



MARYHILL HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 28TH JANUARY 2021 AT 6.00 PM VIRTUAL MEETING VIA CONFERENCE CALL

Board Members	Attended	Apologies
Roger Popplewell (RP)	✓	
Caitlyn Maccabe (CM)		✓
Colin O'Hara (CO)	✓	
Isabella McTaggart (IM)	✓	
Janaki LakshmiNarayanan (JL)		✓
Jenny Crowe (JC)	✓	
Lindsay Forrest (LF)	✓	
Najah Plakaris (NP)	✓	
Paul Imrie (PI)	✓	
Raphael Rickson (RR)	✓	
Richard Turnock (RT)	✓	
Tim Holmes (TH)	✓	

Officers	Items
Bryony Willett (BW)	1-16
Jennifer Simon (JS)	1-15
Rebecca Wilson (RW)	1-15
Karen Fee (KF)	1-15
Alistair McArthur (AM)	1-15
Carol Bain (CB)	1-15
Robert Reid (RRe)	1-15
Marie Murphy	8-10
Lesley Carnegie (LC)	1-15

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1.	Welcome	
1.1	RP welcomed everyone to the meeting, with apologies noted from CM and JL. There were no declarations of interest.	
2.	Co-option of new Board member	
2.1	Board were asked to approve the appointment of Colin O'Hara onto the Association's Board as a co-optee, with this item taken first so he could fully take part in the rest of the meeting.	
2.2	This was approved and RP welcomed Colin onto the Board.	
3.	Approval of previous Board Minutes	
3.1	Board approved the minutes from their meeting on 26 th November 2020.	
3.2	In relation to the meeting held on 17 th December 2020, IM asked if an adequate supply of spare parts would be kept by contractors for the new Quantum heaters, as this had been a problem in the past. JS confirmed that the Association's main reactive repairs contractor would carry a stock of spare parts once these heaters were being installed. This had not been the case in the past because the heaters were only being piloted. JS agreed to catch up with IM outside of the Board meeting to ensure all	JS

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3.3	<p>issues with her own heater had been resolved.</p> <p>RP asked that the last section of the December minutes be amended to document the reason for the decision to move away from air source heat pumps to electric storage heaters in the Business Plan for 2021/22, which was that storage heaters were now the preferred option. This would be updated before the minutes were finalised.</p>	BW
3.4	<p>With this change the Board then approved the minutes from the 17th December 2020.</p>	
4.	Action Tracker	
4.1	<p>Board approved the updates to the Action Tracker including the actions proposed for closure.</p>	
5.	Chair's Update	
5.1	<p>RP provided an update on activities he had been involved in since the previous Board meeting. These included convening a meeting of those Board members who had expressed an interest in taking on a new office bearer role. This would be covered more fully at item 8 on the agenda. RP had also signed off all Board members' Individual Development Plans as part of the annual review process.</p>	
5.2	<p>RP had participated in an external meeting with Chairs of the other housing associations in the G8 group. This is a group of 8 similarly sized housing associations who meet to exchange ideas and share best practice. This meeting included a useful discussion around succession planning.</p>	
5.3	<p>RP had also discussed a range of minor local issues with PI, LF and BW, jointly agreeing how the Association should respond. This included a leak at Fingal Street and a Living Rent Campaign for social housing to be built on a site at Collina Street.</p>	
6.	Rents and Service Charges 2021-2022	
6.1	<p>JS introduced this item, noting that the annual rent consultation had been based on a potential 1.2% rent increase and that the results were around two thirds in support of this. JS also noted that this had been a particularly successful consultation as there had been an increase in the number of responses compared to previous years. The detailed results were included in an appendix to the report. Also appended were letters from the Tenant Service Improvement Group (TSIG) and from a concerned tenant and member of the Association requesting that there be no increase this year.</p>	
6.2	<p>The main theme from the consultation and letters were that 2020 had been an exceptional year with a lot of tenants facing some form of hardship caused by COVID-19. Taking this on board, officers were</p>	

