

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF IHA'S BOARD MEETING HELD ON 26 MARCH 2020**

### **MD REPORT**

The Board received a report on the Association's current operating context in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and how this impacted on:

- Service delivery
- Customers
- Staff
- The financial position
- Governance decision-making

### **BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Board approved the revised Board Terms of Reference which included new powers in relation to the consideration of Group growth opportunities in Scotland.

### **CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2020/21**

The Board approved the capital works programme, the energy efficiency works and the medical adaptation works contracts for 2020/21. Noting that these contracts would be let at the appropriate time in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **LOAN PORTFOLIO RETURN**

The Board noted the contents of the Loan Portfolio Return submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

### **OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Board noted the operational report. It was highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic would have a significant impact on the achievement of year end targets which was impossible to predict.

### **FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Board noted the financial performance report, in particular that there would be an anticipated surplus at year end, as it was not expected that the

implications of the COVID-19 pandemic would have any significant impact this financial year.

#### **KPI'S / OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE TARGETS 2020/21**

The Board noted that proposals for the 2020/21 performance targets would be developed when officers had a clearer picture of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **CHAIR'S ACTION PROCEDURE**

The Board noted the Chair's approval of the change to the Scheme of Delegation – Financial Authorisation Limits to include Petty Cash Expenditure in line with the Chair's Action Procedure.

#### **CORPORATE PLAN**

The Board noted that the draft Corporate Plan would be made available to them for consideration and comment, however, the Plan may be subject to further change in due course.

**THE RIVERSIDE GROUP LIMITED**

**IRVINE HOUSING ASSOCIATION**

Two Hundred and Thirty Fifth Meeting of the Board held at 5.30 p.m. on  
26 March 2020 by tele-conference.

**Minutes**

Present:

Mr D. McEachran (In the Chair), Mrs M. Burgess, Mr G. Darroch, Mrs J. Galbraith, Mr R. Hill and Ms C. McGuinness.

In attendance were Mr P. Hillard, Mrs H. Anderson, Mrs D. Boyle and Mrs M. Hutchinson.

Apologies for Absence

Mr C. Bell, Ms M. Crearie, Mr C. Donohue, Mrs J. Murray and Mr D. Thornton.

Declarations of Interests

None.

1. **Preliminaries**

Mr D. McEachran granted special leave of absence, given the current circumstances, to Mr C. Bell.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting – 234<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting held on 30 January 2020**

The minutes of the 234<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting held on 30 January 2020 were noted and approved, subject to the third paragraph of Item 13 being amended to change “the Chair or the Audit & Risk Committee” to “the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee”.

### **3. Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes**

#### **a) Irvine Housing Association Name Change (Min 2a)**

Mr P. Hillard advised that, due to the current COVID-19 situation, the market research exercise to establish views on a proposed name change would not be progressed for the time being.

#### **b) Sheltered Housing Review (Min. 2c)**

Mrs H. Anderson stated that the consultations, both group and individual, in relation to moving to the new service from 1 April 2020 had been completed. Given the current COVID-19 situation, the decision was taken for the Wardens' end date to be brought forward due to resident safety concerns. [REDACTED], one of the warden staff, had been successful in her application for the retirement living post. She was currently working from home developing the new processes and plans for delivering the new service when appropriate.

Mrs Anderson advised that during the consultation, the issue of access arrangements for contractors etc. was raised and processes to address this issue was would be implemented prior to the move to new the service on 1 April 2020.

#### **c) 30 Year Financial Plan (Min. 3)**

Mrs M. Hutchinson advised that the Association's 30 Year Financial Plan had recently been considered and approved by Group Board.

