

EAST LOTHIAN HOUSING ASSOCIATION

A meeting of the **ELHA Board** was held on Thursday 29 May 2025 at 7.00pm, in the Hayman Room at ELHA Head Office, Haddington, with Katrina Hamilton and Peter Ewart joining via Microsoft Teams.

Present:	Brian Logan	(5/5)	Eileen Shand	(4/5)
	David Rose	(5/5)	Katrina Hamilton	(5/5)
	Iain Atkinson	(3/5)	Peter Ewart	(3/5)
	Alan Forsyth	(3/5)	Pamela Macleod	(4/5)
	Shirley Evans	(2/5)		

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**
 Maureen Batten (3/5) and Paul Hillard (4/5).
2. **Declarations of Interest by ELHA Board Members**
 There were no Declarations of Interest.
3. **Minutes of Meeting 19 March 2025**
 The Minutes were **approved** by the ELHA Board. They were proposed by David Rose and seconded by Pamela Macleod.
4. **Action List**
 The Chief Executive highlighted that under Action List Minute ref 11 (Consider Damp, Mould and Condensation reporting), that this has been included within the remit of the new Performance Committee, set up as part of the Governance Review. If anything significant is highlighted there, then it will also be brought to the attention of the ELHA Board. Damp, Mould and Condensation reporting has also been included in the ARC from 2025/26, and so the Board will see data in future through this reporting mechanism as well.

 The ELHA Board noted the remainder of the report.
5. **Matters Arising**
 There were no matters arising.

GOVERNANCE

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

PERFORMANCE**7. Key Performance Indicators 2024/25**

The Chief Executive explained that the number of Bronze Key tenants had increased significantly (to 51%) during the third quarter and had exceeded target, whilst Gold Key tenant numbers reduced, due to the change in the Gold Key Tenant criteria to require payment by Rent Collector. These figures have remained the same in the final quarter of the year, and new targets will be set for 2025/26 to take this change into account, alongside the plans for Rent Collector payments to become a requirement at Bronze Key Tenant level.

The ELHA Board noted the Key Performance Indicators 2024/25 report.

8. Key Performance Indicators 2025/26

The Chief Executive highlighted that the Rent Arrears performance has been exceptional during 2024/25 and at year end non-technical arrears sat at 2.33%, the lowest figure ever recorded. They have remained consistently under the target of 2.8% for the last year, with the highest figure reported at 2.67%.

It was also noted that going forwards, once HomeMaster has been implemented, it is anticipated that, similar to Housing Benefit, the Association will have the ability to more accurately calculate Universal Credit (UC) 'technical arrears' and deduct some or all of these from the gross arrears figure. A manual calculation suggests if all UC technical arrears could be deducted, arrears would currently stand at less than 1%.

In view of this, the 2025/26 target has only been reduced slightly to 2.6%, but that this still remains a challenging target, and will keep staff focused whilst the HomeMaster implementation is completed. The Chief Executive explained that the 'technical arrears' balance was critical for the Association as that was the level of true arrears that need to be collected. 'Technical arrears' are essentially nothing more than a timing difference whilst direct payments from East Lothian Council and the DWP are processed and paid.

The Chief Executive advised that under Housing Management KPIs (2.4) there had not been a target for evictions previously, but it was proposed that a target of zero be used for 2025/26. This would mean that if any evictions did take place, then the reasons for this would need to be explained to Board in the covering report.

Also, under Housing Management KPIs, a new target for the Percentage of tenants Signed Up to Housing Perks is proposed, as it is important to keep promoting these new discounts to tenants as part of the Key Tenant Scheme, to ensure the return on investment is maximised. The Chief Executive noted that the top four brands for Housing Perks savings so far are Tesco, Amazon, Aldi and Asda (in that order), and therefore that the discounts are helping reduce the cost of basic essentials, so it was important to keep pushing the benefits of the scheme.

It was also highlighted that the KPI for 'Management Committee Attendance' has been renamed as 'ELHA Board Attendance', following the recent Governance Review. A target of 75% attendance is proposed, the same target as the previous KPI for Management Committee attendance.

The target for Percentage of Tenants using their My Home account has been increased to 92% (against current performance of 91%), and the target for paper-free tenants has been increased to 89% (as a step towards the longer-term target, which remains 90%).

The Chief Executive explained that these are still important metrics for the Association as a digital business, although the priority is to at least maintain rather than necessarily increase these figures.

Finally, it was advised that the target for connected Rent Collector accounts has been increased to 60% and will hopefully be achieved through the requirement for Bronze Key Tenants to pay by Rent Collector being introduced later this year.

The Chief Executive also advised that a Tabled Addendum had been added to the meeting papers in connection with Complaint Response Time targets. The Chair gave all those present time to read the additional paper.

Following discussion with the Management Team at the Performance Committee on 27 May 2025, and subsequent discussion within Senior Management Team, a change was proposed to the 'Percentage of Complaints Responded To In Target', and is replaced by three new indicators:

- Average time taken to respond to Stage One complaints – Target: Three days
- Number of Stage One response extensions required – Target: Nil
- Average time taken to respond to Stage Two complaints – Target: 12 days

Changing the reporting in this way would align with the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) reporting, and also allow comparison with other providers when the ARC data is published, as the ARC collects the average time to respond data.

