

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS THESE MINUTES OR ANY OTHER COMMITTEE RELATED MATTER, PLEASE CONTACT YOUR CHAIRPERSON,

LORNA BROWN ON [REDACTED]



**West
Granton**

Housing Co-op

sustaining and championing the co-operative way

These minutes have been redacted where personal or confidential information is noted

West Granton Housing Co-operative Limited

Committee of Management

Minutes of Meeting – April 2020

Present:

Committee Reports complete with Response Forms for each Report Item were sent out to all Committee Members as this was the first meeting post lockdown.

Response forms were completed and received by all 10 Committee Members. This is a 100% response rate.

They are noted as follows:

- Lorna Brown (Chair)
- Fiona Marshall (Vice Chair)
- Marilyn Dickson (Treasurer)
- Donna Anderson
- Jon Douglas
- Joe Moir
- Liz Robertson
- Pat Cordiner
- George Thomson
- Wendy Riordan

In attendance: No staff were in attendance

1) APOLOGIES

None

2) MINUTES OF MEETING 11th March 2020

Approved

3) MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- a. Members pointed out that Item 6J was missing on their Response Forms. All members made a separate note to advised they “noted” their response to Item 6J. The CEO apologises for this omission and thanks Members for bringing this to her attention.
- b. Member ER had asked if WGHC staff could advise those tenants who receive their universal credit payments direct, not to fall in to rent arrears and encourage them to pay their rent. The CEO wish to thank ER for the comment made and wishes to advise that every tenant in this position is given this advice by the Housing Management Team and in addition, staff are referring tenants to various agencies for independent debt and benefits advice. However it is noted that the success of the referrals largely depend on the tenant wanting to engage with these services. The CEO will pass on ER’s comment to the staff to let them know that Committee are very aware of the arrears situation and wish staff to continue to give the advice of “Rent First” when it comes to household payments and other debts.
- c. Member MD noted that the address for Member WR was incorrect. The CEO apologises for this typing error and confirms this has now been amended and corrected.
- d. Member MD asked a question specifically about tenant rent arrears and Universal Credit. The CEO arranged for the Depute CEO to contact the Member to discuss and explain. It was reported back to the CEO, that the Member was satisfied with the explanation given.

4) DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

5. FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

5a) Cash in the Bank – April 2020

Committee were given the latest cash balances:

	£
RBS (immediate access)	752,071
Santander (95 day notice account)	831,138
Bank of Scotland (32 day notice account)	21,316
Total cash in Bank	<u>£1,604,525 (million)</u>

Committee were given the March 2020 figure of £1,652,521 for comparison.

This was a difference of £47,996.

Committee were informed that we in April we paid £55,626 to RB Grant for the Smoke Alarm works. This is in addition to all our usual bills such as the Loans, Salaries, etc

Committee noted the report and that this item is linked to SHR Standard 3.1.

5b) Corporation Tax

The CEO confirmed that WGHC has submitted its corporation tax return to HMRC for the accounting year ending 31st March 2019.

In the accounting year, WGHC received £12,968 in interest.

For the financial year ending 31st March 2019, WGHC paid £2,463.92 in Corporation Tax (for the interest received).

Committee noted the report and that this item is linked to SHR Standard 1.3.

5c) Bad Debts Report 2019-20

Committee were presented with the Bad Debts Report for 2019-20.

A total of £2,421.79 was written off in the year from former tenants who had ended their tenancy with debt on their rent account.

A total of £1,081.10 was written off in the year from two former tenants who left their tenancy below lettable standard. WGHC recharged the tenants for the works carried out in bringing the properties back up to the lettable standard but after a long process of attempting recovery, the debts were written off.

Committee noted the report and that this item is linked to SHR Standard 3.

5d) Spend on Non-Housing Assets for Staff Homeworking

Committee were advised the CEO had to authorise an unforeseen spend of £6.5k to ensure all staff were set up for homeworking due to the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. Committee were provided with a list of the items purchased.

Committee noted the report and that this item is linked to SHR Standard 3.3.

5e) Rent Arrears and Covid-19

Committee were given a report on the number of tenants who were claiming Universal Credit in March and April.

The following table was provided:

Date	Tenants claiming Universal Credit	Current Tenant Rent Arrears £
13 th March 2020	20	£17,246
13 th April 2020	42	£18,478

Committee were further advised that 26 of the 42 tenants in receipt of Universal Credit are in rent arrears amounting to a total of £8,745. That means 62% of tenants claiming Universal Credit are in rent arrears.

Committee were advised they would be kept updated in regard to tenants claiming Universal Credit and rent arrear levels.

Committee noted the report and that this item is linked to SHR Standard 3.3.

6) Governance

6a) Committee Member Resigns

Committee were advised that Member George Nicol resigned from the Committee for personal reasons. Mr Nicol had served on the Committee since 2012.

