

EAST LOTHIAN HOUSING ASSOCIATION

A meeting of the **Management Committee** was held on Thursday 23 February 2023 at 7.00pm, at ELHA Head Office, Haddington with Alan Forsyth joining via Microsoft Teams

Present:	Peter Hayman	(4/4)	David Rose	(3/4)
	Peter Ewart	(4/4)	Iain Atkinson	(3/4)
	Brian Logan	(4/4)	Alan Forsyth	(4/4)
	Joyce Bolan	(3/4)	Eileen Shand	(4/4)
	Katrina Hamilton	(4/4)	Jim Curran	(4/4)
	Paul Hillard	(4/4)	Shirley Evans	(2/4)

In attendance: Paula Oliver, Director of Finance
 Martin Pollhammer, Chief Executive
 Duncan Mackay, Director of Asset Management
 Karen Barry, Director of Housing
 Gary Alison, Director of Finance (Designate) – Observer
 Eric Stoddart, Executive Support Officer (Minutes)

1.0 GENERAL**Condolences**

The Chair noted the sad events of last Friday (17 February 2023) and the passing of an R3 colleague, Brian Kowbel.

It was noted that R3 had effectively closed on the Monday afternoon with almost all staff gathering at a local social club to try to come to terms with what had happened. All staff had been offered counselling. ELHA staff had met on the Tuesday morning, with Brian known to many staff. ELHA staff were reminded of the confidential Rowan counselling service. The Chair asked that the thoughts and condolences of the Management Committee Board be passed on.

The Chief Executive noted that the Scottish Housing Regulator had been informed as a Notifiable Event. The Regulator has subsequently confirmed that no further action, or update, is required by them.

Welcome

The Chair welcomed Gary Alison to the meeting. Gary will be joining ELHA on 1 May 2023 and will replace Paula Oliver as Director of Finance on her retirement at the end of June 2023.

1.1 Apologies

Pamela Macleod (3/4).

1.2 Declarations of Interest by Management Committee Members

There were no Declarations of Interest.

1.3 **Minutes of Meeting 26 November 2022**

The Minutes were **approved** by the Management Committee. They were proposed by David Rose and seconded by Iain Atkinson.

1.4 **Action List**

The Management Committee noted the report.

1.5 **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

2.0 **GOVERNANCE**

2.1 **Secretary's Report**

The Management Committee:

(a) **Approved** the Membership application; and

(b) **Homologated the use of the Seal**

2.2 **Key Performance Indicators 2021/22**

The Chief Executive advised that a small number of targets had been missed, but where this has happened this has not been by much.

The Chair noticed that the heading and reference (under Section 2.4 Audit & Compliance Committee), should refer to the Audit & Assurance Committee.

The Director of Asset Management provided an update on the recent incident that occurred in a property in Haddington in late January 2023 that resulted in a Notifiable Event to the Scottish Housing Regulator. A review has been conducted, and most recommendations have been implemented. There is some refresher training scheduled (on the use of scanners and generators, to identify cables not marked on a plan) and this is due to take place on Monday 27 February 2023. Once that is completed, the Regulator will be contacted to confirm all identified actions have been implemented. It is expected that all fencing / digging activities, which have been suspended temporarily following the incident, will then resume.

Eileen Shand queried whether the insurance settlement regarding Crossgates, Ormiston had been completed yet, and the Director of Finance was able to explain that final invoices are awaited, and when these are received, they will be passed on to the insurers.

The Management Committee noted the report for information.

3.0 **PRIORITY ITEMS**

3.1 **Care & Repair Budget 2023/24**

The Director of Finance highlighted that the five-year funding agreement from East Lothian Council (fixed at £329,891 per year) ended at the 31 March 2022.

The Council froze the grant at the same level for 2022/23 and has indicated to the Association (verbally) that it will only be awarding funding for 2023/24 at the same level as the previous six years, i.e. £329,891.

Expenditure has been reviewed and savings identified to enable the Service to operate within this level of funding. The key saving is to maintain the current vacant Small Repairs Officer post (the incumbent resigned from the Service in December 2021) throughout the year. A further saving is to not recruit an additional Assistant or a Modern Apprentice post. The requirement to make pension deficit contributions ended in September 2022.

Improvements to the Service's software is planned for this year to coincide with the upgrading of the Group network.

