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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
IRVINE HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

Two Hundred and Fifty Ninth Meeting of the Board held at 5.30 p.m. on
Thursday 21 March 2024 via MS Teams.

Minutes

Present:

Mr J. Strang (In the Chair), Mrs M. Burgess, Mr G. Darroch
Mr S. Easton (from Item 5), Mrs. J Galbraith, Mr R. Hill, Mr T.
McInnes, Mr P. New and Mrs S. Petrie.

In attendance were: Mrs D. MacLean, Mrs H. Anderson, Mrs
D. Boyle, Ms H. Duff and Mrs M. Hutchinson.

Apologies for Absence

Mr P. Lynn and Mr S. Stewart

Declarations of Interests

Nil.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Mr P. Lynn and Mr S. Stewart.

The Chair suggested that special leave for the meeting was granted to Mr Lynn, pending discussion to clarify his future participation on the Board and this was agreed.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests to declare.

3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting – 258th Board Meeting held on 1 February 2024**

The minutes of the 258th Board Meeting held on 1 February 2024 were APPROVED as an accurate record.

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

Referring to Row 12, Mrs H. Anderson confirmed that the update to the Complaints Policy to reflect the approach to closing down Stage 1 complaints had been completed.

Referring to Row 21, Ms H. Duff advised that an update was currently awaited from Group and the contractor regarding the ongoing maintenance arrangements of the Switchee devices. Following a query from the Chair, Ms Duff advised that Switchee devices could be monitored via an App, once the Association was provided with the relevant access and this was also being progressed with Group.

The Board thereafter NOTED the updates provided in the Matters Arising Action List.

5. **30 Year Financial Plan**

Mrs M. Hutchinson advised that the budget previously approved by Board at its February 2024 meeting formed the first year of the financial plan, with the remainder of the plan incorporating the assumptions discussed and agreed at the November 2023 Board Meeting, with the exception of known variances e.g. the increased capital works expenditure planned in the next 3 years. Mrs Hutchinson stated that the plan continued to assume no new major development works would take place, however, allowance for purchasing properties on the open market via the buy-back scheme had been included.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Mrs Hutchinson then confirmed that the plan was fully compliant and all covenants could be met, as could all repayment expectations.

Mr S. Easton joined the Meeting.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Mr New advised that Group's stress-testing included a stepped programme of mitigant actions, ordered on a priority basis and queried if it was appropriate for the Association to adopt this approach. The Board discussed this and suggested that these areas which were captured in the Strategic Risk Register could be developed further in order to identify the trigger points at which the Association would implement the various mitigant actions. It was suggested that Mrs Hutchinson obtain this information from Group with a view to Board discussing the adoption of this approach for next year's financial planning process.

[REDACTED]

Mr Darroch referred to the increased void loss figure and had noticed the increase in abandonments and void re-let period during the year and enquired if this was likely to be a significant risk moving forward. Mrs Anderson acknowledged the increased number of abandonments from the previous year. In response, the Association had commenced a programme of annual tenancy visits by the Tenant Partners with a view to the early identification of issues, in order to provide appropriate support. Mrs Anderson suggested that a report to Board on the outcomes of these visits was brought to a future meeting.

Mrs Anderson advised that, following review of the void management process, the Association had made significant change to its process, liaising with the contractor to target resources to improving the void turnaround times. A joint visit between the Tenant Partner and Asset Team was also now being carried out at pre-termination stage, in order to communicate all required customer actions prior to leaving their property. Mrs Anderson stated that the Association was aware of the risk and it was hoped that the pro-active changes being implemented would assist to mitigate this risk.

Mrs H. Duff stated she was confident that the change of approach with the contractor and the targeting of resources to seek to reduce the void turnaround time would start to deliver positive results in the future.

Mrs Anderson advised that the Scrutiny Panel was currently finalising its report following the review of the void management process, which contained some good recommendations for the Association to consider. It was intended that this report would be presented at the May Board Meeting.



The Chair commented that a general increase in abandonments across the sector was being experienced and this was reflective of the fact that the cost of living crisis was far from over, however, he was pleased to note the actions that the Association was putting in place to reduce the risk in this area.


The Board thereafter APPROVED the 30 year financial plan prior to it being presented to Group's Board for final approval as part of The Riverside Group Limited's financial plan approval process.

