

**HOME IN SCOTLAND (HiS)
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING OF HOME IN SCOTLAND BOARD
HELD ON 24 OCTOBER 2024 ON MS TEAMS**

Present:

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

In attendance

Bryony Willett	Director of Scotland
Austin Woods	Company Secretary
Chris Hopkins	Director of Finance [Item 2704]
Will Gardner	Executive Director of Asset & Development [Items 2705/2706]
Paul Walker	Executive Director of Repairs & Maintenance [Item 2707]
Shona Mitchell	Senior Adviser, Home in Scotland
Tom Cuthill	Head of Maintenance, Home in Scotland
Karen Wolstencroft	Head of Service Delivery, Home in Scotland
Ruth Corless	Governance Business Partner

2696 WELCOME AND ADMINISTRATION

The Chair welcomed all to the online meeting. The Chair **NOTED** the apologies received from Gillian Campbell and Catherine Wood.

The Chair welcomed Karen Wolstencroft and Tom Cuthill and invited Tom to introduce himself to the Board.

2697 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Declarations of Interest were **NOTED** by the Board. No amendments were presented.

2698 DRAFT MINUTES OF PREVIOUS HOME IN SCOTLAND BOARD MEETING HELD 10 SEPTEMBER 2024

June presented a correction to Item 2676 and advised Catherine had raised the point.

Action: Ruth Corless

The Board agreed the minutes of 10 September 2024 were a true record and these were **APPROVED** by the Board.

2699 ACTION POINTS OF 10 SEPTEMBER 2024

The Chair noted the review of historic action points and the effective work to address and deal with all outstanding items. Austin summarised the action updates for the Board and confirmed the majority of actions had been included on this agenda or would be closed by November.

Austin confirmed the Joint Venture discussion would be scheduled for the longer term.

Action: Austin Woods

A Strategic Risk paper would be brought to November HiS.

Action: Agenda

2700 BOARD, COMMITTEE UPDATES, COMPANY SECRETARY REPORT

The Chair acknowledged Austin Woods' first meeting as permanent Company Secretary. Austin summarised Committee business since the last meeting and advised of Board appointments and a People Plan update being received. The transfer of colleagues previously employed by Breyer to the Home Group (HG) Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) were shared with the Board. Austin advised that a review of HiS Rules and Operations Manual was in progress.

Austin confirmed that dates for the Scotland Board for 2025 had been shared and the Programme of Business was now in place. Susan and June updated colleagues on the outcomes of new Board Member interviews.

The Chair asked for details of the Mutual Award. Mark explained the process and the amount being awarded this year.

June summarised the Health and Safety Governance Committee business and assured the Board of the robust review of fire safety governance arrangements. Committee Members had made customer site visits which had been very positive and informative.

The Chair sought feedback on the priorities for Board Member recruitment. The Board agreed that strengthening the Social Housing experience of the Board was a priority. All Members agreed to consider reaching out to personal networks and guiding suitable candidates towards the application process.

The Board **NOTED** the Company Secretary Report.

2701 DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Director's Report was presented. Bryony advised the Board of acquisition funding proposals having been submitted for three areas. Outcomes of these applications remained outstanding.

The Novus contract repricing request had been scrutinised and it was likely that some increase in costs was expected due to assumptions made at the time of procurement. Further work to scrutinise the potential cost increases was ongoing.

Bryony confirmed that all notifiable events had now been closed for HiS. The Chair acknowledged the effective tightening up of regulatory returns. This assured the Board, and compliance reporting was evident and clear. The Chair extended thanks to the whole team for all the work completed on these areas.

Grant asked for an update on the properties earmarked for Ukrainian households in Dumfries and Galloway. Bryony advised of work with Homes for Good, discussions with Wheatley South and NHS Supported Accommodation projects to explore all options for these properties.

The Chair asked for changes to the Scottish Housing Bill to be shared. Bryony summarised the potential impact on social housing and the private sector. Shona offered to share further details outside of the meeting and was available to expand on the Bill's details. Grant agreed to contact Shona after the meeting. Shona confirmed that the Development Team continued to consider every consultation and feed views into consultations where appropriate.

