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Some information has been omitted / redacted as disclosure may prejudice the commercial interests of Irvine Housing Association trading as Riverside Scotland.

We recognise that the commercial sensitivity of information may decline over time and the harm arising from disclosure may be outweighed by the public interest in openness and transparency. We commit to review the redaction of any such information from time to time.

Some information has been redacted as it contains personal data which identifies an individual. Disclosure of this information would place Irvine Housing Association t/a Riverside Scotland in breach of the Data Protection Act 2018.

## **THE RIVERSIDE GROUP LIMITED**

### **RIVERSIDE SCOTLAND**

Two Hundred and Forty Sixth Meeting of the Board held at 5.30 p.m. on  
Thursday 27 January 2022 via MS Teams.

#### **Minutes**

##### **Present:**

Mr J. Strang (In the Chair), Mrs M. Burgess, Mrs M. Crearie,  
Mr G. Darroch, Mr. J Galbraith, Mr R. Hill (From Item 14), Mr  
S. Easton, Ms F. Fox, Mr P. New, Mr T. McInnes, Mrs S.  
Petrie and Mr S. Stewart.

In attendance were: Mrs D. MacLean, Mrs H. Anderson, Mr.  
G Cooper, and Mrs M. Hutchinson.

##### **Apologies for Absence**

No Apologies were received

##### **Declarations of Interests**

Mr P. New declared an interest in respect of Item 5.2

#### **1. Preliminaries**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were  
made to the Board and Executive Staff Team.

The Chair expressed well wishes to Mrs D. Boyle who was unwell and  
welcomed Mr G. Cooper who was standing in as secretary.

#### **2. Apologies for Absence**

No apologies were received however it was noted that Mr. R. Hill would  
be delayed in joining the meeting.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

Mr. P. New declared an interest in Item 5.2 and would not participate in the decision-making for that item.

4. **Chair's Action Procedure**

With the agreement of the Board this item was brought forward in the agenda.

The Board NOTED the appointment of Patrick New to the Board of Irvine Housing Association Ltd to replace Cris McGuinness as the Group Nominee.

5. **Minutes of Previous Meetings – 245<sup>rd</sup> Board Meeting held on 2 December 2021**

The minutes of the 245<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting held on 2 December 2021 were APPROVED as an accurate record.

6. **Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes**

There were no matters arising from the previous sets of minutes to report.

7. **Financial Plan**

Mrs M. Hutchinson advised that the 30-year plan was unable to be brought to the Board due to technical problems being experienced across the business, however a rent and service charge increase and the annual budget for 2022/23 are being proposed.

Mrs Hutchinson advised that a 3.1% increase to rent and service charges is proposed from April 2022. This figure reflects the September Consumer Price Index value representing an average £2.99 increase per customer and was considered to be the right balance to protect customers. The proposal had been consulted upon with a majority in favour, there was however a low response rate of 3.5% with responses from a representative geographic area.

Mrs Hutchinson advised that the rent harmonisation programme will continue for some years [REDACTED]. Mrs Hutchinson further advised that affordability testing had been undertaken with the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations toolkit identifying that the vast majority of people can afford to live in Riverside Scotland's homes.

Mr. J Strang noted that information is available for Board Members on the rent harmonisation programme. Board Members were encouraged to inform Mrs. D. MacLean if they wished for a briefing session to be organised.

Mrs. M. Burgess expressed that the affordability calculations would not necessarily take account of all personal circumstances and therefore favoured the lowest possible increases. She enquired whether the negative feedback comments from the consultation had been addressed. Mrs. Hutchinson confirmed that those concerns had been addressed individually.

Mrs. M. Crearie stated she believed that the 3.1% figure achieved the best balance, there was a discussion around benchmarking data. Mr. G Darroch suggested that rent rates are provided on the same terms as benchmarking data in future to aid understanding. Mrs Hutchinson advised that this could be produced for future years.

Mr. P. New noted that previously the Board had reviewed an increase of between 3.5-4.0% and enquired what impact this change might have. Mrs. Hutchinson advised that the previous figure was floated when the CPI rate was not set. In the short term there should be no consequences however once the 30 year plan is produced there may be knock-on effects. Mr. Strang noted that the consultation had been conducted on the higher percentages and residents may see a positive in the lower figure. If approved customers will be notified by letter which will include how we have listened to customers following consultation.

Mrs. F. Fox queried whether small figures in arrears were due to delays in rent increases being applied by Local Authorities for those in receipt of housing benefits. Mrs Hutchinson advised that LAs are informed of increases via a portal and therefore payments should not lag behind increases.

