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Some information has been redacted as it contains either personal data or commercially sensitive data



**West
Granton**

Housing Co-op

sustaining and championing the co-operative way

West Granton Housing Co-operative Limited

Committee of Management

Minutes of Meeting – 24th June 2020

Present: Lorna Brown (Chairperson)
Marilyn Dickson (Treasurer)
Fiona Marshall (Vice Chair)
Jon Douglas
Elizabeth Robertson
George Thomson

In attendance: Larke Adger (CEO)
Alan McKee (Depute CEO)
Sheena Farrell (Housing Admin Assistant as minute taker)

1) APOLOGIES

Pat Cordiner

Donna Anderson

Joe Moir on Committee approved leave of absence

2) MINUTES OF MEETING 20th May 2020

Minutes approved by Elizabeth Robertson

Seconded by Jon Douglas

Approved by all Committee thereafter

3) MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

None.

4) DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Fiona Marshall for item 9

5. FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

5a) Cash in the Bank – May 2020

Committee were advised that WGHC has £1,673,855 million in the bank and were given the breakdown between the working accounts with RBS, Santander (95-day notice account) and Bank of Scotland (32-day notice account).

Committee noted the report.

5b) Fixed Assets Annual Impairment Statement

In accordance with the WGHC Financial Regulations: “The CEO will submit an annual report ... on the carrying value of fixed assets and on impairment.”

WGHC’s houses (assets) are valued at historic cost less depreciation in the annual Financial Statements. If there is any evidence of impairment of value either because of reduced income stream or increased costs, then this should also be deducted from the value. Impairment can be explained as a sudden or unexpected decline in an asset’s use, which would in turn affects its value to WGHC. This might arise from physical damage to our stock, low demand for housing, building defects or significant issues in relation to income or costs.

Having looked at revenue and costs from housing, the CEO believes there is no evidence of impairment of the value of WGHC’s housing stock and that the stated values of non-current assets are reasonable. The CEO has confirmed this to our Auditors during the audit fieldwork and has signed off an impairment review to that effect.

A breakdown of the carrying value of fixed assets at 31st March 2020 is shown below (referring to the page in the report). These values should be repeated in the financial statements to be put to Committee next month. Any significant difference in the final figures will be reported.

Committee approved the carrying value of lands and buildings as shown within the table in the report.

5c) Loan Portfolio Return For Submission to the Scottish Housing Regulator

This return must be submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator by 30th September 2020.

It includes information about the loans WGHC has with its providers and advises how many properties are used as a security in relation to these loans.

WGHC currently has 5 loans with Nationwide Building Society, secured on 302 properties. The outstanding balance on these loans as at 31.03.20 was £3,681,714.

In addition, WGHC currently has 1 loan with the Scottish Government for £148k. This is an interest free loan to assist with the upgrading of our smoke alarm works for when the new law comes into force in February 2021. The period of this loan is 5 years and repayments are annual and are made in the anniversary month of the drawn down date of the original loan. For WGHC, this would be January each year. The first repayment is due 22/01/2021 and the final repayment is due 22/01/2025.

In total WGHC has 6 outstanding loans amounting to £3,829,714.

Once the Loan Portfolio has been approved, the CEO will submit this return to the Regulator.

Committee approved the loan portfolio return.

5d) Rent Arrears and COVID-19

Universal Credit (UC) and Rent Arrears

- April 2020

In April, Committee were advised that 42 WGHC tenants were claiming Universal Credit. 26 out of these 42 tenants were in rent arrears. The total amount of their rent arrears amounted to £8,745.

- May 2020

As at 11th May 2020, there were 23 tenants who were claiming Universal Credit and who also had rent arrears. The total level of their arrears amounted to £9,323.

- June 2020

As at 7th June 2020, there were 51 tenants claiming Universal Credit, 23 of these also had rent arrears. The total level of their arrears amounted to £8,191.92. We receive direct payments of Universal Credit for 13 tenants, the rest receive any payments themselves.

Overall Non-Technical Arrears Figures - June 2020 Non-technical arrears are arrears which are owed directly by the tenants and not expected to be paid by Housing Benefit payments.

The total number of WGHC tenants in rent arrears as at 7th June 2020 was 74 tenants. This includes the 23 tenants who are claiming UC and are in rent arrears. The total number of arrears for the 74 tenants amounted to £16,241.97.

By comparison, in the 4 weeks previous as at 11th May, there were 82 tenants in arrears amounting to £22,109.39.

Arrears have therefore reduced by £5867.42. This in large due to receipt of a Universal Credit payment totalling £4,171.

The Housing Management Team continue to monitor and manage all rent arrears cases on a weekly basis. Where possible, tenants are being offered referral to various agencies for further advice and assistance.

Committee noted the report

5e) Revisions of Budgets and our Five-Year Financial Projections

At the next Committee Meeting the CEO will present revised budget proposals to Committee for their consideration.

It is expected that there will be some changes to the Budgets approved by Committee in February this year, simply because of the impact of COVID-19.

The CEO is currently monitoring WGHC's income and rent arrears and is looking to compare the first quarter of this year (April to June) with the same period last year to see if there is a significant fall in income and rise in arrears. The CEO is also looking at our planned maintenance programme to see if any spend/works needs to be put on hold or if we can continue with what we have already planned.

A report will be presented to Committee for the consideration in July. The outcome of any budget revisions will feed in to our Five-Year Financial Projections which are due to be submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator by 30th September. The CEO is therefore also waiting to receive the first quarter financial management report from Prospect Housing Association (as our financial agent) which will be presented at the July meeting. Thereafter it is proposed the Five-Year Financial Projections will be calculated and presented to Committee in August for their approval.

Committee noted the report

5) Governance

6a) Internal Audit Results and Findings Appendices 2-5

On 28th May, the Internal Audit Sub Committee, the CEO and ylie & Bisset (Internal Auditors) held a meeting through the use of a teleconferencing call facility.

The Internal Audit Sub Committee agreed that the results and findings of the 2020 Internal Audit should be reported to the main Committee of Management at the June Meeting.

During the 2020 Audit, the Internal Audit looked at how WGHC was performing in 4 areas:

1. WGHC's compliance with the Scottish Housing Regulatory financial standards 1 & 3
2. WGHC's Rent Arrears Management
3. WGHC's Key Performance Indicators
4. WGHC's Allocations processes

1 of 4 grades could be awarded for each area looked at.

Committee noted the findings and recommendations

Committee approved the reports

Committee approved the next areas for Internal Audit in January/February 2021

Committee noted the next Audit Sub Committee Meeting will be in March 2021

6b) Financial External Audit and the Audit Clearance Meeting with the External Audit Sub Committee

Alexander Sloan is WGHC's External Financial Auditor. The 2020 financial audit is just about complete at the time of the writing of this report.

This year, due to COVID-19 Alexander Sloan and WGHC carried out the audit "remotely". The CEO loaded all required items up to an online portal supplied by Alexander Sloan.

The Assistant Finance Officer, Jiewen Gao, assisted with the audit as did Prospect Housing Association as our financial agent.

Before the draft financial statements are presented to Committee for their final approval, they must be run past our Financial External Audit Sub Committee. This is done at an Audit Clearance Meeting.

The Audit Clearance Meeting is scheduled for:

Thursday, 23rd July 2020 at 12 Noon.

Depending on where we are in the Scottish Government's route out of lockdown, this meeting may be held in the WGHC Board Room, or perhaps in the large hall in the Prentice Centre or virtually.

The External Financial Audit Sub Committee are required to be in attendance at this meeting, along with Alexander Sloan and Lynne Bell (Finance Manager from Prospect Housing Association).

The External Financial Audit Sub Committee are:

- Lorna Brown Chairperson
- Fiona Marshall Vice Chair
- Marilyn Dickson Treasurer

Committee noted the report

Committee approved the date for Audit Clearance meeting

6c) 30th Annual General Meeting and adoption of the new 2020 Model Rules for RSLs (Membership Rules)

According to its constitution (Rules), WGHC must hold an AGM every year. Apart from approving the financial auditors for the forthcoming year, all the members of the Committee of Management are elected or re-elected. The AGM must be held within 6 months of the year end. Our year end is 31st March. This means we need to host an AGM by 30th September each year.

Without a Committee of Management, WGHC does not have a governing body and therefore WGHC would breach its constitution, the Model Rules and the requirements of Scottish Housing Regulator. In addition, the Cooperative and Community Benefits Societies Act 2014 requires the arrangements for general meetings of these members to be specified in the constitution of the RSL.

This year, because of COVID-19 and social distancing/lockdown restrictions, it would be physically challenging, if not impossible, to host our AGM in the Prentice Centre on the proposed date of 2nd September (Wednesday).

However, all RSLs are in the same position.

A revised law is about to be introduced which will allow RSLs to hold their AGM later in September – but no later than 30th September. This is a UK law and is called the Corporate Insolvency and Governance Bill.

This law will allow for : • Virtual AGMs to take place up to 30th September 2020 • Change the period by which an AGM must take place for all RSLs which will be by 30th September 2020 • This law will override anything that is stated in the constitution or membership rules of the RSL • There are possible provisions giving the UK Secretary of State the power to pass further regulations to extend the period by which an AGM must take place beyond 30th September, although it is likely that this is a “just in case” provision should there be a further spike in COVID-19 and a further lockdown.

The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations is recommending that RSLs seek to hold their AGM virtually by 30th September once the new legislation has been passed. Quorate must still be achieved. For WGHC that means that 28 members or more must attend the AGM.

Of course, Scotland's First Minister is expected to further announce the further relaxation of lockdown rules later this week (18th June 2020) and it could be that by the time we are needing to send out our AGM papers in August – 14 days before the AGM – that we may be able to hold a physical AGM in the Prentice Centre as planned.

But WGHC must make alternative plans to ensure it does have an AGM to allow it to continue operating.

It is therefore recommended that this subject is an Agenda Item of the topmost importance for a Committee Meeting in July.

Meanwhile, the CEO is looking to source a hall larger than the Prentice Centre that would allow for 28 members to physically attend an AGM with social distancing in place. Alternatives could be the West Pilton Neighbourhood Centre, Edinburgh College or the Sports Hall at Craigroyston High School. WGHC should also consider arrangements for a virtual AGM if a physical AGM is not going to be possible.

Committee noted the report

Committee approved that a Committee Meeting is held on Wednesday 22nd July to discuss various alternative AGM arrangements

Committee agree to the CEO sourcing alternative, larger venues for the AGM (Possibly Prentice Centre if available)

6d) Procurement of External Financial Auditor for 2021

Alexander Sloan have been WGHC's External Financial Auditor for 7 years now. They are in the midst of completing WGHC's 2020 Financial Audit. Good practice recommends you do not use the same financial auditor for more than 7 years. With this in mind, the CEO is currently working with the Northern Housing Consortium in Sutherland (a sister organisation of the Scottish Procurement Alliance, of which WGHC is a member). The joint working project is to go to the market using the procurement framework of Public Contracts Scotland. The Invitation to Tender document will be published on the PCS website and 6 Financial Accounting firms will be invited to submit their quotes for providing this service to WGHC. Using this system is considered good practice and the cheapest bidder will win the contract, subject to Committee approval in August. This means we will be in the position to formally appoint the new Auditor at our AGM- which we are required to do. Alexander Sloan are our current auditors and they will be invited to submit a bid in this process. All Financial Accounting firms being asked to submit a bid already provide financial auditing service for other Edinburgh RSLs.

Committee noted the report

6e) Leylandii Trees in West Pilton Drive/Green

On the other side of the boundary fence where WGHC has stock in Granton Mill Drive, Granton Mill Crescent, Granton Mains Gait, Granton Mains Vale and Granton Mains Brae are rows of leylandii trees. These trees are now nearly 40 feet tall. They belong to all the owner occupiers in West Pilton Drive and West Pilton Green. Being of a considerable height they are now posing a danger to WGHC stock. With an increasing number of storms and high winds being experienced each year, branches from these trees continue to fall on to our roofs and in January this year, one large branch fell on to a tenant's car. Thankfully there was no harm to the tenant, but this is obvious a serious concern to the Co-op and the health and safety of tenants and minimizing damage to our stock is paramount.

In early June, WGHC had to pay its contractor another £1k to remove a broken branch from one of these trees. The branch was still attached to the tree but on inspection, it was deemed unsafe and had to be removed.

The CEO has sought legal advice from our solicitors TC Young. They have advised in the first instance, WGHC need to write to all the owner occupiers to make them aware and ask them to take action. In short, we have been legally advised there is a process we must follow. The CEO is hoping that if we follow the legal process, that we may be able to ask the Council to intervene and raise an enforcement action against the owner occupiers to force them to have the trees trimmed down to a safer height. However, the law in this area is very vague and it may be challenging for WGHC to actually be successful with any action. However, the CEO believes this process is worth following through and will report back to Committee with regular update. If Committee approval is required for any decision in regard to this process the CEO will present this to Committee at a future meeting.