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	therefore recommending a rent freeze.	
6.3	RW confirmed that the Business Plan had been re-run to show the effects of a 0% rent increase and this confirmed that the Association would still meet both its internal covenants and those required in its loan documentation. These covenants would be met comfortably throughout the 30 year model even with a rent freeze. The key reason for this was the change from using air source heat pumps to electric storage heaters at the Glenavon blocks.	
6.4	RP asked for an update on the EVH salary negotiations. BW confirmed that these negotiations were ongoing. It had been suggested that the salary increase would be around the average of CPI in the autumn, so 0.5% had been used for the re-run of the Business Plan. RW advised that the current CPI rate was 0.8%, but even if this was used for the salary increase the difference to the Business Plan would be immaterial in terms of the financial viability assessment.	
6.5	TH noted that the 1.2% consulted on was still lower than the usual increase and that the consultation had been in favour of this. TH suggested that 1.2% could give more flexibility to move to lower rent increases earlier in future. TH also noted that the paper refers to a reputational issue with having any rent increase, but as around 80% of housing associations in Scotland were planning some form of increase this was not a significant concern. An alternative viewpoint would therefore be that a smaller increase such as 0.7% might be a good compromise.	
6.6	PI expressed his view that if the Association can freeze rent for the coming year without breaching covenants then this would be the best thing to do. This would show that the Association recognised the difficulties faced by tenants such as redundancy and pay decreases.	
6.7	RP noted that is the ambition of the Association to move to CPI only rent increases in future. RP asked if a rent freeze now would mean that was delayed. RW confirmed that this would not be the case. The significant alteration in the Investment Programme around the heating at Glenavon meant there was the opportunity to have a rent freeze without a significant impact.	
6.8	TH noted that other improvement programmes had previously been delayed to be able to afford the air source heat pump project at Glenavon. RW advised that the forecasts would be re-run for the March Board meeting and that the updated Investment Programme would also be presented for approval.	
6.9	RT noted the positive level of consultation achieved and commended management for considering the rent increase of 0% and confirming that the Business Plan would allow this. RT suggested that if the Association were ever to have a rent freeze then the year of a pandemic and low CPI would be the time to do it. RT agreed with TH that the Association could	

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	<p>be further ahead if there were a small increase, but that 0% would be a positive decision for tenants.</p>	
6.10	<p>NP confirmed that she would support a rent freeze. NP agreed with RT that this year would be one of the only years where this could actually go ahead without a significant impact on the business. It would be positive for the Association to support the Maryhill community in difficult times and customers would remember this.</p>	
6.11	<p>CO agreed with NP and RT that a rent freeze would be preferable. CO noted that there was a lot of activism around fair rents in Maryhill currently, and that this would therefore be seen positively.</p>	
6.12	<p>RR noted that with the air source heat pumps not going ahead in the high rise properties tenants might wonder what a rent increase was for if this planned improvement was no longer happening. A rent freeze may help placate some of that tenant anxiety.</p>	
6.13	<p>IM supported the proposed rent freeze, agreeing that this was the year to do it given the difficulties of 2020. JS confirmed that officers were definitely seeing an increase in tenants losing their jobs or losing pay. The proposed rent freeze was to show the Association was standing in solidarity with its communities.</p>	
6.14	<p>RP thanked everyone for their valuable contributions to an important decision. Board then approved the following for rent and service charges:</p> <p>For all general needs and retirement properties: To apply a rent increase of 0% from April 2021 which is lower than the increase consulted on in view of the extenuating circumstances linked to covid and affordability for customers. From a business viability point of view the business plan projections confirm that applying a rent increase of 0% will allow the Association to remain financially viable in the long term.</p> <p>For retirement housing tenants To delegate authority to the Chair to set service charges from April 2021 based on projected costs for the services following consultation with tenants.</p> <p>For leased properties and temporary furnished flats: To increase rents by 2.1% this reflects an increase of September RPI (1.1%) plus 1%.</p> <p>For shared ownership properties: To increase the rental element from April 2021 in line with the increase being applied to general needs tenants and apply an increase of 0%.</p> <p>For lock ups To increase the lock up charge by 1.2% in line with the original proposal.</p> <p>For factored properties:</p>	