Iain Atkinson commented that the performance figures are generally very good, especially with the arrears being so low.

The Chair added that it was important that KPIs are regularly reviewed, to ensure they are still relevant and meaningful.

The Chair then asked the Director of Finance & Corporate Services regarding two of the Finance KPIs – 'Minimum cash balance held', and 'Cash as % of net cash outflows for next two quarters' and wanted to know how they were defined.

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services explained that the first related to keeping a minimum of £500k in cash to meet outflows, and the second was a way of projecting ahead over the next two quarters to ensure funding was available to match planned outgoings. These targets were already being met, and both were in line with the Treasury Management Policy in respect of liquidity.

The ELHA Board **approved** the revised Key Performance Indicator targets for 2025/26, including the revised Key Performance Indicator targets in relation to Complaint Response Time targets for 2025/26.

9. **Care & Repair Quarterly Management Accounts**

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services highlighted the £5k electrical safety check grant received, and that salaries were overspent due to redundancy payments for the two members of the Care & Repair team who worked for the Small Repairs Service.

The ELHA Board noted the Care & Repair Quarter Four Management Accounts.

PRIORITY ITEMS

10. **Annual Return on the Charter**

The Director of Housing introduced the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) which is to be submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR).

Overall, the ARC reflects a very good performance, having generally stayed the same or improved in most areas compared to 2023/24. The Governance Committee has provided scrutiny of the ARC through spot checks of the data at its meeting on 21 May 2025.

The Chief Executive added that this is something, assuming the average scores do not change, the Association is continuing to report better than the National Average in all areas bar one (relating to repairs satisfaction), but this something that the Director of R3 & Asset Management is working on.

It was also noted that the Tenant Satisfaction Survey (TSS) is underway at present, but with rent increases, and other factors, the responses under the new TSS may not be as favourable as existing ones. This may well have an impact as some of these indicators are then reported on in the ARC for the next three years. It is expected the latest TSS responses should be available in time for discussion at the September 2025 Board meeting.

The Board **approved** the Annual Return on the Charter for submission to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

POLICIES**11. 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 'Stock Investment Strategy', 'Asset Management Strategy', 'Long and Extended Notice', 'Requirements of Writing', 'ELHA & R3 Board Expenses', 'Money & Home Energy Service', 'Insurance' and 'Comments and Complaints'.

The Chief Executive acknowledged that the number of policies to be reviewed this year is very high, but felt that it would be of benefit to the Director of Finance & Corporate Services, and the Director of R3 & Asset Management, who will have been involved in reviewing well over half of the Association's policies by the end of the current financial year.

The ELHA Board noted the Policy Review Summary.

12. Health & Safety Strategy

The Director of R3 & Asset Management explained that the Strategy has been developed to establish a structured and proactive approach to safeguarding the Health & Safety and well-being of employees, contractors, tenants, visitors and other stakeholders within the organisation.

It is recognised that the strategy is a fresh assessment to how the Association analyses Health & Safety. It was also noted that the world of Health & Safety has moved on with a bigger focus on Building Safety and Behavioural Safety.

It was highlighted that this Strategy is the continued development and improvement of the existing Health & Safety management systems in a collaborative way that supports the Association's corporate responsibilities. The Director of R3 & Asset Management then highlighted certain aspects of the Strategy:

- Section 2, which sets out the Aims and Objectives, including:
 - Protecting Health & Well-being
 - Compliance with Legal Requirements
 - Promoting a Safe Work Environment
 - Reducing Costs
 - Boosting Employee Morale and Productivity
 - Support Organisational Goals
 - Encouraging Continuous Improvement

- Section 3, which sets out 4 key objectives:
 - Take H&S management to the next level
 - Align H&S with ELHA's strategic ambitions
 - Data and performance driven H&S management decisions
 - Make H&S everyone's business

It was noted that the Association have two other key documents that sit alongside this – the EVH H&S Control Manual and the EVH Landlord Facilities Health, Safety & Welfare Management System.

The next Health & Safety Committee meeting is 17 June 2025, and the addition of a Safety Compliance Officer (SCO) will help support and provide more focus around Safety and Compliance.

Peter Ewart commented that he was fully supportive of the new approach to Health & Safety, in particular the integrated pro-active management and scoring the supply chain on Health & Safety.

Maureen Batten was unable to attend the meeting, but had passed on comments to the Director of R3 & Asset Management prior to the meeting. Maureen would like to see more recognition in the paper that this Strategy is a key element in the (new) corporate Risk Management Arrangements, as it is fundamental to successful risk management at strategic and operational levels.

Maureen would also like to highlight the importance of not only adequate and appropriate training, but careful maintenance and retention of training records. She has in the past seen many employer's liability claims unable to be defended because the organisation could not produce accurate records detailing what training has been provided.

The Director of R3 & Asset Management agreed with this feedback and will look to enhance what is already noted in the Strategy document. It was also noted that the Association will be using IHASCO, an online training platform with an extensive library of accredited, high quality courses relevant to Health & Safety management, which also creates certificates that can be stored within an employee's Logbook with People HR (PHR).

