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WENDY RIORDAN ON 0131 538 8336



West Granton

Housing Co-operative Limited

Committee of Management

Minutes of Meeting – 18th November 2020

Present:

Wendy Riordan (Chairperson)
Lorna Brown (Vice Chairperson)
Marilyn Dickson (Treasurer)
Elizabeth Robertson
George Thomson
Jon Douglas
Amanda Aitchison
Colin Fraser
Joe Moir

In attendance:

Larke Adger (CEO)
Sheena Farrell (Housing Admin Assistant as minute taker)

1) APOLOGIES

Donna Anderson

2) MINUTES OF MEETING 21st October 2020

Minutes approved by Committee

3) MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

None. All passed

4) DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest

5. FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

5a) Cash in the Bank

This will be reported to Committee each month.

As of 9th November 2020, WGHC had the following amounts of cash in the bank:

	£
RBS (immediate access)	883,096
Santander (95-day notice account)	833,923
Bank of Scotland (32-day notice account)	21,152
Total cash in Bank	<u>£ 1,738,171</u>

For comparison, the October 2020 figure was £1,734,799.

Linkage to Business Plan/SHR Regulatory Standards Compliance

SHR Standard 3.1

The RSL has effective financial and treasury management controls and procedures, to achieve the right balance between costs and outcomes, and control costs effectively. The RSL ensures security of assets, the proper use of public and private funds, and access to sufficient liquidity at all times.

SHR Standard 3.5

The RSL monitors, reports on, and complies with any covenants it has agreed with funders. The governing body assesses the risks of these not being complied with and takes appropriate action to mitigate and manage them

Committee noted the report.

5b) Financial Management Quarterly Report for the 2nd Quarter

(Appendix 1)

Executive Summary

The 2nd financial management quarterly report for 2020-21 was enclosed with the reports.

Erin Mullen from Prospect Housing Association presented the report to Committee at the meeting.

Nationwide Building Society have relaxed their information requirements and advised they no longer required WGHC to submit their financial quarterly reports.

Committee noted the report and no questions asked relating WGHC finances

Linkage to Business Plan/SHR Regulatory Standards Compliance

SHR Standard 3.1

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SHR Standard 3.5

The RSL monitors, reports on, and complies with any covenants it has agreed with funders. The governing body assesses the risks of these not being complied with and takes appropriate action to mitigate and manage them.

5c) Proposal for Rent Increase Consultation

Executive Summary

Inflation and Rent Setting

In rent setting most social landlords look first to inflation indicators.

WGHC looks at the Consumer Price Index or CPI.

The latest CPI figure, which is for October, was 0.7%.

Some social landlords routinely increase rents by more than inflation. However, the Scottish Housing Regulator encourages RSLs to look at inflation only rises. For example, Port of Leith Housing Association are currently consulting their tenants on rent increases between 1.25%, 1.5% and 2%. Prospect Housing are proposing to consult on 0.7%.

In setting rents we should try to ensure that they are:

- Adequate to cover costs
- Are comparable with those of other providers.
- Are affordable for our tenants.

WGHC rents are comparatively low amongst other social landlords in Edinburgh. The CEO has once again used the SFHA Affordability Calculator to compare rents for 1,2,3 and 4-bedroom properties. Unfortunately, the Scottish RSL rents for 2019-20 were not available from the Scottish Housing Regulator when the CEO used the SFHA calculator so the Edinburgh RSL rents for 2018-19 were used as comparators. WGHC's rent still came out as some as the lowest in Edinburgh, along with Lister Housing Co-op and Muirhouse Housing Association.

It is proposed that, from April 2021, rents are increased by 0.7% in line with the October CPI.

It is a requirement that WGHC first consult with its tenants on any proposed changes in rents. Results of the consultation must be fed back to Committee for their consideration before they make their final decision.

Committee approved the CEO to consult WGHC tenants on a proposed rent increase of 0.7% for 2021-22 before committee take the final decision at their next scheduled meeting 16th December 2020

Linkage to Business Plan/Regulatory Standards Compliance

SHR Standard 3.4

The governing body ensures financial forecasts are based on appropriate and reasonable assumptions and information, including information about what tenants can afford to pay and feedback from consultation with tenants on rent increases.

