

# Synergy news

For all residents of the Synergy Housing Group

## so when is all this likely to happen?

*First we have to consult and this is happening through May 2009. Consultation is taking place with you as our residents, with our staff, local authority partners, the regulator and other key stakeholders.*

All the boards will meet again together on 5 June to consider the feedback from the consultation and to make some final decisions. The decisions taken so far are decisions in principle. If they give the go ahead then jobs would be advertised quickly and we would get on with the board renewal process through the summer.

We would like to keep an open dialogue with residents through this process. Our Chief Executive is meeting with the three Panels and we will make sure there are updates at regular intervals as things progress.

*In the meantime if you have any questions then please email or ring them though to Brian Miller on 07545 926998 and we will endeavour to collate a set of frequently asked questions and answers.*

## how to find out more or have a say.....

**If you have any questions then you can either:**

**Call** or text our **hotline on 07545 926998** and leave a message

**Email** us at **info@synergyhousing.co.uk**

**Write** to us at **Synergy News, Synergy Housing Group, Link House, Poole BH15 1LD**

*We promise to get back to you within 2 working days.*

*"I think that these proposed changes to the way we deliver our services, the way the group is governed and the way we involve our residents can be seen to work in harmony. If we can bring them all in over the next year and put some investment into developing our culture and supporting people to do their jobs better then we have every chance of success.*

*This is all ultimately about giving you the best service we can and I believe that we should set our standards to be as good as the very best, in other words excellent.*

*If our goal is "United for Excellence" then I think this Blueprint for Change provides us with a framework for unification and a platform for achieving excellence."*

**Graeme Stanley,**  
Group Chief Executive



## "united for excellence" a blueprint for change

### Welcome from the Chairs

*Welcome to this special newsletter for all Synergy residents. We have decided to produce a single newsletter for all of the Group's residents as we want to ensure that everyone receives the same information at the same time across the Synergy Group which includes East Dorset Housing Association (EDHA), Purbeck Housing Trust (PHT) and Weymouth & Portland Housing (WPH).*

We have been through a lot in that time shaping the group and looking closely at the way that we work together. We found out last year that services to our customers were less than satisfactory. Inspections at PHT by the Audit Commission and later mock inspections at EDHA and WPH showed us that we have a long way to go to achieve excellent services in the next 3 years. That is our goal and we need to make some radical changes if we are to deliver that goal for you.

All boards have now agreed in principle a Blue Print for Change. Its central goal is "United for Excellence" which we think sums it all up quite well. We have looked closely at all of the changes proposed and summarised in this newsletter and we believe that they are the best way forward. They do not affect your status as a tenant or a leaseholder as your landlord will not change. We do however intend to shake up the way we deliver services to you and the way that we give you opportunities to be involved and have a greater say in what we do and how we do it.



**Ernie Battey,**  
Synergy Chair



**Spencer Flower,**  
EDHA Chair



**Alan Clevett,**  
PHT Chair



**Stephanie Taylor,**  
WPH Chair

*If you have any questions or any comments then we would like to hear from you. Details of how you can do that are on the back of this newsletter.*



## why are we making these changes?

*In 2008 the Audit Commission inspection of PHT rated us as a poor (no star) service but they did give us promising prospects for improvement. This reflected the commitment given by the Group to drive forward the change required to bring the service up to scratch. On the back of that judgement we had a look at WPH and EDHA using some consultants, who specialise in carrying out what are called mock inspections, using the same approach as the Audit Commission.*

They found that both WPH and EDHA were “delivering similarly unacceptable levels of performance to PHT across all service areas”. They felt that this “suggests that there remains a significant lack of awareness about current performance and how it compares to high performers elsewhere”.

Clearly this presented a major concern for the group as a whole. We have a long way to go on quality of service, but our prospects for improvement are better, which gives us some confidence that if we move these proposals through we can start to move to 1 star, 2 stars and then 3 stars - in other words from ‘poor’ to ‘fair’ to ‘good’ to ‘excellent’.