Committee were given an up to date list of the remaining 10 members and advised the CEO had updated the SHR Portal Governing Body Members List.

Committee noted the report and that this item is linked to SHR Standard 1.2.

6b) Committee Meetings during COVID-19 Lockdown Restrictions

Committee were advised that:

The Scottish Federation of Housing Association (SFHA) has stated that according to the Model Rules: Committee Meetings can take place in:

“any manner which permits those attending to hear and comment on proceedings. “This means meetings can be held virtually through Skype or Zoom or equivalent”

and that at least 4 Committee Members must be able to participate for quorum to be achieved; otherwise the meeting cannot go ahead.

Committee were advised that we could have no more than 3 Committee Members in the Board Room at any one time because of the rules around social distancing.

Committee were asked to decide if they would be available for a virtual meeting or a physical meeting.

Committee responded and there were 2 Members who advised they would be available for a virtual meeting using Zoom; the remaining 8 advised they would be available to attend a physical meeting if social distancing measures were in place; and that this items is linked to SHR Standard 1.

6c) External Financial Audit 2020 – Alexander Sloan

Committee were advised that Alexander Sloan had proposed a date for the 2020 Financial External Audit: the week beginning 8th June 2020.

Committee noted the report and that this item is linked to SHR Standard 1.3.

6d) Suspensions on WGHC Services

Committee were advised that in accordance with guidance and our own efforts to reduce the spread of Covid-19 WGHC has temporarily suspended the following services:

- All allocations and applications for membership
- Stair Cleaning
- The programme of works for the upgrading of smoke alarms
- All non-emergency repairs
- All tenant home visits and face to face appointments (unless absolutely critical and in an emergency only)
- The play parks and office is closed to the public (Staff are homeworking with a small skeleton staff in each morning to perform critical tasks.

Tasks are performed and staff return to homeworking for the remainder of the day.)

Committee were also advised that the following services were still being delivered:

- Landscaping Works and Limited Grass Cutting Service Works
- Annual Gas Safety Checks
Gas Safe (previously CORGI) have stated it is not permissible to suspend all gas safety checks, as it will unnecessarily put tenants at increased risk, particularly now as people are having to spend all or most of their time at home.

Our Contractor, Lothian Gas, has confirmed to us, in writing, they are already taking the necessary precautions and following the strict guidelines issued to them by Gas Safe.

Committee noted the report and that this item is linked to SHR Standard 2.

6e) Notifiable Event and contact with the Scottish Housing Regulator

Committee were advised the CEO had submitted a Notifiable Event to the Scottish Housing Regulator to advise of the WGHC Office closing to the public as a result of COVID-19.

Since then, the CEO has kept the Regulator up to date in relation to staff homeworking and the suspension of all but our essential services.

WGHC also have a new Regulation Manager.

Her name is Nicola Harcus.

Nicola replaces our previous manager, Kirsty Porter from March 2020.

Committee noted the report and this item is linked to SHR Standard 2.5.

6f) Scottish Housing Regulator- Feedback to WGHC regarding their Annual Assurance Statement

Committee were presented with the letter received from the Scottish Housing Regulator and an excerpt was provided in the Reports. This gave WGHC feedback on their Annual Assurance Statement from October 2019.

SHR confirmed that:

“Reviewing your statement we found that your statement covered all of the areas required by the statutory guidance.”

Committee noted the report and that this item is linked to SHR Standard 1 and 3.

6g) Proposed Amendments to Standing Orders/Scheme of Delegation

In light of the COVID-19 situation and lockdown restrictions, Committee were asked to consider the following amendments to Standing Orders and Scheme of Delegation:

1. In the event of a need for urgent or emergency decision to be made and one which cannot wait until the next Committee Meeting or where the Committee Meeting is not quorate, the WGHC Committee of Management agree that the Office Bearers are given delegated authority to collectively make this decision. For avoidance of doubt the Office Bearers are: Chair (Lorna Brown), Vice Chair (Fiona Marshall) and Treasurer (Marilyn Dickson). All Committee Members will be advised of any such decision/circumstance in writing.
2. Due to homeworking and the social distancing rules in place which has resulted in only staff attending the office when absolutely necessary, it is proposed that invoices no longer require to be signed off by both 2 senior staff signatories (usually it is a line manager and always the CEO) before payment is approved. It is proposed that the CEO can act as the single signatory and is given delegated authority to sign off all invoices approving them for payment.
3. That the Committee of Management agree that WGHC should not proceed with any eviction action, as a result of rent arrears, during this period. This is in accordance with Government guidelines.

The above proposals are temporary only and will no longer stand once the UK and Scottish Government guidance allows staff to return to work as normal.

Committee approved Points 1,2,3, and 4 above and noted this item is linked to SHR Standards 1, 2, 4 & 6.