6. **Annual Assurance Statement – Process Update and Board Questionnaire**

Mrs M. Hutchinson updated the Board on the changes made to the Annual Assurance Statement process cycle and the positive results from the recently issued Board questionnaire. In response to the results, regular training on the Annual Assurance process would now be incorporated within the programme and was expected to be available to Board to utilise by late May / early June.

The Board thereafter NOTED the update on the Annual Assurance Statement Review process cycle and the results of the Annual Assurance Board Questionnaire process.

7. **Capital Investment Programme 2024/25**

Ms H. Duff highlighted the changes to the way in which the Association had devised its proposed capital investment programme, by adopting a fabric first and retrofit approach, rather than basing investment works purely on stock condition survey information and locally held information. By adopting this approach, it was intended that once all works were complete, this would deliver a “new build” property output. 

[REDACTED]

The Board noted that a further update on the investment programme would be provided 6 months into the year.

Mrs D. MacLean advised of the intention to review the Association's Asset Management Strategy during the year.

Mr S. Easton agreed with the approach taken and enquired if the achievement of a specific EPC target would be set for the planned works to deliver, in order to avoid potentially having to return to the property in later years to carry out additional works.

[REDACTED]

Mrs D. MacLean confirmed that the Association would consider the EPC target if this was not already a condition of the funding allocation.

Mrs MacLean also advised that strong recommendations had been made at the recent Scottish Federation of Housing Association's event with housing spokespersons at the Scottish Government regarding making funding available for housing associations to carry out retrofit works to their existing properties, in order to achieve energy efficiency standards set and also address properties where Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) was found, given most were not in a position to fund these works from their financial plans.

The Board thereafter NOTED the capital investment programme for 2024/25.

8. **RAAC Report**

Ms H. Duff gave an update on the Association's process relating to the investigation of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) within the housing stock and reported that the Association was currently working on stage 2 of the 4 stage process.

[REDACTED]

Ms Duff confirmed that

once the risk assessment and survey process had been completed, a further report would be provided to Board.

The Chair queried if the process and the timescales reported for the completion of the works were acceptable to the Scottish Government and the Scottish Housing Regulator. Ms Duff confirmed that they were and a recent update had also been provided to them.



The Board noted that RAAC had been found in flat roofs and out-buildings by other housing providers so far.

Mr R. Hill enquired if the Association was working with the contractors to ensure the reporting of any visual concerns identified during the course of their work. Ms Duff stated that this issue, as well as any other areas of concern, had been raised with the contractor to ensure the appropriate recording of areas for action.

Mr T. McInnes enquired if the proposed timescales were achievable. Ms Duff advised that the risk-assessment and visual inspections were on target for completion by June.



The Board thereafter NOTED the update on the Association's current and reported position in relation to RAAC throughout the housing stock and the steps being taken to identify the potential risks and implement mitigation plans, should any areas of concern be identified.

9. **Financial Redress and Compensation Policy**

Mrs H. Anderson advised that the new policy encapsulated all aspects of when the Association may pay for compensation, when legal support would be sought from the Association's lawyers and when a claim would be made through Group's Insurance Team to settle a claim. Previously compensation claims had been considered on an ad-hoc basis by herself and the Housing Services Manager with support from the lawyers where appropriate. The policy had been based on the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's guidance and model Financial Redress and Compensation Policy and set out the statutory circumstances where the Association would be required to pay compensation or financial redress, as stated within the Housing (Scotland) Act.

Mrs Anderson advised that the Association had aligned with Group's approach to deciding payment compensation levels, which assessed on a low, medium and high impact on the customer basis. An information and training session for all front-line staff had been delivered and, subject to policy approval, operational procedures would be developed to clarify staff's roles within the process.

Mrs M. Burgess queried who decided if the customer was paid by cash or voucher following the assessment of low impact claim. Mrs Anderson advised that this would be decided by the Housing Manager in discussion with the customer.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Mr Easton suggested setting a KPI on compensation claim spend as a useful monitoring tool and this was agreed. The Chair enquired on recent compensation claim costs. Mrs Anderson confirmed that there had been significant overspends in budgets in this area in recent years and the aim of introducing the policy was to have a tighter approach to the management of this area and provide clear guidance for decision-making.

