

## Minutes of a Meeting of the Management Committee of Orkney Housing Association Limited, held in the office and via Zoom on Wednesday, 29 January 2025 at 10.30am

**Present:** In person: Brian Kynoch (Chair), Suzanne Lawrence, MaryAnn Lewis, Fiona Lettice, Bruce Pilkington, John Rodwell, John White and Roella Wilson  
Remotely: Mervyn Sandison

**In attendance:** Craig Spence (Chief Executive – CE)  
Mhairi Hughes (Interim Director of Corporate Services – IDCS)  
Tracey Longworth (Director of Housing & Operations – DHO)  
Dean Campbell (Building Services Manager – BSM)  
Kirstin Mackay (Director of Finance – DF, remotely)  
Sandy Dennison (Relief Accountant – RA)  
Connie Shearer (Minute Taker)

The Chair welcomed those present and advised that:

1. Paper No MC/24/77 has been withdrawn and will be dealt with at a future meeting.
2. Members were due to receive a presentation on rebranding options but due to illness of the designer, this is postponed until 05 February 2024. A session on “Homelessness & Section 5 Referrals” would be delivered instead by the Senior Housing Officers.

### PART 1 – STANDING ITEMS

#### 1.1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Kate Hayes.

#### 1.2 Declarations of (a) interest and (b) hospitality given/received in last 12 months for any items on the agenda

There were none.

#### 1.3 Minutes of the Management Committee meeting held:

##### 1.3.1 • 27 November 2024

The Minutes were agreed to be an accurate record of the meeting and were proposed by Roella Wilson and seconded by John Rodwell. The Minutes were later signed by the Chair.

##### 1.3.2 • 04 December 2024

The Minutes were agreed to be an accurate record of the meeting and were proposed by Fiona Lettice and seconded by John White. The Minutes were later signed by the Chair.

##### 1.3.3 • 10 January 2025

The Minutes were agreed to be an accurate record of the meeting and were proposed by Fiona Lettice and seconded by John White. The Minutes were later signed by the Chair.

#### 1.4 **Matters Arising & Deferred Items** (Verbal update)

1.4.1 The Chair and Vice Chair gave a verbal update on the Housing Market Partnership.

#### 1.5 **Future Meeting Dates:**

Wednesday 05 February, 10.30am - Audit & Risk Management Sub Committee

Wednesday 12 February, 10.30am - Performance & Resources Sub Committee

Monday 24 February, 2.00pm - Online training session '*Housing Sector & Regulatory Awareness*'

Wednesday 26 February, Agreed lunch 12.30pm then MC Workshop from 1pm

Wednesday 05 March, 10.30am - Health & Safety Working Party

Wednesday 26 March, 10.30am - Management Committee

## **PART 2 – STRATEGY**

### **S1 Business Plan Update** (Paper No MC/24/68)

S1.1 Members were updated on progress with previously approved plans for the production of the Association's new 3-year Business Plan covering 2025-28.

S1.2 A productive Strategy Day had been held in December and, following this, members were asked to discuss and approve an updated Vision; approve the Mission Statement; and discuss and approve updated Corporate Outcomes.

S1.3 Following discussion, it was agreed the Vision should be updated as follows:

**Be recognised across the country as a leading provider of quality, affordable housing.**

S1.4 OHAL's Mission Statement of **We will provide good quality affordable homes and services for the benefit of the people and community of Orkney** continues to remain current, and no change was suggested to this.

S1.5 The three Corporate Outcomes were discussed and agreed as follows:

1. **A Great Place to Work** (no change)
2. **Great Customer Service** (no change)
3. **Contributing to a Safe and Sustainable Community**

S1.6 Members:

- a) Discussed and approved an updated Vision as above;
- b) Approved the Mission Statement continues;
- c) Discussed and approved the Corporate Outcomes as above; and
- d) Noted the current position and that the next important stages are the P&R Sub-committee, and a Priorities and Risk workshop from 12.30pm on 26 February 2025.

## **S2 Rent Consultation Responses (Paper No/MC/24/69)**

- S2.1 The DHO introduced the paper, which followed detailed discussions in December when members agreed their preferred option. Two options were consulted on, with residents being notified through a variety of means. A summary analysis of responses was presented which showed that 70% were in favour of the MC Preferred Option ie the three-year increase option. It was noted that the date in the recommendation should read 1 April 2025 not 2024.
- S2.2 A member enquired whether the third year 2.5% increase was legally binding, should inflation increase dramatically. The DHO confirmed this it was not, and the Association can go back to consultation should the need arise – it was agreed that this would be made clear to residents in the letters that are issued.
- S2.3 A member queried the main form of response by tenants, ie email, letter etc. The DHO will analyse this and send the information out to members.
- S2.4 Following review of the responses from tenants and sharing owners, members:
1. Agreed to the proposed rent and occupancy charge increase of 4% in 2025/26, 4% in 2026/27 and 2.5% in 2027/28; and
  2. Noted that the increase will take effect from 1 April 2025 for all tenants and sharing owners.

