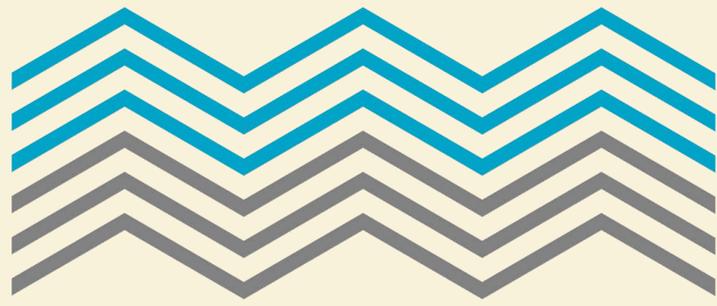


2019  
2020



Blackpool Coastal  
Housing

BCH

BOARD MINUTES

4 . 12 . 2019



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF  
BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING LIMITED  
HELD AT COASTAL HOUSE, ABINGDON STREET, BLACKPOOL  
ON WEDNESDAY 4 DECEMBER 2019 AT 6.00PM**

**Present:** Councillor L Williams, Non-Executive Director (Chairman)  
Councillor J Hobson, Non-Executive Director  
Councillor D Robertson BEM, Non-Executive Director  
Mr N Herring, Tenant Non-Executive Director  
Mrs V O'Shea, Tenant Non-Executive Director  
Mr A Disley, Independent Non-Executive Director  
Mrs M Thompson, Independent Non-Executive Director

**In attendance:** Mrs M Cornall, Director of Operations  
Mr J Donnellon, Chief Executive  
Mr S Dunstan, Director of Resources  
Mrs S Fowler, Chief Executive's PA  
Mr Richard Jones, Performance Manager (Item 7 only)  
Ms Penny King, Performance Officer (Item 7 only)  
Mrs E Ireland, Company Secretary Support

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Non-Executive Directors Ms Upton, Mr Szatkowski and Ms Derby and Mr Towers, Company Secretary.

**2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

**3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 18 SEPTEMBER 2019**

**The Board agreed:** To approve the minutes of the Board meeting held on 18 September 2019 as a correct record.

**4 MATTERS ARISING**

**18 September 2019 Board Meeting**

Minute 14

Mr Donnellon apologised for not providing the requested report on the recent property fires and assured the Board that he would circulate the report prior to the next Board meeting in February 2020.

## **5 NON EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR POSITIONS**

**The Board agreed:** To note the extension of the terms of office for Mr Alan Disley and Ms Elaine Upton for a further 12 months.

## **6 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

The Board expressed its thanks to Mrs Vivienne O'Shea for her hard work and contributions over the previous 12 months.

**The Board agreed:** To reappoint Mrs Vivienne O'Shea as Vice Chairman to the Board.

## **7 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS/HOUSEMARK BENCHMARKING**

The Board received a presentation on Housemark data feedback for the 2018/2019 period from Mr Richard Jones, Performance Manager and Ms Penny King, Performance Officer. Mr Jones highlighted the key findings and determined that Blackpool Coastal Housing (BCH) had performed well in comparison to its peer 'family group' made up of 10 other organisations considered to share similar qualities. Mr Disley queried whether performance could be considered good when BCH demonstrated lower comparative performance across a number of indicators. Mr Jones explained that BCH had significantly closed the gap with its peers and performance had showed significant improvement on the previous year. Mr Disley acknowledged that whilst expenditure remained comparatively low, tenant satisfaction levels were good.

In response to a query from Mr Herring regarding specific expenditure of void property repairs, Mr Jones confirmed that he would provide more detailed analysis indicating which repair categories were generating higher costs.