Eileen Shand commented that this is a very helpful document, but wondered about benchmarking, to see where the Association stood in comparison to competitors, or other Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). The Director of R3 & Asset Management agreed to look into this, and the Chair added that perhaps the best source of having comparators, would be against other RSLs. It was also noted that this is considered very much as the start of a journey.

David Rose advised that his understanding is that EVH are looking again at their Health & Safety documentation, and it was understood that there is a continuous revision of this material.

The Chair acknowledged that there is a lot contained within the Health & Safety Strategy, and wondered if there was an Action Plan, to try and break down the various activities over a three year period.

The Director of R3 & Asset Management confirmed this was the case, and that one of the requirements is to ensure that Health & Safety features regularly on relevant meeting agendas, to ensure the Action Plan is followed through.

The Chair enquired whether this information would come through the Annual Report to the Board, and also through the new Health & Safety Committee. It was confirmed that this was the intention.

The ELHA Board **approved** the Health & Safety Strategy.

13. **Conversations Framework Policy**

The Chief Executive highlighted that the Association introduced the Conversations Framework in place of the Appraisal Policy for an initial one year trial in 2023. Between Hive surveys with staff and discussions at JCC, this was agreed to be successful, but it was agreed with Management Committee that before replacing the Appraisal Policy, a further year's trial would take place, to ensure the approach followed up effectively on the previous year's discussion.

Through further Hive surveys and JCC discussions, the approach was found to be more effective than the previous approach to annual appraisal, and staff support for adopting the approach is very strong.

It was noted that it is a regulatory requirement that the Chief Executive have an annual appraisal. In order to fulfil this requirement, if the Conversations Framework approach is approved, the existing Appraisal Policy will be reviewed by the Chief Executive, Chair and Vice-Chair and presented to the next Board meeting in August 2025 as a 'Chief Executive Appraisal Policy'.

It is also proposed that all future reviews of this Policy are delegated to the Senior Management Team. The ELHA Board **approved** the Conversations Framework Policy.

14. **Money & Home Energy Service Communication Strategy**

The Director of Housing provided some background in that ELHA's new in-house Money & Home Energy Advice Service was set up in 2022, and at that time, a commitment was made to work towards achieving Level 2 of the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers. This is a Quality Assurance Framework for agencies involved in the provision of information and advice, which incorporates standards, performance indicators and competencies for advisers.

In January 2024, the Money & Home Energy Adviser was appointed and has since been working to establish the service and develop evidence towards meeting the required standards. One such piece of evidence is the need for a Communication Strategy.

The Director of Housing added that although a standalone document for evidence purposes now, it is anticipated that it will be incorporated into the Associations Communication Strategy when it is next due for review in 2027. In view of this, a full tenant consultation has not been carried out at this time, but the Tenant Involvement Group (TIG) have had an opportunity to provide feedback.

The Chair asked if any feedback had been received from TIG, but the Director of Housing indicated nothing received.

The Board **approved** the Money & Home Energy Service Communication Strategy.

15. **Neo-Natal Care Leave & Pay Policy**

The Chief Executive advised that this paper is being presented the 'wrong way round' as it would normally be taken to staff for consultation before coming to Board. However, in this instance, the Policy is being introduced to ensure the Association complies with the requirements of the Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Act 2023, which came into effect in April 2025, introducing a new entitlement in the UK to neonatal care leave.

The Act highlights that employees are entitled to neonatal care leave (if they meet the eligibility criteria) for a baby born on or after 6 April 2025 and the baby has received medical or palliative neonatal care for at least seven consecutive days within the first 28 days after birth.

The Association understands that if an employee is considering the use of this policy, they will be going through a difficult and stressful period. The Association is therefore committed to supporting its employees to both be able to be with their baby and look after their own wellbeing throughout this period.

Pamela Macleod welcomed this legislation and approach, and was pleased to see the Association adopting an appropriate policy.

The ELHA Board **approved** the Neo-Natal Care Leave & Pay Policy.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

16. **Complaints and Praise Annual Report**

The Director of Housing advised that this report is for information, and that it is a standard report provided each year.

It was noted that there was a significant increase in Stage One complaints from 115 in the previous year to 173, whilst the number of Stage Two complaints received only very slightly increased from 15 to 16. At the same time, the number of praise records decreased from 589 in the previous year to 549.

The Director of Housing explained that the increase in Stage One complaints can be attributed to improved recording following several staff training sessions during the course of the year on the recording and handling of Stage One complaints.

Whilst there has been an increase in numbers at Stage One, it is clearly evident that the complaints handling training has been put into practice given the Stage Two complaints have only increased by one.

It was also good to see that Praise has remained steady and a rise in praise for staff in Asset Management, Corporate Services and Housing has been seen.

The ELHA Board noted the Complaints and Praise Annual Report.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business, and the meeting closed at 7.54pm.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 21 August 2025 at ELHA Head Office, Haddington at 7.00pm.

**ADOPTION OF THESE MINUTES APPROVED AT THE MEETING ON
21 AUGUST 2025**

Signed

(Chair)