

Minutes from the Strategic Board meeting

Date 06/02/2024

Time 16:00 - 18:30

Location Zoom

Chair Sandra Stock

Explanation Present:

Mrs Sandra Stock - Chair

Mr Brian Fisher - Vice Chair

Mrs Lynne Pascal - Board Member

Mr Ron Eldridge - Board Member

Mr Stephen Clark - Board Member

Mr Brian Gallacher - Board Member

Mr Laurie Boles – Board Member

Mr Ricky McAulay - Yourplace Chair, Board Member

In attendance:

Mrs Nicki Donaldson - Chief Executive (CE)

Mr Derek Banks - Director of Finance, Governance and Assets (DoFGA),
Company Secretary

Mrs Beverley Graham - Director of Housing (DoH)

Mrs Caroline O'Donnell - Director of Operations (DoO)

Mr Gary Keddie – Co-opted Member

Mr James Ryan - IT Manager (Colleague Consultation Group discussion
only)

Mr Gavin Waddell - Housing Officer (Colleague Consultation Group
discussion only)

Mrs Christine Coetzee - Secretariat

1 Procedural

1.1 Welcome, apologies and introductions

Presenter: Chair

The Chair welcomed all Board members to the meeting.

Apologies were received from:

Mr James Wilson – Board Member

Miss Laura Grieve – Chief Executive and Governance Assistant (CEGA)

No apologies were received in advance from:

Mr Chris Gray - Board Member

Mr Rhodri Davies - Board Member

Mr Derek Adam - Board Member

1.2 Membership Application

Presenter: Director of Finance, Governance and Assets

Agreed: The Board noted the contents of this report and approved the membership application.

1.3 Co-option of Board Member (verbal)

Presenter: Chair

The Chair advised that Mr Gary Keddie is recommended to be co-opted to the Board until the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in September 2024 with a view to then being elected to the Strategic Board.

Agreed: The Board unanimously approved the co-option of Mr Gary Keddie.

1.4 Colleague Consultation Group

Presenter: Convenor of Colleague Consultation Group

The Chair welcomed Mr Waddell and Mr Ryan to the meeting and invited them to provide the Board with colleague feedback in regards to any cost of living award for the financial year 2024/25.

Mr Waddell and Mr Ryan explained the process carried out with colleagues, indicating that they had open and honest discussions with colleagues. Whilst the majority of responses were realistic and acknowledged that it was difficult to impose large rent increases, colleagues expressed concerns about the significant increase in the cost of living, however, the salary increases are not sufficient to cover their additional costs. The highest rate of salary increase suggested was 9.8% to cover the cost of living and reduction in pension. This issue is having a negative impact on colleagues' wellbeing, as they worry about the future. In particular, it is difficult for frontline colleagues dealing with tenants' hardships.

The Board thanked Mr Waddell and Mr Ryan for their contribution and they both left the meeting at this time.

Agreed: The Board will consider the verbal update given, and report back to the Colleague Consultation Group.

1.5 Declaration of Interest

Presenter: Chair

The CE, DoO, DoFGA, DoH and the Secretariat all declared an interest in the Salary Benchmarking report and it was agreed that they would leave the meeting during the discussion. However, it was agreed that the Secretariat would remain in the meeting for the purposes of recording the minutes.

1.6 **Minute of the previous meeting**

Presenter: Chair

There were no amendments to the previous meeting.

Agreed: The minutes from the previous meeting were unanimously approved.

1.7 **Matters arising**

Presenter: Chair

The DoH gave a verbal update on the Orchard in Rosyth. A meeting was held with the Community Group and Fife Council and an agreement was reached that Fife Housing Group (FHG) would extend the lease with Fife Council to 99 years instead of transferring ownership of the land to the Community Group.

Agreed: The Board approved the transfer of land and lease extension.

1.8 **Action points**

Presenter: Chief Executive

The Chief Executive provided an update on the outstanding action points.

SHARE E-learning

The CE advised that alongside the Chair, they have reviewed the extensive list of online e-learning modules and will make recommendations to the Strategic Board at the next Board meeting.

Agreed: The Board noted the contents of the action points.