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	To increase the annual management fee by 1.2% in line with the original proposal.	
7.	Maryhill's ambition for new build development	
7.1	AM introduced this item, explaining that the Strategy and Development Funding Plan (SDFP) was due to be submitted to Glasgow City Council (GCC), contributing to their overall housing strategy and plan for Scottish Government. AM explained that Block A in the SDFP included our current projects, and Block C included the current feasibility studies that would be brought to Board for consideration next year.	
7.2	RP asked Board members if they were content with the breadth of the proposed development programme.	
7.3	PI confirmed that he was in support of the programme and that what the Association was planning was a great step for the local area. PI noted that it was positive to see work started at Botany Corner, and that with this in mind the Association should really push to obtain the adjacent Maryhill Cross site.	
7.4	IM asked if the Smeaton Street development started in May 2021 whether the 12 month contract could be achieved. AM confirmed that the contract length would not be affected by the start date.	
7.5	Board then approved the Strategy and Development Funding Plan for submission to Glasgow City Council.	
8.	Board development and succession planning	
8.1	RP introduced the Board Appraisal Report. RP noted that in relation to succession planning LF had agreed to step up to become Chair. This would be confirmed at the first Board meeting after the AGM in September 2021.	
8.2	RP drew Board members' attention to the table in the report that outlined the areas for improvement that had been identified via individual Board member reviews and the collective review, asking if they agreed with the items in the table.	
8.3	LF confirmed that these items reflected what was said in feedback both individually and collectively.	
8.4	RT noted that one area of concern in the past was succession. RT noted that the Board was now in a very different position and that there had been really positive development of the Board, which was now in a much better position with strong new members and a succession plan in place. TH agreed that the work officers had carried out to recruit new members was positive and that things felt stronger than they were a year ago.	
8.5	RP asked that one additional item be included on the Governance	

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8.6	Effectiveness Plan for 2021-22 around having some kind of social event for the Board once COVID restrictions were lifted. This would allow everyone to get to know the new Board members. Board agreed the areas for improvement outlined in the Board Appraisal Report and agreed the next steps for developing the overall Governance Effectiveness Plan for 2021-22.	LC
8.7	Board also approved the recruitment of a co-opted Board member with finance expertise as well as corporate management experience such as HR and IT.	
8.8	MM joined the meeting at this point.	
9.	Recruitment and Selection Policy	
9.1	MM introduced this item, explaining that the policy was being reviewed earlier than the usual 3-year point to allow the Association to modernise and streamline its approach to recruitment. This was following feedback from managers and staff.	
9.2	RP asked if section 4.6 of the policy could be extended to cover the situation where the appointed candidate leaves within for example 3 months, so that the Association could go back to the second placed candidate without readvertising. MM confirmed that this was possible and would be added to the final version of the policy.	MM
9.3	RP asked if there would be specific arrangements in place for recruitment to the CEO post. MM advised that part of the recruitment procedure was a matrix that included details of the approach for CEO recruitment. MM agreed to update the policy to say that the Association would refer to best practice from the Scottish Housing Regulator when recruiting a new CEO.	MM
9.4	RP asked if the policy incorporated lessons learned from previous restructuring exercises, during which vacant posts had taken a long time to fill despite the candidates being internal. MM confirmed that the new policy provided a more consistent approach to recruitment and enabled posts to be filled more quickly. However some of the delays during the restructure were due to the decision to use assessment centres. A large restructure can also take longer due to the requirements for consultation and the legal regulations that need to be met.	
9.5	TH had discussed the policy with MM prior to the meeting. MM confirmed that the final version of the policy would also incorporate his feedback.	MM
9.6	With these changes the Board approved the Recruitment and Selection Policy.	
10.	Electrical Safety Policy	
10.1	CB introduced the revised Electrical Safety Policy that sits within the	

