

**WELLHOUSE HOUSING ASSOCIATION
MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 24th October 2019
AT 6PM AT THE ASSOCIATION'S OFFICE, THE HUB, 49 WELLHOUSE CRESCENT G33 4LA**

1. Welcome, Sederunt & Apologies.

Present:

Darron Brown	Chair
Maureen Morris	Vice Chair
Clare Monteith	Treasurer
Tom Lucas	Committee Member
Jane Heppenstall	Committee Member
Michelle Harrow	Committee Member
Sarah Morris	Committee Member

In Attendance:

Martin Wilkie-McFarlane	Director
Gordon Kerr	Finance & Corporate Services Manager
Carol Hamilton	Housing & Customer Services Manager
Bill Black	Assets & Maintenance Manager
Linda Logan	Minute taker
Shona McKenna	Observer
Tony Kelly	TPAS (Item 3 only)

Apologies:

Vanda Cooper	Committee Member
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The Chair welcomed Shona McKenna (Observer), Tony Kelly (TPAS) and Michelle Harrow returning from a leave of absence. Introductions were made and Shona provided background on her experience and why she wanted to contribute to the organisation.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. TPAS presentation

Tony Kelly (TPAS) provided a brief explanation of the Next Steps Programme which aims to help tenants and landlords build an agreed action plan. It is supported by the Scottish Government to build on strengths and to help address any barriers or weaknesses. The programme includes a desk top audit, workshops with tenants, the staff and the committee to develop an action plan, with a 6 month review to assess progress. He stressed that effective tenant participation is when the Association has taken what our customers have said and provides evidence that what they have actually said, has influenced services.

He highlighted that Wellhouse's current participation strategy and preferred outcomes were to ensure our customers know the ways to be involved in and make decisions on services as well as accessing support and resources to become effective, and to contribute to the development of quality services and standards.

Tony asked committee to reflect on what they would like to consult on to develop an action plan and to consider what participation activities work well. He encouraged committee to contact him with comments and to consider how we may possibly network with EHRA to produce a strategy for the area.

He asked committee to agree and to contact him with preferred dates to consult within the next 6 weeks and consideration of the way forward.

The Director elaborated on various activities within the EHRA group over the last few months that had had very positive feedback. He discussed consultation on the ARC, value for money and our estate services. He expressed the positives and opportunity for Wellhouse HA to provide feedback to the Scottish Government.

Resolution:

It was agreed that committee would provide a date for TPAS to consult with committee and to develop an action plan for consultation with service users and how our users may influence services.

Tony left the meeting at this time.

4. Jargon buster.

Noted for information.

5. Minutes of the Committee Meeting of 29 August 2019, including confidential minutes.

The minute of the committee meeting of 29 August 2019, including the confidential minute were proposed as accurate by Maureen Morris and seconded by Jane Heppenstall.

6. Matters arising and actions from the minute report.

Development Proposals:

The Director confirmed that DRS had verified that they have our SDFP submission and were perplexed at the query received at the AGM re: our development opportunities. He confirmed that we have applied for housing association grant aid for valuation of the Archdiocese site and if not approved, committee had previously agreed that we would fund the valuation ourselves. He will keep the committee updated on progress.

There were no other matters arising that were not covered in subsequent agenda items.

7. Assurance Statement

The Director provided a summary on the process of the review of the SHR's regulatory framework and discussions with the SFHA and key stakeholders. He reminded committee of the regular updates they had received on progress on the updated framework during this time and their responsibilities thereof.

He highlighted that the Association had submitted a voluntary Assurance Statement last year which was testament that the committee were confident to make a statement to the Regulator that they felt assured that the Association was well run and they themselves complied to the regulatory standards, which had been confirmed at our away day with Linda Ewart.

The Director drew committee's attention to our Assurance Statement on page 34 of the report which confirms that the governing body has the appropriate assurance that we comply with the regulatory requirements as set out in Chapter 3 of the Regulatory framework and the standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter and comply with relevant legislative duties. He highlighted committee's responsibility to confirm that they had seen and considered appropriate evidence to support the level of assurance and to confirm the date they had considered and agreed the statement. The Assurance Statement will be signed by the Chair and submitted to the Regulator.

He highlighted to committee that in order for the Association to remain compliant we will during the year focus on improving standards of customer satisfaction and participation, work towards full compliance with human rights and equalities requirements by 2021 and mitigate the impact of welfare reform and the potential impact of Brexit.

