

## 3a. Minute

**Barrhead Housing**  
**Minute of Governing Board Meeting**  
**Thursday 22 February 2024 6pm**  
**BHA Offices and by Video Conference**

### Present

J Hamilton (Chair)	D McKinney (Vice Chair)
A Oliver	J Whyteside
LA Junner	Clr Devlin
Beth Welsh	
Deborah McVey	

### In Attendance

L Wilson	Chief Executive (CEO)
K Devon	Minute Taker (CSO)
C McCulloch	Director of Customer Services (DCS)
L Rice	Director of Finance and Corporate Services (DFCS)
S Stewart	Director of Assets and Communities (DAC)
F Lees	North Star Consulting & Research (Observer)

<b>Minute – BHA Governing Board Meeting</b>	
<b>1</b>	<p><b>The meeting started at 6.00pm</b></p> <p><b>Apologies &amp; Sederunt Check</b> Apologies were received from P McIlvenny, R McGuire (BEM), A Glasgow and B Connelly.</p>
<b>2</b>	<p><b>Declaration of Interest: Board and Staff</b> There were no declarations of interest.</p>
<b>3</b>	<p><b><u>Approval of Minutes</u></b></p> <p><b>3a. Approval of Governing Board Minute of 14 December 2023</b> The Board <b>approved</b> the minutes as a true record.</p> <p><b>3b. Board Action Tracker February 2024</b> The Board noted the action tracker.</p>
<b>4</b>	<p><b>Matters arising from minutes</b> There were no matters arising.</p>
<b>5</b>	<p><b>Matters for Approval</b></p>

**5.1 Final Business Strategy, Delivery Plan and Performance Framework**

The CEO presented the report to the Board seeking approval of the 2030 strategy.

The key highlights:

- The Governing Board approved the new draft strategy on 14 December 2023.
- The consultation was launched on 22 January until 16 February to the team and public via social media, website, posters, flyers, emails and an online survey.
- Feedback was overwhelmingly positive.
- A few minor changes were made between draft and final document as a result of the consultation. These are detailed in report.
- Launch of the strategy will take place March and April via several communication channels: Media release, newsletter, social media campaign, website & presentations to key partners.

The CEO extended an invitation for feedback and welcomed any questions from the Board.

The Board remarked on the ambitious new build targets and noted that any withdrawal of funding by the Scottish Government would impact the plans.

The CEO stated that the clarity regarding the reduction in funding has not yet been provided, and the Scottish Government will provide updates on funding once the situation becomes clearer.

The Board noted that coverage should encompass areas beyond Barrhead, considering the Association's broader scope, and they asked about the plan for the media release.

The CEO expressed a desire to discuss the media release with J. Whyteside, Board member given their expertise in this field. J. Whyteside agreed and expressed willingness to assist and advise.

Finally, the Board concluded that the strategy represented an ambitious yet impressive plan. They recommended that it be reviewed annually to assess progress towards the ambitious targets set.

The Board **approved:**

The final business strategy 2030.

The communication plan for the strategy launch.

The delivery plan for 2024/25.

The performance framework for 2024/25.

**5.2 Rent increase 2024**

The DCS presented the rent increase consultation to the Board.

The key points highlighted were:

- A consultation proposing a 6.6% rent increase was sent out to all tenants.
- 158 responses were received.
- 54% of tenants were satisfied or very satisfied with the level of information given in the proposal.
- The most common themes mentioned were repairs, investment in homes and high cost of living.
- 74% of tenants stated they were managing finance 'okay', 11% had no concerns about finances and 15% were struggling at present.
- Progress has been made towards rent harmonisation. 417 properties now have harmonised compared with 267 last year.
- The GWSF annual survey showed rent increases across the board range from 4% to 8% with the average likely to be 5.5% to 6.6% for 2024/25.

The Board asked for further information on the rent harmonization, seeking clarification on whether the rents were deemed to be too high or too low.

The DFCS confirmed that the rents were evenly divided, with around 50% being considered too high and 50% too low. During the rent setting for 2023/24 and 2024/25, high inflation prompted a cap on rents deemed too high. However, for those rents considered too low, it was deemed unreasonable to raise the rents by more than the proposed increase.

The Board noted from the consultation responses that 78% of tenants who pay their rent without Universal Credit support disagreed with the proposal.

The DCS clarified that tenants who do not receive support from Universal Credit will be specifically targeted to help and support to ensure they can afford their housing costs.

The DCS concluded that without a rent increase, the programme of works and investment would not be feasible. However, they acknowledged that a 6.6% increase is high for those on low incomes, and the team is actively focusing on assisting tenants in this category.

The Board emphasised their concern regarding the negative comments and responses received during the consultation. They requested a follow-up report after contact had been made with these customers.

The Board **approved** the rent increase of 6.6% and stipulated that they must receive a report on the response to the negative feedback.

### 5.3 Final budget 2024/25

The DFCS presented the final budget for 2024/25.

The main points highlighted were:

- Interest cover loan covenants are tight but there is scope to include an adjustment for major repairs funded by reserves if the Board agrees. Our lenders have confirmed by

email that they are comfortable with a calculation including adjustments for major repairs funded by reserves in relation to the current financial year.

- Minor adjustments have been made to investment. £20k contingency for component replacements and the ROTS budget has been increased to £640k, assuming eight properties are bought at £80k each and attracting 50% government grant.
- The budget now shows grants expected in relation to Blackburn Square (£100k) and ROTS (£320k).
- Rent loss from voids has been reduced to £45k.
- Salaries have increased by £13k due to: maternity cover, extending finance admin assistant for HomeMaster implementation and EVH salary increases expected 1 April.

The DFCS welcomed any questions from the Board.

The Board deliberated on the "Golden Rules" and the value of cash reserves the association should hold.

The board discussed the budgeted interest cover and agreed it was closer than they were comfortable with. It was suggested that since we have scope to adjust for major repairs funded from reserves, we should assume making whatever adjustment would allow us to achieve 120% interest cover on our tightest covenant.

The DFCS mentioned that the salary increase hadn't been finalised and would return to the Board with an update from EVH. A 5.5% increase is the assumption.

The Board approved the final budget with the caveat of maintaining a 10% cash reserves value.

#### **5.4 Policy approvals**

##### **5.4a Agile Working Policy**

The DFCS presented the agile working policy to the board, seeking approval for implementation on 1 April 2024, initially for a trial period of one year.

The key points highlighted were:

- There was extensive discussion and consultation with staff prior to writing the policy.
- The agile policy does not affect the flexible working policy.
- The policy would replace the current toil or flexi-time system, which allows employees to build up time in credit.
- There will be no need to clock in and out during the working day. The clock-in function will remain available to staff as some stated they want to monitor times worked for wellbeing reasons.
- Unite, the union, were informed of the draft policy before launching the consultation to employees.

- There has been extensive research carried out. Another housing association currently operates a similar system which offers 20 agile days. This seemed excessive and the Executive Team is recommending 12 days per year which aligns with the current toil policy of 14 hours per two months.
- Agile days are fairer across the board, especially for staff who are unable to accrue additional hours.
- Agile days contribute to staff wellbeing and could help prevent burnout.
- The approximate maximum notional cost of granting 12 agile days is £76k. This is not a real additional financial cost as it is met within the existing staff budget. It is however offset by several benefits to the Association, such as;  
Employee retention, resulting in lower recruitment costs.  
Attracting high quality employees, given candidates often cite work flexibility as very important.  
Lower sickness, due to the ability to take agile days and avoid burnout.  
Better productivity by employees and goodwill to go 'above and beyond'.

The DFCS welcomed any comments or questions from the Board.

The Board raised the following questions:

- Is the policy fair, given some roles are front facing and they may not have the same flexibility to take agile days?
- Does £76k represent the actual cost and is it based on the assumption that everyone would work 35 hours per week?
- Will staff use all 12 agile days?
- If advance approval is not required, how will the agile days be coordinated?

The Executive Team's response to the Board's questions:

- The current toil and flexi-time system operates on a two-tier basis. For instance, while some staff members have the flexibility to work late, others may have constraints due to varying commitments.
- The current trend is staff work more and go above and beyond their contractual 35 hours per week.
- Staff can currently take one toil day per month. Upon reviewing the toil days taken, it's evident that staff are not using up to 12 days within a 12-month period. Therefore, it's assumed that not all agile days will be taken.
- Staff presently coordinate annual leave, flexi-time, and sickness cover. Agile days would follow a similar process but with less rigidity, as team members can be relied upon to manage cover within departments.

J Hamilton and L Junner left the meeting at 7pm.

The Board members engaged in a detailed discussion regarding fairness, staff capabilities, their efficiency, and whether offering 12 optional agile days was excessively generous.

The Executive Team emphasised that staff currently have the option to take 12 toil days in a year, with the key distinction being that agile days would not require accruing time. This would ensure fairness for those unable to accumulate time from working extra hours.

Due to Barrhead Housing being a small organisation, there would be transparency regarding agile days and the productivity of staff during a working day.

Finally, the DFCS noted that financial incentives are not viable within the voluntary sector, and time serves as a valuable benefit for staff.

The Board reached the conclusion that the agile working policy represented a cultural advancement but expressed concerns regarding the allocation of 12 days.

D. McVey requested that it be noted in the minutes that she endorsed the philosophy of the agile working policy but not the allocation of 12 days.

The Board **approved** the implementation of the agile working policy on a trial basis for 6 months, granting 6 days. They welcomed the inclusion of a review after 3 months as part of the proposal.

#### **5.4b Allocations Policy**

The DCS presented the Allocations and Housing Options policies to the Board.

