

**WELLHOUSE HOUSING ASSOCIATION
MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD
ON 25 January 2023 AT 6PM – via Teams and in house**

1. Welcome, Sederunt & Apologies

Present:

Maureen Morris	Chair
Gordon Kerr	Committee Member
Helen Lafferty	Committee Member
Jane Heppenstall	Committee Member
Michelle Harrow	Committee Member

In Attendance:

Martin Wilkie-McFarlane	Director
Bill Black	Assets & Maintenance Manager
James Wilson	Housing & Customer Services Manager
Linda Logan	Minutes

Apologies:

Darron Brown	Committee Member
Leeann Brown	Co-opted Member
Graeme Wetherill	Co-opted Member

The Chair welcomed James Wilson to his first committee meeting. Introductions were made. She asked that our condolences be recorded to Shona McKenna's family. We are unaware of funeral arrangements at this time.

2. Jargon Buster

Noted for information.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of Interest.

4. Minutes of the Committee Meeting of 30 November 2022

The minutes of the committee meeting of 30 November 2022 were proposed by Helen Lafferty and seconded by Gordon Kerr as an accurate record of the proceedings.

5. Matters arising from the minutes report.

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

Action: The Director sought confirmation that the Finance Manager had emailed committee with details on the financial implication on lenders covenants if a 0% rent increase was applied. It was agreed that he would email details before the end of the month.

6. Rent Consultation update and decision.

The Housing Manager presented the report to highlight methods of consultation undertaken to offer residents opportunities to respond and to make recommendations in relation to the proposed rent increase.

He advised that the proposed 3% rental increase was lower than any of our peer groups within the local area. 110 tenants had responded to the consultation with 88 of those who responded indicating that they felt their rent did not represent value for money and 85 of those not in support of either a 3 or 5% rent increase. However, the MIH independent survey had suggested a much higher percentage of tenants feeling that their rent did represent value for money.

Michelle Harrow sought confirmation that if a 3% increase was approved would it allow us to continue with proposed works as stated within the business plan, if we were aware of the number of our tenants that would have their rent covered via housing benefit and given the cost of living crisis if there was scope for a hardship fund. The Housing Manager confirmed that a 3% increase had been assumed in preparation of the proposed 23/24 budget and noted that approximately one third of our tenants were in receipt of housing benefits.

Action: The Director discussed and it was agreed that a report be brought to committee in the future to explore a hardship fund and completion of a benchmarking exercise, with other organisations that have a hardship fund in place.

Jane Heppenstall suggested that consideration be given to future consultations, to allow a forum where our tenants who work could contribute more during the consultation events. The Housing Manager concurred that different methods and flexible times would be applied next year to target our tenants during consultation. The Director suggested that before the next rent consultation that an independent consultant be retained to engage with tenants during evening and weekend survey sessions.

There were no further questions.

Resolution:

Committee

Noted the contents of the report and the responses received from tenants during consultation.

Approved the recommendation of progressing with a flat rate 3% rental increase.

The flat rate rental increase of 3% was proposed by Michelle Harrow and seconded by Jane Heppenstall.

7. Draft 2 – 23/24 budget assumptions

The Director presented in the absence of the Finance Manager.

He noted the budget was drafted on the recommended 3% rent increase following consultation.

He asked committee to note an error on page 23 – point 4.1 which reflects last years recommendation of an alternative level of a 3.8% rental increase and the incorrect financial year of 22/23. The report will be amended to reflect the correct levels agreed for 23/24.

The Director advised that our main area of cost was the maintenance expenditure. He noted detailed discussion between the Finance and Maintenance Manager to ensure the costs were a realistic reflection of anticipated costs in the forthcoming year. He sought clarification and the Maintenance Manager confirmed the budget reflects the most up to date information and accurately reflects estimates received from our contractors and providers and was based on our income with a 3% increase.

He advised that estate services currently had an external contractor provide a weekly bulk uplift service and it is not envisaged that this service would be removed. An extra provision was made for charges applied at the local recycling centres as GCC no longer provide a free service. Void rates continue to be high and will be monitored by the Housing and Maintenance Manager.

Page 25 of the report references remodeling of the Hub in error and should refer to essential repair work and reinvestment.

He discussed loss of income to the Association in applying a 3% increase and requested that the Finance Manager bring a further stress testing report to committee. He reflected that we need to build a culture of focusing on cost savings.

He discussed payroll costs and considered that the current staffing compliment was adequate. He suggested that any requests, for additional staff should be critically questioned by the committee. He discussed the terms and conditions of being a full member of EVH and consideration being given to becoming an associated member. Discussion ensued with regards joint procurement with colleagues in EHRA.

He drew members attention to point 6.7 on page 29 which highlighted budget results in relation to surpluses being at £183,701 and cash being expected to increase by £57.3K. Lenders covenants are being achieved.

Michelle Harrow advised and the Director confirmed that an announcement had been made by the Scottish Government that funding would be made available to rehome families from the Ukraine. Void losses were discussed and the rehoming of families to mitigate homelessness.

The Chair considered the committee training budget to be low given the increase on committee member numbers. The Director agreed a formal review of the budget would be carried out later in the year.

Actions:

- **A formal re-forecasting budget will be brought to committee later in the year.**
- **The Finance Manager will bring a further report to committee to stress test lost income**
- **The Business Plan approved last year will be reviewed and a different model and scenario planning will be considered.**
- **A comparison will be carried out against last years budget to provide a clear picture of increased costs.**

Resolution:

Committee noted that the current levels of CPI, RPI and CPIH were higher than the recommended rental increase of 3% and that this may present challenges in with future with regards meeting the

requirement of the budget that services housing stock and leaves sufficient surpluses to meet the loan commitments and components.

