

Meeting Minutes

Board Meeting

Thursday 16 April 2020 at 10.00am
Via Teleconference

Present:	Bob McDougall (Chair)	In attendance:	Lorna Cameron
	Beverley Graham		Jon Turner
	Bob Hartness		Fiona Hoffie*
	Douglas Taylor		Carol Bonham*
	Frances Wood		Elaine Whyte*
	Grant Carson		Emma Wilson*
	Jean Hamilton		
	Jill Pritchard		Michelle Allen-Proust
	Susie Fitton		(Minutes)

*Excluding items of Private Business 4483 to 4486.2

Due to the ongoing social distancing restrictions surrounding the Coronavirus Covid 19 outbreak, this meeting was conducted virtually using teleconferencing.

4472 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Bob McDougall welcomed everyone to the meeting. A special welcome was extended to Jon Turner, CEO of Link. Jon was joining the meeting to discuss any questions about the group-wide strategy and response to the Covid19 situation and to feedback on the Intra-Group Agreement and associated actions.

Grant Carson was welcomed back to the Board following a leave of absence.

Apologies were received from Chris Baird.

With regret, the Board noted the recent resignations of Janice Flanagan and Stuart Dow, each for personal reasons.

The Board members were sorry to lose valued Board members and extended their thanks to Janice and Stuart for their contributions, support and enthusiasm while serving on the Board. It was noted that, although no longer

members of the Board, Janice and Stuart would remain Ordinary Members of the Association.

It was agreed that the items of private business on the agenda would be taken at the end of the meeting, to enable staff to leave the teleconference prior to consideration of those final, confidential, items.

4473 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Jill Pritchard declared her position as a member of the Link Property Board.

There were no other declarations of interest.

4474 COVID 19 – UPDATE

This report provided an updated summary of the impact to date of the current Covid19 pandemic on Horizon's housing services.

The item was discussed in detail, with questions and comments focusing on the following themes:

Back log of work:

Assurance was given that core services continue to be delivered, with the management team monitoring non-essential or not immediately essential pieces of work and flagging potential difficulties at an early stage.

Staff Furlough

Currently no staff in Horizon are furloughed. Office staff are working from home, and the Estates Team started back on site this week completing outdoor/grounds maintenance and work that can be carried out at distance. It was confirmed that the appropriate PPE equipment to enable staff to work safely had been received and is in use.

Vulnerable tenants:

As noted in the report, initially staff contacted all vulnerable tenants by phone in the first week of lock-down, and they continue to follow up on those calls to provide support.

Horizon has identified 178 vulnerable tenants for regular contact. Clarification was provided on the criteria used to define 'vulnerable' in current situation,

with focus on the health, wellbeing, and the current level of support available to individuals. It also includes those who may be struggling due to the financial impact caused by the current situation.

Most people have reported that they have support from family/ friends/ carers/ community. Staff are now focusing on those individuals known to be less well supported, or who benefit from our phone calls. Support provided has included being proactive in offering support with food deliveries where we are able.

Bad Debt/Non-payment:

This is kept under a constant review and comprehensive monitoring of debts is taking place at both subsidiary and Link group level. It is helpful in identifying and supporting tenants at risk or in financial difficulties. While the numbers remain low, we are carrying out some sensitivity analysis and financial modelling to deal with any future rises.

Court proceedings are also on hold due to the current circumstances, and staff continue to support those with reduced income due to the pandemic.

Relets:

Across the sector, relets are on hold for the time being.

Regarding homeless nominations, Horizon have a very limited stock and a low turnover but remain in contact with local authorities and are working with Link to support any requests for assistance. Any requests will be addressed on a case by case basis and we will help where possible. It was suggested that Fife Council may be keen to work with Horizon on homeless solutions, which will be explored.

Impact on Subcontractors:

Progress on the planned maintenance programme has been impacted by the lock-down, as sub-contractors are also unable to work. This work is included in the back-log monitoring report, and work will resume when it is practical and safe to do so.

The new gas contract commenced on 1 April and, as an essential service, Kingdom Gas are running business as usual as far as possible.

Adaptations:

It was noted that most adaptation work has ceased nationally, with the works that continue to be carried out being focused on at home palliative care requirements.

We have two current referrals for bathrooms but no new referrals. The bathroom contractor is not working at present.

Current advice from Scottish Government on funding is that for current adaptations Scottish Government have released more funding from 2019-20 but are not yet open for new claims for 2020-21. The funding process is currently on hold. It was noted that cyclical maintenance and adaptations were included on the monitor record of backlog works, and the Board would continue to be updated on the position of all backlog works.

Supporting staff working from home:

Board members were sympathetic to the challenges of working from home in the current circumstances, understanding that many staff would be juggling conflicting work and personal commitments, and not always with ideal workspaces available.

The Board welcomed the flexible and supportive approach in place to enable staff to balance their work and personal responsibilities and supported the physical and mental health and wellbeing of staff available during these unprecedented times.

