

**EAST LOTHIAN HOUSING ASSOCIATION**

A virtual meeting of the **Management Committee** was held on Thursday 24 February 2022 at 7.00pm, using Microsoft Teams

**Present:**

Peter Hayman	(3/3)	David Rose	(3/3)
Peter Ewart	(3/3)	Iain Atkinson	(3/3)
Brian Logan	(3/3)	Alan Forsyth	(1/3)
Shirley Evans	(2/3)	Eileen Shand	(2/3)
Katrina Hamilton	(3/3)	Pamela Macleod	(3/3)

**In attendance:** Paula Oliver, Director of Finance  
Martin Pollhammer, Chief Executive  
Duncan Mackay, Director of Asset Management  
Eric Stoddart, Executive Support Officer (Minutes)

**1.0 GENERAL**

**1.1 Apologies**

Joyce Bolan (2/3), Jim Curran (1/3), Karen Barry, Director of Housing.

**1.2 Declarations of Interest by Management Committee Members**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

**1.3 Minutes of Meeting 26 November 2021**

The Minutes were **approved** by the Management Committee. They were proposed by Shirley Evans and seconded by Peter Hayman.

**1.4 Action List**

The Management Committee noted the report.

**1.5 Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

**2.0 GOVERNANCE**

**2.1 Secretary's Report**

The Management Committee noted the report.

**2.2 Key Performance Indicators 2021/22**

The Chief Executive explained that the end of Q3 had been disrupted by Omicron. However, overall performance had been acceptable.

The Management Committee noted the report for information.

**3.0 PRIORITY ITEMS****3.1 Care & Repair Budget 2021/22**

The Director of Finance highlighted that the five-year funding agreement from East Lothian Council (fixed at £329,891 per year) ends at 31 March 2022. A funding bid for 2022/23 was submitted to the Council in November 2021, to cover increasing costs, and a projected cumulative deficit at the end of 2021/22 of £26k.

Unfortunately, the Council has notified the Association, that funding will only be awarded at the same level as the previous five years. This has required the Association to review expenditure and identify savings to enable the Service to operate within this level of funding. The key saving has been to maintain the current vacant SRS Officer post (the incumbent resigned from the Service in December 2021) throughout the year. Planned improvements to the Service's software are also proposed to be put on hold.

The cumulative deficit at the end of March 2022 is now estimated to be in the order of £19k. However, the projected surplus of £16k for 2022/23 should largely cover this deficit, leading to a projected cumulative deficit at the end of 2022/23 in the order of £3k.

Eileen Shand noted that there is a Local Advisory Committee (LAC) which is meeting on 10 March 2022. Eileen also queried whether the approach by East Lothian Council regarding allocating funding was mirrored across other organisations. It had been thought that all funding came from the Scottish Government, but it is now believed, at least part comes directly from East Lothian Council. This point will be raised at the next LAC meeting.

The Chief Executive noted his disappointment at the funding allocation. He noted that he had been trying to engage with the Council for over two years about future funding, but there had been no meaningful engagement. The situation is worse than it seems as the current funding was based on a five year agreement, with the annual sum remaining the same each year. This meant that in the early years a surplus was created which was used to subsidise the later years. In reality, freezing the grant at the current level is effectively freezing it at the level mid-way through the five-year agreement, so freezing it as 2019/20 levels.

He went on to say that in some ways the Association had been "lucky" in that a Small Repairs Officer had resigned in December 2021. Had this not happened, redundancies would have been required, but there would have been no funds to pay the redundancy costs. It was not clear what would have happened in these circumstances.

As it is, the situation is not sustainable into the longer term, but the Council officials now responsible for future funding were in active discussion with the Association (those involved in the last funding approval have all left the Council since), and the Council has agreed to meet to start discussions about future funding early in the new financial year, although no meeting dates have yet been set.

The Management Committee noted the report for information.

