

**HOME IN SCOTLAND (HiS)  
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING OF HOME IN SCOTLAND BOARD  
HELD ON 14 NOVEMBER 2024 ON MS TEAMS**

**Present:**

Susan Deacon	Chair
Gillian Campbell	Board Member
Gavin MacKenzie	Board Member
Robyn Inglis	Board Member
Grant Campbell	Board Member
June Wylie	Board Member
Mark Henderson	Board Member
Helen Meehan	Board Member

**In attendance**

Bryony Willett	Director of Scotland
Austin Woods	Company Secretary
Will Gardner	Executive Director of Asset & Development [Item 2180]
Shona Mitchell	Senior Advisor, Home in Scotland
Ruth Corless	Governance Business Partner
Tom Cuthill	Head of Maintenance, Home in Scotland

**2173 CHAIR'S WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. Thanking all for their time the Chair reminded the Board Members the meeting would focus on Rent Setting.

Apologies were received from Catherine Wood and Emmanuel Asante.

**2174 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Chair advised the Board that her term of office with the Edinburgh Festival had concluded. The Declarations of Interest update was noted.

Austin advised that a comprehensive review of all registers would take place and annual declarations sought in January.

**2175 MINUTES OF THE HOME IN SCOTLAND BOARD MEETING 24 OCTOBER 2024**

A correction to the planned meeting between Shona and Grant was made. Pending this amendment, the minutes were agreed as a true record.

The Board **APPROVED** the minutes of 24 October 2024.

**2176 ACTION POINTS**

The Chair acknowledged the work to complete and close action points.

Austin advised that he had been informed that a discussion on Joint Ventures had already taken place but the action was in respect of taking the Board through this at a later date upon the identification of a scheme that would benefit from a Joint Venture approach. Will Gardner will ensure this is done when an appropriate scheme opportunity arises.

Bryony updated the Board on Community Engagement events and advised Members of a Viewpoint meeting held earlier in the month. Apologies and reasons for delays and cancellations for Board visits to Customer Promise Assessments was shared. The Chair welcomed the plans to reschedule these events and acknowledged this important aspect of the Board's role. Bryony updated that Community Engagement generally is being discussed with the

Director of Customer Experience, Colette Flattery.

The Board **NOTED** the updated action list.

## **2177 BOARD, COMMITTEE UPDATES, COMPANY SECRETARY REPORT**

Austin summarised elements of the Company Secretary Report and advised the Board of the transfer of colleagues into the Home Group Repairs Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) and the Gift Aid payments from Home Group Development Limited (HGDL).

Austin summarised the business of each Committee which included details of the Care Review being undertaken by Kate Still as reported at the Clinical Governance Committee and the Shared Ownership product discussed at Development Committee. The Audit Committee had discussed follow-up on audit reports.

The Chair invited members of the Board from Committees to update Members. Gavin confirmed that the Audit Committee had agreed on the expectation of effective responses to Audit Action Reports. The Chair noted that a Home Board and Health and Safety Governance meeting would take place in November.

An update on Board Member recruitment for Scotland was given. Board Members were advised that expertise in social housing and energy efficiency improvements was sought for future candidates and all were asked to consider known candidates ahead of the next campaign in January 2025.

### **Action: All Board Members**

Bryony thanked the Chair and June Wylie for their time on recent Board Members' interviews. Gillian's imminent end of term was noted.

Austin confirmed that an update to the Rules and Operating Manual for HiS was in progress. Outcomes of work with TC Young would be shared with the Board in the spring.

The Board **NOTED** the report.

## **2178 DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Bryony presented the Director's Report and summarised points of note.

The Annual Report and ESG Report had been published and additional updates to the website had taken place. All Members were asked to visit the website to view the updates.

The Board were advised of overspends in adaptations within customer homes. Additional funding for adaptations was being sought by the sector, but no allocation had been awarded.

Glasgow City Council was noted to be willing to offer Acquisitions Funding. Internal reviews would determine whether this was a good opportunity for HiS and an Action Committee would be called if approval was needed ahead of the next meeting.

