

WHEATLEY HOMES EAST BOARD MEETING

Date: Thursday 24 November 2022

Time: 10.30am

Venue: New Mart Road, Edinburgh

Chairperson: Alastair Murray

Present: Helen Howden (Vice Chair), Bryan Pitbladdo, Jack Cadell, Jane Menzies, Anne McGovern, Judith McGlashan, Ruth Kynoch

In Attendance: Hazel Young, Group Director of Housing and Property
Stephen Wright, Director of Governance
Laura Henderson, Managing Director
Alex Lamb, Head of Housing
Lyndsay Brown, Director of Financial Reporting
Frank McCafferty, Group Director, Repairs and Assets

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mark Keane. The Chair confirmed that a quorum was present.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Board noted the standing declarations of interest. No new declarations of interest were made.

3. Minute of meeting and action list

- a) **Decided: The Board approved the minute of the meeting held on 22 September 2022.**
- b) **Decided: The Board approved the minute of the AGM meeting held on 22 September 2022 subject to noting the registration of a proxy and apologies for absence received from Ruth Kynoch.**
- c) **Decided: The Board noted the update on the action list including the agreement to schedule a tour of Customer First Centre with a tentative date of 14 December 2022. (Post meeting note: this visit had taken place as scheduled).**

4. Chair's update

The Chair provided an update to the Board on the following his recent appointment:

- attendance at the Wheatley Group Board Meeting
- introductory meetings held with each board member
- attendance at upcoming site opening at West Craigs (to be accompanied by Bryan Pitbladdo and Judith McGlashan)
- update on the projects approved by Wheatley Developments Scotland

Decided: The Board noted the update as reported.

5. Customer value and insights

The Board received an update on: sector wide customer satisfaction intelligence; feedback on recent customer insight and research in relation to repairs; and families and our planned response to the key findings. The Board also considered an update on how we will ensure the customer voice and insight is being embedded in our future strategic planning and decision making. The Board noted that the report also set out an outline programme for how the customer voice will inform Board decision making over the next 12-18 months.

The Board noted the severe impact of the pandemic on our ability to deliver services and the recognition that this could shift customer views and satisfaction levels with recent pulse surveys consistent with this expectation. The Board discussed how this was reflective of the position being reported across the wider sector. The Board noted the measures being implemented to support improvement across the top three service priorities.

The Board was pleased to note that we would resume our quarterly newsletters which would contain updates on the customer voice activity. The Board also discussed the scrutiny panel and noted the proposals to expand the membership to a greater number of tenants across the group. Additionally, the Board acknowledged the other forms of engagement and scrutiny, such as neighbourhood walkabouts and themed customer reviews.

Decided: The Board noted the report and provided feedback on the proposed customer insight programme.

6. 2023/24 rent and service charges – consultation and engagement

The Board received a report outlining the current position in relation to 2023 rent setting and implications for planned 2023 rent increase including the planned engagement and consultation with our tenants.

The Board carefully considered the proposals put forward and noted that the key principles that directed our group rent setting framework focussed on a) affordability, b) comparability, c) financial viability and d) consultation with tenants and service users. The Board noted that our consultation approach this year requires to take account of the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) Act 2022.

The Board recognised its responsibility to balance the requirement to remain financially stable whilst delivering improvements to customers' homes that would help to make them energy efficient and therefore more affordable to run. In considering our rent consultation proposals the Board took account of the Here for You Fund and other support measures we have in place, including fuel advisors and EatWell, to help customers during the current economic environment and cost of living pressures.

Decided: The Board

- 1) Approved the proposed rent increase level for Wheatley Homes East set out in the report, in the context of the current Scottish Government emergency legislation.**
- 2) Noted the current position in relation to ongoing discussion with Scottish Government on rent consultation.**
- 3) Noted that an additional Board meeting will be convened once the Scottish Government confirm the rent cap position for 2023/24.**

7. Annual Assurance Statement and governance update

The Board received the Group's Annual Assurance Statement confirming material compliance with the Scottish Housing Regulator's Regulatory Framework and an update on Board Membership.

The Board was advised that following the self-assessment process and internal review by the Assurance Team, we have identified no areas of material non-compliance that require to be disclosed in the Annual Assurance Statement. The Board noted that as per the Group Standing Orders, the Group Board considered the evidence against the above Framework and approved our Annual Assurance Statement at their meeting on 26 October 2022.

The Board also considered (i) proposed membership cancellations following the AGM and in line with our Rules; and (ii) new membership applications.

Decided: The Board

- 1) Noted the 2022 Annual Assurance Statement which has been submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator.**
- 2) Approved the proposed list of membership deletions as outlined in Appendix 3 of the report.**
- 3) Approved the membership applications as outlined in Appendix 4 of the report.**

8. Property condition assurance approach

The Board received an update on our approach to property condition assurance. The Board was advised that the design of our operating model enables a proactive approach and local accountability, and our 'Think Yes' culture ensures that issues are resolved and/or escalated as required.

