

**Minute of the Management Committee meeting
held on Tuesday 25 January 2022
by Zoom Conference***

Present:

[REDACTED]

In Attendance:

Michael Carberry* (Director); Patricia Davidson* (Corporate Services Officer)

(* attended in office)

1) Apologies

Apologies were received from and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] is on Leave of Absence until her work shift pattern changes. [REDACTED] has advised that she is unable to continue as a Committee member due to childcare responsibilities.

2) Declarations of Interest

It was noted that Committee members who are tenants had an interest in the rent review discussion whilst owners had an interest in the item on Passivent. [REDACTED] declared an interest in item 17(b) and left the meeting during discussion.

3) Adoption of the Previous Minute of 30 November 2021

The minute of the previous meeting was adopted by [REDACTED] and seconded by [REDACTED].

4) Matters Arising from the Previous Minute of 30 November 2021

a) Previous Item 4(a) - Code of Conduct and Register of Interests

The Corporate Services Officer (CSO) will collect the remaining forms

5) Finance

a) Management Accounts to 30 September 2021

The Director advised that [REDACTED] has been on Sick Leave since 5 November and will not return before mid-February at the earliest. Assistance is being provided by NG Homes to deal with [REDACTED] issues. Management Accounts for 30 September and 31 December are being finalised and will be available for the February meeting

b) Rent Review 2022/2023

The Director referred to the papers issued with the agenda:

1. The Association borrowed £5.5 million in 2017, to consolidate existing loans and to fund a Major Repairs programme. It was agreed that rent increases would be RPI + 1.5% until 2022 and then RPI + 1% until 2027
2. The Retail Price Index (RPI) was introduced in 1947 and the Consumer Price Index (CPI), introduced in 2003
3. RPI is generally higher than CPI. Government can be criticised for using the lower CPI measure to calculate payouts to the public, such as, benefits, whilst using higher RPI to calculate what the public have to pay
4. RPI increased from 1.2% in December 2020 to 7.5% in December 2021. CPI was 5.4% in December 2021
5. If CPI is used to calculate rents for 2022/2023, under the 2017 decision, the increase would be 6.4%

6. Inflation is predicted to increase throughout the first six months of 2022. However, it could be argued that there are exceptional circumstances impacting on the economy, such as, the global pandemic and Brexit
7. As a community owned organisation, aware of the financial pressures on its community, a 6.4% increase would be difficult to justify. But the association must make sure it remains financially viable
8. The Committee considered reports on
 - estimated expenditure for the year 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 as £1,273,500
 - current rents and the impact of various percentage increases
 - planned maintenance - external works to Contract 4 (19/27 Dunolly St & 3/7 Sandmill St) – new facia, downpipes and gutters; new close doors and door entry systems. If the programme goes ahead, and is proving successful, similar work at Contract 5 (2/36 & 15/31 Sandmill St) may be brought forward
 - rent increases, since 2004, are 0.4% higher than inflation. Blochairn Place is 0.5% higher than inflation
9. The Tenant Bonus returns £75 to tenants; equal to £1.44 per week
10. An affordability analysis of Blochairn rents in 2020 by Scotland's Housing Network showed that Blochairn's rents are affordable to its client group
11. Proposed increases by other associations. Caution should be used when considering this as existing rent levels are unknown and the stock type, age and condition is unknown. Higher increases relate to business plan projections, similar to Blochairn's 2017 projection
12. Proposed increases for local associations are
 - Ng Homes - 2.7%
 - Hawthorn – 3.2%
 - Copperworks – 4.2%
 - Spire View – 5%

The Committee was asked to consider this information and to propose the increase for 2022/2023. The proposal will be put to tenants for consultation before a decision is made at the February meeting as part of the Budget setting.

During a lengthy discussion the Committee considered how important the Tenant Bonus Scheme/Christmas Bonus was to residents. A saving of £1.44 on weekly rents would be achieved by removing the Tenant Bonus Scheme. It was concluded that the Bonus Scheme was an important measure, highly valued by residents, as evidenced in Tenant Satisfaction Surveys. It is part of Blochairn's culture and ethos, emphasising that everyone has a part to play in making the community and area one that people want to live in and are proud to say they come from.

The Director emphasised that the draft budget was roughly estimated. The full budget would be presented at the February meeting. The 2017 agreement was not written into the bank loan agreement. In any case, the rise in inflation is exceptional. The Association provides regular information to the Bank. The Association has never missed a payment to any Bank in 30 years.

The Director advised that the CSO had recently discussed re-affiliation with the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) and the Glasgow & West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations (GWSF). The Association withdrew from membership several years ago. It was felt that SFHA was not representing small, community owned associations. On the issue of housing sex offenders,

the SFHA did not defend their interests. It is felt that it would be worthwhile re-affiliating to see how things have changed and what benefits the Association may gain. When the Association adopts the latest Rules, the Scottish Housing Regulator accepts the Rules scrutinised by SFHA. Non-members pay £500 for access to the scrutinised Rules. Affiliation to SFHA will cost £1,000.