Mr. T. McInnes expressed support for the figure proposed but requested that a close eye be kept on the subject with action taken if necessary.

In respect of the budget proposals Mrs. M. Hutchinson highlighted the largest single increase arising from repairs and maintenance due to rising costs. In programmed repairs the volume of disabled adaptations is expected to reduce as the backlog is eliminated. While there is grant funding available for 'Green' works this has not been assumed in the budget.

Mrs Hutchinson advised that operating costs including salaries includes an allowance for some existing staff members to work additional hours due to handovers in the development programme planned in the coming year. It was also noted that savings had been made through reduction in office space and hybrid working.

Mrs. D. MacLean advised that contact had been made with G8 partners to explore joint procurement for the Green agenda which will help with efficiencies and in building key partnerships for growth. Mr. G Darroch enquired whether TRGL are also approaching the agenda. Mrs. MacLean advised that she is working with the Group and the resources of the Sustainability Team however there will be areas where Riverside Scotland acts autonomously.

Mr. P. New enquired whether bad debt provision assumed in line with run rates would allow for deterioration in bad debt performance. Mrs. Hutchinson advised that there is a risk within this area which is highlighted in the report; in the short-term it can be mitigated with help being provided to those customers who need it however once the 30-year plan is produced there is a risk of efficiencies being required.

The Board thereafter APPROVED a 3.1% increase to rent and service charges and APPROVED the 2022/23 budget subject to subsequent approval by The Riverside Group Ltd Board in March 2022.

8. **Membership Register**

Mrs. D. MacLean advised that in accordance with the Association's Rules ten Members have failed to attend or submit apologies to five consecutive AGMs and therefore deemed to have withdrawn from membership of the Association. She further noted that 57 Members remain and consideration should be given to increasing the numbers of and engagement of Members.

The Board thereafter RESOLVED that the 10 members identified at Appendix 1 of the report shall be deemed to have withdrawn from membership of the Association and his / her ordinary share shall be cancelled and the amount paid thereon shall become the property of the Association.

9. **Risk Management Policy**

Mrs. M. Hutchinson advised the Board that the policy was a Group-wide policy and had been recommend to the Board by the Audit & Risk Committee.

Mr. P. New noted that section 3.o states "Members of TRGL Board are appointed to subsidiary and TRGL Board Sub-Committees and will escalate risks and concerns to TRGL Board.". Mr. New advised he had raised this with the Group Company Secretary as this does not reflect the responsibility of the Board to raise risks with the Group.

The Board thereafter APPROVED the Risk Management Policy on the understanding that a change to reflect the above may be forthcoming.

10. **Allpay Indemnity**

Mrs M. Hutchinson advised that the proposal arises from the cessation of cheques being used for payments throughout Riverside and permits refunds to be made via the Allpay service with a key benefit to customers of quicker repayments.

The Board NOTED the contents of the report and the Standard Indemnity at Appendix One and thereafter:

- APPROVED the indemnity; and
- DELEGATED AUTHORITY to David Reid and the Group Treasury Team to make the necessary arrangements with NatWest and BADS to proceed with the creation of the new Service User Number required to give effect to the increased Allpay facility.

11. **Fire Risk Assessments – Stay Put Policy**

Mrs H. Anderson reported the proposal for all Riverside Scotland communal blocks to adopt a stay-put fire policy following significant work from the Group fire safety consultants, Savills. She confirmed that residents would be informed, with those residents in Retirement Living having individual discussions to ensure the proposals are understood. Personal Fire Risk Assessments are being produced for vulnerable residents which will be shared with the fire brigade.

Mrs Anderson raised the Fire Door Replacement Programme which was implemented prior to the introduction of new standards in 2019. Savills advised a risk-based approach to replacement doors with replacement conducted over a two-year period as the blocks are not multistorey.

A number of Board Members expressed concerns over the length of the replacement programme noting that fire safety is an issue requiring priority. Mrs. Anderson confirmed that the schedule was provided by Group compliance on review of risk however the capital programme could be accelerated. Mrs. D. MacLean advised that the programme would be reviewed and returned to the next Board meeting with information on acceleration and the impact on other maintenance programmes.

Following discussion, the Board AGREED that the matter is to be returned to the next Board meeting with options for accelerating the fire door replacement programme.

12. **National Housing Federation Code of Governance**

Mrs D. MacLean advised that the report will be presented to the TRGL Board and the Board would be advised of any issues arising in advance of the next meeting but it was not anticipated there would be any material changes.