2 **For Approval**

2.1 Rent setting options 2024/25

Presenter: Director of Finance, Governance and Assets / Director of Housing

A rent increase of 4.25% p.a. was proposed for most properties, with an alternative 3.25% for the larger properties. The proposed increase is lower than most social housing providers, however, this is thought to be achievable as we are in a strong financial position. The lower rate will reduce the gap between Fife Housing Association and other Housing Associations in Fife. The DoH also sought approval to increase the rent on the Pharmacy in Dysart based on the approved valuation and the Board confirmed they were happy to approve this

Agreed: The Board noted the contents of the report, and unanimously approved the proposed rent increases.

2.2 Communications and Marketing Strategy 2024-27

Presenter: Director of Housing

The report outlines the expansion of our communication channels to increase digital content. Whilst it was acknowledged that this Strategy is clear on what our aims are, a Board member raised a concern that tenants who are unable to go digital or have no confidence to do so may be left behind. The DoH reassured the Board that there has been an upsurge in elderly tenants going online, however, we continue to engage with those who do not. During the RAG visits, Housing Officers always ask tenants for their preferences on how we engage with them. Communications are only sent by the preferred method of engagement.

Agreed: The Board noted the contents of the report and unanimously approved the Communications and Marketing Strategy for 2024-27.

2.3 CONFIDENTIAL - Draft Budget for 2024-25

Presenter: Director of Finance, Governance and Assets

The DoFGA presented this report, and will review the draft budget in March 2024 for final Board approval.

The DoFGA also updated the Board on pension information he received about a cession payment when the scheme closed. As FHG have met certain criteria, we will be receiving a substantial repayment, which will be treated as income, and the Board will decide how this will be used. This will be carefully communicated to colleagues and reassured that their pension funds remain safe.

Costs have been received for work on our British Iron and Steel Federation (BISF) properties, amounting to £70,000 per property. As these are regarded as health and safety issues, the Board also approved that we should carry out work on two of the worst-affected BISF properties first and then agree to further action.

Agreed: The Board noted the contents of the report and unanimously approved the budget assumptions and the draft budget for the financial year 2024/25, subject to the final budget being presented in March. The Board also agreed to work being carried out on the two worst affected BISF properties.

2.4 **Confidential: Pay & terms and conditions review**

Presenter: Director of Operations

The DoO circulated the ema report, which had been requested by the Board, and the various scenarios developed by the DoO at the request of the Board. The Board asked for clarification questions on the scenarios presented.

At this point, the CE, DoO, DoFGA and DoH left the meeting.

The Board had a lengthy discussion on the various scenarios presented to them. The Board felt that there was a lot of information to consider and would need more time to agree on a way forward. After the discussion, the CE, DoH, DoO and DoFGA were invited back into the meeting.

The Board advised that a decision was taken to set up a Working Group consisting of two Business Leadership Team (BLT) members and a number of Board members and appropriate colleagues. The Board asked ND to move this forward. Once this has been deliberated, the Working Group will report back to the Strategic Board.

Agreed: The Board noted the contents of this report and unanimously agreed that a Working Group (led by a Board member) should be set up to fully consider the report and scenarios on salary benchmarking. They also agreed that the next cost of living increase for colleagues should be REDACTED% from 1 April 2024 which was also approved for car allowances. The DoO was asked to update all the scenarios to reflect the REDACTED% cost of living increase.

2.5 **Business Plan 2024-2029**

Presenter: Chief Executive

The Chief Executive advised that the action plan and Operational Plans for 2024-2029 will be articulated in the Business Plan, and a summary document for colleagues and shareholders will be circulated (the full document does not go on the website).

The DoFGA was asked to build in the confirmed cost of living increase from 1 April 2024, and also include an estimated REDACTED%, for 2024/25 for the output from the Salary Benchmarking Working Group, which will be set up to fully review possible changes to salary structures. The CE and DoFGA will finalise the Business Plan for the Board to sign off on before submitting it to the Scottish Housing Regulator by the end of this month.

The Board acknowledged their appreciation to the BLT for all the hard work involved in the Business Plan.

Agreed: The Board noted the contents of this report, and agreed that Sensitivity 2 on Appendix two is the preferred option to work towards.