The Board noted the impact on tenants, service delivery and staff of the current Covid19 pandemic and the actions underway to support tenants and staff and assess the short- and longer-term impact.

ITEMS FOR DEBATE/DECISION/APPROVAL

4475 APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 14 FEBRUARY 2020

Approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

Moved: Beverley Graham

Seconded: Dougie Taylor

The Board considered the previously circulated report, noting the following additional comments or updates during discussion:

4477.1 Intra-Group Agreement

Jon Turner confirmed that the final Intra-Group Agreement was now with the responsible officers of each partner organisation for signature and provided an update on the current work underway to take forward the new strategic structures that would under-pin the new Agreement.

In response to the request for a nominated representative from the Horizon Board to sit on the Link Group Board, the Board members agreed that the Chair of the Horizon Board would be the nominated representative, with the Vice Chair deputising if required.

Moved: Susie Fitton

Seconded: Frances Wood

Jon Turner would also circulate further information to Board members on the working-group he planned to establish to consider and formulate the group-wide sustainability strategy. The Chair would then seek a volunteer from the Board to represent Horizon on the working-group.

Decision: The Board agreed that the Chair of the Board should represent Horizon at the Link Group Board, with the Vice-Chair deputising if required.

4477.2 NL Care & Repair Tender – update

The Board remain disappointed by the decision by North Lanarkshire Council to end funding for the Care and Repair Service and thanked the staff who made the service the success that it was.

Discussion focused on continuing to support the affected staff, especially in light of the current Covid-19 situation. It was noted that several weeks ago legal advice had been taken regarding the potential to furlough the C&R NL staff,

advice at that time had been that this would not be possible. However, it was noted that the interpretation and application of the legislation over recent weeks may have changed and may have opened an opportunity for furloughing of the staff to be reconsidered. The Board requested that further legal advice be sought and that, if it proved possible, furlough should be extended to any C&R staff that it may be applicable to.

Decision: The Board agreed that:

- Further legal advice and clarification on the application of the legislation regarding furlough would be sought and,
- if furloughing staff was a possibility, the Board supported extending furlough to any qualifying C&RNL staff.

4478 BUSINESS PLAN

4478.1 Business Plan 2020-21

This report presented the revised business plan for 2020/21 updated following feedback from the Board meeting in February. The main changes included slightly revised strategic objectives, with an action plan to deliver these. The revised document also included reference to the current Covid19 virus, which is likely to have a significant impact on the business plan.

A number of comments, including suggested amendments, were received from Board members on receipt of the report, which Lorna Cameron summarised. Board member agreed the amendments and Lorna confirmed that these would be incorporated in the final version.

It was also agreed that, due to the impact of Covid19, a financial forecast report would be presented to the Audit Committee on 13 May 2020.

Carol Bonham and Jon Turner provided further information on the current and medium-term financial considerations:

- Horizon currently have a 300k underspend due to funds that would have normally been spent in the usual running of business by this point in the financial year not yet having been spent.
- Information to date is that the accounts for Horizon are projecting a 500k cash balance at year end.

- Stress testing – it is difficult to have certainty on the accuracy as there are so many unknowable variables at present. It has been suggested that, Link wide, the organisation will run figures at end April. However, it is recognised that the impact of any rent pressures is unlikely to manifest until end May/June.
- Audit Committee should receive robust figures as these will be drawn at end April from the Year End and rents run at that time.
- The impact of Covid-19 will likely produce a challenging financial climate for the coming year, and likely the year after that also. However, at present we cannot predict what the depth of rent pressure is likely to look like that far ahead.

Bob Hartness, who was due to have a meeting with SFHA involving the SHR later in the day, agreed to provide fellow Board members with an update on any useful advice or information he was able to share following the meeting.

The Board recognised that the landscape of health and social care that we will be moving into in the short terms/medium term would likely be very different to how it looked pre-pandemic.

Decision: With the requested amendments and caveats in mind, the Board approved the Business Plan 2020-21.

4478.2 End of Year Review 2019-2020

The Board considered the end of year review against the actions from the 2019-20 Business Plan.

The majority of operational actions were complete (including rent restructuring, implementing estates action plan, review of customer services team etc.) Other actions were rolled into 2020/21 plan and mainly related to the development and implementation of housing strategy (e.g. value for money work, localities/neighbourhood housing options etc), as well as the work on PR/communications and influencing the national agenda regarding accessible housing.

The importance of keeping this under review as we move through short, medium- & long-term recovery from the Covid19 crisis was recognised.

The Board noted the year end progress against the Business Plan 2019/20 objectives.

4480 HEALTH AND SAFETY STATEMENT OF INTENT

When considering the draft *Health and Safety Statement of Intent 2020* the Board requested that when listing the groups of individuals to which the statement applied there should be specific reference to Board members.

Decision: With this update in mind, the Board approved the Health and Safety Statement of Intent.

Moved: Beverley Graham

Seconded: Bob McDougall

4481 POLICY REVIEW

4481.1 Policies for noting:

- Short-term Leave & Time Off Policy
- Worker Policy
- Redundancy Policy
- Organisational Change Policy

The above policies were noted with no further comment.

