

MINUTES OF THE 545TH MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING OF WILLIAMSBURGH HOUSING ASSOCIATION, HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 14TH FEBRUARY 2024 AT 6PM (HYBRID)

PRESENT:	D. Eadie M. Symons Cllr. M. MacLaren T. Thomson R. Coelho	Acting Chairperson
OBSERVER:	██████████	
IN ATTENDANCE:	J. Grant L. Ramsay L. Ferrie G. Scott L. Fleeting	Chief Executive Officer Head of Finance & Corporate Services Head of Housing Head of Development HR Manager

The Management Committee elected D. Eadie (Vice Chair) to sit as Chairperson for this meeting (in the absence of J. Scott), proposed by M. Symons, seconded by T. Thomson.

1. (a) Apologies

Apologies were received from J. Scott, E. McDermott, J. Kerr, C. Henry, A. Ballantine (Committee members) and ██████████ (Observers).

(b) Declarations of Interest

Cllr. M. MacLaren declared an interest in item 6, relating to Renfrewshire Council and would not participate in the item.

M. Symons declared an interest in item 7 and would not participate in the item.

J Grant, L. Ramsay, L. Ferrie, G. Scott and L. Fleeting declared an interest in item 5 and would not participate in the discussion relating to the report.

2. (a) Minutes of Management Committee Meeting: 12.01.24 (No.544)

The minutes of the Management Committee meeting held on Friday, 12th January 2024 (No.544) were proposed correct, on a motion proposed by R. Coelho, seconded by T. Thomson.

(b) Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

3. Rent Review 2024/25

L. Ferrie presented the report, providing an outline of the new rent consultation process and advised that most tenants preferred the 5.5% increase. The results, in terms of responses were the highest ever, with over 600 tenants providing their view on the options. Only one critical comment was received, which took the view that there should be no rent increase.

L. Ramsay presented the updated financial plan, operational budgets and 30 year projections, noting that the plans had been amended since the first iterations of them were discussed at the November Management Committee meeting. The key change related to the adjusted future rent increase approach, notably to include above inflation rises from 2025/26. This followed the discussion at the Committee's strategic planning day in January where this approach was acknowledged as necessary to continue levels of investment and new build activity. It was further explained that cost growth was showing some positive early signs of levelling off, following recent focus on procurement and contract management in reactive repairs and voids.

A member welcomed the high level of response from tenants and thanked staff for all the work that had gone into getting these.

A member noted that the increase of 5.5% was the right level of increase in the current cost of living context but that future increases would have to be higher to compensate for the last three years of cost increases.

A member asked if welfare benefit checks and support were offered to tenants as part of the rent increase process? L. Ferrie advised that this is the case, as W.H.A. has a dedicated member of staff, who provides this service all year round.

There was a short discussion relating to responding to messages posted on Facebook where it was noted that standardised responses are posted in reply.

3. Rent Review 2024/25 Contd.

The recommendations were approved – to implement the 5.5% rent increase, the 2024/25 service charges, the 20024/25 factoring management and selling fees, and also to approve the 30 year financial projections and the operational budgets for 2024/25 – proposed by M. Symons, seconded by D. Eadie.

4. Strategic Risk Review and Presentation

J. Grant provided a presentation providing an overview of the current strategic risks facing the Association, including the Scottish Housing Regulator's assessment of the key risks facing the sector. It was explained that uncertainty and volatility were continuing, making it essential that a prudent approach to risk was maintained. The appetite for risk was to remain low with a continuing significant investment of resources into compliance activity such as tenant safety/health and safety, GDPR and cyber-security. Mitigation actions were explained and links to the proposed new strategic objectives for 2024/25 were highlighted.

Members welcomed the overview and agreed that the risk appetite should remain low, and that uncertainty was likely to continue for some time.

A member agreed with the key risks and supported the approach to resourcing the mitigations. These were good where we have control but is the challenge greater for risks that we have less control over? J. Grant agreed and noted some risks where much is still unknown, such as the Net Zero standards, that are high impact and high likelihood. He explained that a worst-case scenario is assumed for these types of risks with more flexible mitigations in place, as a result.

A member agreed that it was a comprehensive list and had no further risks to add.

The recommendation was approved – adopt the strategic risks for 2024/25 – proposed by Cllr. M. MacLaren, seconded by T. Thomson.

5. Revised Employment Terms and Conditions

L. Fleeting presented the report, explaining that the HR Strategy implementation action plan has now resulted in the review of 14 policies and included a review of T&Cs. The proposed changes to T&Cs are to adjust annual leave carry-forward and to extend notice periods for key specialist roles and for all the Senior Management Team members. The changes to T&Cs are supported by the Staff Forum.

5. Revised Employment Terms and Conditions Contd.

A member welcomed the progress on modernising the HR policies and agreed it was sensible changes that were proposed which were in line with industry standards.