#### 4.0 POLICIES

##### 4.1 Temporary Accommodation and Decants Policy Review

It was noted that reference to Appendix 3 under Heading 2.0 Policy Changes, should refer to Appendix 1.

Pamela Macleod highlighted that under Section 5.5 on page 4 of the Policy it states that the tenant is responsible for arranging services such as satellite TV or broadband. It was recognised that the availability of internet is a very important requirement for most people now, so could this be looked at, to minimise inconvenience to tenants.

The Chief Executive offered to have this investigated, and one option may be to reimburse the cost of a mobile SIM with an appropriate data allowance.

The Management Committee **approved** the revised Temporary Accommodation and Decants Policy.

##### 4.2 Emergency Call Out Policy Review

No changes are proposed to the Policy. The Chief Executive advised that the policy has been through staff consultation with the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) at its meeting on 24 November 2021, and no amendments were required.

The Management Committee **approved** the Emergency Call Out Policy.

##### 4.3 Disclosure Scotland – Use of Information Policy Review

The Chief Executive advised that only minor changes have been made to this policy.

The Management Committee **approved** the revised Disclosure Scotland – Use of Information Policy.

##### 4.4 Openness & Confidentiality Policy Review

The Chief Executive explained that this policy was created originally prior to the extension of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 to housing associations. It has, to a large extent, been superseded by the subsequent implementation of this Act across the sector, as well as other changes brought about by the Data Protection Act 2018, and the Association has policies in place in respect of each of these, namely the 'Freedom of Information Policy', and the 'Privacy Policy'.

Changes to the Openness & Confidentiality Policy make reference to these two policies, and large parts of the Openness & Confidentiality Policy have therefore been removed to reduce duplication with the other two policies, but it was felt useful to retain some of the remaining policy statements.

The Management Committee **approved** the revised Openness & Confidentiality Policy.

**4.5 Money & Home Energy Advice Service Policy**

In the absence of the Director of Housing, the Chief Executive highlighted that the Association has operated an independent Money Advice Service since 2011. This was achieved by buying-in service from Places for People Scotland and was expanded in 2020 to include home energy advice.

Management Committee gave approval to bring this service in-house in 2020, however, the transition to a wholly ELHA managed and operated service has been delayed for several reasons, including staff absence, the pandemic, and the requirement for ELHA to register to provide some aspects of the service with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).

It is therefore necessary for the Association to have in place a Money & Home Energy Advice policy, and this describes the Service that will be provided when FCA authorisation is given, and demonstrates the Association's commitment to meeting all the legal and regulatory requirements.

Peter Hayman proposed a slight amendment to Section 10.2 (third bullet point) and that it should read 'An annual report of levels of satisfaction' rather than 'dissatisfaction'.

Katrina Hamilton referred to the section headed 'Debt Repayment' on page 8 and highlighted that on occasion repayment of debts is not in the best interest of tenants, and this should be made clearer. The Chief Executive will take this item away to check with the Director of Housing.

Eileen Shand also mentioned the need for clarity around service boundaries, and where there may be a conflict of interest if ELHA staff are providing advice, between what is best for ELHA (e.g. payment of rent arrears), and what is in the best interest of the tenant.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Director of Housing has been taking advice from the current providers (Places for People Scotland) around ensuring impartiality of advice. However, this will be highlighted to the Director of Housing. Ultimately the FCA process examines whether appropriate controls and safeguards are in place to ensure the service operates for the benefit of the service users, and not the service provider, so the Management Committee can take assurance from the FCA accreditation, if it is secured.

Eileen Shand did also recognise that this report is to be welcomed, and that it should provide a helpful and relevant service for tenants.

The Management Committee **approved** the Money & Home Energy Advice Service Policy, subject to the points made above.

**5.0 BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

There were no reports for this section.

**6.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Thursday 24 March 2022 at ELHA Head Office, Haddington at 7.00pm.

**ADOPTION OF THESE MINUTES APPROVED AT THE MEETING ON  
24 MARCH 2022**

Signed *Signature* (Chair)