### **4 MD Report**

Mr P. Hillard referred to the updates which had been sent to the Board and also the Scottish Housing Regulator on the Association's response to the COVID-19 situation to date. The Audit & Risk Committee had also discussed this emerging issue at its meeting on 9 March 2020 when plans were already being put in place to respond. The Association was able to arrange for the majority of staff to be set up to work from home from Wednesday 18 March 2020. Daily meetings of each team, the management team and the Riverside incident response team were taking place to discuss and consider issues as they arose. Every staff member was receiving regular contact from their manager. [REDACTED]

Mrs H. Anderson reported that there had been a change to service delivery following the recent restrictions of movement and as such only emergency repairs were now being carried out. In line with Group's

approach, annual gas safety checks were also still being carried out where access was being granted. Where access was not being granted, the reasons for this were being recorded. The decision had also been made that no forced accesses would be carried out or capping of the gas supply during this time.

Mrs Anderson stated that lets had currently been suspended, apart from priority homeless allocations and the team were working closely with local authority partners during this process. The Housing Officers had been contacting all tenants over the age of 65 in order signpost them to local agencies to provide assistance where needed. The Board enquired on customer feedback on this service. Mrs Anderson stated that feedback had been very positive to date and they were considering rolling this service out to all customers moving forward. The Board highlighted that the local authority was offering delivery of food parcels and prescriptions to tenants and enquired if this service was available to the Association's customers. Mrs Anderson advised that this service was available through the community support hubs and Housing Officers were making customers aware of this service available. Following a further query from the Board, Mrs Anderson stated that moral was good and staff were regularly discussing different ideas to assist customers as best they could. Due to Housing Officers being aware of anecdotal evidence that there were many customers under the age 70 bracket who they also considered vulnerable, they had decided to contact all those 65 and over rather than over 70s in order to capture more vulnerable customers.

Mrs Anderson advised that the decision had been made not to instigate any court action and no tenant would be evicted over a 3 month period. Housing Officers were being as supportive as they could and providing all relevant advice and guidance available to assist those in hardship.

Mrs Anderson advised that an operational service impact log had been created to allow any service that could not currently be fulfilled and the reasons why to be recorded. It was anticipated that the Regulator may also wish to know this information at some point in the future.

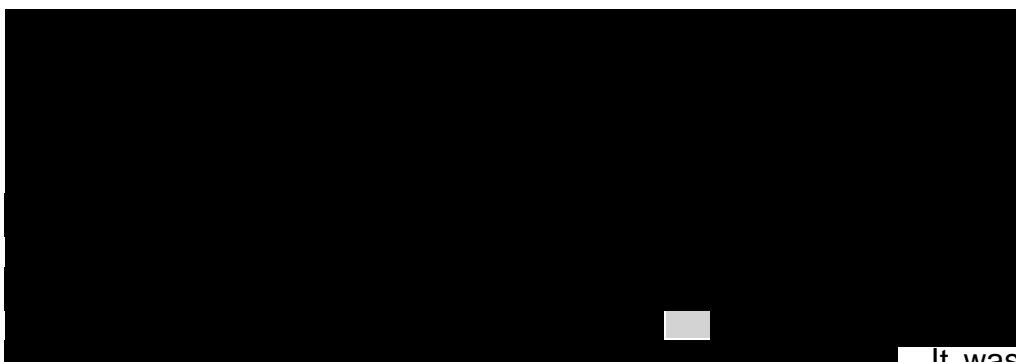
Mrs Anderson stated that all communal areas within the sheltered housing units were being closed off, apart from the communal laundry areas. This matter had been carefully considered and all appropriate safety protocols had been put in place to ensure everyone's safety when making use of this area, which was considered a necessity for residents.

Mr Hillard advised that a letter had been send to all customers advising on the 2 key ways in which the Association would be providing advice and assistance:

- Through the website and also promotion on social media
- A recorded message giving advice on where to receive appropriate guidance and information.

