by Newport City Council. Applicants register via Home Options and a needs-based banding system is used to allocate the properties of partner social landlords. The partnership is committed to providing a high quality service that is responsive to the needs of applicants whilst ensuring that the housing stock available is allocated equitably, offering choice to individuals as well as ensuring the housing stock is used most effectively to meet the changing needs within the city.

Q5. Does giving Value for Money and or reducing your carbon footprint give you a licence to exclude given groups from having information in an accessible form, eg braille, large print?

A5. Whilst reducing our carbon footprint and delivering value for money are important to us, residents remain at the heart of every decision we make. This means we will continue to deliver the commitments in our Customer Service Standards because we understand how important it is to provide information in accessible and easy to understand formats, including braille or large print. Our high-quality telephone contact service is available for residents who choose to use it or may need more in-depth assistance and, subject to ongoing Covid 19 restrictions, our service function at @195 will remain a key part of our service delivery model for the foreseeable future.

As part of our commitment to enhance our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion, we will continue to tailor our services to our residents.

We appreciate we have more work to do on collecting and recording data as to how residents would prefer to hear from us. Our newly formed resident data group is considering how best we can capture resident contact information and communication preferences. This will enable us to better serve our residents' needs.

Q6. What is an unacceptable amount of rubbish and litter in a communal area, before NCH will take steps and talk to the tenant? Our doctor and district nurse have to pass through the area, and it is embarrassing and unhygienic, it is also attracting rats. We have to lock our bins and recycling boxes away as they are being filled by the tenants of the other flat (complaint and photos submitted a few weeks ago and we were told it is acceptable, if anything now it is even worse).

A6. We take the cleanliness of communal areas very seriously and have a dedicated team of cleaners who ensure these areas are cleaned on a regular basis so as not to cause fire hazards.

We continue to work closely with Newport City Council in dealing more effectively with the problems around fly tipping and the use of other residents' bins. Taking effective action requires the collection of evidence across a period of time and a member of our customer services team will contact you to discuss your concerns further.

Q7. Why did NCH cancel the contract with growing spaces? and who do elderly tenants turn to now for help with gardening they are no longer able to manage on their own?

A7. We deliver grounds and estates maintenance work directly via our direct labour organisation (DLO) and, as such, any services previously provided by external contractors, Growing Space, are now being delivered by our own teams.

Residents who wish to use this service should contact the customer service team on 01633 381111.

Q8. Happy homes make happy residents, so what steps are being taken to irradiate or control historical issues of hate crime and anti-social behaviour, drug misuse, theft, bullying and victimisation and intimidation?

A8. We recognise our important role of providing homes in communities where people want to live. In addition to the core housing management and maintenance services we provide, we also work with residents and partners to provide services that contribute to a feeling of safety for people, whether at home, in the street or at work. We do this by supporting neighbours to live respectfully of each other rather than in conflict, for example, by referring tenants experiencing a breakdown in relationships to Newport Mediation, a local conflict resolution service.

We are committed to working in partnership with the Police, Newport City Council and other third sector organisations to co-create a common vision which will deliver the best possible outcomes for tackling crime and disorder, supporting victims and delivering so much more for the environmental, social and economic well-being of a sustainable Newport.

We would encourage any residents suffering from issues such as these to report them to the appropriate authority, eg Gwent Police, Newport City Council or to us.

Q9. Are you running the risk of excluding certain groups such as those who cannot read a computer screen owing to the nature of their disability? People who need large print or braille, this is denying them equality and information in an accessible form.

A9. We want residents to be at the heart of everything we do and for every person who lives in our homes to be able to access, benefit from and value the services we provide in a way that works for them. We recognise that there has been a real shift towards people using online means of communicating with others and accessing goods and services, a move that has accelerated since the Covid 19 pandemic. We aspire to become a 'digital first by choice' association, meaning that we provide straightforward and convenient digital services that residents choose and prefer to use and recognise that being 'digital first' cannot be 'digital only'.

As part of our commitment to enhance our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion, we will continue to tailor our services to our residents, including those who do not use internet-based services.

We appreciate we have more work to do on finding out and recording how residents would prefer to hear from us. Our newly formed resident data group is considering how best we can capture resident contact information and communication preferences. This will enable us to better serve our residents' needs.

If you would like us to update your preferences sooner, please get in touch so we can record your preferences immediately.

Q10. What is the newly identified conflict of interest with board member?

A10. A conflict of interest is considered to be a situation in which a person is considered to be in a position to derive personal benefit from actions or decisions made in their official capacity. To ensure any potential conflict is understood as early as possible, board members and colleagues are required to declare any perceived or real conflict of interest as they arise. In circumstances where an interest is reported to the board as a possible conflict, the board determines whether it is appropriate for the member to be part of any discussions and decisions relating to the matter or, in some circumstances whether the member can continue to hold their position or that they should retire from the board.

The members reported to have retired had accepted new employment positions which the board deemed to be a conflict of interest and therefore both members agreed to stand down with immediate effect.

Q11. Why do we have to wait nearly a full year before we receive a copy of the previous AGM minutes.

A11. Following feedback from share members, a copy of the draft AGM minutes will be made available on the website, noting that the minutes remain a draft copy only and could be subject to change at the next AGM.

Q12. I understand it has been a difficult year so far, and with no doubt more obstacles to come in the near future but what plans are in place and what budget has been allocated to the estates grounds maintenance? Malpas grass/bushes/trees and shrubs are looking quite neglected at the present time.

A12. At the beginning of the pandemic we were required to halt all external works until restrictions were eased. Work has now restarted, and we are carrying out works across Malpas, cutting grass, trimming bushes and trees as well as dealing with significant fly tipping. Our budget for estates and grounds maintenance is just under £2m per annum which is utilised across our estates in Newport. Unfortunately a significant proportion of this does go into dealing with fly tipping, litter picking and other antisocial behaviour, and we are working closely with Newport City Council to bring the costs of fly tipping etc down by targeting specific problem areas, events and behaviour, allowing us to invest in tangible value added services for residents. An example of reducing costs against the estates and grounds maintenance budget is the annual clearing, for safety reasons, of unlicensed bonfires which often contain toxic foams, compressed gas canisters etc, by working in partnership with the local police a campaign of no bonfires is being trialled this year.

Q13. When will all housing stock meet the full welsh standards? I ask as previous AGMs state they are, though mine at least is original from 1970s.

A13. We invest over £10m per annum through our long-term stock investment programme and are currently 100% Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) compliant. Residents have had the ability to refuse investments works, and as such these are removed from the count of completed properties, classed as acceptable fails and, as such, are exceptions when categorising WHQS data.

Any resident wishing to discuss the recommencement of investment works in their home should contact us on 01633 381111 to make suitable arrangements.