

**LOCHABER HOUSING ASSOCIATION
MINUTES OF BOARD OF MANAGEMENT MEETING
HELD IN 101 HIGH STREET, FORT WILLIAM
ON THURSDAY 15th DECEMBER 2022 AT 10.00AM**

Present: Di Alexander
Jenni Hodgson
Andrew Carr (Chairperson)
Jacqui Wight
Moir MacVicar
John Cooney
Jacob Green
Sarah Fanet

In attendance: Margaret Moynihan, Chief Executive
Jenny MacKay, Customer Services Manager
George Doran, Finance Manager
Siobhan Toal, Customer Services Officer
Brian Pearson, Housing Services Coordinator
David Smith, Accountant

1. Apologies

Apologies have been received from Cathy Osborn, May Tosh, Morag Cameron and Fiona Sorley.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Declaration of Interest report was **approved** and it was also **noted** that Jacob Green would leave the meeting while Agenda Item 6 was discussed and be invited to re-join when this item concluded.

3. Minutes of Meeting held on 17th November 2022

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17th November 2022 were **approved** with an amendment to be made to Agenda Item 18.

4. Matters Arising from Minutes of Meeting held on 25th August 2022

(i) Highland Housing Register

The Housing Services Co-Ordinator advised the Board that the next Highland Housing Partnership Group meeting is not until January and an update will be brought back to the February meeting around the voting protocol for Local Letting Initiatives.

The Board **noted** the update.

(ii) Disposal

The Board **noted** that the sale of the property at 147 High Street had settled on 07th December 2022 and that this had been logged on the Scottish Housing Regulator's portal to advise them of this transaction.

5. **Regulatory Standards – demonstrating compliance**

The Board **noted** the compliance with regulatory standards.

6. **Rent Review**

The Housing Services Co-Ordinator presented the report to the Board in which they were advised that, as agreed, the rent consultation with our tenants had been undertaken and that 80% of those tenants who responded (176 tenants which is a sample size of 25%) to the questionnaire supporting the 5% increase for the coming year.

Following on from the discussions at the Board Away Day in October, and the further worsening of the economy along with several interest rate rises, the Board discussed with David Smith, Financial Advisor, how this impacted the business plan and how a possible extension to 23/24 of the rent freeze by Scottish Government would impact the viability of the Association.

The Board provisionally **approved** a 5% increase and **agreed** this would be confirmed at the February meeting once the Scottish Government has announced their decision and had given further consideration to the annual budget for 23/24.

7. **Budget 2023/24**

The Finance Manager presented the draft budget for 2023/24 to the Board along with the various assumptions which has been used in the preparation of this draft particularly around inflation, rent increase and salary negotiations.

There were various discussions around the planned and cyclical maintenance budget and the Finance Manager outlined possible suggestions on what costs could be reduced should other works take priority.

It was agreed that there would be a requirement this year to be very careful regarding our spend and that some works may have to be postponed.

Other items of expenditure were discussed, such as IT and the Housing Needs Survey and it was **agreed** that the work on the survey would be postponed for a year until December 2023 but that partnership funding for this project is still researched.

The Board **approved** the draft budget and **agreed** that the amended budget would come back to the February meeting.

8. **ICT Strategy**

The Customer Services Manager presented the report to the Board in which they were advised that the draft document has been prepared by external consultant Steve Bromley along with support from staff at the LHA Group and Tecnica (our new IT support). It was **noted** that the strategy does not include the SDM housing management system and due to a significant cost increase the Association will be undertaking a value for money exercise.

The Board also **noted** that the action plan has been pushed back slightly due to the onboarding process being delayed due to difficulties Tecnica were experiencing with TSG who we were moving from.

The Board **approved** the ICT Strategy and **noted** that the report and action plan would come back to the Board in a years' time for a progress update.

9. EDI

The Board **approved** the interim approach for two years - to continue collecting anonymised tenant data. After this period the Board would re-consider linking tenant data.

10. Health and Safety Contract

The Customer Services Manager informed the Board that following approval earlier in the year to extend the Ecosafety contract to 31st March 2023 it was now time to look at options beyond that time.

The Board **approved** the recommendation to continue the contract with EcoSafety for a further three years with LHA Property Services being the lead company with an option to review on an annual basis.

11. Board Meeting Dates

The Customer Services Manager presented the report to the Board and thanked all Board members who responded with their preference for meeting dates for 2023.

It was noted that the proposal was that all Lochaber Care & Repair and LHA Property Services meetings would be in person but that there would still be the opportunity for members to join online. It was also proposed that the AGM and a Board meeting in August are held on the same day with the AGM being held in the afternoon and the Board meeting held in the evening.

The Board **noted** and **approved** the proposal in relation to the Board meeting dates for 2023.

12. Local Letting Initiative

The Board **noted** the guidance in the report and **approved** in principle the consideration and use of Local Letting Initiatives subject to approval of the checklist which will be presented at the February Board meeting.

13. Early Repayment of SIS Loan

The Finance Manager presented this paper demonstrating the savings of repaying this loan in full within this financial year.

The Board **approved** the early repayment of the SIS Loan.

14. Options Appraisal Glen Shiel, Ballachulish

The Chief Executive advised the Board that the property at Glen Shiel, Ballachulish has been vacant for several months having been identified as being one of the more

challenging rental off the shelf (ROT) properties within the Asset management Strategy in terms of the refurbishment required to be able to bring it up to the required standard.

The two options available for this site are:

Option 1 – Sell the site with the proceeds being treated in a similar way to other ROTS sales.

Option 2 – Demolish the current property on the site and use this to develop four new units.

The Board discussed the financial implications of both options also giving consideration that the Association, had to date, not been able to access available land in this area to invest in providing affordable housing

The Board **considered** and **approved** Option 2.

15. Development – *Certain aspects of this report have been redacted as they have been deemed as commercially sensitive*

The Chief Executive updated the Board on the following developments:

Tigh Aran, Spean Bridge – all the building warrants are now in place and due to timing of the handover from the contractor (15th of December), depending on their preference, some tenants are now being signed up immediately and others being signed up in the New Year.

Mallaig – is now on site.

The Board **noted** the development report. It was also **noted** an update on the LINK development in Upper Achintore would be provided at the February meeting.

16. Annual Declarations of Interest

The Board **noted** the annual declarations of interest report.

17. A.O.C.B

(i) Opportunity for Board members to meet other housing associations

The Chief Executive advised the Board that there was a proposal that Meeting for Board members from other Highlands & Islands RSL's to be held in April on either a Monday or Saturday in Inverness. Once a date has been confirmed this will be circulated to the Board.

The Board noted the update.

(ii) SFHA Social Housing Fuel Fund Application

The Housing Services Co-Ordinator informed the Board that the Housing Association has been successful in obtaining a £192,000 bid from the SFHA Social Housing Fuel Fund. This funding will be used to give all tenants who are over 65, in receipt of Housing Benefit or in receipt of Universal Credit a

£250 payment towards their fuels costs as well as purchasing heat related and energy efficient equipment for these tenants. It was also advised that the Association is hoping to be able to use this money to help tenants who are not in receipt of any benefits.

The Board **noted** the verbal update and that a further report will come back to the Board in February providing an update.

(iii) CEO Appraisal

The Chair advised the Board that the CEO's appraisal had now been carried out and a report will come to the February Board meeting.

The Board **noted** the verbal update.

(iv) Application for Membership of the Association

The Board **approved** the application for Shareholding Membership of Chris Robinson.

(v) EVH Wages Ballot

The CEO advised the Board that EVH had confirmed a 5.25% increase in salaries for 2023/24.

The Board **noted** the verbal update.