A member asked if flexible working and flexitime would be reviewed in the future? J. Grant advised that this was included as an objective for 2024/25.

The recommendations were approved – amendments to the Conditions of Service, issue revised T&Cs to staff and to make the current Staff Handbook obsolete – proposed by T. Thomson, seconded by R. Coelho.

6. New Build Report

G. Scott presented the report and advised that the Scottish Government grant offer had been received after the Committee reports were issued. The grant offer is as expected and as outlined in the November Management Committee report. Due to the tight turnaround, Committee were asked if they were content to approve acceptance of the grant offer at the meeting and, therefore, that the project would be taken forward as planned. This was approved, proposed by M. Symons, seconded by T. Thomson.

G. Scott provided an update on the grant funded strategic acquisitions project, advising this was making good progress with 2 properties purchased and another expected to be purchased in February.

A member thanked G. Scott and the team for the purchases and advised that this was a good strategy for the future when new build was becoming so expensive.

The recommendation was approved – continuation of the strategic acquisitions programme into 2024/25 – proposed by M. Symons, seconded by T. Thomson.

7. Chief Executive's Report

J. Grant presented the report, providing an update on the pay award position and the progress with the investment works planned for Ralston House. The update from TPT regarding the future pension deficit was outlined and W.H.A.'s contingency plans to mitigate potential risks. The FLAIR shared services project was outlined, with the shortlist of options explained. The position with Shareholding Membership was also highlighted and the appetite to re-instate a membership in specific circumstances was explained.

A member noted the update on the pensions deficit and highlighted why it was important that the pensions review had been completed. This would help to reduce risk and future exposure to deficit payments.

7. Chief Executive's Report Contd.

The recommendations were approved - the CEO can take forward shared service opportunities, from the short-list of options, with FLAIR associations and for the re-instatement of a Shareholding Membership.

8. Assurance Statement: Self-Assessment Review

J. Grant presented the report, explaining that the purpose of the Assurance Statement process is to enable the Committee to demonstrate that it is satisfied that the Association is either achieving compliance or is working to do so. The Assurance Statement self-assessment document is subject to a rolling review, where any changes to compliance are recorded. The approach taken is to record against each standard to demonstrate the status of current compliance.

It was highlighted that good progress continues to be made in improving compliance in areas identified for improvement. No areas of material non-compliance had been identified and two new areas of improvement had been included in the action plan, relating to the Factoring service and the process for estates inspections of common areas.

A member thanked the team for the update and welcomed the regular review. While not being complacent, the detail provided and the openness to making improvements does provide a good level of assurance.

A member thanked the team for the progress on making improvements to areas where they were needed. The extra focus on homelessness lets and procurement were good news.

The Committee noted the report.

9. Health and Safety Annual Report

J. Grant presented the report, highlighting the continuing focus on compliance with health and safety for staff and tenants. A wide range of activities had been completed in the last twelve months, including significant staff training, investment in the office, new processes for safe systems of work and an overhaul of all risk assessments. Compliance for tenant safety is at its highest level, with all key indicators being met and significant investment having been completed across the housing stock. Most importantly, the organisational culture had changed with all staff involved in the improvements. More activity is planned for 2024/25 to build on what has been achieved so far.

9. Health and Safety Annual Report Contd.

A member welcomed the good progress and agreed it must remain the top priority for the organisation. How much progress has been made on addressing dampness and mould? J. Grant advised that monitoring and reporting is in place alongside a new policy and process. Tenant information is available on the website and through the newsletter. Humidity and air quality monitoring systems have been installed in two properties, and one of these will be receiving a new mechanical ventilation system. The increasing airtightness of properties, to achieve net zero standards, is resulting in some issues with increased dampness and this will be closely monitored to inform future investment decisions.

The Committee noted the report.

10. Strategic Objectives Q3

J. Grant presented the report, highlighting continued delivery of the objectives in the third quarter. Highlights included the pensions review, tenant engagement officer in post, new Management Committee member recruitment, purchase of properties on the open market and the external review of Energy Performance data for EESSH and future net zero standards. This is in the context of the continuing achievement of service performance targets.

The Committee noted the report.

11. Any Other Business

L. Ferrie presented the Factoring Service Written Statement of Service (WSS), which had received minor amendments, and had been a late addition to the Committee papers.

The Written Statement of Service was approved, proposed by M. Symons, seconded by D. Eadie.

J. Grant provided a verbal update on the Regulatory Framework, following the completion of the SHR's recent review. A more detailed report on the changes would be provided for the March Management Committee meeting.

12. Date and Time of Next Meeting

D. Eadie thanked everyone for their attendance and advised that the next scheduled meeting of Williamsburgh Housing Association's Management Committee would be held on **Wednesday, 27th March 2024 at 6:00 pm (Hybrid)**.

CHAIRPERSON:

DATE: