



MINUTE OF THE BOARD MEETING

30 November 2022

Present: R Hutton (Chair); I Crawford (Vice Chair)

**A Groat; N Hicks; C Jayne; G Kitchener; W Raeburn;
P Rowsby**

C Ironside (Secretary)

In attendance: C Hughes, A Hay, K Miller

Apologies: A Clark; A Scott

N Hicks, C Jayne, P Rowsby and W Raeburn attended the meeting virtually via Zoom.

ACTION

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from A Clark and A Scott.

2 Declarations of Interest

N Hicks – Board member and treasurer of The Action Group, and member of SHAPS Pensions Employers Committee

R Hutton – Employee of Harbour Homes .

G Kitchener – tenant of the Association

C Jayne – Employee of City of Edinburgh Council

4 Risk Management Issues / Health & Safety Issues / Notifiable Events / GDPR

C Ironside asked members to note that the data breaches that had taken place since the last meeting are noted in the SMT update.

5 Minutes of the Board meeting held on 26 October 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2022 were approved as a true record, G Kitchener and seconded by P Rowsby.

6 Matters Arising

Agenda Item 4

Risk Management/Health & Safety Issues/Notifiable Events/GDPR

At the meeting of 30 October 2022 a member had asked if the Association has a policy on Duty of Candor. C Ironside advised that there is an Openness And Confidentiality Policy and members agreed that this was appropriate. C Ironside further confirmed that the Policy is currently under review and will be presented to the Board in January 2023.

CI

7 Board Actions

A member questioned if the timescale for the CEO and Vice Chair to review the Chair's appraisal would be achievable. C Ironside confirmed that this has been arranged for 12 December 2022.

Members noted the remaining actions.

8 Minutes of Sub Committee or Subsidiary Meetings

Members noted the minute of the MEAL Board meeting held 17 November 2022.

9 Matters for Approval / Decision

9(i) Pre-Budget 2023/24

K Miller introduced the report that had been circulated previously and invited questions.

N Hicks asked if the grant funding referred to in respect of the energy advice service was paid to tenants or to the Association. C Hughes confirmed that the majority of the resources to assist tenants accessed through Changeworks relate to funding to assist with fuel debt and negotiations with utility companies.

A Hay advised members that the proposed staffing changes in the Property Services Team were intended to stabilise the team. She outlined the approach that has been taken to develop the team and confirmed that we are seeking to consolidate the position by making temporary posts, permanent.

K Miller confirmed that if the proposals are agreed, costs will be included in the budget that will be presented to the Audit Committee in January 2023.

C Ironside advised members that the recent Tenant Satisfaction Survey has identified a dip in satisfaction levels with the repairs service. She noted that work is ongoing to address issues with the contractor and emphasised the importance of getting a settled team to ensure that improvements in the service are achieved.

P Rowsby acknowledged that the Property Service team feels to be more settled and stable and it is positive that the previous issues have been addressed.

A Groat asked why there had been temporary staff within the team. C Ironside confirmed that there had been long-term absences during covid. In addition, the trial that has been carried out of a different approach to managing the complexity and reactive nature of tasks has been successful. It has demonstrated that the increased level of staff is necessary and gives potential to further develop services.

W Raeburn noted that there has been excellent progress in addressing the previous issues within the team and that this gives a strong message to staff that they are being listened to and supported.

C Hughes outlined the rationale for creating the Income Assistant post, noting that it was always intended to review and consider making the post permanent if it proved to have a positive impact. The information presented in the report clearly shows that the objectives set for the trial period had been achieved, both in terms of the reduced level of arrears and the time available to the Housing Officers to focus on customer engagement activity.

C Hughes asked members to note the success of the welfare rights service and outlined the opportunities that an increased resource in this area would present.

Following discussion, members approved all the proposed changes, proposed by P Rowsby and seconded by N Hicks.

9(ii) Rent and Service Charge Increase 2023/24

K Miller introduced the report that had been circulated, noting that this was preparatory work as we will be unable to take a decision on the matter until the Scottish Government confirms their position mid-January 2023.

K Miller highlighted the proposal to consider increases of 3, 5 or 7per cent, noting that these had been informed by the approaches being taken by other organisations.

K Miller referred to the approach being taken to tenant consultation this year. We have tried to explain as best we can the reasons for our proposals, including the impact of lower rent increases in recent and future years.