We also then had a look at the governance of the group. That means the boards and the board members who are responsible for the overall direction of the group and its subsidiaries and making sure that we are doing what we should be. This review found that governance was poor and that we needed to make some radical changes to improve to avoid being told what to do by our regulator the Tenant Services Authority (TSA).

*The TSA have also said that they feel that the Group's governance is not currently operating as they would expect and they are looking for assurances that it will improve significantly. Standing still and not changing is therefore simply not an option.*

## a brief history of synergy

*The Synergy Housing Group was set up in 2004 by EDHA and PHT, with WPH joining in 2006. The group has a parent company called Synergy Housing Group Ltd and the three social housing organisations are its subsidiaries. It also has a commercial company called Zebra Property Solutions (ZPS).*



## changes to the way we deliver services

We carried out a review with the help of some outside consultants. In that review the consultants spoke to a lot of staff and they were quite vocal in what they wanted to see. In summary they wanted:

- Strong leadership
- To have open and honest communication
- A clear vision of where we are going, and how and when are we going to get there
- To be able to do our jobs better – with good systems, processes, and equipment
- To get rid of duplication and be consistent, working with our peers more effectively.
- Better quality and more responsive central services

## principles

*Before we started on planning the changes ahead all boards agreed some key principles.*

### In summary these were:

- We are not considering collapsing the group now (i.e. rolling it all into one organisation) due to the fact that any long term benefits are massively outweighed by the costs. It does remain something we will look at though in the future.
- We want the highest standards of strategic leadership – in the boards and the management – the best people for the job.
- We need to quickly reorganise the way we run our services in a way that greatly increase our chances to deliver excellent services within 3 years.
- We need to increase opportunities for residents to become involved to help create a customer focused organisation.
- We make sure the whole process of change reflects our values.

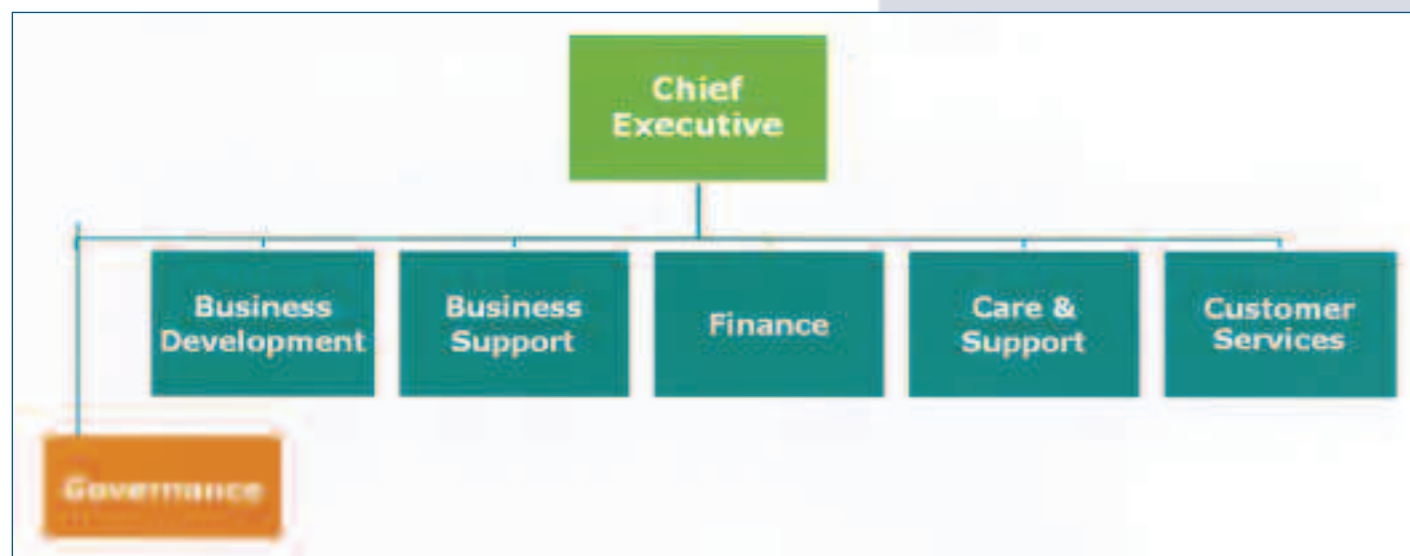
## new synergy structure

Our staff are open to change but understandably concerned about what is going to happen. We will keep involving them and informing them as we go along. The key thing at the moment for them is not to take their eye off the ball and to keep working at improving the services even through this period of change.