Customer Promise Assessments plans were highlighted. The Chair encouraged all Board Members to participate. Board Members continued to be keen to complete these and expected the Customer Promise Assessment dates to be recirculated.

Action: Ruth Corless

The Chair welcomed the Cost-of-Living Fund examples in the report and signposted colleagues to these.

The Director's Report was **NOTED** by the Board.

2702 Q2 COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE REPORT

Karen Wolstencroft presented the Complaints Report and noted the reduction in complaints between Quarter 1 and Quarter 2. Complaint stages and timescales were explained. Karen confirmed the 100% performance target would remain in place.

Karen advised that the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) had not upheld some recent complaints and the SPSO had commended HG's good response and record keeping in relation to the issues. The partnership working, record keeping, and positive level of action had been noted. The HiS team had welcomed this outcome and a review of 'lessons learned' had taken place. Robyn cited some known issues around contractor performance and was advised that site visits and internal meetings had taken place to address

the issues. Strong local partnerships continued to develop in order to deal with issues.

Gavin asked how the downward trend of complaints received compared to previous years given this was usually a 'steady' figure. Bryony confirmed this reduction was a group-wide trend and was linked to improvements in reactive repairs in the last year.

June acknowledged the positive picture that existed and congratulated the whole team on the impressive evidence of responsiveness in place.

The Complaints Performance Report was **NOTED** by the Board.

2703 Q2 FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT

Chris Hopkins reported a current position of £0.9m ahead of budget. The operational margin was also ahead, and figures were being driven by employee cost savings, insurance claim reductions and lower than planned borrowing. Recruitment challenges still existed and remained a prominent consideration.

Chris advised there would be some expected 'unwinding' of the over-performance, but the position remained optimistic. Gavin commended the close-to-budget figures in all key lines of the budget.

June asked what roles were still hard to recruit for. Mark advised challenges in recruitment existed across the organisation, and in particular in specialist trades. The competitive situation in Housing Management was explained and Scotland-specific challenges were detailed. Bryony reported that challenges around recruitment and retention had impacted Rent Collection performance in areas such as Dundee.

The Chair sought further detail on the current position of HiS pay scales along with sector comparisons. Bryony agreed to provide this sector benchmarking around Housing Manager pay after the meeting. A high-level recruitment report and benchmarking paper would be provided at the next meeting.

Action: Bryony Willett

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

2704 Q2 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI) REPORT

Bryony confirmed the Key Performance Indicators figures for this quarter and briefed the Board on rent collection. Mid-market rent evictions had reduced current arrears, but further work was required on social rented arrears.

Bryony reported that the application of the HG and HiS Anti-Social Behaviour Policy was being reviewed in Scotland to ensure effective and consistent

implementation of the policy was in place and that cases were actively managed. Work to ensure colleagues were clear, had oversight of cases and were checking in line with the wider HG policy would be a focus. Figures were expected to improve in the next quarter. Robyn asked how long anti-social behaviour (ASB) cases should normally remain open. Bryony acknowledged that some cases had been left open for over 12 months. This was being addressed. Robyn asked if mediation was offered to customers. Mark confirmed this was offered as standard, but not always taken up.

First-time completion of repairs was noted as significantly improving. Tom explained the measurements in place and data improvement that had driven this. The Board acknowledged the work in this achievement.

The homelessness offer was discussed. Bryony explained the barriers involved in addressing this and the differing approaches from Local Authorities. The Board agreed that time would be set to focus on homelessness more generally.

Action: Agenda

The Board **NOTED** the KPI Report.

2705 Q2 ASSET PERFORMANCE REPORT

Will Gardner presented the Asset Performance Report and updated the Board on Stock Condition Surveys. Recruitment issues had led to delays in surveys being completed and targets being met. Catch-up was now being seen and would continue. The access rate for these surveys was greater in Scotland and positive cross-team working provided the confidence that the upward trend would continue.

Will was asked to explain the nature and purpose of the Stock Condition Surveys and the five-year audit that was expected. Will explained that customer's homes were accessed at a number of touch points and therefore cyclical stock condition surveys should act like an audit to check condition and data accuracy and lead to active asset management and investment planning.

The Housing Quality Standard indicator would be considered next meeting and an update to the Stock Condition Surveys would be presented. Will advised that increasing the number of surveys could lead to an increase in fails figures and issues arising.