Discussion was held around the issue of tenants leaving garden areas in need of work, with Councillor Robertson asking if the associated fees could be recharged to tenants. Mrs Cornall, Director of Operations confirmed that recharges could be issued in cases where it had been determined that the neglect was the fault of the tenant although she acknowledged that pursuit of payment could be difficult. Mrs Cornall informed the Board that gardens often fell into disrepair when tenants were unable to adequately maintain them without help, for example in the case of elderly tenants. Mrs O'Shea questioned whether voluntary groups could be utilised to undertake gardening for such tenants, with Mrs Cornall stating that whilst a volunteer group was utilised in such a way, the amount of work required was too large for this alone.

Discussion was held around asbestos removal and investment in improving the housing stock in order to avoid high levels of everyday repairs in the future. Ms King, Performance Officer informed members of the Board that a proactive approach had been taken towards identification and removal of asbestos within empty properties.

Clarification was sought around the rent arrears data, with Mr Jones explaining that the data excluded outstanding arrears from the previous year. More specific information with regards to the 'family group' was requested, which Mr Jones agreed to provide to the Board.

The Board expressed its thanks to Mr Jones and Ms King for the informative and interesting presentation.

[Mr Jones and Ms King left the meeting on conclusion of this item.]

**The Board agreed:** To note the presentation.

## **8 DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN**

Mr Donnellon, Chief Executive presented the company's draft 2020/2021 Business Plan to the Board. Mr Donnellon explained that the draft business plan had been prepared following the Board's recent strategy day and that it reflected the company's continuing ambitions for strong core services coupled with an extended role around the Council's ambitions and a continuation of BCH's supported housing work. The plan also referenced the company's recent commitment to be carbon zero by 2030. Mr Donnellon further explained that the business plan report was normally accompanied by a series of more detailed service plans that were based on the business plan objectives. Officers were still in the process of preparing service plans which Mr Donnellon informed Board members would be forwarded once complete. Mr Donnellon also reminded the Board that the outcome of the general election may result in the need to review any approved plan should a new policy direction become clear.

Budgetary considerations were highlighted, with Mr Donnellon explaining that the company's funding was largely through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and would be set as an annual fee by the Council when it sets its budget, usually in February. Clearly BCH needed to have a reasonably firm expectation of fee levels and overall finance some months before the new financial year started in order to inform tenants of rent levels within the legally prescribed timescales. Mr Donnellon acknowledged that the Council was in a difficult position as it tried to set an overall budget given the calling of a December election. As a result of the national political position, the Council had to delay its budget setting process which separated the HRA decision making, which would take place in February 2020, from that of the General Fund, the Board was informed that whilst this could be managed, it was not the optimum position.

Mr Disley questioned whether moving funds from the HRA to the General Fund would be in line with guidance from the external auditors. Mr Donnellon advised that any such movements would need to be evidenced to ensure they were being utilised for housing related options that would be appropriate for HRA funding and that all such decisions

would be brought to the Board for prior discussion.

Mrs Thompson questioned whether the delay in the Council's budget setting would have an impact on tenants. Mr Donnellon provided assurance that the HRA and rent levels would be determined in February and as such letters to tenants would be issued in accordance with statutory deadlines as usual.

**The Board agreed:** To approve the 2020/2021 draft business plan and draft budget strategy.

## **9 JOINT WORKING TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATE**

Councillor Lynn Williams updated the Board on the work of the Joint Working Task and Finish group. The Board was informed that comparative information on structures used by Stockport Homes and South Tyneside Homes had been gathered and would be shared with the Task and Finish Group at its meeting in the new year. The jointly agreed brief for the ALMO contract review had been issued to HQN who would conduct the review and the brief had been shared with Board members separately. Councillor Williams advised that it was anticipated that the final report would be available early in 2020. The Board heard that Blackpool Housing Company was making progress on the development of a Registered Provider subsidiary, with the key decisions having been taken by the company's Board at its last meeting to establish a registered provider, with work underway to meet the requirements of the regulator. Councillor Williams confirmed that the next meeting of the Task and Finish group would take place in February 2020, with a date as yet to be determined.