## **S3 Equalities (Paper No MC/24/70)**

- S3.1 The report provided an update on progress with actions to address the Scottish Housing Regulator's Regulatory Requirements in respect of equalities and human rights. An Action Plan was presented which detailed progress and amended target dates where relevant. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy was provided for information, and the Equalities Data currently collected had been updated.
- S3.2 Following discussion around data that may be time limited (ie pregnancy), members agreed with the updated information gathered in relation to the 9 protected characteristics. It was agreed that "When relevant" would be substituted with "Yes".
- S3.3 A member proposed that they were comfortable with the data currently collected and the justifications for doing so per Attachment 3. They further proposed that in their opinion, there was no need for consideration of the collection of further data in relation to the 9 protected characteristics of our housing applicants, tenants, job applicants, staff or committee members and to proceed with collection on this basis. This was unanimously agreed by those present.
- S3.4 Members noted the current position and, taking account of the decision at S3.3, approved the remainder of the revised Action Plan as presented.

#### **S4 Conclusion of Repairs Review (Tabled Paper No MC/24/71)**

- S4.1 The BSM apologised for the late issue of this Paper and advised that he would talk through it with members. The paper provided an update on progress with a review of the repairs service and Trades Team. This followed significant research undertaken by the previous Director of Operations in 2023.
- S4.2 As part of the review, substantial improvements have already been implemented (regular monitoring meetings, live collaborative spreadsheets, automation of labour-intensive admin tasks, enhanced contractor engagement and improved internal communication) which have resulted in a marked improvement in reactive repairs performance.
- S4.3 They advised that the Association has a very good relationship with our external contractors, and they are used more frequently when our Trades Team are on leave, but they also have issues with capacity and are not able to be as reactive as in previous years.
- S4.4 Our Trades Team currently undertake around 65% of Works Orders but with the numbers rising, this is putting increased pressure on them and a larger number being outsourced to external contractors. Increased development and ageing housing stock will likely only increase the numbers of repairs and voids.
- S4.5 Members discussed:
- The importance of our Trades Team who have direct contact with our residents
  - Increasing contractors list to include smaller, 'lone' operators;
  - Succession planning for the Trades Team;
  - Retaining skills and further training
  - Recruitment to the Trades Team
- S4.6 Members thanked the BSM and DHO for their excellent report and noted:
- a) progress to date,
  - b) that final proposals will be incorporated into the Workforce Strategy and Business Plan, but will likely include an increase to staffing establishment of one post.

### **PART 3 – GOVERNANCE & ASSURANCE**

#### **G1 SHR Self-Assessment Update (Paper No MC/24/72)**

- G1.1 Members noted the contents of the report and:
- a) Agreed that no material changes are required to the AAS since its submission;
  - b) Noted no notifiable events have been made since the last meeting;
  - c) Noted the update to the list of Governance Related Policies; and
  - d) Noted the additions to the Evidence Bank in relation to the Regulatory Requirements and Regulatory Standards per Sections 5 and 6.

## **G2 Policy Reviews & Approvals (Paper No MC/24/73)**

G2.1 A number of policies remain outstanding but will be reviewed and presented to members when workloads permit.

G2.2 Treasury Management Policy: The CE explained that this has been reviewed early to incorporate changes to roles/duties and to consider the context of the subsidiary and raising finance.

G2.3 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights Policy: This has been reviewed early due to the Worker Protection Act 2023 (Amendment of the Equality Act 2010) which came into force on 26 October 2024. It included clarification of member queries around definitions when presented in November 2024.

G2.4 Dignity at Work Policy: This has been reviewed early and takes into account new legislation requiring employers to address the prevention of sexual harassment in a proactive manner. Training has been delivered to all staff and some Committee, together with refresher training on Equalities, Diversity & Human Rights, and a Sexual Harassment Risk Assessment prepared for information. A member noted it was difficult to prove 'malicious and unfounded harassment or bullying' but the IDCS said there were procedures to follow should this occur.

G2.5 Members:

- a) Approved the amended Treasury Management Policy;
- b) Approved the amended Equality, Diversity & Human Rights Policy;
- c) Approved the amended Dignity at Work Policy; and
- d) Noted the Sexual Harassment Risk Assessment as presented.

## **PART 4 – PERFORMANCE**

### **P3 Development Report (Paper No MC/24/74)**

P3.1 The BSM presented the paper which provided updates on the development programme. They noted that no new information had been obtained regarding the Corse West (Soulisquoy) development. Members were updated on the BSM's exploration of the future expansion of the Walliwall development (Walliwall 10) with plans being finalised for approval.

A further opportunity exists at another site in Kirkwall with investigations taking place. Initial capacity suggestion was for 62 units but with some re-working the BSM hopes this can be increased to approximately 80 units. Members will be kept updated.

Another partnership project in Kirkwall which had previously been approved was being revisited, with potential for 8 x NSSE plus another 12 units by other parties.