Affiliation to GWSF would cost £1,909. When the Association left the GWSF, and the Director resigned from its Board, a formal complaint was submitted about how the Association and the Director had been treated. GWSF's approach to the sex offender issue was considered to be not in the interests of community owned associations. The whole episode was toxic. The two Committee members who were on Blochairn's Committee at the time of resignation, felt strongly that the Association should not re-affiliate. After discussion, this was agreed

The CSO advised that she is in discussion with employment law specialists, Croner, and she provided a detailed summary of the benefits that Croner provide. It is proposed to remain affiliated to Employers in Voluntary Housing. This year may see a transition to being more reliant on Croner. It was agreed that the Association would engage Croner.

After discussion the Committee decided that a rent increase of 4% should be put to tenants for consultation.

6) Employers in Voluntary Housing (EVH)

a) Salaries 2022/2023

The Director advised that there had been no further information was available

7) Health, Safety & Human Resources Sub Committee

The Committee noted that the Sub Committee has not met since 16 November.

8) Health & Safety

a) Covid 19

The Committee noted that a Risk Assessment is on Committee iPads. Restrictions are being eased by the Scottish Government. The Finance Assistant is on Sick Leave until at least mid-February. The Housing Services Officer is on Annual Leave until 9 February. It was agreed that staff could assess the position in early February, with a view to opening to the public on Monday 14 February

9) Scottish Government/Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)

a) Annual Assurance Statement (AAS). The Committee noted that there had been no change since the previous meeting

b) Tenant Health & Safety Assurance Survey. The Director referred to the papers issued with the agenda. The survey was received on 12 January. The layout is not ideal and there were immediate requests from associations for clarification on several questions. It may be that the main purpose of issuing the survey at this time is to check on progress with the new smoke alarms. The Director advised that he would respond to the questionnaire and review the documentation held by the Association on the issues raised

10) Tenant Bonus Scheme

a) Christmas Bonus. The Director advised that the Bonus was paid to 204 (71%) tenants. It was withheld from 7 tenants who returned the survey form

b) Monthly Draw. The draw for January will be made by staff. The draw will be made at Committee meetings when Zoom meetings are no longer necessary

11) National Accommodation Strategy for Sex Offenders (NASSO)

a) **NASSO Awareness Group (NAG).** The Director advised that a meeting has been arranged for 27 January. The agenda includes:

- 1) *Membership.* Which of the 10 members want to continue?
- 2) *Section 5 (Homeless) Referrals.* Being made to RSL's who have refused to sign the Information Sharing Agreement and, in some cases, without informing the RSL that the applicant is a sex offender
- 3) *Block Profiling.* A 'Block Profile' would be carried out if a house becomes available near to a sex offender to check whether anyone in the applicant's household is in the sex offender's risk category. If so, the applicant would not be offered the house; but could not be told why. Police/Social Work make the decision. This has been in place at GHA since 2017 and 'rolled out' to other RSL's in 2018

b) **Block Profiling.** A Freedom of Information enquiry will be made to GHA. Letters will be prepared to MSP's, SFHA, the Scottish Housing Regulator asking for their views. FOI enquiries will not be made to other RSL's at this stage

12) Royston Strategy Group

The Director advised that the next meeting was on 28 January.

13) Internal Audit

The Director advised that he had requested that the Internal Audits, due in February, ('Corporate Governance & Risk Management' and 'Long-Term Maintenance Planning') be postponed until October.

He explained that the impact of two years of dealing with the global pandemic has stretched the organisation to the limit. The focus has been on maintaining a service to tenants and other customers; which has been achieved. Staff have worked in the office – as Essential Workers – since March 2020.

It is difficult to operate, fully and properly, remotely. Not being able to hold meetings in person has meant considerable disruption to the Management Committee, delaying strategy meetings to review, for example, the Internal Management Plan or Risk Management Framework.

There has been considerable disruption to staffing levels. At the start of 2021, there were 4 staff. The Housing Services Assistant began Sick Leave in February and left on 30 April. The office ran with 3 staff until the new Housing Services Assistant joined on 16 August.

A Corporate Services Assistant joined on 30 August to increase the staff compliment to 5. The Finance Assistant began sick leave on 5 November and is unlikely to return until late February.

There may be a return, soon, to normal operations, particularly to face to face meetings. Delaying the Internal Audit, assuming that COVID restrictions continue to be relaxed, will give time to bed in new staff and get back to something like normality.

It is also preferable for auditors to be in the office, to meet staff and to tour the area and housing stock, to view its quality, rather than carry out a desk top exercise.

The Internal Auditor cautioned that this would result in no Internal Audit work for 2021/2022. As Internal Audit is a requirement, this may impact the Assurance Statement and the signing off of the accounts by the External Auditor. The Director suggested that, in these exceptional times, a case can be made to explain this, if necessary. He emphasised that he was conscious of the stress that the last two years has brought on to the Association's staff and resident Committee members.

It is hoped that the current Internal Audit programme could be completed by 31 March 2023.