Committee noted the report

6f) Staffing and Plans for Returning to the Office

Some information has been redacted as it contains either personal data or commercially sensitive data

Plans for Returning to the Office the CEO has been keeping up to date with the SFHA and the Scottish Government Guidance in regard to staff returning to work in the office. In addition, the CEO as Chair of ARCHIE has had quite a few discussions with ARCHIE Members about their proposed plans.

The First Minister has announced that businesses should be prepared to start working on their premises from 15th July. This is part of the Phase 3 in the Scottish Exit Route out of Lockdown. However, this is just a proposal at the moment, and it is thought that still social distancing measures of 2m are still going to be imposed on us. With that in mind, the CEO has talked with staff and it has been discussed that staff would be split in to 2 teams and only 1 team would be in the office at any one time. The other team would work from home and then the next week, we would swap the teams over. This would not only allow us to put in place social distancing in the office but also it means that if one staff member in a team becomes infected with COVID-19 (which would then cause that whole team to self-isolate for 14 days), it means that WGHC has still one team to remain on site.

Hand free pump sanitisers have now been placed throughout the office, with social distancing signs and tape. A plastic screen has been put up at Reception. Risk assessments now need to be carried out for staff and the roles they perform to ensure we are protecting them and minimising their risk of infection.

To prepare staff going back to work in the office, the CEO has arranged for the entire staff team to attend a virtual session with the Rowan Counselling Group (through EVH). There are 2 sessions booked. The staff have already had 1 session to discuss their fears and how to cope moving from homeworking to blended working in both the office and at home. The session was delivered virtually using Microsoft Teams for all the 9 staff together. Feedback from staff about the first session was both excellent and positive. The second session is going to centre around practical measures staff need to be aware of in regard to COVID-19 and working in an office with social distancing measures.

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Committee approved the CEO to employ the services of a Cleaning Agency instead of WGHC employing a cleaner full time.

Committee approved the CEO to employ the Cleaning Agency for a trial period of 3 months.

Committee noted the report on the Plans to Return to Office Working.

Committee approved the CEO to allow staff to return to work in two teams, if still feasible when the time comes.

6g) Memberships

There have been no new memberships since the last report.

There has been one termination of a sole membership and two joint to sole memberships following the death of tenants since the last report.

Membership and Allocations- Committee decision required

WGHC are currently looking at the guidance of letting empty properties during COVID-19. Edindex are soon about to start their advertising service again through Key to Choice. Other Edinburgh RSLs are carrying out assessments over the phone or virtually. When it comes to viewing, they are either videoing the inside of properties and sending these on to applicants to allow them to view the property. Or they are meeting applicants at a property and allowing them to enter the property on their own whilst the staff member remains outside so as to ensure there remains 2 metres social distancing between the parties. When it come to the sign up, the tenancy agreements are being sent out in the post or being emailed to applicants to sign and return. WGHC has taken legal advice about this matter and have been advised that an electronic signature is not really legally acceptable. Therefore, a wet signature should always be sought. If social distancing can be carried out safely at a sign up, then WGHC could facilitate to do sign ups physically within the WGHC Boardroom.

Committee noted the report

Committee agreed to Option 2 – Carry out the Memberships appointments with applicants physically within the WGHC Office using the Board Room to ensure ALL parties remain 2 metres apart at all times. Face masks may be worn if parties wish to use them; or Committee could insist on face masks being worn throughout the membership meeting.

6h) Health & Safety Report

There have been no incidents or accidents since the last report during this period of COVID-19.

Committee noted the report

7) Maintenance

- Gas Safety Checks we have done since 01.04.20
 - 53 completed
- Gas Safety Checks overdue- action we are taken/have taken
 - One property overdue, forced entry planned for 11/06/20
 - One property overdue, completed in April
- **Planned Maintenance update**
 - External painting area one (Granton Mains): 143 properties painting of fascia boards and metal railings. Plan to start late summer.
 - Replacement of smoke detector heads: Area Six (Forthquarter) 45 flats and common stairs.
 - Energy performance cert: estate wide. Surveys to be carried out in 100 properties.
 - DEICR electric safety testing: estate wide, rolling program of 90 properties per year.
 - Gas boiler replacement: Area four 72 properties.