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10.2	<p>Landlord Health & Safety Control Manual, explaining that the changes brought the policy in line with best practice and current regulations.</p> <p>TH had discussed the policy with CB prior to meeting. The policy wording around the frequency of Electrical Installation Condition Reports (EICR) checks would be changed in the final version of the policy as a result of this discussion.</p>	CB
10.3	<p>RP asked whether paragraph 5.1 precluded the provision of emergency electric heaters, if for example a gas boiler can't be quickly replaced. CB confirmed that portable electric heating would be provided in the event of heating failure, and that these would be brand new heaters that were not expected to be returned. The policy would be updated to reflect this.</p>	CB
10.4	<p>CB advised that the approach to electrical safety was currently being audited by an external health and safety expert. The report will be presented to Audit & Risk Committee in February 2021. The policy would be further updated at that point if required.</p>	CB
10.5	<p>With these changes Board then approved the Electrical Safety Policy for inclusion into the Association's Landlord Health and Safety Control Manual.</p>	
11.	Rent Arrears Policy	
11.1	<p>RRe introduced this item, noting that there were not many amendments being proposed as the recent internal audit of arrears management had found the policy to be robust.</p>	
11.2	<p>IM asked whether the Association was allowed to request rent in advance. RRe advised that rent in advance was a tenancy condition. However the policy allows for discretion to be used in cases where there are mitigating factors, and in Section 5 homelessness referrals from Glasgow City Council.</p>	
11.3	<p>Board then approved the Rent Arrears Policy.</p>	
12.	Business Continuity Policy	
12.1	<p>RP introduced this item, noting that the previous policy had focused on IT failure and that the new policy had been developed to reflect wider business continuity.</p>	
12.2	<p>KF confirmed that the new policy also incorporated learning from the last year and dealing with the impact of a pandemic. KF advised that approval of the policy would be followed by development of a Business Continuity Plan for the Association, which would be completed over the next financial year.</p>	
12.3	<p>RP noted that it had been remarkable how staff had kept services running throughout the challenges of last year and passed on the Board's thanks</p>	

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12.4	to everyone. Board then approved the Business Continuity Policy.	
13.	Development Team – 1 year review	
13.1	RP introduced this item, explaining that a review is carried out after a year has passed from each team restructure. BW confirmed that this review had been delayed but that no major issues had been identified.	
13.2	RP explained that Maryhill Housing’s development team also works across other housing associations. This was positive for attracting candidates when recruiting, and helped ensure there was always a consistent workload for the team.	
13.3	The Board noted the results of the review of the Development Team staffing structure.	
14.	COVID impact and relaunch summary	
14.1	KF introduced the standard COVID impact analysis and update on relaunch planning.	
14.2	RP asked why when there was a backlog of voids there was still an overspend on the void repairs budget. JS explained that there were a number of key points causing the increase in spend including the lack of pre-termination inspections to agree repairs, lack of in-person Property Officer visits to the property to agree the specification and a reduction in reactive repairs during COVID restrictions. It had also been discovered that recharges had not been happening for two Property Officer patches, which had now been rectified. There had also been an increase in costs for decoration works that would not normally be carried out.	
14.3	TH noted that officers had reflected on the start of lockdown and felt that more staff could have been furloughed. TH asked if this was currently the case. JC noted her surprise at such low levels of the furlough scheme currently being utilised, suggesting that this should be seen as an opportunity for savings given the ongoing restrictions likely to last into March and beyond.	
14.4	BW confirmed that this had been considered recently for Property and Community Regeneration teams but that senior managers were confident that both were being fully utilised. There was also one Property Officer on long term sick and one due to retire soon, which had an impact on the team.	
14.5	JS noted that one of the considerations had to be the wellbeing of the staff members not furloughed, who would have to pick up the extra workload. Calls to the main line were now back up to normal levels, so Customer Contact and Housing Teams were busy. The Neighbourhood Team was still fully utilised through their cleaning services and safety	

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14.6	<p>checks. There was therefore not a lot of scope to remove people from the workforce.</p> <p>RP asked that this was kept under review as things progress. BW suggested that benchmarking information on the use of furlough might be useful, and that this was possible via the Scottish Housing Regulator's COVID statistical return. It was agreed that this should be added to the COVID update for the next Board meeting.</p>	KF
14.7	The Board noted the COVID Impact Analysis as at 15 th January 2021 and the progress on relaunch planning.	
15.	CEO Report	
15.1	<p>BW introduced the latest CEO report, also referring to an email that had recently been sent to Board members with an additional item for consideration.</p>	
15.2	TH asked about paragraph 1.4 which referred to homeworking, noting that managers would need to think about how teams work together and communicate, and how management will successfully monitor performance. BW confirmed that the proposed Remote Working Policy would refer to this and would be supported by a range of accompanying procedures and management guidance.	