After discussion this action was approved by the Committee.

14) Policy

- a) **Allocations Policy.** The Director advised that the revised allocations policy would be presented when Zoom meetings were no longer required
- b) **Strategy ('Away Day) Meeting.** The CSO advised that the meeting had been postponed due to difficulties in securing a suitable, safe venue

15) Training

The CSO will contact Committee members to ensure that they are registered with SHARE for training courses

16) Items for Future Agendas

Committee members were reminded to advise the Chairperson or Director of issues they might want to discuss under future agendas.

17) Any Other Competent Business

a) Passivent

The Director referred to papers issued with the agenda

- i. The Passivent system was installed in Blochairn Place in 2011, as a new way of ventilating buildings, using minimal energy. Despite indications that it would be a new standard, it has not been installed universally since then
- ii. It has proved difficult to manage because houses above ground floor are linked to a common system, with a mechanical extractor (MEV) in the loft
- iii. The survey of the 11-year-old system identified a number of issues, including poor installation in lofts
- iv. Surveys were carried out in lofts and in houses with no charge to owners, as it was important to get an understanding of how the system works and what maintenance was required
- v. Owners were asked to pay for the new vents within their house (up to £■■■■ for houses above ground floor). If they did not co-operate and agree to fit new vents in their home they would be asked to pay for a share of the common cost of any work required in the loft
- vi. Nine houses above ground floor have had vents renewed. There is slow progress on the remaining 11
- vii. It is proposed that owners are not charged for the cost of the vents in their home. This would be a one-off exercise, to bring all houses and buildings to the required standard
- viii. Annual servicing of the vents and MEV's will be carried out thereafter
- ix. The proposal considers that the system was not described accurately in 2011 and instructions were not passed on regarding future maintenance
- x. Full information was not passed to owners, either those who moved in 2011 or in later years

- xi. Early enquiries revealed that the sub-contractor who fitted the system went out of business soon after 2011
- xii. The cost of this gesture is estimated at £ [REDACTED]

After discussion the Committee approved this action

b) Rechargeable Repairs

The Director referred to the papers issued with the agenda

- i. The current policy is: 'The Association will charge Tenants for the cost of carrying out repairs which are due to the neglect, carelessness or abuse of property and for repairs needed because of problems caused by the Tenant's own equipment or fittings. If property or fittings are damaged because of a criminal act by someone not connected to the Tenant the Association may ask the Tenant to get a Crime Reference Number from the Police'.

The Housing Services Assistant will deal with administration of rechargeable repairs. If possible, the Tenant will be asked to agree to pay for the repair before it is ordered. Alternatively, the Tenant will be advised in writing as soon as possible that the repair is rechargeable. The Tenant will normally be given the option of paying by instalment. Tenants who are unhappy about a recharge can follow the Complaints Procedure. The Housing Services Officer can use discretion and not charge for the repair if the amount is less than £100. Amounts over £100 will be referred to the Management Committee.'

- ii. The Tenant Handbook states: 'You might be recharged for repairs to put the property back to its original condition; because of an accident; because of carelessness, negligence, misuse or abuse or because of forced entry to the house'
- iii. Accidental damage would normally be covered by Household Contents Insurance. Many tenants do not have insurance
- iv. In recent years, procedures have more relaxed. Tenants have not been asked to confirm, in writing, that they will pay the recharge. In many cases, such as, losing keys, there is an urgency and a quick response
- v. Tenants can pay by small instalments. Generally, this means that the situation is uncomplicated and uncontentious
- vi. Two recent cases resulted in a dispute and a formal complaint. Both involved accidental damage to bathroom fittings
- vii. The cost of each repair was found to be reasonable, considering that the plumber had to inspect the job, source and collect the replacement, then return to complete the job. There is also a mark-up on materials
- viii. Tenants were taken aback by the cost. They thought that they could have sourced a replacement much cheaper, if given that option
- ix. Costs: Case 1 – replace bathroom sink - £225.26. Case 2 – replace cistern lid £207. In Case 2 it was not possible to source a lid on its own
- x. In Case 1, it was established that our communication had been poor. There was some confusion caused by staff absence and temporary staff covering
- xi. The complaint was upheld and the recharge was withdrawn
- xii. In Case 2, on reflection, staff should not have acted so quickly or so informally
- xiii. If the tenant had been given time to make his/her own enquiries, they would have realised that replacing a lid was not straightforward
- xiv. This would not result in the complaint being upheld. However, it is recommended that the recharge is written off
- xv. Staff will review procedures, with a view to not treating Rechargeable Repairs with the same urgency as other repairs, unless the tenant expressly requests this and accepts that the repair is rechargeable

After discussion the Committee agreed with these proposals

c) Police Incident

The Committee noted there had been a major Police operation on 5 January in Blochairn Place following a serious assault within a house

d) Tenancy End

The Director advised that the Proof Hearing, scheduled for 25 January, for an eviction due to anti-social behaviour, did not go ahead. The tenant voluntarily ended the tenancy on 19 January and has vacated the house

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