**The Board agreed:** To note the update.

## **10 SUPPORTED HOUSING TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATE**

Mrs Cornall, Director of Operations updated the Board on the Supported Housing project. She informed the Board that a project structure had been established incorporating the Board Task and Finish group to provide in-depth updates to Board members. Also included in the structure was a Project Board, which included senior staff from BCH, the Housing Client and Public Health and a Steering Group which included relevant service managers, the performance team, communications and representatives from Adult Social Care.

The Board was informed that it had become apparent that additional capacity was needed within the management of the service to embed and take forward service initiatives. A review of the supported housing structure had taken place and a new structure developed based on three service managers. This review also rationalised the management capacity within the Care and Repair/Adaptations Service. The new structure agreed by the Senior Management Team would be contained within current financial

resources.

Mrs Cornall provided an update on the More Positive Together (MPT) project. The Board was informed that the accountable body, Active Lancashire had secured a change control which would see the project funded until the end of December 2019. In addition the MPT2 bid for funding which was scheduled to commence at the beginning of February 2020 until December 2021 was to be dealt with as a change control of the existing project rather than a full bidding process. Mrs Cornall advised that this suggested that the collaboration of partners with Active Lancashire had been successful in securing the second tranche of funding, although this had yet to be confirmed in writing. Should this be the case then almost all the additional funding which the Board had agreed to extend staffing contracts until the end of the financial year would be reimbursed.

Mrs Thompson enquired whether a detailed evaluation of the sustained longer-term outcome of those accessing the service had been undertaken, in particular in relation to outcomes after one year. Mr Donnellon advised that this data could be tracked going forward. Mrs Cornall confirmed that analysis of those in employment to examine whether they had successfully remained in employment six months later would be beneficial. She also advised that the whole Lancashire Partnership was collating data, including BCH.

Discussion was held around the implementation of emergency accommodation and the placement of hostels within particular areas of the town. Mr Donnellon explained that BCH was responsible for the placement of two hostels which were dispersed across different areas of the town. He further explained that a number of other providers had created Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) to offer 'supported housing' which were not affiliated with BCH or the Council.

Mr Herring raised a concern that wider diversification of the work of the company could lead to increased risk and he questioned whether the Board held sufficient expertise in relation to the new and expanding areas, in particular with regards to Children's Services. Mr Donnellon asserted that all decisions were given full consideration and any potential financial or delivery risks were taken into account, reassuring the Board that meeting the housing needs of Blackpool residents remained the company's primary role. Mrs Cornall added that all new proposed services covered their own operational costs. With regards to the expertise of the Board, Mr Donnellon felt confident that the Board provided a diverse and well qualified range of experience but that any future vacancies could generate further discussion, with appointments made on the basis of relevant skills and any identified gaps.

**The Board agreed:** To note the report.

## **11 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

Mr Donnellon introduced his report. He advised that following the discussions on the

Management Agreement at the last Board meeting, a brief for the review of the ALMO agreement which had previously been circulated to Board members had been agreed between BCH and the Council. Mr Donnellon advised that it was likely that HQN would carry out the associated work early in the new year. HQN were familiar with how BCH operated due to the number of detailed accreditations that they had undertaken for the company. This accumulated knowledge would help in cutting down the amount of investigation that would otherwise be required to review performance to date. Mr Donnellon informed Board members that HQN may want to speak to them during the review as part of the work on governance, advising that once details of the lead consultant and a work programme had been received, he would inform the Board in order to give as much advance notice as possible for submitting their views.

The Board was reminded that all Council owned companies had been asked to sign up to the Single Use Plastics policy as a way of tackling the amount of plastic entering the environment. Mr Donnellon presented the Board with BCH's proposed Single Use Plastics policy for approval.

**The Board agreed:** To adopt the proposed policy on single use plastics, as submitted.

## **12 DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES' REPORT**

Mr Dunstan, Director of Resources introduced his report. He informed the Board that following an Ombudsman review of one of the company's anti-social behaviour (ASB) cases, BCH had been asked to pay the complainant £250. The judgement had found that the ASB service did not initially act quickly enough in resolving the case. Mr Dunstan stated that whilst this was disappointing, the service accepted the comments of the Ombudsman. In addition to the proposed changes to accepting cases being developed, a staff member had moved to an area better suited to their skill set.