**Our plans are to pool the skills and experience across the Group and operate as a single organisation as Synergy.**

We aim to streamline customer services, restructure and refocus central services, and rationalise and strengthen leadership. There would be investment in training and support for staff to be able to deliver the new agenda and we will focus heavily on getting the culture right.

## new staff structure



**The most important changes for you as residents are that there will be 2 new departments:**

- **Customer Services**
- **Care & Support.**

*It is inevitable that bringing all organisations together as one would mean having to restructure further down than senior management. The aim is to develop all our plans by the new year once the new directors and heads of service are in post with a view to bringing in any further changes in 2010.*

## customer services

The new **Customer Services** department would provide a unified and consistent approach to services to all tenants and leaseholders. We would have a new Director of Customer Services. We would be introducing customer service training for all staff. Services would all be underpinned by a new neighbourhood focus.

*There would be three Head of Customer Services – one covering Asset Management, one Tenancy Management and one Repairs & Servicing – all working together with the Director to make our services a consistently high quality wherever you live.*

We also plan to have a new **central customer services** team, with a manager who also reports to the Director. The team would manage the first line of enquiry for our customers by phone and email as well as covering our reception areas. They would also oversee our complaints process.

To ensure that we maintain a degree of local accountability, as there would be no managing directors, the 3 Heads of Customer Service would each take lead responsibility for one of the subsidiary boards at EDHA, WPH and PHT. They would oversee locality planning, help the co-ordination of service delivery issues at a local level, and cover all local partnerships.

## care and support

*The new **Care and Support** department brings together all of our services for older & vulnerable people.*

It will have a new Director of Care and Support. It will work closely with those bodies that oversee the funding that is provided for support services and it will deal with the review of services and schemes. We see care and support for older people as a really important service for the future and we want to ensure that it has sufficient profile and presence to enable that to be taken forward.

*There would be 2 Heads of Care and Support – one covering Strategy and one covering Operations. Most of the front line staff would come under this post and we would look at bringing all of the best practice together to deliver the best service we can for our most vulnerable residents and other service users.*

There would be a number of changes to our **central services** and **development services** but these back office functions have little impact on you as residents. Be assured however that we are making savings in the long term through these changes with fewer people in management positions.

As we would be working as one organisation all staff would be employed by Synergy Housing Group Ltd. We would deliver services to all tenants and leaseholders as one organisation even though they would still have their existing landlords. Some jobs are similar to existing posts and so there would be some people that slot into the new structure. It does also mean however that there would be some redundant posts at a management level. The vacant posts would be advertised in June and we hope that all would be filled by October/November.