Discussions are ongoing with the Council regarding a possible expansion of the service to manage its minor adaptation works. The budget will be revised should the Service take on this work.

The Management Committee noted the report for information.

3.2 Tenant Satisfaction Survey

The Director of Housing advised that the Association had appointed Knowledge Partnership to carry out a Tenant Satisfaction Survey on its behalf, to seek views on the services ELHA provides, how well it performs these services, and to help identify where services can be improved. The survey took place during October to December 2022, when 725 face to face interviews were carried out, representing a 55.3% response.

The performance was considered as still very good, and in comparison, to the ARC national average for 2021/22, demonstrates that the Association exceeds the average in almost all areas.

There are some areas highlighted in the report where action to improve services is required, and the Tenant Involvement Group (TIG) and staff will shortly work together to develop an Action Plan to address any areas of weakness. The TIG will oversee the implementation of the Action Plan, and progress will be reported in the quarterly Tenant Participation report provided to the Audit & Assurance Committee.

The report will be fully discussed with staff at the Staff Away Day in March 2023, and the Management Committee will be updated at the Management Committee Away Day in November 2023.

Paul Hillard highlighted that the possible future use of online or digital surveys may result in a dip in responses and results, as this has been his experience when there has been a change in the methodology used.

The Chair noted that the positive 'value for money' response of 85% was exceptional, and Eileen Shand also added that the performance generally was very good.

The Chief Executive commented on the repairs service feedback and expressed a little disappointment that the scores had dropped against previous surveys. It was noted that the 'Basket of Repairs' service was being introduced, which would allow tenants to co-ordinate multiple repairs, and given the initial enthusiastic response from tenants, will hopefully help improve satisfaction levels in the future. In addition, staff and operatives will be undergoing 'Customer Care' training and awareness, which should help improve the tenant experience.

The Management Committee noted the report for information.

4.0 POLICIES

4.1 Driving Policy Review

No changes were required to the existing information in the policy, however, the Executive Support Officer (HR) recommended adding in guidance for Driving in Winter Conditions as published by EVH. This addition was agreed by the JCC.

The Management Committee **approved** the revised Driving Policy.

4.2 Rent Arrears Policy Review

Peter Hayman recommended several minor changes to the Director of Housing, principally around slight changes of wording within the policy.

Section 3.2 - first bullet point, move the words 'with them' to follow after 'discuss'.

Section 3.2 - second bullet point, move 'where appropriate' to follow after 'Affordability Tool'.

Section 7.5 - change the wording 'lay' to 'lies'.

Section 13.1 – 'in either' to be removed and the word 'any' added before the wording 'changes necessitate'.

Shirley Evans recommended that reference to the 'Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland Act) 2022 be made at Section 7.

Eileen Shand recommended that the opening paragraph at Section 1.0 be expanded to recognise that maximising rental income starts before the new tenancy commences, and that reference to the Sharing Owners Policy be added at Section 6.

Subject to these amendments, which the Director of Housing will incorporate, the Management Committee **approved** the Rent Arrears Policy.

5.0 BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

5.1 Shared Ownership Occupancy Charges Review

The Chair and Vice-Chair both asked for clarification of the proposals around the Occupancy Charge increase, and possibility of subsequent discount, just to fully understand the likely budget impact.

The Director of Housing, and Director of Finance, explained that the budget assumes a 6% increase across the board, and the additional 2% charge for Shared Owners is to recover the cost of introducing the paper-free discount (the 8% increase can, on average, be reduced to a net 6% by the Sharing Owner going paper-free). The proposal therefore has virtually no impact on the 2023/24 budget.

A short discussion took place regarding whether savings obtained were equivalent to the discount being offered. The Chief Executive explained that the increase is normally based on the rate of inflation, but as there are no costs other than loan repayments related to the Occupancy Charge, it was felt unreasonable to apply a full inflationary increase, and instead match the ELHA increase, taking into account the additional 2% matched by a new 2% discount.

Subject to the above, the Management Committee **approved** an 8% Occupancy Charge increase and **agreed** to paying a £5 per month Occupancy Charge Discount to Sharing Owners who sign up to paper-free services from 1 April 2023.

6.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 23 March 2023 at ELHA Head Office, Haddington at 7.00pm.

**ADOPTION OF THESE MINUTES APPROVED AT THE MEETING ON
23 MARCH 2023**

Signed *Signature* (Chair)