- P3.2 On-site projects are progressing well. Walliwall 8 has been completed with 4 NSSE properties under offer with another 4 being actively advertised. A very successful open viewing session was held last Friday/Saturday which attracted good publicity and lots of positive feedback, particularly around space standards – reinforcing the high-quality homes provided by the Association. Walliwall 9 is currently on programme. The BSM has submitted a grant application to enable the purchase of a former shared ownership property back into stock for ‘key-worker’ housing.
- P3.3 Internally, staff are modelling capacity going forward. The RA advised that this was assuming a build of 50 properties (32 rented and 18 other (NSSE or possibly Mid Market Rent) over the next 5 years, totalling 250. This includes revisiting existing landbank sites, which have an anticipated capacity of 70. Kirkwall is where the main area of demand is, but other locations are being considered.
- P3.4 The Chair said he was very encouraged to hear about all the work the BSM has been doing and the positive way that development proposals are lining up. This showed there was no need for outside contractors as the Association is able to do this with local partners.
- P3.5 Members noted the current position with the development programme.

## **PART 5 – ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

### **D1 Community Bonds Update (Paper No MC/24/75)**

- D1.1 The CE presented the paper noting one action from OHAL’s 2024-25 Operation Plan was to explore options to ensure adequate finance for future developments. This led to considering delivery of alternative housing options, via OHALE, and financing such work via Community Housing Bonds. The paper outlined the positive progress being made to develop and launch this financing option to support future and additional development to help meet Orkney’s housing needs.
- D1.2 A prospectus is being drawn up with a target date for launch of the Community Bonds at end of March/start of April, together with OHAL’s rebranding and new 3 year Business Plan.
- D1.3 Responding to queries, the CE explained that legal advice has been sought to ensure the Association meets all criteria in order to issue Community Bonds; and to get everything ready for presenting to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR). The CE has already tentatively broached the idea of innovative new finance & development with the SHR.
- D1.4 A member enquired whether the benefits of being a CIC had been explored, and the CE said our solicitors had confirmed a CIC was good enough and saw no reason to change this. It was confirmed during the meeting that the asset lock on the subsidiary named Orkney Housing Association Ltd.

D1.5 Following discussion, Management Committee:

- Noted the review of our Rules and updating of our Treasury Management Policy create a sound framework for a financial relationship between OHAL and our subsidiary;
- Noted the legal advice received to date as set out in section 6.3 of the paper; and
- Noted other progress as set out in section 7.2 and the remainder of the paper.

**D2 OHALE (Paper No MC/24/76)**

D2.1 Members received an update on progress to establish OHALE as a Private Letting Agent (PLA). The DHO had undertaken extensive scrutiny of the requirements that the subsidiary would need to meet in order to operate as a PLA.

D2.2 At a recent meeting of OHALE, a draft Business Plan had been endorsed which was also presented to this meeting for review and agreement to further development. A progress paper will be presented to a future Management Committee meeting.

D2.3 Following a query, the CE confirmed other opportunities are being explored with regards to Orkney 2025 Island Games.

D2.4 In Section 3.1 of the paper; Governance, a member felt that Item 5 in the 'Activities' table should also be highlighted as per Item 2. This was agreed.

D2.5 Following discussion, Members:

1. Approved the Draft Business Plan;
2. Agreed a reporting timetable, with a progress paper to be included as part of the Management Committee meeting cycle;
3. Agreed to consider the appointment of further Directors to OHALE; and
4. Agreed to consider views on the name and branding for the subsidiary.

**D3 Rented Allocations & Lettings Policy – consultation topics (Paper No MC/24/77)**

D3.1 This paper was deferred until 26 February at the MC Workshop.

**PART 6 – ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

**I1 Annual Lease Update (Paper No MC/24/78)**

I1.1 Information on current leased properties was presented to members. Members noted that there are no issues with any of the leases, that three leases are due for expiry in the next calendar year, and discussions with the leaseholders will be held around extending the leases.

I1.2 Members noted the content of this report.

**I2 Annual Service Charge Review (Paper No MC/24/79)**

I2.1 The paper outlined the services equalisation account position for 2024/25 and the proposed charges for 2025/26.

I2.2 Members noted:

- a) The projected services equalisation position at 31 March 2025 has an anticipated debit balance of £1,125, which should hopefully be converted back to a credit balance by 31 March 2026 by the recovery of the deficit on insurance charges; and
- b) The proposed approach to service charge setting for 2025/26.

**I3 Cost of Living Update (Paper No MC/24/80)**

I3.1 The report highlighted the continued impact the cost-of-living crisis is having on tenants. OHAL staff continue to engage, locally and nationally, with support organisations which augments the support offered by Association staff and allows access into funding streams.

I3.2 Members noted the content of this report.

**Any Other Competent Business**

**Presentation: Homeless & Section 5 Referrals**

Emma McConnachie & Alan Sim, Senior Housing Officers

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 12.50pm

Signed: .....

Date: .....

Chair