The Board then APPROVED the new Financial Redress and Compensation Policy.

10. **Performance Targets 2024/25**

Mrs M. Hutchinson advised on the internal process for identifying the proposed targets presented.

Mr R. Hill enquired if targets for void rent loss, arrears recovery collection rates and bad debts should be included in the report. Mrs D. MacLean advised that this information was captured in other statistical reports which were regularly monitored and commented that % rent lost on rent due and the total % of arrears were included in the targets presented. On this basis, the Board agreed it was content not to include the additional targets in the report.

Mr G. Darroch suggested that the target for complaints handling satisfaction was low at 60% and queried if the Association should set its target in line with the ombudsman's guidelines. Mrs MacLean advised that the target was a Group measure and the Association did monitor against the ombudsman's guidelines in relation to meeting the response timescales set. The Group target was another useful target to monitor. The Association had seen an increase in satisfaction levels since the introduction of a dedicated temporary Complaints Officer post which had now been made a permanent post. The 60% target set, was reflective of allowing the post to embed into ongoing service provision, with the intention of setting higher targets year on year. The Board also noted that satisfaction with the outcome, rather than satisfaction with how the complaint was handled questions would provide differing satisfaction results.

Following Board's review of the content of the proposed targets against past and current performance, the Board AGREED the performance framework for 2024/25.

11. **Review of Common Housing Allocations Policies**

Mrs H. Anderson stated that the Association was not involved in a common housing register (CHR) approach in South Ayrshire, given that it took 100% nominations from the local authority in this area.

Referring to the 2 revised policies presented, Mrs Anderson advised that the key changes to the policy for East Ayrshire's CHR were to increase the priority need groups to include persons from the armed forces and young people leaving care. The policy for Dumfries & Galloway had been significantly changed in a move to adopt a choice-based lettings approach which had involved significant negotiations.

Mrs Anderson advised that the policy for North Ayrshire was currently out for consultation and once finalised, would be brought to Board for consideration, although at this stage, it was expected that the changes would include an increase in priority need areas.

Mr G. Darroch enquired if a choice-based lettings approach in Dumfries and Galloway would have an impact on staffing resource. Mrs Anderson advised that significant impact was not envisaged at this stage due to the administration of housing applications no longer being required and the IT system being more user-friendly.

The Board thereafter NOTED the update and APPROVED the:

- a) Revised policy for East Ayrshire's Common Housing Register and
- b) Revised policy for Dumfries and Galloway's Common Housing Register.

12. **Schedule of Duties & Responsibilities**

Mrs D. Boyle advised that the Association had aligned with the Group approach of preparing an annual Board report detailing Board Members' duties and responsibilities, rather than issuing a letter to Board which had been the previous practice.

Following Group's recent review of its Schedule for its Directors, the Association's lawyers, TC Young, were instructed to review and update Group's document to ensure that it was appropriate for the Association's operating environment. The main changes made to the Schedule reflected the Association's Board's duties and responsibilities as a Board Member of a Scottish registered social landlord and a Trustee of a Scottish charity.

The Board then NOTED the Schedule of Duties and Responsibilities of Board Members of Irvine Housing Association Ltd (Riverside Scotland).

13. **Board Appraisal Improvement Actions Update**

Mrs D. Boyle reported on good progress against the improvement actions and training plan agreed at the September 2023 Board Meeting, with completion of the remainder of outstanding actions being targeted by September 2024.

The Board NOTED the update provided on progress against the improvement actions and the training plan agreed as part of the 2023 appraisal process.

14. **Operational Performance Report**

Mrs H. Anderson reported that following a decline reported in the last quarter, overall satisfaction performance and listening to views had increased again as at the period end. The main driver for customer satisfaction was the repairs service.

Mrs Anderson stated that following a deep dive of dissatisfied customer comments in relation to satisfaction with latest repair, key areas were identified for action to drive through service improvements:

- Improved communication from the Customer Service Centre, the Association and the contractor, particularly in relation to follow-on works.
- The monitoring of completion of those follow-on works.
- Advising the customer of completion of external works.