The Board was informed that following a tendering exercise the company's external audit contract had been awarded to Smith Craven, who were already providing external audit services to other Council companies including Blackpool Housing Company.

Mr Dunstan advised that he would be leading on the company's approach to working towards carbon neutral status and that the company was in the process of commissioning a baseline audit on this. The Head of Asset Management along with Mr Dunstan would be attending a local event in January 2020 for public sector organisations. Further details would be provided to the Board at its next meeting in February 2020.

Following discussion on the lack of progress with some audit recommendations at the last Audit Committee meeting, BCH Senior Management Team and selected other senior managers met to review outstanding recommendations. Mr Dunstan stated that progress had generally been made although there was still work to be done on some fire safety recommendations. The Health and Safety Committee meeting on 9 December 2019 was

being dedicated to fire safety in light of this and the recommendations to date arising out of Grenfell.

In response, Mr Herring questioned whether there were any anticipated Health and Safety recommendations that would be made to BCH as a result of the findings of the Grenfell review. Mr Donnellon stated that any resulting building regulations or controls were for the government to review and that there was a relatively small risk in Blackpool due to the lack of high rise accommodation. He further advised that recommendations around the issues of vulnerable tenants, building management, dealing with complaints and public engagement were expected. Councillor Hobson raised a query over whether Health and Safety obligations were being adequately met despite an unfilled Health and Safety vacancy. Mr Donnellon provided assurance that good risk assessment and reporting systems were in place, in particular in relation to fire risk processes.

Councillor Williams asked whether detailed anti-social behaviour service plans had been produced. Mr Dunstan confirmed that detailed plans for all service areas had been produced and would be brought to the Board for information. In addition, in response to a question regarding complaints, Mr Donnellon advised that performance data on complaints would be brought to the Board.

**The Board agreed:** To note the Director of Resources' report.

### **13 DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS' REPORT**

Mrs Cornall, Director of Operations introduced her report. She informed the Board that the full Repairs accreditation visit had taken place during September 2019. Feedback from the accreditor had been positive and he was due to complete his report with a recommendation to award accreditation to the HQN validation panel. Mrs Cornall advised that BCH was still awaiting formal confirmation of accreditation but that it was hoped that this would be received before Christmas.

Given the recent feedback from the accreditation visit and the length of time since the Responsive Repairs policy was reviewed, the policy was brought to the Board for approval following updating. The key change to the policy was the move away from priority times other than the attendance within four hours for emergency jobs and to make mutually convenient appointments for all other repairs offering a more customer-focused service. Mrs Cornall advised that in practice this change had already been initiated successfully within the service and was a contributory factor in the positive metrics the service currently enjoyed.

Mrs Cornall advised that the Gas Repairs and Maintenance policy had been reviewed to reflect current good practice. The Board was informed that there had been minimal changes to the policy but that the revised version required members' consideration and approval.

The Board was informed that Read and Errington, the current gas contractor, had been successfully appointed as a new combined contractor for repairs, servicing and boiler replacement over the next 10 years. Negotiations were underway to finalise the new contract and to ensure maximisation of efficiencies to be achieved.

**The Board agreed:**

1. To approve the revised Gas Servicing Repairs and Maintenance policy.
2. To approve the revised Responsive Repairs policy.

**14 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Board considered the proposed dates for Board and Committee meetings for 2020 as below:

Board	Audit Committee	Appointments and Remuneration Committee
5 February	22 January	w/c 6 July (TBC)
22 April	18 March	
22 July	2 July	
14 October	2 September	
2 December		

**The Board agreed:** to approve the proposed dates for Board and Committee meetings for 2020.

**15 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Mrs Thompson raised the concern that the majority of agenda items were listed to 'inform' the Board, querying whether the purpose of the reports should instead be to 'assure' the Board. She felt the differentiation was important as it defined the role of the Board as to seek assurance and to be satisfied that the assurance had been provided. Mr Donnellon agreed that reports should clearly specify whether a decision was required but that in other circumstances relevant information was brought to the Board for information, with such background information being of necessity to inform members of the Board of developments and progress across a number of services.

