

EAST LOTHIAN HOUSING ASSOCIATION

A meeting of the **ELHA Board** was held on Wednesday 19 March 2025 at 7.00pm, in the Hayman Room at ELHA Head Office, Haddington.

Present:	Brian Logan	(4/4)	Eileen Shand	(3/4)
	David Rose	(4/4)	Katrina Hamilton	(4/4)
	Maureen Batten	(3/4)	Peter Ewart	(2/4)
	Paul Hillard	(3/4)	Pamela Macleod	(3/4)

In attendance: Martin Pollhammer, Chief Executive
Karen Barry, Director of Housing.
Gary Alison, Director of Finance & Corporate Services
Charlie Cooley, Director of R3 & Asset Management
Eric Stoddart, Executive Support Officer (Minutes)

GENERAL

- 1. Apologies**
Iain Atkinson (2/4), Alan Forsyth (2/4) and Shirley Evans (1/4).
- 2. Declarations of Interest by ELHA Board Members**
It was noted that David Rose would not participate in the discussions at Agenda Item 7 on the Charitable Donations 2024/25 as he is a Trustee of the East Lothian Care & Repair Charitable Trust.
- 3. Minutes of Meeting 20 February 2025**
The Minutes were **approved** by the ELHA Board. They were proposed by Maureen Batten and seconded by Katrina Hamilton.
- 4. Action List**
The ELHA Board noted the report.
- 5. Matters Arising**
There were no matters arising.

GOVERNANCE

- 6. Secretary's Report**
The ELHA Board noted the Secretary's Report.

PERFORMANCE

There were no reports under Performance.

PRIORITY ITEMS**7. Charitable Donations 2024/25**

David Rose left the room (at 19:07) before this Agenda Item was discussed.

The Chief Executive explained that the Association's Sponsorship and Donations Policy permits it to expend up to 0.5% of the preceding year's audited accumulated surplus, up to a maximum of £1,000. The Association's accumulated surplus at 31 March 2024 was £16.5m, so 0.5% of last year's accumulated surplus is £83k, and the Association may donate £1,000 this financial year.

It is proposed that, as in previous years, a charitable donation of £1,000 be made to the East Lothian Care & Repair Charitable Trust. The Trust is an Eligible Charity in terms of the Association's policy, and uses its income to help individual Care & Repair clients who are struggling to find the funding for the adaptations they need.

The Chief Executive noted that he understood the Charitable Trust is going to continue for now, but it may review its position in the future, given the recent changes to the Care & Repair service, which will result in a significant loss of income for the Trust as donations from Small Repairs Service users will dry up.

Peter Ewart commented that the maximum payment of £1,000 seems to have been fixed at that level for some time, and queried how this could be increased. The Chief Executive clarified that any change would need to be approved at the AGM, and it was agreed this should be done in 2025 to propose an increase to £2,000.

The ELHA Board **approved** a donation of £1,000 to the Care & Repair Charitable Trust during the year ending 31 March 2025.

The ELHA Board also **approved** that a proposal be taken to the 2025 AGM to raise the maximum donation to £2,000.

David Rose re-joined the meeting (at 19:10).

POLICIES**8. Policy Review Summary**

The Chief Executive reminded everyone that in terms of the new Governance process that had been agreed, this update would provide a table setting out the policies reviewed by the Senior Management Team where they have Delegated Authority to undertake the review, since the last ELHA Board meeting.

The policies included in the current review are 'Domestic Abuse', 'Domestic Abuse in the Workplace', 'Lone Working', and 'Treasury Management'. There was also a late addition of 'Privacy Policy', and the Chief Executive explained that this was an unscheduled update following a review undertaken by Anderson Strathern as part of the exercise of preparing contracts with Wyser for the ASSIST software licence.

The Chair enquired about the changes to the Treasury Management Policy, and whether these should be approved by Board. The Director of Finance & Corporate Services advised that the changes made to the policy are minor, and relate to changes in titles etc.

The Chief Executive noted that all policy changes are tracked and recorded in a copy of the policy held by the Senior Management Team, and that a Summary Sheet of changes is also held, so a full audit trail of all changes made is always kept.

The Chair asked that in future reports a note was added to clarify why Senior Management Team delegation had been used to approve the policy and this was agreed. The ELHA Board then noted the revised policies, and where the updated versions could be accessed.