5d) Approval for a 2nd Credit Card Account with RBS

Executive Summary

Some data or information has been redacted because it contains personal or sensitively commercial information.

The CEO is therefore seeking approval from Committee to open a 2nd Credit Card Account with a maximum credit limit of £150 on the card/account for the sole purpose of topping up gas and electric credit on to the utilities key or card. The 2nd credit card would have to have a staff name on the card besides the company name of WGHC. Some data or information has been redacted because it contains personal or sensitively commercial information.

In accordance with WGHC's Financial Regulations, Committee approval is needed for any account to be opened and new signatory to be authorised.

Committee authorised:

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- That the sole use of the second card is to purchase top ups of gas and electricity online for void properties; and that
- The maximum credit limit on the card is £150.00.

Linkage to Business Plan/Regulatory Standards Compliance

SHR Standard 3.1

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5e) Short life Working Pensions Group for Pensions

Executive Summary

Further to last month's report on moving staff from a defined benefits pension scheme over to a defined contributions scheme, the CEO advised Committee

that the next Short Life Working Group meeting is to be held virtually on 25th November 2020.

Eamonn Connolly (EVH Director) will facilitate the consultation of the working group consisting of Committee Members and WGHC staff.

As SHAPS (Scottish Housing Association Pensions Scheme) require at least 3 months' notice before any changes are made, it is intended that the outcomes from the above meeting will allow a formal proposal to be made to the Committee in December for consideration. This will allow the required notice period of 3 months to be adhered to so WGHC can adopt the changes in time for the commencement for the new financial year starting April 2021.

Committee are reminded that the main objective for changing to a defined contributions pensions scheme is to reduce costs for WGHC and move some of the associated risks away from WGHC as the employer over to the employees. Such a change is considered to bring significant financial benefits to WGHC in the longer term, than if it were to remain offering staff a defined benefits pension.

Committee noted the information

Linkage to Business Plan/Regulatory Standards Compliance

SHR Standard 3.6

The governing body ensures that employee salaries, benefits and its pension offerings are at a level that is sufficient to ensure the appropriate quality of staff to run the organisation successfully, but which is affordable and not more than is necessary for this purpose.

5e) Scottish Procurement Alliance and Cheque

Executive Summary

WGHC are a member of the Scottish Procurement Alliance (SPA).

The SPA is a procurement provider to the Scottish Public Sector.

WGHC used its framework to procure the doors and windows for Area 1 last year.

SPA Partners who meet a certain threshold for projects are eligible for a rebate at the end of each financial year.

The SPA have contacted the CEO to advise that they have a cheque to present to WGHC in respect of their rebate because of the £800k they spent on the above doors and windows project, which was called off their framework.

The SPA would like to have a virtual meeting with the Chair and the CEO to present the cheque to WGHC.

The CEO will arrange the meeting with the Chair and SPA in due course to receive this cheque. The SPA looks for this money to be added back into a community benefits donation or sponsorship.

Committee noted the report

Linkage to Business Plan/Regulatory Standards Compliance

SHR Standard 3.1

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6) Governance

6a) Annual Assurance Statement (Appendix 2)

Executive Summary

The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) requires all registered social landlords (RSLs) to submit an annual Assurance Statement by 30th November 2020.

As stated in the new SHR Regulatory Framework, the requirements cover the following areas:

- All relevant regulatory requirements as set out in Section 3 of the Regulatory Framework
- Assurance and Notification
- The relevant standards of the Scottish Social Housing Charter
- Whistleblowing
- Constitutional Requirements
- Regulatory Standards of Governance and Financial Management
- Our statutory obligations in respect of tenant and resident safety, housing and homelessness and equalities and human rights.

To allow WGHC to ensure it meets all of the above requirements, it has had to carry out a program of self-assessment. Self-assessment is now an ongoing requirement throughout the year.

The SHR uses the Assurance Statement to help it carry out its annual risk assessment on each RSL. The outcome of the SHR risk assessment results in

WGHC being awarded a level of engagement. The levels are low, medium, and high.