4481.2 Policy for approval:

- Fixed-term Contracts Policy

Decision: The Board approved the Fixed-term Contracts Policy

ITEMS FOR NOTE

4482 UNCONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 6 FEBRUARY 2020

The Board noted the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee, held on 6 February 2020.

Fiona Hoffie, Emma Wilson, Elaine Whyte, and Carol Bonham were thanked for their contributions and left the meeting.

PRIVATE/RESERVED BUSINESS

The following three items were considered private/reserved business, and, with the exception of Lorna Cameron and Michelle Allen-Proust, no other staff were present during consideration of the following items:

4483 COST OF LIVING AWARD

The Board considered the recommendation of the Employment Sub Committee for a 2% Cost of Living Award for 2020-21. In addition to the information provided in the previously circulated report, it was also noted that negotiations between Link and Unite the Union had ended on 15 April, with agreement on a 2% Cost of Living Award.

Decision: The Board approved the recommendation from the Employment Sub Committee of 2% cost of living award for 20/21 as accepted by the BENCH.

4484 CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE EMPLOYMENT SUB-COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD ON:

- **27 JANUARY 2020 – Confirmed Minutes**
- **16 MARCH 2020 – Unconfirmed Minutes**

The Board noted the confidential minutes of the Employment Sub-Committee.

4485 RESEARCH AND INFLUENCING REPORT

This report summarised initial discussions with media and public relations consultants to support Horizon's values and influence national stakeholders to achieve independent living and equality of housing opportunity for disabled people. It also highlighted some more immediate options for current media profiling to share the experiences and work of Horizon and the impact of Covid19 on tenants.

Discussion was detailed and focused on the following key points and suggestions:

1. Need to focus on influencing legislation and the housing sector in developing more accessible housing.
2. Need to influence stakeholders, and government around the accessible housing agenda and improving funding for adaptations.
3. PR/Communications work should target stakeholders, funders, key influencers rather than the general public.
4. Habinteg have a huge media presence and are very active on twitter, including around partnerships to lobby for improvements to wheelchair and accessibility standards and numbers e.g. their #accessiblehomes campaign. If not already linked in, explore ways to work in partnership with Habinteg. (With the caveat that the Habinteg agenda is designed to tackle the legislative and housing systems in England and that the Scottish systems differ)
5. Incorporate examples of the assistance offered by Horizon to the vulnerable tenants during this pandemic, with Horizon staff going above and beyond to offer support.
6. Opportunity also for Board members to increase Horizon's profile including through Horizon's Twitter account. This needs to be developed to its maximum potential, and that Board members and senior staff ensure re-tweeting of posts.
7. The health and housing agenda is currently very high profile so Horizon should be working on this too.

The Board agreed that initial focus should be on a social media strategy to increase Horizon's presence and capacity to influence at this time. Later work would build on this to do longer term national work to influence key stakeholders, building on 'Still Minding the Step', and 'Match Me'.

It was agreed to establish a working group of Board members to support the development of a PR and Communications Strategy for Horizon. Any future work with consultants would need to identify at the outset clear indicators to measure the success and impact of what was achieved.

With the above comments and suggestions in mind, the Board agreed to the immediate focus of a PR strategy being on implementing a social media strategy to raise Horizon's profile and build on achievements. The Board further agreed on the establishment of a working group to support the development and implementation of a wider influencing strategy that may involve the use of consultants. The Board noted the update on research and influencing activities.

4486 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

4486.1 AGM 2020 – CHANGE OF DATE

Decision: The Board approved the change of date for the 2020 AGM to Tuesday 15 September 2020. Though it was recognised that the arrangements and format of the meeting would be subject to the potential continued impact of the Covid19 pandemic and social distancing measures that may still be in place at that time.

4486.2 BOARD APPRAISAL

The Board noted that the appraisal process for 2020 had been subject to delay due to the current position with Covid-19. However, work continues to establish a format for the appraisal process that can be supported while observing the required social distancing measures.

It was further noted that there is a requirement to hold a Board member recruitment process and that there are currently five Board member vacancies. Two of these are specifically reserved for tenants, and three are for General Members.

As part of appraisal process, there will be a review of the skills that would be desirable in new Board members.

The Board made some further suggestions on Board recruitment including:

- Current Board members providing statements on what it means to be a Board member of Horizon and what it entails.
- These could also be done as short video clips
- Extracts of the video produced for our CEO Recruitment campaign could also be useful.

CLOSE

Bob McDougall thanked Board members and staff for their participation in what had been an unconventional but ultimately successful Board meeting. While the teleconference had worked well, this platform is more challenging for participants than holding a physical meeting. Staff will continue to explore other virtual meeting platforms focusing on visual options for future meetings.



Date of the next meeting

The date of the next meeting is Thursday 11 June 2020 at 10:00 a.m. in Livingston.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. McDougall'.

R (Bob) McDougall

Dated: 11 June 2020