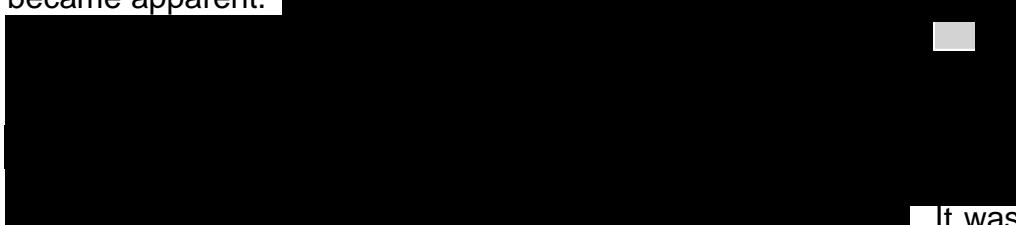
Mr Hillard advised that a key risk was that the Association would not be compliant in ensuring that all properties had current gas safety certification, given that some tenants were refusing entry to have this work carried out. Mrs Anderson advised that the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations had asked for the consideration of extending the annual deadline, given that most housing providers would be in the same position.

Mr Hillard advised that other key risks were the reduced cashflow, given that a number of tenants were now experiencing financial hardship and were unable pay their rent and also that there would be increased void loss, given that the Association was currently only allocating to urgent homeless cases. Officers were monitoring this situation closely in order to be able to measure the impact of these changes.



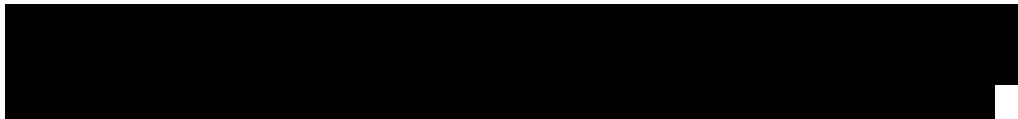
It was expected that some customers would lose their jobs and would go on to direct payments for Universal Credit, so rent payments would be delayed. Mrs Hutchinson stated that there was currently not enough meaningful information available to be able to accurately predict rent payment levels. Further to the Board's query, Mrs Hutchinson advised that she hoped to be able to establish a clearer financial position by the end of April.

The Board commented that the next Board Meeting in May was currently 8 weeks away. They advised that they would feel more comfortable in getting an accurate picture at the end of April, rather than not discussing this further until the end of May. Mrs Hutchinson undertook to let Board Members know as soon as any potential issues with covenants became apparent.



It was envisaged that some further guidance may come out from the Scottish Housing Regulator in relation to the current situation.

Mr Hillard advised that he would send a further update to the Scottish Housing Regulator to advise on the current service provision, given this had changed since his previous update sent to them.



Mr Hillard advised that he was in regular contact with the Chair and Chair of Audit & Risk Committee, as they had meetings to consider what required to be reported to the Regulator through the Notifiable Events process.

Mr Hillard stated that given the format of the current meeting, it had been decided that some of the information items which had been due to go on the agenda for the meeting, would instead be uploaded to the REX and notification of this would be sent when done. The Board noted that a new video conference facility was being rolled out which was hoped to be in use for all governance meetings moving forward.



The Board enquired on whether a gas contractor had been sourced in order to carry out emergency repairs to households who were self-isolating. Mrs Anderson advised that following ongoing discussions with the Association's current gas contractor, they had changed their position and had now agreed to attend all properties requiring emergency repairs and appropriate safety measures for carrying out this work had been agreed.

## 5. **Board Terms of Reference**

Mr P. Hillard advised that the recommendation was being made following Group's review of its governance structure. In response to a query from the Board, Mr Hillard confirmed that the changes proposed to the Board Terms of Reference, essentially meant that the Association's Board would consider any Scottish growth opportunities, outwith its own Financial Plan, and make appropriate recommendations to Group Board. The Board advised that they were content with the proposals, however, highlighted that more time would be required in order to consider a Growth Strategy for Scotland, as there was unlikely to be sufficient time to consider this in the detail required within the regular Board Meeting cycle.