The SHR guidance makes it clear that it is the governing body, in this case the WGHC Committee of Management who are responsible for signing off the Assurance Statement.

The guidance also makes it clear that it is the Committee who are giving their assurances to the Regulator.

Committee were recommended to ask the CEO about details or any evidence in the report before they approve the Chairperson to sign it, on their behalf. Any further evidence required can be obtained by the CEO at the meeting and shown to Committee before the statement is signed.

Committee Members:

- **Confirmed they did not need to see any other evidence**
- **Agree they are satisfied with Assurance Statement**
- **Acknowledged they are responsible for giving their assurances to the Scottish Housing Regulator**
- **Agreed the Assurance Statement could be signed off on their behalf by the WGHC Chairperson and authorised the CEO to submit the statement to the Scottish Housing Regulator thereafter**

Linkage to Business Plan/Regulatory Standards Compliance

SHR Standard 3.7

The governing body ensures the RSL provides accurate and timely statutory and regulatory financial returns to the Scottish Housing Regulator. The governing body assures itself that it has evidence the data is accurate before signing it off.

6b) Revised Financial Regulations (Appendix 3)

Executive Summary

WGHC's Financial Regulations were last revised in 2017.

Appendix 3 presented the revised and updated Financial Regulations for 2020 incorporating the changes in staff structure, including the financial delegated authorities of the WGHC Senior Management Team.

Committee approved the revised WGHC Financial Regulations

Linkage to Business Plan/Regulatory Standards Compliance

SHR Standard 1.2

The RSL's governance policies and arrangements set out the respective roles

SHR Standard 3.1

The RSL has effective financial and treasury management controls and procedures, to achieve the right balance between costs and outcomes, and control costs effectively. The RSL ensures security of assets, the proper use of public and private funds, and access to sufficient liquidity at all times.

6c) Standing Orders Policy (New – Appendix 4)

Executive Summary

WGHC did not have a specific Standing Order Policy.

The standing order arrangements were spread across the WGHC Rule Book, WGHC Financial Regulations and the Governance Policy.

In addition, there was no specific schedule of authority for the Senior Management Team.

As part of our Improvement Action Plan and ongoing self-assessment, the CEO produced a Standing Orders Policy covering all of the above in one policy document.

Committee approved the new Standing Order Policy.

Linkage to Business Plan/Regulatory Standards Compliance

SHR Standard 5.3

The RSL pays due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality, and human rights, and foster good relations across the range of protected characteristics in all areas of its work, including its governance arrangements.

6d) Staffing Update

Executive Summary

Some data or information has been redacted because it contains personal or sensitively commercial information.

Committee noted the report

Linkage to Business Plan/SHR Regulatory Standards Compliance

SHR Standard 3.6

The governing body ensures that employee salaries, benefits and its pension offerings are at a level that is sufficient to ensure the appropriate quality of staff to run the organisation successfully, but which is affordable and not more than is necessary for this purpose.

6e) Memberships

Executive Summary

There has been 3 new memberships since the last report.

Some data or information has been redacted because it contains personal or sensitively commercial information.

Termination:

Some data or information has been redacted because it contains personal or sensitively commercial information.

Committee noted the report.

Linkage to Business Plan/Regulatory Standards Compliance

Standard 6.1

The RSL has a formal, rigorous, and transparent process for the election, appointment, and recruitment of governing body members.

Standard 6.4

The RSL encourages as diverse a membership as is compatible with its constitution and actively engages its membership in the process for filling vacancies on the governing body

6f) Health and Safety Report

Executive Summary
<p>There have been no incidents or accidents since the last report.</p> <p>All staff have had their office-based work risk assessments carried out.</p> <p>All staff have access to face masks, face visors, gloves, hand sanitizing gel, a hand held body scan thermometer, sanitising sprays and have been made aware of physical social distancing measures and screening questions to ask if they are required to enter a tenant's home.</p>

Committee noted the report

Linkage to Business Plan/Regulatory Standards Compliance
<p><u>SHR Standard 5.3</u></p> <p>The RSL pays due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality, and human rights, and foster good relations across the range of protected characteristics in all areas of its work, including its governance arrangements.</p>

7) Maintenance Report

Executive Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Gas Safety and Maintenance Contract</u> <p>Some data or information has been redacted because it contains personal or sensitively commercial information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Tender Outcome for the External Paintworks for Area 1</u> This contract was awarded to Dumbreck Decorators Ltd.