Committee instructed the Finance Manger to finalise the budget on the basis of the 3% increase and have final meetings with the budget holders to ensure all known costs had been considered and to present the final version at the February committee meeting.

Committee approved the 2023/24 draft budget (version 2 – includes 3% rent increase)

The 2023/24 draft budget – version 2 was approved by Michelle Harrow and seconded by Gordon Kerr.

8. Rent arrears update report.

The Housing Manager asked committee to note that the arrears position stats were for November 2022 in the main due to timings between the last Housing Manager retiring and him taking up post in January. He reported that the position had now been updated to reflect stats until the end of December. Gross rent arrears had increased to £302,523.66 with 389 current tenant arrears cases. Former tenant arrears were £59,000.

He reflected on the positives since starting with the Association. He noted a good working relationship and knowledge within the housing team. He considered that being out in the estate was fundamental to bringing down rent arrears and improving estate management.

The Chair asked if there were any questions. There were none.

Committee noted the update on the arrears position.

9. Policy Report

The Housing Manager presented the following Policies: It was noted that all policies have be updated to reflect our Equalities and Diversity Policy and action plan requirements.

Action: The Chair requested that front cover policies of the policies be amended to reflect if it was a new policy/or a revised policy and that the date of the next review be clearly stated.

Succession Policy:

The policy had been reviewed with no amendments.

Jane Heppenstall noted page 8 of the policy – Adapted properties – which states that a tenancy can only be inherited twice under the provision. She suggested that the paragraph be moved to page 6 – point 7 of the policy to provide a clearer explanation of succession.

Customer Engagement Policy:

The policy had been reviewed and changed to reflect priorities arising from the approved Tenant Participation policy and action plan and to managing dampness.

Neighbourhood Management Policy:

The policy had been reviewed and reference to the garden assistance scheme removed as this service is no longer provided by Glasgow City Council. There were no further amendments.

Action: Jane Heppenstall asked if policies had been checked against the November version of the Scottish Social Housing Charter to reflect where some emphasis and wording that had changed.

Rent Setting Policy:

The policy was amended to reflect the rent setting approach used by the Association to emphasize the difference between rent setting and the process for the annual rent increase.

Vulnerable Tenants – Domestic Abuse Policy

The policy had been reviewed. There were no amendments.

Action: The Chair requested that that the word victims be amended to victims/survivor in both the Tenant and Staff Domestic Abuse Policy..

Vulnerable Staff – Domestic Abuse Policy

The policy had been reviewed. There were no amendments.

Managing dampness, mould and condensation policy and procedures

The Maintenance Manager informed committee that this was new policy and procedure. He noted that it is anticipated that cases of damp and mould will require to be reported to the Regulator at some point. The policy and procedure will be kept under review and developed to take account of legislative requirements.

Michelle Harrow sought clarification on whether we were waiting for an outcome of a national review that had taken place earlier this year. She sought clarification if the policy would require further amendments at that time. The Director advised of a recent meeting with various regulatory bodies to discuss the issues and he was confident that the policy would cover legislation requirements.

Resolution:

Committee approved all of the aforementioned policies subject to policies being checked to take account of the relevant legislation changes to the revised Scottish Social Housing Charter which was published on 1 November 2022.

The policies were approved by Michelle Harrow and seconded by Jane Heppenstall.

10. Asset Management Strategy and action plan

The Maintenance Manager presented the revised and updated Asset Management Strategy and action plan for approval. He advised that the previous strategy had been a bulky document and had been amended to be more concise and user friendly. It had also been reviewed to take on board the outcomes and key recommendations of the SHR's Strategic Asset recommended practice review and the SFHA's revised Asset Management Manual

Resolution:

Committee noted and approved the new Asset Management Strategy and action and consultation to proceed with tenants.

Michelle Harrow proposed and Gordon Kerr seconded the revised Asset Management Strategy and action plan and to progressing to consultation with tenants.

11. Operational update

Director:

EHRA

The Director advised that an EHRA planning day had been scheduled for 8 February 2023 to refocus and refresh the committee and its future direction. An invite was extended to all committee members to attend.

Housing Manager:

The Housing Manager advised that the full staff team had completed its Equality and Diversity training on Tuesday 17 January 2023.

The Housing Manager and Service Improvement Office had attended Rent Increase webinar provided by HomeMaster on 17th January 2023.

The collection of rent arrears and site visits remain a priority.

The Income and Advice officer continues to support tenants. The SFHA 15K fuel insecurity fund has now been closed. 152 households were awarded fuel payment between October 2022 and January 2023.

Maintenance Manager:

The Maintenance Manager Advised estates management recruitment had been unsuccessful. Of the 4 applicants invited only one had attended interview. We will readvertise in February.

He noted a consultation event carried out today in the Hub with Queenslie Recycling. He noted new legislation being implemented for the disposal of beds, curtains etc. and he foresees GCC implementing further charges.

Finance Manager:

The Director reported in the absence of the Finance Manager.

He noted that we had retained a licence with SDM who were our previous providers and mainly for archive information. He advised that we were focused on moving all archive information over to HomeMaster, which would allow us to close down the licence.

Gordon Kerr sought clarification from the Housing Manager on the content of the HomeMaster rent increase webinar and the usefulness thereof. The Housing Manager advised that the process seemed straight forward, provided a brief explanation of the processes and offered to send the information to Gordon.

12. AOCB

There was no other business. Meeting closed 8:00PM

Next Meeting 22 February 2023 at 6PM via Teams and in house