6h) Annual Returns to the Scottish Housing Regulator- extension dates

Committee were advised that the SHR has extended timescales to 31st July 2020 for the following annual returns:

- Annual Return on the Charter
- Five Year Financial Projections
- Loan Portfolio
- Energy Efficiency Scottish Social Housing Standard

Committee noted the report and that this item is linked to SHR Standard 3.7.

6i) Staffing

Committee were advised of the new staff structure now that WGHC had completed its recruitment and selection process for the new housing admin assistant and housing officer.

An update was given on staff absences and on Staff Homeworking, Homeworking Guidelines and Arrangements; and how staff were accommodating the many methods of rent payments preferred by our tenants including those continuing to pay by cash.

Committee noted the report and that this item is linked to Section 10 of the 2020 Business Plan: Risks & Mitigation.

6j) Memberships

Committee were advised there had been one new membership since the last report and there had been no new terminations since the March report.

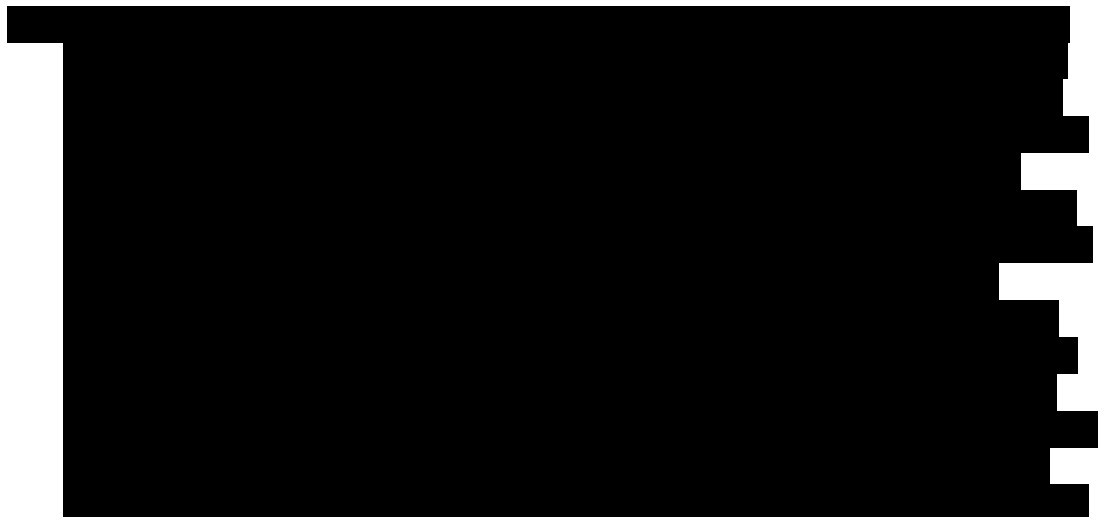
Committee noted the report and that this item is linked to SHR Standards 6.1 and 6.4.

6k) Health and Safety Report

Committee were advised there had been no incidents or accidents since the last report.

They were further advised that:

1. During the COVID-19 pandemic the WGHC Office is closed and staff are working from home. A skeleton staff is on site in the office for a couple of hours each morning only when critical tasks which cannot be performed at home need to be done. This includes taking rent card payments from tenants processing all rent payments (including housing benefit and universal credit payments, standing orders and direct debit payments on to our tenants accounts), the processing and payments of invoices.



Committee noted the report and that this item was linked to the SHR Standard 5.3.

6L) Outstanding Governance Works

Committee were advised that:

Due to sickness levels of senior staff throughout 2019-20 and now this restricted period of operations, the CEO has had to put a large amount of governance work on hold. The CEO would like to advise Committee that the following are still outstanding:

- Some Committee members still need to sign the Health and Safety Responsibilities Sheet as part of the new policy
- Revision of Staff, Governance and Complaints policy
- Introduction of a new Domestic Abuse policy
- Introduction of a new Harassment policy
- Introduction of a new ASB policy and procedures
- Introduction of a new Lone Working Policy
- Introduction of a new Treasury Management Policy
- Introduction of a number of new Data Protection Policies
- Putting out tender for a new Governance Board Support Consultant
- The Internal Audit Sub Committee Meeting to review the outcomes and recommendations of the Year 1 Internal Audit with Wylie & Bisset
- Committee Training in Equalities
- Approving and introducing the new SFHA Model Rules 2020
- Putting out to tender for the painting of the railings and fascia boards, electrical testing and replacing all the smoke alarm heads at the Forthquarter
- 30 Year AGM arrangements (including advising date of WGHC registration)
- Ongoing Assurance Assessment Planned work

The CEO has all the above marked on her Action Plan and will ensure these are presented to Committee over the next year to ensure WGHC remains on track for meeting all our regulatory requirements.

Committee noted the report and that this item is linked to SHR Standard 4.3

6M) Business Continuity Update

Committee were presented with the following Business Continuity Table to provide assurances to the Board that she has worked to put the following in place:

Critical Issue	Update/Assurance	Actions Taken
Service Delivery/Performance		
Repairs	All non-emergency repairs reported are being logged for action when restrictions lifted	Emergency Repairs only at this time. Gas safety checks still being carried out.
Allocations and Membership	Suspended	Publicised to tenants and on our website
Rent Payment Facilities	WGHC offering flexibility where possible	Staff still taking cash posted through the door and arranging phone calls to tenants to take card payments.
Tenancy Sustainment	Suspend Eviction Actions resulting from rent arrears	Proposed to Committee in this report
Staff Welfare		
Adequate Cover	No change in cover	Staffing levels maintained
Remote Working Arrangements	Put in place by CEO	All staff working from home
Support/Welfare Issues	Offered to all staff	By CEO and EVH
Legal and Regulatory Requirements		
Tenant Safety	Priority	Emergency Repairs, Gas Safety Checks and other emergency will be dealt with
Notifiable Events	Already happening	CEO submitting regularly
Finance		
Cash Flow	Priority	Maximising opportunities and flexibility for rent payments; all creditors still being paid on time
Covenant Compliance	No risk	Interest Cover ratio still being met

Committee noted the report and that this item is linked to SHR Standard 4.2 and Section 7 of the WGHC 2020 Business Plan: Corporate Objectives.

7. Asset Management and Maintenance

7a) Award of second phase Linked Smoke Alarm Works to RB Grant

Committee were advised that:

The Maintenance Manager reported the contractor RB Grant has performed well in carrying out Phase 1 of the Upgrading Works to Link Smoke Alarms.

The first phase involved Areas 2,3,4 and 5 – a total of 184 properties.

Before lockdown and WGHC's decision to suspend this work, the contractor had successfully completed works in 133 out of the 184 properties.

At the December 2019 Meeting, the Committee formally agreed this contract should be awarded to RB Grant and in addition, agreed that subject to a satisfactory completion of the above works that R B Grant Ltd be invited to carry out the upgrading works to the remaining 140 WGHC properties.

In accordance with the above, the Maintenance Manager discussed contractor performance with the CEO and it was agreed that RB Grant should be invited to carry out the works in Phase 2, as approved by Committee at the December meeting.

Once COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, R Grant will complete phase one and proceed with the upgrading works in Phase 2.

Committee noted the report and that this item is linked to SHR Standard 1.3 and page 20 (section 15) of the WGHC 2020 Business Plan: Priorities for 2020-21.

8) Housing Management

8a) Update on raising action to move a WGHC tenant to another WGHC tenancy

Committee were advised that following their decision in March 2020 to approve legal action under Ground 8 to be raised against a WGHC tenant the following events had taken place:

As agreed, the CEO sent a letter to the tenant inviting them to move to the other WGHC tenancy and that this offer would remain open until 19th June 2020 (due to the current COVID-19 restrictions). In the same letter, the tenant was advised that if they failed to accept the move then it is WGHC's intention to raise legal action to seek an order from the Sheriff to enforce the move.

Since receiving the letter, the tenant had contacted the Office to advise they refute all allegations of anti social behaviour and harassment and had made counter allegations. In addition, the tenant also advised they will not be moving from their current tenancy and that the alternative accommodation being offered by WGHC is not suitable for their needs.

The CEO had gone back to seek further advice from TC Young. They advised that we now proceed with serving the Notice of Proceedings but warned there must now be a 3 month notice period put in place before any legal action can be raised. This means if the Notice of Proceedings is served on the tenant next week, then WGHC has to wait 3 months before it can request a court date to raise the action in court.

Ordinarily, a social landlord would only have to wait 28 days after serving a Notice to request a court date to raise legal action. But because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Scottish Government has introduced new legislation which states that this notice period must now be extended from 28 days to 3 months.

In addition, given everyone else is in the same situation, it is likely we will wait many months thereafter to get a court date. Realistically it could be September/October 2020 before we actually get a court date.

The CEO made Committee aware of this new 3 month notice period and the long wait we may have to get a court date. Meanwhile, the accommodation on offer has to remain empty and available to the WGHC tenant at all times. This means the rent loss due to the property being void is now expected to increase from £2.5k to nearer £5k. This is in addition to the legal costs of between £5k and £10k.

Committee noted report and that this item is linked to SHR Standards 1.3, 1.4, 2.2, 3.4 and 4.1

9) Date of Next Meeting

Committee agreed the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 20th May 2020 and that this item is linked to SHR Standard 1.1.

Signed:  2020

Lorna Brown, Chairperson