Mr Hillard advised that he had recently been working with Group colleagues on a Scotland Growth Strategy. It was intended that an additional Board Meeting in April would be required to discuss this document in detail. The document would be uploaded to the REX to allow Board Members the time to consider this in detail. He hoped to be able to arrange this meeting using the new video conference software and would be in contact with regard to arranging a date for this meeting.

The Board thereafter agreed the proposed changes to the Board Terms of Reference.

#### **6. Capital Investment Programme 2020/21**

Mrs H. Anderson advised that due to the COVID-19 situation, the capital works programme would be postponed for 3 months and customers would be advised of this. Mr P. Hillard highlighted that there was a risk that given it was proposed not to let the proposed contracts at this time, the contractors may not hold the original price quoted. It was envisaged, however, that they would also not want to lose any contracts either, so discussions with contractors in this regard would be progressed at the appropriate time.

The Board thereafter noted the planned capital investment programme for 2020-2021 and approved the award of associated contracts as detailed in Appendix 1.

#### **7. Loan Portfolio Return**

Mrs M. Hutchinson stated that the Loan Portfolio Return presented was an in-year Return which had already been submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator and was required to be reported to the Board.

The Board thereafter noted the content of the Loan Portfolio Return submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

#### **8. Operational Performance Report**

Mrs H. Anderson advised that the Association was outwith the tenancy sustainment target, which had seen a steady increase during the year. Despite the Tenancy Sustainment Team's close working with customers, the figures reflected an increase in vulnerable customers with significant support needs within the customer base.

Mrs Anderson reported that the new Customer Satisfaction Improvement Plan had now been implemented and month on month improvements were now beginning to show through, however, it was likely to be a few months before any real benefits could be evidenced.

Mrs Anderson highlighted that the arrears levels had been very close to target, however, given the current COVID-19 situation, and the impact this would have on arrears levels, it was expected that arrears levels would see significant change. The roll out of Universal Credit and the volume of new claims during the year had made the ear end target challenging.

The Board enquired on whether transfers would be cancelled in order to reduce the number of voids. Mrs Anderson stated that all transfers and mutual exchanges had been cancelled for the foreseeable future. Only those which were already partly through the process would now be completed.

The Board thereafter noted the Operational Performance Report for Period 11.

#### **9. Financial Performance Report**

Mrs M. Hutchinson advised that report detailed a favourable variance against budget with an anticipated surplus at year end. She highlighted that it was likely a low volume of works would not be completed by year end. The Board noted that it was not expected that the implications of the COVID-19 situation would dramatically impact this financial year.

The Board thereafter noted the Financial Performance Report for Period 11.

#### **10. KPI's / Operational Performance Targets 2020/21**

Mrs H. Anderson advised that due to the current ongoing COVID-19 situation, it was considered more appropriate to present proposals for the 2020/21 performance targets, when Officers had a more accurate picture of the implications of this and were then able to propose more realistic targets. The Board concurred with this proposal.

#### **11. Chair's Action Procedure**

The Chair advised on the circumstances which had arisen which required him to approve a revision to the Scheme of Delegation – Financial Authorisation Limits to include Petty Cash under the Chair's Action Procedure.

The Board thereafter noted the Chair's decision to approve the amendment to the Scheme of Delegation – Financial Authorisation Limits in line with the Chair's Action Procedure.

**12. Any Other Business**

**Corporate Plan**

Mr P. Hillard advised that the draft Corporate Plan had been produced and would be uploaded to the REX in due course for comments. He highlighted that the current timescales for approval were likely to change and also that certain sections of the Plan may need to be revised when there was a more accurate picture of the operating environment, and the full implications of the COVID-19 situation were known.

**13. Date of Next Meeting**

Board Meeting - 5.30 p.m. on Wednesday 27 May 2020, 44-46 Bank Street, Irvine.

P. Hillard  
Secretary  
27 March 2020  
PH/db .....