Action: Agenda

The pilot sustainability investment project in Dundee was outlined. Customer engagement had been successful and support for proposals had been received from the majority of residents. Improvements would include electrical work and kitchen upgrades. June noted the significant amount of 'good news' that needed to be shared. Shona confirmed that promotional

materials were prepared and released in a timely manner. An update on communication plans would be shared next meeting.

Action: Shona Mitchell

The Chair welcomed the monthly horizon scanning document which would highlight projects of particular interest to the Board.

Emmanuel queried some of the figures in the report and Will agreed to address the presentation of these in future reports.

Action: Will Gardner

The Chair declared her interest in the University of Edinburgh before asking about research and development links in place. Will agreed to provide details of the work in place and the benefits of this.

Action: Will Gardner

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

2706 Q2 DEVELOPMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT

Will presented the Development Performance Report and noted there were few changes in figures and funding levels in the last quarter. Will advised that new funding schemes were being explored, but due diligence for fully completed properties was necessary. Shona acknowledged that the National Care Project in Scotland had been halted and budget clarity was presently delayed.

The Chair noted previous discussions on joint venture possibilities and proposals that would come forward at the proper time.

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

2707 Q2 HEALTH AND SAFETY PERFORMANCE REPORT

Paul presented the Health and Safety Performance Report and confirmed that the last quarter had been a steady, quiet period. Work in Edinburgh following the year's earlier Riddor incident had resumed and changes to site approaches had been made.

Paul confirmed that asbestos surveys were fully completed and Fire Risk Assessment follow on work was being conducted. Colleague mandatory training was confirmed as up to date.

There were no fire events to be reported, and damp and mould was reported as being well managed.

The Board **NOTED** the details of the Health and Safety Performance Report.

2708 LANDLORD PERFORMANCE AND ARC BENCHMARKING REPORT

The Landlord Performance and ARC Benchmarking Report was presented. Bryony advised the Board that a full benchmarking comparison had been shared in the Reading Room. The Board was advised of HiS's strong performance on the quality of homes, and the response to non-emergency repairs. HiS perform less well compared to peers on rent increases and customer satisfaction.

Tom shared the good practice seen at Wheatley and explained about how customer satisfaction had improved through additional communication throughout the repair journey. Tom reinforced the need for clear information at the first point of contact.

The Chair welcomed a greater understanding of the rent setting process across the sector.

The Board **NOTED** the Landlord Performance and ARC Benchmarking Report.

2709 ESG REPORT FOR SCOTLAND

Helen presented the draft ESG Report and invited feedback and comments ahead of the final draft being presented to the Home Board. The Board noted the inclusion of examples from Scotland and confirmed the assurance given to lenders and key stakeholders from the report. Helen advised that HG remained in a strong position, with good governance and positive social value. Gavin noted the encouraging picture and the alignment of the organisation with aims of the Scottish Government.

Helen confirmed that future reports would include benchmarking and target setting details which would clarify the sector position. The HG environmental strategy would be clarified, and measures for this defined in the next report to provide assurance and target benchmarking. June asked that place names be included in the report.

Action: Helen Meehan/ Communications Team

The Board **NOTED** the ESG Report.

2710 PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS 2025-2026

Austin presented the Programme of Business for the next meeting and confirmed the plans for an overnight visit to Glasgow. The training session would be 'Whistleblowing.' A Novus contract update and development approvals would be provided. Anticipated changes to the Rules and Operations Manual would be presented in early 2025.

The Chair asked for an outline of the rent setting process. The increase figures

and consultation process were outlined to the Board including consultation and implementation dates. Bryony confirmed that mid-market tenants had a rent increase applied every 12 months.

Helen advised that the rent increase of CPI+1% level was lower than had been anticipated. A 3.5% increase had been set in the business plan. Budgets would be adjusted to address this lower-than-expected level of income, which equated to £2m across the group.

The Chair sought visibility on service charges as part of the November meeting.

Action: Agenda

The Board **NOTED** the details of the Programme of Business.

2711 AOB

There were no other items of business.

2712 DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 14 November 2024

Signed:..... Date:
Chair

Susan Deacon

21 NOV 2024 - 21:43:25 GMT