These aspects had now been incorporated within internal processes and would be monitored by the new Complaints Officer who would be the main point of contact for the communication of information relating to follow-on works with the customer. They would also ensure that customers were satisfied with works, prior to the closure of the repair job. The findings of the deep dive exercise had also been shared with the contractor.

Mrs Anderson advised that a customer communication had been issued providing information on the different categories of repair timescales in order to manage customer expectations moving forward.

Mrs Anderson stated that it was hoped that the Association could reach 70% overall satisfaction by year end. If this did not however transpire, there had been significant progress with regard to service improvement during the year and the Association would continue on its journey of improvement. The Board agreed that significant progress was clear to see and that the staff team should be commended for their efforts and encouraged by this work.

Mr R. Hill reported on the progress and improved results being achieved in the income collection area of the business, which had been regularly reported to the Audit & Risk Committee throughout the year. The Board were pleased to note the positive results in this service area too and requested that its thanks were extended to Ms G. Gascoigne and the team for their achievements.

The Board thereafter NOTED the report on the Association's operational performance position as at the end of Period 11 of 2023/24.

15. **Financial Performance Report**

Mrs M. Hutchinson reported that the Association was fully compliant with all its covenants and was also ahead of margin and surplus in the period.

Mrs Hutchinson stated that, with year-end approaching, focus was being targeted to ensuring that all expenditure attributable to the financial year was included in the system for the financial year and all records were up to date for year end.

The Board [REDACTED] thereafter NOTED the financial performance report as at the end of Period 11 of 2023/24 and also to the Quarter 3 Forecast.

16. **Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2023-26**

The Board NOTED the update on the Group Equality, Diversity and Inclusions Strategy 2023/26 and also the supplementary Riverside Scotland action plan.

17. **MD Report**

Mrs D. MacLean reported on the quality of candidates interviewed for the Head of Housing & Communities post and was pleased to report that Pamela Forrest had been offered the post and would be joining the Association and would meet the Board in due course.

Mrs MacLean highlighted the positive results of the recent Hive survey and the Strategic Risk Register which had been attached to the report.

[REDACTED]

Referring to the Chair's Action Procedure item on the appointment of a strategic partner for energy efficiency retrofit works, Mrs MacLean advised that it had been highlighted that this item also required to be considered by Group's Executive Team and Board.



[REDACTED]

The Board noted that Group Executive Director's had approved the appointment and Group Board's consideration of the appointment would take place the next week.



Mrs MacLean also reported that the Association's engagement plan with the Scottish Housing Regulator had been received and stated that the Regulator continued to engage with the Association regarding its concerns on customer satisfaction levels. The Board noted that the Association would continue to have lower levels of satisfaction when compared to some peers, due to a lack of standardisation for the collection and reporting of this information and this had been communicated to the Regulator.

The Board thereafter NOTED:

- a) the content of the MD's Report.
- b) the decision approved under Chair's Action Procedure to approve the award of the contract to Union Technical as the Association's strategic delivery partner for energy efficiency retrofit works. 

- c) that Board's decision to approve the contract had subsequently been recommended to Group Board for final approval.
- d) the Association's Strategic Risk Register which had recently being reviewed and updated for the March Audit & Risk Committee Meeting.

18. **Minutes / Updates**

The Board NOTED the:

- a) Unconfirmed Audit & Risk Committee Meeting Minutes – 7 March 2024.
- b) Unconfirmed Customer Experience Committee Meeting Minutes – 8 February 2024.

c) Group Board Meeting Highlights – January and February 2024.

19. **Any Other Business**

a) 2025/26 Meeting Dates

Following review, the Board AGREED the Board and Committee Meeting Dates for 2025/26.

b) Farewell

The Chair highlighted that this would be Mrs H. Anderson’s last Board Meeting prior to her moving on to a new role with another housing association. He thanked Mrs Anderson for being a huge support to him, the Board and to the Senior Management Team and wished her the very best in her new career opportunity.

Mrs Anderson thanked the Chair for his comments and stated she had enjoyed her time with the Association. She thanked the Board for providing the right level of scrutiny and support and wished them all the very best for the future.

20. **Date of Next Meetings**

260th Board Meeting – 5.30 p.m. on Thursday 23 May 2024 at 44-46 Bank Street, Irvine and via MS Teams.

D MacLean
Secretary
22 March 2024
DMcL/db

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Date: