

**Minutes of the Board Meeting held on
Wednesday 25 March 2020 at 6pm**

Present:

S. Gaunt - Chairperson (SG)
J. Ayorinde
K. Barker
A. Edgar
M. Flaherty
E. Gotowicz
H. Gracie
F. Koroma
M. Overthrow

In Attendance:

A. McKee, Chief Executive (AM)
N. Logan, Finance Director (NL)
J. Murray, Housing Services Director (JM)
D. Weir, Technical Director (DW)
M. Hutcheson, Corporate Services Manager (MH)

Paul McNeil (PM) (part meeting only - Item 4)

This meeting, originally scheduled for Wednesday 18 March 2020, took place remotely via **Zoom**, following the Association's decision to close our office to the public until further notice in line with Government advice issued as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

The meeting was also recorded to allow the Minutes to be produced. The Board **noted** that the recording would be deleted as soon as the Minutes had been completed.

The Chairperson (SG) welcomed everyone to the meeting, adding that he hoped everyone and their families were well during the current emergency. SG thanked NL for setting up the technology to allow the meeting to take place via video conferencing.

The Chairperson welcomed Paul McNeil (PM) who had been invited to the meeting to discuss the Association's Private Finance requirements and Treasury Management Strategy. The Board **agreed** to take Agenda Items 4(1) and 4(2) first to allow PM to leave the meeting after these items had been discussed.

4. **Matters for Discussion/Decision**

(1) **Private Finance Report** (Paul McNeil was in attendance for this item)

See Confidential Minute

(2) **Treasury Management Strategy**

See Confidential Minute

The Board **approved** the changes to the Treasury Management policy.

The Board **noted** the Treasury Management Strategy, which will be updated accordingly.

(Paul McNeil left the meeting)

1. **Apologies and Declarations of Interest** (including agenda item to which this refers)

Apologies:

Apologies were **noted** on behalf of Board Members K. Clayton, A. Loudon, P. McGinlay MBE, E. McShane and M. Smith. Apologies were also **noted** on behalf of staff member P. Bridges.

Declarations of Interest:

Nothing to report.

2. **Minutes of previous Board Meetings**

(i) **Decisions taken between meetings**

Nothing to report.

(ii) **Board Meeting 19.2.20 & Confidential 19.2.20**

The Minutes were **approved** as an accurate record of the meeting.

(iii) **Matters Arising/Tasks**

See Confidential Minute

3. **Minutes of Sub-Committees and other Meetings**

(i) **Finance, Audit and Corporate Services Sub-Committee 23.10.19**

Noted.

4. Matters for Discussion / Decision

- (1) Private Finance Report
- (2) Treasury Management Strategy

Both items were discussed at the start of the meeting.

See Confidential Minute

5. Board Priorities

- (1) Board Training
- (2) Rent Harmonisation
- (3) Succession Planning and Staff Resources
- (4) Office / Community Hub
- (5) Tenant Communication / Transparency

These items were raised and discussed at various points throughout the meeting.

6. Health & Safety

- (1) Health & Safety Report

DW advised that the Association had received a number of updates for the Health & Safety Control Manual from ACS/EVH and confirmed that these have been incorporated into the Manual. The updated Manual has been circulated to all staff.

The Board **noted** that two minor Health & Safety incidents had taken place recently and that fire drills for the Board and staff had been carried out.

DW advised that he would be contacting ACS to ask if the Health & Safety training session for the Board scheduled for Wednesday 8 April 2020 can be carried out remotely. DW will contact the Board to confirm the arrangements for the training session.

The Board **noted** the report.

- (2) Update on Coronavirus

AM advised that his report had been written two weeks ago, adding that the Coronavirus situation had been changing daily since then. AM gave a detailed update on the report.

AM confirmed that the Association's Office Bearers **agreed** to close the office to the public from Monday 23 March 2020 until further notice following advice given by the Government. Tenants can still contact the Association by telephone/email/our Tenant Portal. AM confirmed that all staff are now working from home, and thanked NL, MH and their colleagues for their work in getting the IT and telephone systems ready for staff to access from their homes.

AM wrote to all tenants at the end of last week to advise that the Association is changing the way it delivers its service to tenants and other customers due to the Coronavirus pandemic (the Board also received a copy of the letter). The letter advised that in order to safeguard the health and wellbeing of tenants and staff, our office will be closed to the public and staff will not be able to visit tenants at home. SG commented that it was critical to keep in touch with our tenants. AM advised that the Association would be giving tenants regular updates via the website, Facebook, Twitter and by text message.

To help tenants who may be feeling anxious and isolated, we also included an information sheet prepared by our goConnect staff, giving tenants contact details of the agencies that may be able to offer them help and support during the health crisis. The information sheet also included the contact details of the goConnect staff and encouraged everyone in the community to support their vulnerable and elderly neighbours, or to contact the goConnect team if they know of someone who may need our assistance.

Rental Income

AM advised that we do not know what impact the coronavirus outbreak will have on our rental income. Arrears are definitely going to increase but we won't be able to analyse that for a few weeks yet. In the meantime, tenants have been advised that they should continue to pay their rent in the usual way if they are able to do so. We also encouraged tenants who are having difficulty with paying their rent to contact our Housing Services staff so that they can help them through this crisis, e.g. by providing Welfare Benefits advice. A lot of our customers work in jobs where they may be losing work or having their contracts terminated and we know that getting welfare advice to them will be critical.

Rent Payments

A Board member asked for clarification about the rent payment methods available, especially for those tenants who usually pay their rent at the post office but have been advised to stay at home. JM added that tenants could pay their rent in a number of ways, e.g. by telephone or direct debit. JM hoped that tenants would call us for advice and support or consult our website for further information. There has already been a huge increase in requests for help and our Housing Services Officers and Welfare Rights staff are working hard to advise and support tenants.

Evictions

AM confirmed that the Association would not be carrying out any evictions during the current emergency. JM added that the Association had obtained two decrees last week, and although these were not connected to the coronavirus outbreak, the decision had been taken not to pursue them.

Contractors - changes to services

The services provided by our contractors have changed significantly recently.

The Board **noted** that the Association is obliged to notify the Scottish Housing Regulator (the Regulator) about any significant disruption to service levels.

The Board **noted** that AM has notified the Regulator about the changes to our services as a result of the coronavirus and that AM would continue to update the Regulator as required. The Regulator will monitor the impact of the pandemic on housing associations and will report any significant impact to the Scottish Government.

- Reactive Repairs

When our letter was sent out to tenants, our contractors (City Building) were still working as normal and had indicated that they would be able to provide a full repairs service. However, City Building have now advised that, due to the continuing spread of the virus, their staffing levels have been reduced and they will only be able to carry out emergency repairs. We have notified tenants about this change to our repairs service via our website, Facebook and Twitter.

- Gas Servicing

GasSure have been carrying out some gas servicing recently but have indicated that this will stop soon. This is a big issue for us because we have a legal duty to carry out a gas safety check in every property on an annual basis. However, it was noted that other housing associations will be in a similar position.

- Landscaping & Stair Cleaning

See Confidential Minute

- Bulk Uplift

Our letter to tenants advised that Glasgow City Council have stated that they will not uplift bulk refuse for the foreseeable future and as such, tenants were asked not to put bulk rubbish outside until further notice. A Board member asked what could be done where bulk items had already been pulled through from the backcourts ready for uplift. AM noted that it was unfortunate that this had happened just before the letter had gone out to tenants. JM advised that Housing Services Assistants will be contacting a couple of tenants in each close to keep in touch and deal with any issues that may arise. AM suggested that the Housing Assistants could ask the tenants to return the bulk items to the backcourt.

Arden Phase 5

See Confidential Minute

Housing Applications

We have written to all housing applicants to inform them that we have to suspend the allocation of any properties until further notice. The letter advised that staff would continue to progress applications, conducting most processes by telephone or email.

End of Tenancy/Voids

If any homes become void, we will arrange for our contractor to make the house secure, change the locks and keep hold of the new keys for us.

'Furloughing' Staff

See Confidential Minute

Vulnerable Tenants

The Board discussed the arrangements for supporting vulnerable tenants. JM advised that staff were offering a lot of help and advice and were working with local agencies, e.g. food banks, to support tenants. Two staff members have been appointed to take this forward.

JM gave an example of the care being given by staff to our vulnerable tenants. A staff member had noticed that a vulnerable tenant had not been in touch and asked the Community Police to attend and force entry to the property. This intervention meant that this vulnerable person received the medical attention they urgently needed. JM added that staff are dealing with these issues when they arise and are making sure people are being offered support and being looked after.

Some of our Board members work for other housing associations and shared some of the initiatives their associations have introduced to support tenants, including telephone befriending to alleviate loneliness. A Board member advised that their association is working with local pharmacies to ensure that the supply of medicine to vulnerable tenants is being maintained. AM will find out more about pharmacies in our area and get information out to tenants.

JM mentioned a local organisation called 'SouthsideSIS' who are trying to set up a group of volunteers, adding that the Association will be advertising this on our Facebook page.

The Chairperson noted the following:

- Board/Sub-Committee meetings: Video conference is working well so the Board **agreed** to keep to the normal programme of meetings.
- Staff: **See Confidential Minute**
- Full Staff meeting: SG asked if this would be possible. NL advised that Zoom could be used for this. Zoom has a 'breakout room' function which would mean that individual department meetings could take place immediately after the staff meeting. AM added that several WhatsApp groups have also been set up which have been very useful.
- Rent Harmonisation: **See Confidential Minute**

On behalf of the Board, SG thanked the entire staff team for the way they have responded to the coronavirus crisis. AM thanked the Board for their support and the staff team for rallying round to communicate with tenants and set everything up to allow staff to work from home.