The Board thereafter NOTED the route to compliance with the NHF Code of Governance 2020.

13. **Progress Reports on Development Projects**

Mrs. D. MacLean advised that Tarryholme Phase 2 had returned to site and while it is now 2 weeks behind schedule is nonetheless progressing well. [REDACTED]

The Board thereafter NOTED the update report on the Association's current development projects.

Mr R. Hill joined the meeting.

14. **Operational Performance Report**

Mrs H. Anderson reported on performance against agreed KPIs up to Period 9 and noted that there has been some difficulty in gathering data following disruption to IT systems in November which also had an adverse impact on the service provided to customers.

Gas Safety Compliance was reported at 93% with one certificate reaching expiry due to the tenant isolating with COVID. This check had been conducted however the certificate had not been uploaded to the reporting system. Mr. J. Strang noted that it could be demonstrated that certificates were valid to which Mrs Anderson agreed and informed the Board that staff would work to address this backlog once the system came back online.

Mr. P. New asked whether welfare calls would continue as a tool to improve customer satisfaction. Mrs. Anderson replied that the high point of customer satisfaction reporting was experienced while welfare calls were being undertaken with people reporting the personal touch was valued. Housing Officers will be carrying these out on a rolling basis going forward.

Mr. G. Darroch suggested that a 'you said, we did' exercise could be conducted to better inform customers of activity, involving a more

substantial tenant survey. Mrs Anderson advised that this already forms part of service updates however this has become less proactive since COVID; a post-COVID customer involvement strategy is needed to harness the changes to digital working and supporting communities at a local level. Mrs. D. MacLean proposed that time is spent at the upcoming Board Away Day to look at a Riverside Scotland Census to deep dive into what each tenant's main issues are.

The Board thereafter NOTED the content of the Operational Performance Report.

15. **Financial Performance Report**

[REDACTED]

Mrs Hutchinson highlighted that the forecast remained robust and all covenants are fully compliant. A key risk was reported in asset contracts which have seen increased costs and a reduction in contractor capacity.

The Board thereafter NOTED the content of the Financial Performance Report.

16. **MD Report**

The Board discussed the following points within the MD's Report:

a) **Board Recruitment**

Mrs D. MacLean advised that no applications had been forthcoming and the three expressions of interest would be chased before the closing date with direct approaches made if there remained no interest. Mrs. M. Crearie suggested that an interview with a Board Member to explain more about the role. Mr. J. Strang added that he had seen a similar video with three previous chairs of an Association. Mrs MacLean agreed this would be beneficial to appear on the website.

b) **Recovery from Malware Attack**

Mrs MacLean advised that all systems had returned to normal with the exception of the Promaster gas servicing system. Manual processes had ensured servicing remained compliant. Mrs MacLean

praised the staff team who had worked including during Christmas and New Year.

c) Refurbishment of the Bank Street Office

Mrs MacLean advised that structural work had been approved to ensure compliance with accessibility requirements however the physical layout of the office is being reviewed to better accommodate hybrid working.

d) Board Strategy Planning

There was a discussion around the Board Strategy Day, Board Members expressed a preference for a longer event with time to socialise the preceding evening being especially beneficial for newer members. Mrs J. Galbraith noted in the past there had been a guest speaker from the SFHA to give examples of work in practice.

e) Scottish Housing Regulator

Mrs MacLean confirmed that the regulator had been kept informed of developments related to the malware attack. The quarterly return was submitted on time. Mr. S. Stewart asked how the time for the length of re-lets in the quarterly report was defined. Mrs. MacLean advised the regulator often asks for specific reporting criteria so would confirm and report back.

f) Risk

Mrs MacLean noted that the Audit & Risk Committee had agreed to examine how risk is reviewed and monitored at a strategic and operational level. Work is underway with the Group Director of Internal Audit and will be brought to the Board for discussion at the Strategy Day.

After discussion, the Board NOTED the content of the MD Report.

17. Minutes/Updates

The Board NOTED the Group Customer Experience Committee Meeting Minutes – 2 December 2021.

18. Disclosure

No disclosures were made.

19. **Any Other Business**

a) **Audit and Risk Committee**

Mr. J. Strang noted that it had previously been agreed to add a member of the Audit and Risk Committee and it was agreed that Mr T. McInnes be appointed to the Committee by the Board.

20. **Date of Next Meeting**

5.30 p.m. on Thursday 31 March 2022 via MS Teams / Bank Street Office, Irvine.

D MacLean  
Secretary  
15 February 2022  
DMcL/gc

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