The Director took committee through the assurance data bank that has been completed by staff to evidence compliance. He encouraged committee members to scrutinise the evidence and carry out spot checks to ensure that we are compliant. He asked committee to note the new Standard 7 which comprehensively outlines the new requirement for disposals and constitutional change. He highlighted that this Standard does not apply to us however we have compiled evidence to confirm this. He took members through the areas where we already comply and noted that there had been no disposals and no constitutional changes other than a small change to the rules in 2016. He assured committee that all information stored in the evidence bank had been discussed at committee meetings. He highlighted evidence relating to financial returns, the ARC, our internal audit process and our annual landlord report to our tenants. He reiterated the comprehensive improvement plan completed during regulatory intervention, which we have maintained and improved on and would provide committee with further assurance of compliance.

The Chair encouraged members to take up the offer to complete spot checks and to examine the evidence bank. Jane Heppenstall confirmed that she would complete this exercise. The Director welcomed this suggestion.

Resolution:

Committee approved the Assurance Statement for submission to the Scottish Housing Regulators.

Clare Monteith proposed and Jane Heppenstall seconded, the Chair signing the Assurance Statement for submission to the SHR.

8. Statutory Annual Return FCA and OSCR.

The Finance & Corporate Services Manager provided an explanation of the figures reflected in the Annual Returns which were approved by the management committee at its meeting of 29 August 2019. He highlighted that a full set of accounts will accompany each return to the FCA and OSCR and Wellhouse will comply with its

statutory obligations to submit these Annual Returns to the FCA by 31 October 2019 and to OSCR by 31 December 2019.

Resolution:

Committee approved the submission of the Statutory Annual Return to the FCA and OSCR by the required dates, which was proposed by Sarah Morris and seconded by Maureen Morris.

9. Freedom of Information Policy.

The Finance & Corporate Services Manager noted that the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 will come into force on 11th November 2019. It was noted that much of this information was already included on our Website and the policy will be uploaded to include the links to the Guide of Information (GTI) to make it easier for users to follow.

The Director sought confirmation if charges were proposed in relation to this link. The Finance & Corporate Services Manager confirmed that the charging schedule will be appended to the GTI. The charging schedule is based on a schedule currently used by Edinburgh Leisure which has been in place for a number of years.

Discussion ensued where information would not be supplied under commercial sensitivity and/or personal breach of GDPR and confidential committee reports and minutes not being uploaded to the website.

Resolution:

Committee approved the Freedom of Information Policy which was proposed by Michelle Harrow and seconded by Maureen Morris for adoption.

10. Domestic Abuse Policy – Tenants and Employees.

The Housing & Customer Services Manager presented the domestic abuse policies for vulnerable tenants as well as vulnerable employees for consideration. She highlighted that she had volunteered to champion our “Make a Stand Pledge” commitment and to support our activity and in collaboration with our partners within the EHRA group.

She highlighted that social landlords have a duty of care to those experiencing domestic abuse and to protect tenants and children’s rights to a home life. She discussed current housing policy and practice responses based on expecting women and children experiencing domestic abuse rather than the perpetrators to leave their homes. She noted that domestic abuse was the main cause of women’s homelessness in Scotland with a high incidence of repeat homelessness on the same grounds.

She stated that the above information applies equally to employees who may suffer from domestic abuse and asked committee to note how we will support employees in such a situation as set out at appendix 2 of the report.

Committee discussed at length preventing and addressing domestic abuse requirements and the need for us to have contingencies in place to react within the first 24 hours. It was noted that this procedure was intended to be safety focused and supportive rather than punitive. Michelle Harrow welcomed our commitment to supporting domestic abuse victims in particular for children, where it could prevent another cycle of homelessness and

Trust Honesty Integrity Excellence Accountability Sustainability

abuse. The Housing and Customer Services Manager highlighted support information for victims to access on our website and further guidance contained within the policy to access support agencies.

The Director thanked the Housing and Customer Services Manager for the comprehensive information she had compiled and her commitment to support this activity. He reaffirmed our commitment to this policy.

Resolution:

Committee approved the Domestic Abuse Policies for Tenants and Employees, which were proposed by Clare Monteith and seconded by Michelle Harrow for adoption.

11. Rent Arrears.

The Housing and Customer Services Manager presented the report to update committee on the arrears position. She stated that since the last report in July 2019 gross arrears have reduced by £33,981 and non-technical arrears have increased by £28,410. Arrears attributed to Universal Credit have increased by £28,615 for the same period. She highlighted that the number of tenants with rent arrears has risen by 32 which in the main can be attributed to the closure of the office over the September weekend and direct debit payments due on 30th September not going into accounts until the 1st October 2019.