Mr Disley questioned whether background papers could be circulated to Board members outside of meetings, with only those reports requiring a specific decision by the Board to be included on the agenda. He referenced a 'portal' utilised by a different Board that he was a member of, which was a way of accessing and referring to background papers without the need for them to be included on the Board agenda.

The Board suggested that a Task and Finish group be established in order to review the governance and reporting methods of the Board, with the initial meeting to be arranged for January 2020 and the invitation to be extended to all interested Board members.

Mrs Thompson stated that she felt that the minutes of Board meetings did not always reflect the level of challenge made by individual Non-Executive Directors. She asked if reference to individual Board members could be made more consistently within the minutes, to reflect their questions and points of challenge, rather than a generic reference.

**The Board agreed:**

1. To establish a Task and Finish group to review the governance and reporting methods of the Board, with an initial meeting to be arranged for January 2020.
2. That, where appropriate, Board minutes should include the names of Board members to reflect their specific questions within the meetings.

**16 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

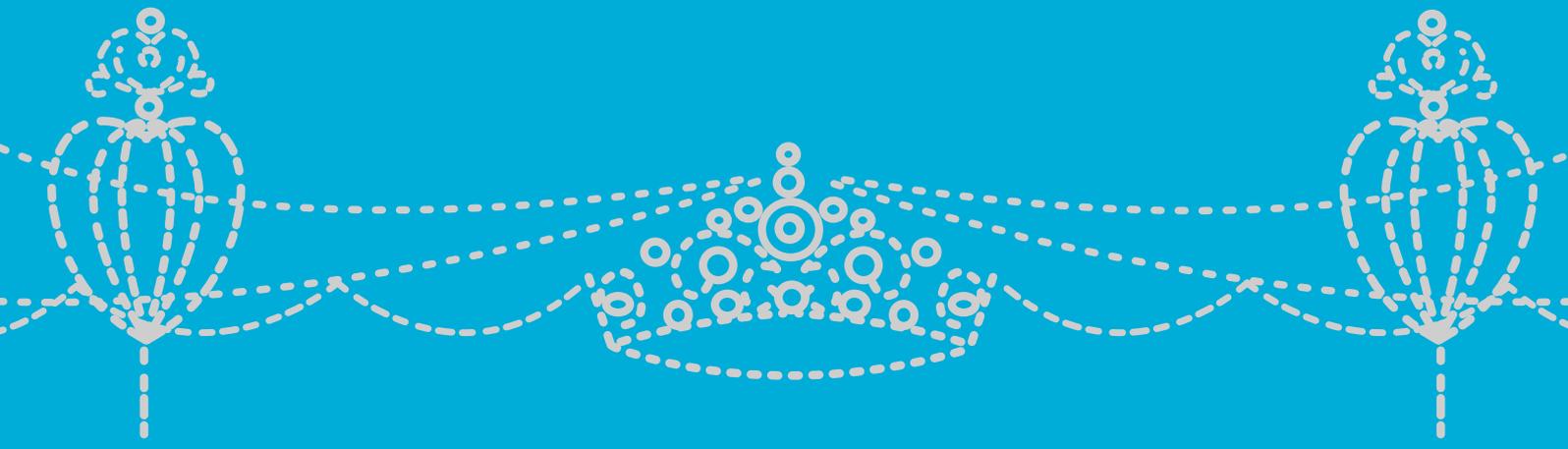
**The Board Agreed:** To note the date of the next meeting as Wednesday 5 February 2020.

The meeting ended at 7.40pm

**Signed by the Chairman**

.....  
**Councillor L Williams, 5 February 2020**

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