3

For Update

3.1

Chairperson's Verbal Report

Presenter: Chair

Recruitment - Board members

There is an upcoming recruitment exercise for new Board members and it is anticipated to hold interviews at the end of March any Board members who would like to be on the interview panel are asked to contact the Chair.

Board appraisals

These are due in April 2024 and will be conducted face-to-face, and will be in the same format as last year, with the Chair and Linda Ewart. The CEGA will schedule these.

SHARE E-learning

The Chair confirmed that she is reviewing the current online training module list and a further update will be provided.

Board Strategy Day

It is planned to hold the Board Strategy Day later in the year and will be part of monthly discussions with the CE.

Chair meetings

The Chair advised that she had attended the following FHG meetings recently:

- Salary benchmarking meeting with the CE, DoO and the Vice Chair

- CE's 1-2-1; and
- Yourplace Board meeting.

Agreed: The Board noted the verbal Chair's update.

3.2 Chief Executive's Report

Presenter: Chief Executive

The CE presented the report and highlighted the following:

Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR)'s

The CE has been in discussions with the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) to explain the current situation with EICRs in response to their email. The CE explained to them that EICRs are currently being carried out, a small amount internally but the majority by an external contractor, as we had been unsuccessful in appointing another electrician at this time. We will be asking the contractor to put an extra electrician in to speed up the process. The SHR advised that it is not necessary to do a notifiable event at this stage, until we give them a position statement at the end of February, at which time, they will consider the next steps.

Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA)

The annual fee has increased to £REDACTED and approval was sought to continue with the membership for the next year, given that we have received a lot of support, particularly during Covid. The Board unanimously agreed to continue with our membership.

Agreed: The Board noted the contents of this report and approved the SFHA Invoice for membership for the financial year 2024/25.

3.3 Management Accounts – P9 2023/24

Presenter: Director of Finance, Governance and Assets

The DoFGA has no concerns and highlighted that there is a significant overspend for the treatment of dampness and mould against a budget of £100k this financial year, another £100k has been budgeted for next year as there continue to be issues in some properties.

Agreed: The Board noted the contents of this report.

3.4 Performance Dashboard

Presenter: Director of Finance, Governance and Assets

The DoFGA presented the report and confirmed they had no concerns, except for the issues around the right-first-time Key Performance Indicator (KPI). Due to recent weather conditions, some external work was delayed, but we are working towards completing these works.

Agreed: The Board noted the contents of this report.

3.5 Audit and Risk

Presenter: Convenor of the Audit and Risk Committee

The Convenor of the Audit and Risk Committee provided the following verbal update from the meeting held on 30 January 2024:

Insurance

Insurance premiums have increased significantly. The Committee agreed that we remain with the current insurance provider Marsh.

Audit report

Only one tender was received, and this was from our current Auditors, Wylie & Bissett. The Committee agreed to a three-year contract, with an additional two-year extension.

Policy Review Schedule

14 policies are due for review in March 2024 and consideration will be given to reschedule some of the policy review dates to alleviate numerous policies being due for approval at one time.

Agreed: The Board noted the contents of the verbal update.

3.6 Homeless quotas and allocations

Presenter: Director of Housing

The DoH presented the report and it was acknowledged that homelessness is difficult to manage, and there is currently no grant funding available to assist.

The DoH invited any further questions and none were received.

**Agreed: The Board noted the contents of this report.
For Noting**

4

4.1 Minutes for noting

4.1.1 Yourplace Meeting minutes held on 31 October 2023.

Agreed: The Board noted the contents of the Yourplace minute.

4.2 Minutes for homologation

- 4.2.1 Audit and Risk Committee minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2023.

Agreed: The Board approved the minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting.

- 4.3 **Operational Workplans Q3**

Presenter: Chief Executive

Agreed: The Board noted the contents of this report.

- 5 **Other**

- 5.1 **AOCB**

Current Bank

The DoFGA asked the Board for their approval to swap our current bank account from the Bank of Scotland to the Royal Bank of Scotland, as we are not receiving quality service. The Chair agreed for the DoFGA to use her electronic signature on this occasion.

Agreed: The Board unanimously agreed to change our bank account to Royal Bank of Scotland.

- 5.2 **Date of next meeting**

Tuesday 26 March 2024 at 4:00 p.m.