She provided a snap shot of the Universal Credit arrears between April 2019 and October 2019 which had experienced a 122% increase attributed to an increase in claims to Universal Credit due to natural migration. Housing Officers continue to focus on reducing the average length of time tenants have arrears resulting in the escalation of the process and increase in legal action. The Housing Manager continues to invite those tenants owing more than £1,000 for interview and support. She highlighted that the Income Advice Service has generated financial gains for tenants of £1,706,889 from May 2018 to September 2019.

The Housing & Customer Services Manager provided evidence of Housing Officer activity for contact with those in arrears in excess of £1,000. She provided a comprehensive analysis and breakdown of tasks completed by the Housing Officers and herself which total 5,920 actions and activities completed by the team. In addition, there have been 24 void properties since April 2019, some with several refusals and 49 anti-social behaviour complaints. She highlighted staff shortages due to long term sickness and maternity leave and considered that activity by the team had been exceptional given these factors.

The Chair sought clarification on the means of collection of the 518 Housing Officer rent collection activities and his concern for the number of tenants who have no set routine for paying rent. The Housing & Customer Services Manager confirmed that these activities were completed in the office or by telephone and the time taken to process these activities. Committee discussed payment dates and how this is reflected as an arrear.

Michelle Harrow asked that of the 70 cases of arrears cases due to Universal Credit, how successful had we been in getting payment backdated. The Housing & Customer Services Manager stated that the Income Advice Officer has provided tremendous advice and support to these tenants however those on Universal Credit will always be 4 weeks behind on rent due to delayed payments and the Association will need to absorb this every month.

Committee agreed to discuss the impact of Universal Credit in detail at its next meeting and how to mitigate the risk and support that can be offered to tenants. The Director highlighted discussions he had had with Kevin

Stewart, Scottish Housing Minister and Aileen Campbell with regards the impact of Universal Credit and hopefully having access to mitigation funds being offered by the Scottish Government.

Committee noted the contents of the report.

Action: Universal Credit will be included on the November committee meeting agenda.

12. Management Team Report.

The management team presented the report to highlight any notable changes to the operating environment for Wellhouse HA.

Director:

Hub Business Plan

A draft business plan for the Hub has been drawn up. Due to the Director being distracted with other issues it is anticipated that a clean version will be presented by the end of the calendar year.

EHRA

The Director provided an update on the election of EHRA office bearers. Maureen Morris was elected as Secretary. Committee shadowing across EHRA is being co-ordinated by the Director. Sarah Morris and Clare Monteith have expressed an interest and members of Blairtummock HA will attend our meeting in November.

Assets & Maintenance Manager:

Planned & Cyclical Maintenance Programme.

The Assets & Maintenance Manager provided an update on completed survey work and cyclical painting works. He stated that Phase 1 & 2 windows were being surveyed to ascertain the quantity of windows required to allow tender work required.

Committee requested that street names be used in reports rather than a Phase number as they found this to be confusing.

Tenant satisfaction.

The Assets & Maintenance Manager provided an explanation of his investigation in the drop in satisfaction levels with repairs in the last quarter. Of the 84 tenants surveyed, 9 were unhappy with the service. He had written to these tenants to ask if they would like to meet or call to discuss issues they have. To date none of these 9 tenants have responded. He provided a breakdown of the repairs requested by these tenants.

Housing Manager:

Training:

The Housing Manager reported that a Housing Officer has updated her skills in relation to the process of dealing with abandoned properties and former tenant arrears and that front line staff had received training to deal effectively with complaints.

Finance Manager:

Freedom of Information:

Following on from his report on the Freedom of Information Policy, the Finance Manager provided an update on software and a demonstration which was provided by a company called Kiswebs, on 23 October which should reduce the amount of manual input required in recording information required to be able to report back to the Scottish Information Commissioner on a quarterly basis. The software will be tested before recommendations are made to committee.

He asked committee to note the Freedom of Information schedule attached at appendix 2 of the report.

Committee noted the contents of the FOI action schedule attached at appendix 2.

13. Forward Planning.

Noted for information. Universal Credit study will be added to the agenda.

14. AOCB

Governance Matters following the AGM:

The Corporate and Governance Assistant confirmed that Tom Lucas and Michelle Harrow had completed their Declarations of Interests forms and signed the Code of Conduct. Michelle Harrow confirmed her willingness to continue as a member of the Staffing Committee.

Committee agreed to co-opt Shona McKenna to the management committee.

Schedule of Committee Meetings:

Committee approved the updated schedule of committee meetings for the year ahead. The Corporate and Governance Assistant will send the schedule to committee for information.

There was no other business.

Meeting closed: 9pm. Next meeting: 28th November 2019 6pm

I certify that the above minute has been approved as a true and accurate reflection of the proceedings:

Signed (Chair)

Date:.....