- **Cyclical Maintenance update.**

Gas safety and maintenance of gas appliances: estate wide. Current contractor has been doing this for a number of years so we really should put out to tender again. Plan to do this late Summer 2020

Fire alarm systems: Areas Five, Forthquarter and West Pilton Bank. Annual service of system is done by Chubb, have not provided a good service. Planning to tender.

- **Upgrading of smoke alarms**

New laws came into force meaning that we are required to upgrade the smoke alarms in WGHC properties. 327 properties require to be upgraded. Work started on January 2020 and 132 properties were completed by March 2020. We hope to start back on this contract in early August.

- **How many routine repairs logged to date?**

We currently have 24 minor repairs logged on our system which will be dealt with once the lockdown is eased.

We have carried out 85 urgent repairs during this period.

- **Water leak at Colonsay close**

A major water leak has happened at Colonsay close which affects 28 properties in this area. We managed to carry out a temporary repair which reduced the leak. A full repair was completed on Monday 8th June; the water supply was shut off and bottles of water were provided to each household. These properties are served by a high-pressure plastic piping system which very few contractors are able to repair and this caused a delay in effecting this repair.

Committee noted the report.

8) Housing Management

Anti-social Behaviour

We received 2 reports of ASB in April, one relating to an ongoing neighbour dispute within a stair. We are in contact with various agencies to work out a successful resolution in this case. The second case was a minor incident resolved with a phone call.

We received 6 reports in May, one relating to the dispute noted above. All other cases were resolved by informal action.

A further 3 reports have been received in June with two relating to the above ongoing situation. The situation initially involved a falling out between two neighbours in a stair but unfortunately, other neighbours have also become involved. We are pursuing a multi-agency approach to resolve this situation and are currently waiting for confirmation of a case conference being organized by Social Work.

Welfare calls to tenants

At the start of lockdown, we had made initial contact by phone to offer advice and support to our more mature tenants. Some of these tenants had requested regular call-backs to check on their situation, however, over time they have let

us know that they are receiving support from friends and family and do not require ongoing contact from ourselves.

The Tenancy Manager is in the process of setting up a support/sustainment programme with an aim to establishing ongoing contact and providing support with vulnerable tenants across the board.

Estate Management

Although we are not in a position to carry out regular Estate Management Inspections at this stage, we are able to react to reports of dumped items, untidy gardens etc reported by staff, neighbours or contractors

Allocations

We have been fortunate that we have not had any properties available to let during the lockdown period. Although we have 2 empty properties neither is currently available for let due to ongoing legal actions.

Committee noted the report

9) APPEAL (Succession)

Some information has been redacted as it contains either personal data or commercially sensitive data

10) Request for donations

Donation Request 1

Dear All,

Hope you are all keeping well in these difficult times.

As you would be aware the Management Committee of the West Pilton Neighbourhood Centre called the first meeting of the Covid 19 Food Share group in the Centre.

The Group then met online and over the last 9 weeks we have built a community response to the crisis. Over 16 000 meals per week plus other services that people are requiring have been delivered to people in their homes in our area of North Edinburgh and beyond.

The last meeting agreed to the production of an 8-page Newsletter, this week explaining the work of the Covid 19 Food Share group and giving useful numbers and information to cover emergency needs and support.

This is a request to all groups and organisations to support this initiative to produce 14 000 Newsletters. We are asking each Community Council in North Edinburgh to consider donating £500 and other organisations to be equally generous to cover the cost of printing and distributing the newsletter.

Some information has been redacted as it contains either personal data or commercially sensitive data

Donation Request 2

Funding Request to West Granton Housing Co-operative Committee from PYCP FACENorth

Some information has been redacted as it contains either personal data or commercially sensitive data

Committee agreed to donate £250.00 to Donation Request 1

Committee agreed to donate £400.00 to Donation Request 2

11) AOCB

GMA/GMV – Sewers

The Maintenance Manager has been working on this and has been in contact with Scottish Water

GMA – Rubbish Dumped

Black bags of rubbish being left lying by local tenants which is potentially causing increased mice/rat infestation.

Committee noted the information

12) DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Wednesday, 22nd July 2020

Committee approved

Signed

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Date:

Chairperson