They highlighted the following key points:

- There was a minor change to the draft policy following feedback from ERC with reference to their role.
- There were no further alterations made to the draft policy apart from enhancing clarity in the wording, as per the feedback received from the Board on 14 December 2023.
- If the policy is approved the DCS will report to customers formally before the new policy is implemented from April 2024.
- Homelessness applications will remain a priority, and the Board will be requested to approve the quotas annually.

Furthermore, the DCS mentioned that following a poll for the name of the new AI chatbot on the new website, the chosen name was Vox, derived from Latin, meaning "voice."

The board **approved** the allocations and housing options policies.

Cllr. Devlin left the meeting at 7.35pm.

#### **5.4c Debt Recovery Policy**

The DCS presented the policy to the board and welcomed any feedback or questions.

	<p>The Board expressed satisfaction with the policy but enquired about the measures in place to ensure staff safety during visits related to rent arrears.</p> <p>The DCS verified that there are alerts in place to notify team members if tenants require a two-person visit. Additionally, employees have a lone working app installed on their work mobiles, enabling them to be tracked and quickly call for assistance via the app if needed.</p> <p>The board <b>approved</b> the policy and immediate implementation.</p> <p><b>5.5 Governance and Compliance Report</b> The CEO presented the report to the board and noted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ There will continue to be six Board meetings per year.</li> <li>➤ The AGM will be arranged for September 2024.</li> <li>➤ The Board away day will be planned for week commencing 4 November 2024.</li> <li>➤ The Audit, Risk and Health and Safety sub-group will meet quarterly.</li> <li>➤ The Development sub-group will meet six monthly.</li> <li>➤ The Governance planner contains proposed agenda items. This gives the Board members the opportunity to feed into future agendas.</li> <li>➤ Meeting invites will be sent via Teams if approved.</li> <li>➤ The Board agreed and confirmed they wanted to maintain the frequency of Governing Board meetings at six per year.</li> </ul> <p>The Board <b>approved</b> the board meeting schedule and planner and noted the report.</p>
<p><b>6</b></p>	<p><b>Matters for discussion</b></p> <p><b>6.1 Six month review of asset strategy and investment plan</b></p> <p>The DAC presented the six-month review to the Board.</p> <p>The key points highlighted were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 16 of the 19 action points have now been completed.</li> <li>➤ On course to complete the strategy by 2025.</li> <li>➤ The kitchen replacement contract is due to complete next week and is on budget.</li> <li>➤ 45 properties have new heating system upgrades.</li> <li>➤ We have acquired five properties via ROTS (rent off the shelf)</li> <li>➤ The windows and doors replacement programme has been a great success and is forecasted to complete under budget.</li> </ul> <p>The Board commended the team on the strategy and investment plan, expressing appreciation for not only meeting deadlines but also staying within budget. They expressed great satisfaction with the report.</p> <p>The Board noted the report.</p>

## **6.2 FLAIR shared services opportunities report**

The CEO presented the report to board.

The main points highlighted were:

- The steering group is being led by the CEO, looking at opportunities for shared services across FLAIR member housing associations.
- There are opportunities to share services with other housing associations. Barrhead Housing already procures development services from Maryhill HA, providing flexibility as there is no requirement to employ development officers.
- The report summarises a list of ideas from the steering group, including services such as shared HR resource, tenancy sustainment and support services, and access to expertise in achieving net zero.
- Community-based resources will not be shared, as the intention is to keep them local and tenant-focused. The Community Investment Manager previously held a dual role and collaborated with another Housing Association, which didn't work and Barrhead Housing reverted to employing them full time.

The CEO invited any questions or comments from the Board regarding the reports and analysis presented. The CEO noted that the Board will be kept informed of any updates regarding the feasibility study.

Following discussion, the board noted the report.

## **6.3 Investors in People report**

The CEO announced that Barrhead Housing has attained the Investors in People Gold status. The complete report was provided to the Board. The recommendations will be discussed at the full staff meeting on 28 February and an action plan will be formed.

The Governing Board extended congratulations to the team for this huge achievement and noted that it was pleased that it will be shared at the team meeting on 28 February.

## **6.4 CEO verbal update**

The first episode of the 'Barrhead Housing Podcast' has been recorded and shared with the full team, receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback. The leadership team will be interviewed for upcoming episodes focused on embracing mistakes and learning from them, with the aim of encouraging openness among the team.

A reminder that the first session of the Governing Board Health and safety training will be held via Teams on 23 February at 12pm.



## Minute

---

<b>7</b>	<b>Parent Monitoring</b> <b>Development sub-group</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 21 March 2024 6pm</li></ul> <b>Audit, risk and health and safety sub-group</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Met 15 February 2024</li></ul> <b>LPS board</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 14 March 2024 5.30pm</li></ul>
<b>8</b>	<b>Any other business</b> None.

**Date and time of next meeting(s):**

**18 April 2024 at 6.00pm**

Signed by Chairperson: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_