9. **Authorisations and Standard Charges / Allowances**

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services introduced the proposed revisions to the Authorisations and Standard Charges / Allowances Policy and advised that one thing to add to the paper, is that the EVH allowances have since been approved and will be updated once this policy is approved and released to staff.

It was highlighted that there were three key changes, which were deemed material, and so which has brought this policy for approval. These were:

- Increasing levels on delegated costs out with budget, Section 2, including a proposed increase of Development Cost Overruns from 1% to 5% of works (the 1% is deemed too low and would require constant Board approval for any immaterial overspends)
- Changes to staff call out rates, Section 14, including wording to clarify the rates to be used (also considered are Out of Hours fire alarm activations and the need to attend the office as the fire brigade will not attend on the alarm going off without staff checking the building and calling them)
- Finally, write off's £25 and over increased to £750 for SMT, bringing it to a similar level as ex gratia payments.

Peter Ewart recognised that the existing 1% level for Development Overruns is too low, but questioned whether 5% is too high.

Pamela Macleod advised that a level of 5% for Development overruns is considered as a normal contingency level in construction. This was accepted, but it was felt that in addition, there should be a maximum financial amount, and this was agreed at £500k.

The Chair highlighted that he had a few minor issues re typos etc. but would submit a list of these to the Director of Finance & Corporate Services to be incorporated.

In addition, however, the Chair expressed a concern over the list of Authorised Signatories (Section 3.7), and specifically whether there were sufficient individuals named to cover instances when some were unavailable through illness, holiday, or other factors. It was agreed that Katrina Hamilton would be added to the list of authorised signatories, as contingency.

The Chair indicated that he was in general agreement with proposed levels for the R3 Repairs Allowances, but queried the level of the Car Allowance, which seemed significantly higher than that for ELHA.

The Chief Executive explained that this was R3's car allowance level and had been higher than ELHA's for a long time. Whilst ELHA applied the standard EVH levels, these were probably quite low in comparison to industry levels. It was also noted that the maintenance industry is one where a car allowance can be more valued, and therefore car allowances tended to be much higher.

The Chair also referred to Section 14.1.2 and the option where a staff member may bring a second adult with them, in the event of an 'Out of Hours Fire Alarm Activation'. The Chief Executive explained that whilst there had been a lot of discussion around this at the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) meeting, this had been agreed by JCC. In terms of context however, it was noted that in 14 years, there has never been a single activation. However, the second person would not enter the building and would just provide extra assurance. It may also make a response to a fire quicker as a second person from another household would then not have to attend.

Katrina Hamilton asked whether the role of Company Secretary would always sit with the Director of Housing. The Chief Executive confirmed that this role is with the Director of Housing, not the individual, but as part of their responsibilities as Deputy Chief Executive.

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services highlighted that there is an annual requirement to submit the 'Fair Work First Statement' to the Scottish Government. The content of this has not changed, but he asked that the document was now approved as at March 2025.

The ELHA Board **approved** the change to the 'Fair Work First Statement', and the revised Authorisations and Standard Charges / Allowances Policy.

10. **Damp, Mould & Condensation Policy**

The Director of R3 & Asset Management explained that the Damp, Mould & Condensation (DMC) Policy has been introduced to ensure appropriate control measures are in place to manage DMC within homes. The Association aims to ensure all its homes are free from DMC, and has a legislative requirement and a duty of care to provide safe homes for tenants.

The policy is designed to ensure that the root cause of DMC occurrences are accurately identified, so that the appropriate actions are taken to address the issue and prevent recurrence.

The Scottish Housing Regulator has introduced three new indicators that Social Landlords are required to report on in their Annual Return of the Charter (ARC).

Landlords are required to start collecting data for these new indicators from 1 April 2025. The first ARC using the new indicators will be due by 31 May 2026.

The three new indicators that landlords are required to report are:

- The average length of time taken to resolve cases of damp and/or mould
- The percentage of resolved cases of damp and/or mould that were reopened, and
- The number of open cases of damp and/or mould at the year end

The Director of R3 & Asset Management explained that the Policy sets out a three-stage approach to DMC:

- Preventative approach – how ELHA will prevent DMC from occurring
- Reactive approach – how ELHA will respond when DMC issues have been raised by tenants
- Monitor and Reporting – how ELHA will manage, monitor and report on DMC cases

Eileen Shand queried whether, in terms of reporting incidents (of DMC), they will be recorded against the property, and if so, whether this would help identify particular property types that are more likely to suffer from DMC.