P Rowsby asked if a rent freeze is a probable outcome, or if it is more likely that a cap will be imposed. K Miller advised that a freeze is the worst case scenario. The feeling within the sector at the moment is that a cap may be set and that this will be lower than those set in England and Wales, likely to be around 6%.

C Ironside advised members that the Association is part of a working group set up by the SFHA to deal with this issue, The group is currently looking to refer a commitment to the Scottish Government regarding an average percentage

rent increase, although no organisation will be held to the level included in the commitment.

N Hicks expressed the view that the matter is now about politics rather than economics, referencing what has been happening in England in recent years. He considers that the level of rent increases that could be applied is now outwith our control and is likely that we will have to re-work the figures when the Government announcement is made.

(Discussion was paused between 6.10 and 6.30 for a presentation by Lorna Shaw of Research Resource regarding the recent Tenant Satisfaction Survey – notes appended to this minute).

P Rowsby asked if the SMT would usually make a recommendation regarding the rent increase. K Miller advised that it was difficult to do so this year as there are so many unknowns, however she confirmed that the Association would be seeking to apply as high an increase as possible to secure a strong financial position in future years.

W Raeburn noted that at the recent Finance Conference, the Regulator's focus was very much on cash flows and indicated that he would like to see more information regarding worst case scenarios, being concerned that the position is potentially worse than that we are currently looking at.

W Raeburn also noted that it is difficult to make a decision on this issue without information about affordability and asked that this be made available as soon as possible.

K Miller advised that the information provided in January 2023 on the new budget and 25 year plan will include scenarios and their effect on the cash flow.

K Miller further advised that she was confident information regarding affordability will be available when the budget is being discussed further in January 2023. She drew members' attention to the proportion of tenants whose housing costs are paid by housing benefit or Universal Credit. R Hutton sought to caveat that information and C Ironside advised that the Association is not being complacent, rather we are giving contextual information.

Members noted that there will be further discussion on this matter once the Scottish Government's decision is known.

Following discussion, members approved the increase of 10.1% to decoration allowances.

9(iii) Risk Management Review

C Ironside introduced the report that had been circulated previously and highlighted the key areas where changes are proposed.

Following discussion, member approved the Risk Register as presented.

.10 Matters for Information

10(i) Returns Register 2022

Noted

10(ii) Board Meeting Schedule 2023

C Ironside confirmed that the May meeting will be held on 31st rather than 24th May as noted on the report. She confirmed that the schedule will be re-issued.

CI

10(iii) SMT Report

C Ironside introduced the report, highlighting the key issues.

Those members who attended the Finance Conference found it interesting and informative.

In response to a question from P Rowsby, C Ironside confirmed that the first in-person Staff meeting had gone well, with SMT providing a healthy breakfast.

A Groat sought information regarding Transactional Analysis. C Ironside gave a brief summary of the work that has been carried out with a consultant in respect of 'adult' communication.

10 Any Other Competent Business

- (a) R Hutton expressed the Board's condolences in respect of A Clark's recent bereavement.
- (b) R Hutton referred to the recent tragic case where a child died as a result of black mould in their home. She is confident that there are measures in place to ensure that the Association properties are not in such poor condition and that immediate action would be taken to review and address any emerging issues.
- (c) K Miller confirmed that it was not possible to upload the slides from the Finance Conference to Govenda, however the link to the slides has been issued to all members.

11 Date and time of next meeting: Wednesday 25 January 2023 at 5.30 p.m.

The meeting closed at: 7.01 p.m.

TENANT SATISFACTION SURVEY

Lorna Shaw of Research Resource gave a brief presentation on the outcomes of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey carried out on behalf of the Association.

Members noted that there are several areas where satisfaction levels have decreased, particularly in respect of the repairs service. L Shaw noted that comparisons with the Scottish Average may not reflect actual performance by other associations as it could be some time since they have had a survey carried out.

N Hicks questioned the option for those taking part in the survey to opt for 'neither/nor', noting how this might affect the other figures. L Shaw confirmed that they are obliged to use the options as outlined by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

P Rowsby questioned why there was no Scottish Average figure in respect of Customer Service, L Shaw confirmed that this is not a question included in the Annual Report on the Charter, so no average is available.

R Hutton thanked L Shaw for her presentation.

C Hughes advised members that SMT will now be working on an action plan to address issues highlighted in the report. A further mini survey will be commissioned in around 18 months' time to establish the impact that actions are having.