A Human Rights Self-Assessment had been completed using the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) guide to determine whether Home in Scotland was fully meeting Regulatory expectations. Following this, updates to the Governance Effectiveness Plan and Operational Plan had been made and shared with Board.

The Board raised a series of questions on the Director's update. Gillian asked if parameters would be set for market acquisition discussions with Glasgow Council. Bryony confirmed that 10-20 years old newer builds, for standalone family housing would be a priority in any acquisition decision.

June asked if there had been an increase in the demand for adaptations in the last year and how this could be future-proofed, given the expected limits to funding. Bryony agreed to review historical spending on adaptations and present this at the next Board meeting. Whilst demand had not necessarily increased, the reason for the overspend was that funding had significantly reduced. A robust framework around the decision-making process was required. Some scenarios were outlined to Board which noted adaptation decisions versus relocation of customers to more suitable housing. Occupational Therapists were to be included at an earlier stage in the decision process and customer expectations would be managed. Other Housing Associations' responses to this issue would be reviewed. The Chair welcomed the proposal for Board to see some clear thinking on this. An adaptations report would be presented to the next meeting.

**Action: Bryony Willett**

Shona reminded the Board of UK Government budget announcements made since the last meeting. Scottish Government figure for capital spending and the affordable housing supply programme were discussed. Levels of uncertainty remained but work to try to influence an adaptations funding increase this year was in progress. Many Housing Associations were reported to be ceasing their adaptations work raising concerns about increased risks for people being able to live in their homes.

June asked if Home in Scotland had engaged with the CIH Dementia Framework. Bryony agreed to consider this framework.

**Action: Bryony Willett**

The Board **APPROVED** the Revised Operational Plan.

The Board **APPROVED** the update Governance Effective Plan.

The Board **NOTED** the correction and change in frequency of the Internal Audit Report.

## **2179 SOCIAL RENT CONSULTATION PROPOSALS FOR APRIL 2025**

The Chair reminded the Board that the discussion relating to rent levels was one of the key decisions for the Board. The reminder of a statutory requirement to consult was noted. The discussion today would consider rent options in the context of viability of the business and customer impact.

Bryony advised that the report proposed a rent increase of CPI+1% which equated to a 2.7% rise. This was aligned to the HiS Business Plan and Five Year Financial Plan which assumes that annual rent increases will increase in line with Home Group (HG) increase. The Board was advised of fluctuations in the rent increase for Scotland in recent years. 2.7% would be one of the lowest proposed in the Scottish sector this year.

Helen confirmed that going lower than 2.7% would have an impact on the Business Plan and uncertainties still remained pending any further Government announcements. The contractual renegotiation with Wheatley and Novus was noted and the potential financial pressure caused by this. Core services would be unaffected, but investment for improvements and building more homes could be impacted.

The Board were advised of the pressures on affordability. These pressures remained as similar to last year. Management of household costs was discussed and the increase in single people living alone noted.

Increases to Service Charges were discussed. Fly tipping and ground maintenance costs had been reviewed and increases were expected. Prevention

of some of these costs was being considered, with CCTV use to support and deal with fly tipping. Service wide utility cost reductions had not yet been passed on to the customer, following an extensive exercise to ensure accurate metering. The Chair welcomed the greater visibility of Service Charges and sought Board Members' feedback on the proposal to consult on a single proposed rent increase.

Gillian asked about the service charge increase and was advised this was largely due to fly tipping and grounds maintenance. In relation to grounds maintenance incorrect budget allocation in previous years had been resolved, however fly tipping was a group-wide issue and the most effective ways to deal with this were being explored. Bryony confirmed that bespoke customer communication where customers would see large (plus £5 per week) changes in service charges would be issued.

Pressures on Single Occupancy tenants was considered, and the Board sought to understand the level of analysis that had been done for longer term challenges in affordable rents. Bryony confirmed that National Insurance increases were expected to have some knock-on effect on costs, but to date no contractors had raised this. Helen advised that HiS was expected to still meet budget targets for this financial year. Estimated National Insurance increase costs were cited as £65K for HiS and £3.7M for HG.