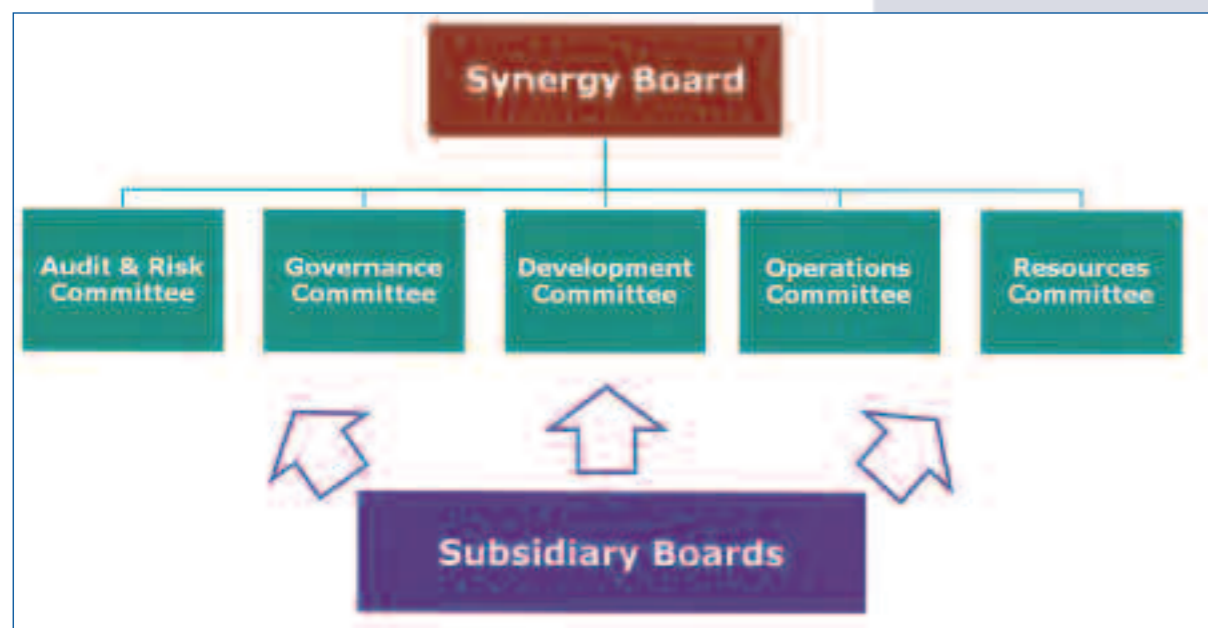
## changes to the way the group is governed

To make the improvements that we feel are necessary we need to have greater central control of the way that decisions are made about our plans and policies and the standards that are set for the quality of services which we provide.

*We are not planning to change board structures but the roles and responsibilities of the boards would however change.*

The Synergy Board would have a wider role in operational services and budgets and as such it needs a greater customer focus. The plan is to bring, by right, residents onto the Synergy board - one each from PHT, WPH and EDHA. It would also increase in size from 9 to 12 with 3 new independent places to strengthen its skills.

*The subsidiary boards of PHT, WPH and EDHA would have changed roles to ensure that the services delivered locally are up to standard. Their members will still be involved in setting standards and policies. They will have a greater role in ensuring that residents are involved at a local level. They would reduce in size from 12 to 9, with a composition of 4 residents, 1 council nominee and 4 independents.*



There also plans to set up some new committees to share the workload and give a much greater opportunity for subsidiary board members to get involved across the group. These committees would have decision making powers and be able to set strategy, policy and standards across a range of areas of the business.

*There would be a major review of the current board membership and a process of matching up, nominations and appointments to make sure that we have the right balance of skills, experience and competencies across all boards and committees. Board members would also get extra training, development and support to enable them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities.*



## opportunities for residents to be involved

We have looked at how this new resident involvement strategy works with our new staffing and governance structures and we feel that it links up well at all levels as the diagram illustrates.

At the strategic level we see the linkup between the Synergy board, the new committees and the newly formed Synergy Residents Panel – focusing on things like service standards, strategies and policies, service reviews, design standards and contract procurement.

At the local level we see the linkup between resident associations and panels and the subsidiary boards - focusing on things such as service delivery, contract delivery, development of neighbourhood plans, development schemes, local issues such as ASB hotspots, and so on.

### We have a new Resident Involvement strategy. It works at three levels:

- **Local level** - working with local people to address issues that are causing concern, building confidence and skills to improve quality of life
- **Strategic level** – where residents can influence policies, procedures and priorities across all services
- **Reaching individuals** – ensuring feedback from diversity of residents before making changes aimed to improve services or areas

*The relationship has to work effectively at all levels and in order to do that we have to build trust and maximise the potential of the partnership. Our aim is to place residents at the heart of the business. To do this well requires commitment and an increase in investment of time and resources and we intend to make that happen.*