Some data or information has been redacted because it contains personal or sensitively commercial information.

- **Planned Works**
- Linked Smoke Alarms

We only have 3 properties left in which works need to be carried out. All 3 tenants have been suffering with ill health and contact has been made with them and rescheduled arrangements are to be made in due course, and well before the requirement date (currently February 2021 but looking to be extended to 2022).

Committee approved that the Gas Maintenance and Service Contract is to be awarded to Kingdom Gas;

Committee expressed concern that the exterior painting contract which had just started would be subject to constant delays because of the weather and also advised it was preventing local residents from decorating their houses and gardens over the festive period. They requested that this be postponed until Spring 2021. This was passed to the Maintenance Manager who has subsequently arranged for the work to be put on hold until early Spring 2021.

Committee noted the remainder of the report;

8a) Housing Management (Appendix 6 & 7)

Executive Summary

1. Legal Action Update:

Appendix 5:

WGHC's solicitor, TC Young submitted a note to Committee in respect of this case.

Committee have noted the report.

Linkage to Business Plan/Regulatory Standards Compliance

Under the Scottish Social Housing Charter, WGHC has a duty around the safety of tenants' homes, and to respond to resolve incidents of anti-social behaviour within locally agreed timescales.

8b) Rent Arrears and COVID-19

Executive Summary

Universal Credit (UC) and Rent Arrears – As at end of September 2020

- **UC and 3rd Party Deductions**

As of 30th September 2020, 63 tenants were claiming Universal Credit, 28 of whom had arrears. The total level of arrears for the 28 tenants was £11,344.01.

We receive direct payments of UC for 12 tenants, the remaining 51 tenants receive payments directly to themselves. We also receive 3rd party deductions for 5 tenants on Universal Credit in arrears.

- **Overall Non-Technical Arrears Figures**

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 of 30th September 2020 was 69 tenants. This includes the 28 tenants who are claiming UC and are in rent arrears.

The Housing Management Team continue to monitor and manage all rent arrears cases on a weekly basis. The Housing Manager is reviewing all arrears cases this week to ensure adequate and proportionate steps are being taken in each case.

Tenants are now being offered access to the Welfare Rights Adviser service provided in partnership with PoLHA with the service having started on 10th August. To date, we have 4 active referred cases. 2 for a general benefit “health check” and 2 for both a benefit check and assistance with Personal Independence Claims.

Rent Arrears and Legal Action Cases

We have 3 arrears cases within the Court system that are currently sisted. These cases are very closely monitored. All cases are currently making payments as agreed and there is currently no need to recall any of the 3 cases back into Court.

Committee will be kept updated each month on WGHC arrears figures, given the current lockdown restrictions and how this is having an impact on tenants’ incomes, and ultimately WGHC’s rental income/cash flow.

Committee noted the report

Linkage to Business Plan/Regulatory Standards Compliance

SHR Standard 3.3

The RSL has a robust business planning and control framework and effective systems to monitor and accurately report delivery of its plans. Risks to the delivery of financial plans are identified and managed effectively. The RSL considers sufficiently the financial implications of risks to the delivery of plans.

9) AOCB

Some data or information has been redacted because it contains personal or sensitively commercial information.

10) DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Executive Summary

It is proposed the next meeting be held on Wednesday, 16th December 2020.

It is likely given the ongoing situation with COVID19 that this will be a virtual Committee Meeting.

Committee approved the next Committee Meeting to be on Wednesday 16th December 2020 which will be virtually.

Linkage to Business Plan/Regulatory Standards Compliance

SHR Standard 1.1

The governing body sets the RSL's strategic direction. It agrees and oversees the organisation's business plan to achieve its purpose and intended outcomes for its tenants and other service users.

Signed Some data or information has been redacted because it contains personal or sensitively commercial information.

Chairperson

Date: 16.12.20