Grant acknowledged the comprehensive detail provided to the Board. The viability of the business balanced with the commitment to support vulnerable people was clearly shown. Good quality homes were needed in the sector and ensuring this was important. Shona confirmed that the Rent Consultation document had been prepared with financial inclusion 'front and centre'.

The Financial Inclusion reports were welcomed by the Board and the 240 customers falling into the unaffordable category was noted. June asked what triggers were in place to ensure customer support. Bryony summarised the analysis and explained that 50-60 people in single person households were estimated to be paying more than one third of their income on rent. The arrears process was outlined, with offers of support ahead of any legal action being required. Colleagues would make this offer of help as early as possible, though it was known that some customers would delay accepting this help. This resulted in arrears escalations. HG continued to explore ways of engagement and Housing Managers were expected to knock on doors rather than just send letters. It was proposed more customer events would help in this. The Chair welcomed the planned discussion around community engagement and customer involvement at a future meeting.

**Action: Bryony Willett**

Homelessness prevention duties were highlighted by Grant. Bryony agreed to confirm that the refreshed Tenancy Sustainment Framework was aligned to the new prevention duties.

**Action: Bryony Willett**

Robyn agreed that a 2.7% Rent increase was sustainable for the business but acknowledged the number of customers in hardship and without benefits. This group was more likely to be impacted by an increase. Ensuring this was sustainable for customers was important.

Following a robust discussion the Chair sought confirmation that the Board agreed to consult on a proposed rent increase of 2.7% from April 2025.

The consultation timescales were shared, and it was noted that the final decision would be confirmed at the 6 February Board meeting.

The Board **APPROVED** the proposed rent increase of 2.7% for the customer consultation process.

**2180 DEVELOPMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Will joined the meeting and shared the Development Performance Report. Will outlined the grant opportunities for acquisition of new builds which could be turned into affordable housing. Timescales to secure the grant were short and the Board were advised that an Action Committee might be needed if decisions were required between meetings.

Will informed the Board of a proposed development in Gilmerton South and grant discussions taking place with the City of Edinburgh Council. The Gilmerton South scheme included mid-market rental properties and Shared Ownership homes which would not require affordable housing supply programme grant. Progress had been delayed because of lack of clarity over grant availability. The proposal was presented to the Board for their early consideration but not yet for decision.

The Chair welcomed the early visibility of the scheme and reiterated the Board's support and openness to new opportunities. Board Members affirmed the support for this mixed tenure project. Will explained the Council's preference for social rented developments but noted that positive conversations were taking place in Edinburgh.

The Board **NOTED** the Development Performance Report.

**2181 TREASURY REPORT**

Helen presented the Treasury Report and confirmed that the Royal Bank of Scotland extension had been finalised with a fixed rate lower than Board had been advised. HiS liquidity position was strong with 37 months in place.

The Board **NOTED** the Treasury Report.

**2182 RISK MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW**

Austin summarised the Risk Management Report and advised the Board that risks within the organisation were being refined and would be presented to the Home Board later in the month. A risk workshop would be scheduled as part of the follow up to this. The group remained financially solid, however operational risks existed.

Work within HG on Risk Appetite was explained. This would be covered in the planned workshop and included the risk profile of the sector and Regulatory requirements for Scotland. The risk workshop would be planned for Spring 2025.

**Action: Austin Wood**

The Board **NOTED** the Risk Management Report.

**2183 PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS 2025**

The Programme of Business for the whole year would be shared in the Reading Room for each meeting. 2026 dates would be planned on a rolling basis.

The Programme of Business was **NOTED**.

**2184 AOB**

The Chair noted the possible need for short update meetings.

**2185 DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 6 February 2025**

Signed: ..... Date: .....

Chair

*Susan Deacon*

10 FEB 2025 - 12:00:58 GMT