The Board also received an update on our mould and damp procedures which had been introduced in February 2022. The Board noted that these had been supplemented to ensure that we have housing officer visits arranged whenever we are notified that there is mould or damp within a property. In addition, we are providing further training to our front-line staff to help them respond to potential cases of mould and damp. Lastly, it was explained that we had introduced a policy position through which we would force access to a property in circumstances where the tenant has refused or failed to provide this following repeated visits.

The Board also discussed the potential to use new technology to monitor dampness and moisture readings within each of our homes and noted that we will continue to look at new technology to assist us to manage our properties as this comes to market.

The Board requested an update on the presence of radon gas at Hyvots and it was agreed that this would be provided at the next meeting.

Decided: The Board

- 1) Approved the approach and criteria for forcing access for mould and damp.**
- 2) Noted the contents of this report.**

9. Performance report

The Board received an update on performance delivering against targets and strategic projects for 2022/23 as of the end of quarter 2 including the measures and strategic projects dashboards.

Key points highlighted to the Board included areas of continued focus: non-emergency timescales, new build completions, gross rent arrears, average days to relet and project slippage and the continued strong performance in several key areas, namely:

- improved complaint response timescales and high tenancy sustainment
- emergency repair timescales are being completed in less than three hours with an improvement in right first time which is now achieving target
- medical adaptation completion timescales are well within target
- percentage of relevant lets to homeless applicants are above target

The Board noted in particular the information presented at point 4.36 in the context of performance in relation to sickness absence reporting a 30% absence rate where the cause was stress/anxiety. It was explained that this related to home and personal stress and anxiety and that we were aware of an increase post Covid. The Board was provided with information about the range of support and wellbeing we provide to staff.

Decided: The Board noted the content of the report.

10. Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Human Rights policy (presentation)

The Board received the updated Group EDI and Human Rights policy which has been approved and designated as group wide by the Group Board at its meeting on 28 September 2022. The Board was assured that, as a Group, we are strongly committed to EDI and Human Rights with a strong focus on continuous improvement and ensuring this is reflected in our organisational culture.

The Board noted the update and outcome of our first customer equalities data collection exercise and noted how this will be used to inform our decision-making and strategy workshop next year.

The report was supported by a presentation to the Board on the key aspects of the policy. It was agreed that a copy of the presentation will be circulated to all Board Members.

Decided: The Board

- 1) Noted the range of EDI related activity already underway and in progress.**
- 2) Noted the reviewed EDI and Human Rights policy and its designation as a group wide policy.**
- 3) Noted that a copy of the supporting presentation will be circulated to all Board Members.**

11. Arrears and Debtors Policy

The Board received an update on the review of the Group Arrears and Debtors Framework and considered the updated Wheatley Homes East Arrears and Debtors policy which has been updated to better reflect our practices and our current operating model. Each section of the policy has been reviewed, refined, and updated. In particular, further emphasis has been given to the effective management of income and prevention of customer debt.

The Board considered the report and policy. The Board commented that the policy was fair and clear and that they were satisfied with the range of support we provide to try and reduce arrears and support sustainment.

Decided: The Board

- 1) Noted the content of the report and updates to the Policy.**
- 2) Approved the Wheatley Homes East Arrears and Debtors Policy that has been developed based on the Group Framework.**

12. Finance Report

The Board received an overview of the management accounts for the period to 30 September 2022 including Q2 forecast. Additionally, the Board received an update on the review of new build appraisal target return rate with agreement sought from the Board that this be updated on the new build approval criteria for project approvals by Wheatley Developments Scotland.

The Board noted the performance to 30 September 2022 and the Q2 2022/23 Full Year Forecast as summarised in section 4.2. The key points related to the review of New Build Appraisal Target Return Rate were outlined to the Board. The Board noted that the increase to the target rate of return was approved by the Group Board at its meeting in October 2022. The target will be reviewed again in February 2023 after confirmation on the level of the rent cap is provided by Scottish Government.

Decided: The Board

- 1) **Noted the management accounts for the period to 30 September 2022 at Appendix 1.**
- 2) **Noted the revision to the target return rate for new build social and mid-market rent developments and agreed that the criteria for Wheatley Development Scotland approving projects on our behalf is updated to reflect this.**

13. Corporate Risk Register

The Board considered the proposed changes to the Wheatley Homes East Risk Register as summarised in the report.

Specifically, the Board noted that four risks had been identified as out with the risk appetite related to Cyber Security (Risk019); Financial impact of rent control legislation (arISK022); Group Credit Rating (Risk 010) and Fire Safety (Risk 003).

The Board noted that the implementation of any identified actions will be monitored by management and residual risk scores will be reviewed as part of the scheduled quarterly review of all risks.

Decided: The Board approved the updates as presented in the report.

14. Group Assurance update

The Board received an update on the internal audit work performed during the first two periods of 2022/23 and the rolling Internal Audit Plan 2022/23.

The Board noted that following completion of the listed reviews, no significant matters were noted to bring to the attention of the Board. Management have agreed actions to address the improvement actions identified during each review. The Internal Audit team will monitor completion of these actions and report progress to future meetings of the Group Audit Committee and this Board.

Decided: The Board noted the content of the report.

15. AOCB

There was no further business considered.

Signed
(Chair)