The Director of R3 & Asset Management replied that with the upcoming implementation of Homemaster, it is expected that the software will be better able to record and monitor any instances of damp and mould by property type.

Maureen Batten suggested that the communication process around this is important, and the Director of R3 & Asset Management advised that ELHA has now managed to install the first two COSIE home sensors, which can monitor temperature and humidity levels.

The Chief Executive added that he was very pleased to see the first two COSIE homes sensors installed, and also that these are now working in My Home, which means that tenants are able to view their own data. It was stressed that the Association's approach was to ensure that tenants have access to their data, and as a result they can use it to make their own decisions about their home environment. However, as a consequence, the Association will also have access to this data, and can use it to support tenants if there are any concerns.

It was acknowledged that the data being provided can be presented better, and this will be developed going forwards. It was also recognised that boiler sensor data is not yet available in My Home, but will be a future enhancement.

Paul Hillard was very pleased to hear of this development and recognised that it was often the people who have less income, that struggle to manage their situation, so gaining access to this sort of information should help them make better choices in the future.

The Chief Executive also highlighted that in general, the properties owned by the Association are well insulated, and also a bit smaller than average, which should make them cheaper to heat. One benefit of introducing the sensors, is that the Association can obtain evidence of this.

Katrina Hamilton wondered whether the Association's introduction of sensors should be publicised, but the Chief Executive suggested caution on this at present. There is budget to install sensors into a further 250 homes in the coming financial year, but it would probably be better to publicise this once a greater percentage of homes have been upgraded.

Pamela Macleod added that an issue with new homes / developments, is that consideration for drying clothes (a frequent cause of DMC) is not addressed very well.

The Chair asked in respect of the Board's responsibility for Health & Safety, where does the assurance come from, and in particular around the reporting of any incidents.

The Director of R3 & Asset Management advised that this was something that is very much 'work in progress' as part of the implementation of HomeMaster.

The Chief Executive noted that the new Health & Safety Committee had been successfully established, but that the next meeting, in June 2025, would consider the Action Plan for compliance with the Landlord Safety Manual. It was also stressed that there is a need to be realistic about timescales for this work, and that it will be something developed through the course of the year. In the meantime, this will remain on the Risk Map as an area of concern to the business.

The ELHA Board **approved** the Damp, Mould & Condensation Policy.

Eileen Shand asked whether details of DMC cases would be included within the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

The Chief Executive explained that the targets for KPIs would normally be presented to the March Board meeting, but it was felt better to delay bringing these to the May Board meeting, as this would allow Year End figures to be considered in new target setting.

It was also noted that the first reporting on the three new Indicators to the Scottish Housing Regulator would not take place until 2026. Thought was being given to how best to capture the required data, and how that might be best shared with Board. This issue will be picked up in the Action List.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

11. Tenancy Debt Write Offs

The Director of Housing advised that Housing staff have reviewed and recommend the write off of former tenancy debts (as detailed in Appendix 1).

This includes a recommendation to write off one significant chargeable repair debt of £57,842.95 which relates to malicious damage to one of the Association's properties during 2017, which was not covered by ELHA's insurance. The full recovery of this debt was never expected given the age and economic status of the former tenant, and though the write off is recommended, it will not have a current year financial impact on the Association as the debt has been fully provided for.

David Rose commented that this was a lot of money, but the Chief Executive confirmed that there was no prospect of recovery.

The Director of Housing added that the former tenant had a long history of unemployment and mental health issues, and there was no expectation of further payment towards the debt. The Association has recently switched to a new debt collection agency, and whilst this is proving beneficial, it has resulted in a number of write offs being required at the same time, as some had been held to see if the new collection agency would have any success in collecting them.

The ELHA Board **approved** the write-off of £75,366.88 in former tenancy debts.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business, and the meeting closed at 7.40pm.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 29 May 2025 at ELHA Head Office, Haddington at 7.00pm.

**ADOPTION OF THESE MINUTES APPROVED AT THE MEETING ON
29 MAY 2025**

Signed

(Chair)