7. Assurance Statement

(i) Assurance Statement Action Plan March 2020

The Board **noted** the Action Plan. NL advised that, due to the current crisis, some of the completion dates will have to be amended. Going forward, SG asked staff to focus on reporting any exceptions to the Board.

(ii) Assurance Statement Review Programme

The Board **noted** the Programme.

(iii) 2020 Review of Regulatory Standard 1

The Board **noted** the report. NL advised that staff would update the recommendations.

8. Risk Management

(i) Strategic Risk Report

(ii) Strategic Risk Register

NL confirmed that the Strategic Risk Report had been updated to include two new Risks - Rent Restructure and Coronavirus. The Board **reviewed** and **approved** the Strategic Risk Register.

9. Notifiable Events

AM advised that he had notified the Regulator of the Association's decision to close the office following Government advice about the Coronavirus outbreak. AM added that he is still waiting for a response from the Regulator. AM will continue to update the Regulator with regard to Notifiable Events, e.g. the situation with gas servicing. DW advised that he has been looking at ways to get as many gas safety checks done as possible. Our contractor usually arranges access directly with the tenant but they currently do not have the resources to do this. DW suggested that the Association's staff could try to arrange access, adding that staff would not insist that access is given to ensure the safety of both tenants and gas engineers. If a tenant did not wish to give access to the property, we would still be able to record that we had attempted to comply with the regulations.

10. Staffing

See Confidential Minute

11. **Membership** - *nothing to report*

12. **Use of Seal** - *nothing to report*

13. **Policy Review**

(1) **Interim Review of Entitlements, Payments and Benefits Policy**

See Confidential Minute

(2) **Scheme of Delegated Authority**

NL advised that she would be adding information about 'Staff Settlement and Severance' to the Scheme of Delegated Authority. The Board **reviewed and approved** the Scheme of Delegated Authority.

(3) **Financial Regulations**

The Board **reviewed and approved** the Financial Regulations.

(4) **Treasury Management Strategy**

The Board **reviewed** and **approved** the Treasury Management Strategy.

(5) **Risk Management Policy**

NL advised that the name of this document had been changed from Risk Management Strategy to Risk Management Policy. The Board **reviewed** and **approved** the Risk Management Policy.

14. **Community Regeneration**

AM confirmed that, as mentioned previously, John Gordon (Consultant) had recently retired and would not be working for Glen Oaks as of 31 March 2020.

15. **Matters for Information**

(1) **Calendar of Board & Sub-Committee Meetings 2020** - *updated*

AM referred to the Calendar and noted that the next Board meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 27 May 2020. The Chairperson commented that, given the current situation, he was uncomfortable with waiting until May for the Board to meet again. The Board **agreed** that a Special Board Meeting will take place on Wednesday 29 April to keep the Board updated on the Coronavirus pandemic.

There are also two Board training sessions on the Calendar - 8 April 2020 (Health & Safety) and 13 May 2020 (Rent Setting and Affordability). AM proposed that these sessions should go ahead, possibly via video conferencing. The Board **agreed** with this proposal.

AM will speak to NL, MH and the Chairperson of the Finance, Audit and Corporate Services Sub-Committee to agree on a new date for the Sub-Committee to meet. The members of the Sub-Committee will be notified of the new date.

16. Report back from Meetings / Conferences attended

F. Koroma, A. Loudon and K. Clayton had attended the SHARE Conference at Peebles. F. Koroma said that the conference featured several good, thought-provoking sessions including a workshop given by Alan Ferguson about the challenges currently faced by housing associations, e.g. fuel poverty and the ageing population. F. Koroma added that K. Clayton had given a presentation about the recruitment of Board members and had answered some challenging questions from delegates.

17. Correspondence and Other Matters for Decision

Nothing to report.

18. Any Other Competent Business

(i) Minutes of Office Refurbishment Working Group 27.2.20

See Confidential Minute

(ii) Board Induction

AM spoke about the induction process for the newer Board members, advising that he would be happy to continue this by telephone if that was convenient. AM will email his contact details to all Board members tomorrow and asked the Board to contact him if they wish to raise any issues.

(iii) Arden Phase 5

SG asked if there had been any feedback from the tenants who had moved into the new houses at Arden Phase 5. DW replied that everyone seemed to be very happy with their new homes. The Board was pleased to end the meeting on such a positive note!

19. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be a **Special Board Meeting** which will take place on **Wednesday 29 April 2020** at **6pm** via Zoom.

Signed:

Date: