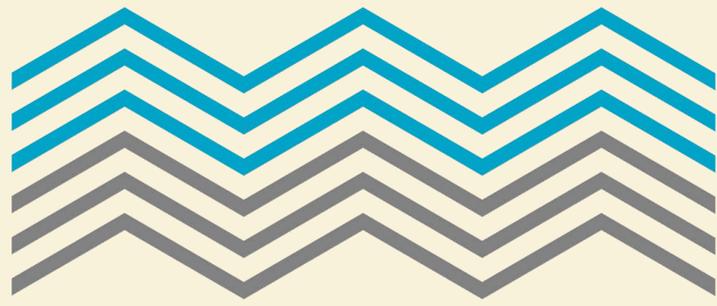


2020  
2021



Blackpool Coastal  
Housing

BCH

BOARD MINUTES

03.02.2021



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF  
BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING LIMITED  
HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS  
ON WEDNESDAY 3 FEBRUARY 2021 AT 6.00PM**

**Present:** Councillor Campbell, Non-Executive Director (Chair)  
Mr A Disley, Independent Non-Executive Director  
Mr N Herring, Tenant Non-Executive Director  
Mrs V O’Shea, Tenant Non-Executive Director  
Councillor Robertson BEM, Non-Executive Director  
Mr A Szatkowski, Independent Non-Executive Director  
Mrs M Thompson, Independent Non-Executive Director  
Mrs E Upton, Independent Non-Executive Director

**In attendance:** Mr J Donnellon, Chief Executive  
Mrs M Cornall, Director of Operations  
Mr S Dunstan, Director of Resources  
Mrs S Fowler, Chief Executive’s PA  
Mr M Towers, Company Secretary  
Miss Y Burnett, Assistant Company Secretary

		<b>Actions</b>
<b>1.</b>	<p><b>Apologies for Absence</b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Hobson, Non-Executive Director.</p>	
<b>2.</b>	<p><b>Declarations of Interest</b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>	
<b>3.</b>	<p><b>Minutes of the last meeting of the Board held on 2 December 2020</b></p> <p><b>The Board agreed:</b> To approve the minutes of the Board meeting held on 2 December 2020 as a correct record.</p>	
<b>4.</b>	<p><b>Matters Arising</b></p> <p><u>Performance Report</u> Mr Dunstan confirmed that the Audit Committee, at its meeting on 20 January 2021, had considered the Performance Team review of the Rents Service.</p> <p><u>Director of Resources’ Report</u> Mr Dunstan reported that since the last meeting he had spoken with Councillor Hobson, but would provide him with a further update on the Climate Change</p>	<b>SD</b>

	Actions
<p>Action Plan after the meeting.</p> <p><u>HQN Report – Review of the Management of Blackpool Coastal Housing</u> Mr Donnellon reported that he was in the process of identifying a date for the virtual session to review the recommendations from the HQN report and would advise the Board shortly.</p> <p>Mr Towers added that the Council’s preferred option/way forward for the closer alignment of the three housing organisations was due to be presented to the Shareholder’s Advisory Board in March/ April 2021. Prior to this, Shareholder would brief the Chair and the Chief Executive/Managing Director from both of the housing companies and then a communication would be sent to Board members.</p> <p><u>The Housing White Paper</u> Mr Donnellon explained that a virtual session to consider the impact on the Company of the additional Housing White Paper regulations was being planned for the end of February/early March 2021 and would involve Council representatives, as the regulations would have a greater impact on the Council.</p> <p><u>Director of Operations’ Report – Compliance</u> The Committee was informed that the Audit Committee, at its meeting on 20 January 2021, had considered the external Gas Safe audit, which in addition to the recent internal audit (Statutory Property Compliance) had made no recommendations. Mrs Cornall added that a further internal audit on Gas Safety was being scoped, but she expected a positive outcome based on the two previous audits.</p> <p><u>Director of Operations’ Report – More Positive Together</u> Mr Dunstan confirmed that the Audit Committee, at its meeting on 20 January 2021, had considered a draft Assurance Framework.</p> <p><u>COVID-19 Vaccine</u> Mr Donnellon reported that employees were able to access lateral flow testing through the Council and a number of frontline employees from Emergency Housing, Emergency Repairs and Sheltered Housing had been vaccinated. He added that some employees were volunteering at vaccination hubs.</p> <p>The Board was advised that Mr Donnellon had not discussed communication methods with Dr Rajpura as he was of the opinion that the messages from the NHS were effective and there had been no evidence that tenants were not taking up the vaccine.</p>	<p></p> <p><b>JD</b></p> <p><b>JD/Co Sec</b></p> <p><b>JD</b></p>

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<p><b>5.</b></p>	<p><b>Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting Held On 20 January 2021</b></p> <p>The Chair of the Audit Committee, Mr Szatkowski presented the minutes highlighting the key areas of discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Internal Audits</u> – The Committee received two very positive internal audits on Statutory Property Inspections and Lettings.</li> <li>• <u>HQN Income Management Accreditation Annual Assessment and Performance Team Rent Service Review</u> – Two comprehensive reports on income collection services that had made a number of recommendations, had provided assurance to the Committee. The Committee was of the opinion that the Performance Team review was a good model for internal reviews and the Committee looked forward to receiving future reviews.</li> <li>• <u>Audit and Scrutiny Action Tracker</u> – The Committee had strongly raised its concerns regarding the three outstanding recommendations from the Internal Audits Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety and Fire Risk Assessments, but had been assured that those would be completed prior to the March 2021 Committee meeting.</li> </ul> <p>In response, Mr Dunstan informed the Board that whilst acknowledging the impact of COVID-19 on the Health and Safety Team, he was of the opinion that the three outstanding recommendations should have been completed and the Health and Safety Advisor had been tasked to progress this and it would be completed within the next ten days.</p> <p><u>Governance Framework</u> Mr Towers informed the Board that he had consulted with the Board Chairs of all the wholly owned companies with regard to hosting a workshop to review the existing Governance Framework and arrangements would be confirmed within the next few weeks. He added that the Company Managing Directors/Chief Executive/ Senior Managers would be consulted as part of the next phase, prior to a revised Framework being submitted to the Board for approval.</p>	<p><b>SD</b></p>
<p><b>6.</b></p>	<p><b>Chief Executive’s Report</b></p> <p><b>COVID-19 Update</b></p> <p>Mr Donnellon reported that the Company remained resilient, despite the third national lockdown and continued to work in a flexible way. Whilst no significant changes to working practices were anticipated in most areas, the Company had moved to emergency only repairs limiting the services offered in properties to statutory services to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus, as</p>	

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<p>it had been evident that tenants had become more cautious. He added that the service would be reviewed mid-February to determine whether it was feasible to reinstate day-to-day repairs.</p> <p>The Board was informed that whilst employees remained resilient the Company was mindful that another lockdown could lead to higher than normal levels of mental health problems and a number of initiatives were being supported including weekly quizzes and virtual baking lessons to help boost morale. He added that a virtual question and answer session for all employees was scheduled in March, when hopefully the current restrictions would be eased and would provide an opportunity to discuss the Business Plan and the future operation of the Company.</p> <p><b>Business Planning 2021/2022</b></p> <p>Mr Donnellon was of the opinion that the three virtual away day sessions had worked well and proposed to roll forward the existing Business Plan. A link to the existing Plan 2020/2021 and proposed draft text for the 2021/2022 had been provided in the report, along with the Council's Proposed Rent Review 2021/2022. It was reported that the Rent Review, which had been agreed by the Council's Executive and would be considered at the Council meeting on 10 February had recommended an increased management fee to support the increased activity undertaken by the Company on behalf of the Council. Mr Donnellon whilst acknowledging that this would place the Company in a reasonable position going into the next financial year, was mindful of the £20.3m savings target imposed on the Council, the requirement for voluntary redundancies and the loss to the Council of dividends from other wholly owned council companies.</p> <p>In response to a question from Mrs O'Shea, Mr Donnellon advised that the reference in the Council's proposed rent review report that the Company was exploring accommodations options was in respect of the office at Grange Park. He explained that the office, which was not open to the public, was primarily used as an office base and the option of linking it with the Hub was currently being considered. He added that the Company was not seeking to make a saving by reducing office space, as the wider debate was the continued support of the town centre regeneration, but a potential partnership for utilising the office space could be considered whilst continuing to support agile working.</p> <p>Mr Donnellon reported in response to a question from Mr Herring that he did not anticipate any major risk to the Company following the insurance companies increased scrutiny on fire safety following Grenfell as the focus was on buildings of a particular height and there were no buildings in that category</p>	<p>JD</p>

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<p>in the housing stock. He added that the condition and maintenance of Dunsop Court was being monitored.</p> <p>Mr Dunstan added that the demolition of the Queens Park flats had removed the main risk to the Company, but informed the Board that there were some issues regarding leaseholder insurance. In acknowledging Mr Herring's comment that the insurance company focus could change to low rise flats, he agreed to provide an overview of the company's insurance arrangements at a future Audit Committee.</p> <p>In response to a question from Mr Szatkowski, Mr Donnellon confirmed that following the virtual sessions the Key Performance Indicators had been updated to reflect the Board's discussion and priorities and would be circulated to the Board for comments shortly. He added in response to a further question from Mr Szatkowski that he had discussed at great length with Mr Thompson the proposal to freeze all service charges and increase rent by 1.5% for the financial year 2021/2022 and was of the opinion that this was a balanced judgement. The additional funding would support the Company's strategy to invest in the Council House Investment Plan (CHIP) at Grange Park and Troutbeck whilst not greatly affecting tenants and other customers.</p> <p>The Chair added that the Council had imposed a rental freeze for the last four years, which the Board noted had had a major impact on the HRA account. It was also noted that any low paid tenants could qualify for a rent rebate through the Housing Benefit system.</p> <p>The Board supported the proposals regarding the Business Plan and commented that the document was well balanced and an appropriate tone had been used to articulate the Company's ambitions.</p> <p><b>The Board agreed:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To approve the text for the 2021/2022 Business Plan.</li> <li>2. To note the Chief Executive's report.</li> </ol>	<p><b>SD</b></p> <p><b>JD</b></p>
<p><b>7. Director of Resources' Report</b></p> <p>Mr Dunstan presented his report to the Board explaining that the Quarter 3 balanced scorecard had been circulated after the publication of the agenda.</p> <p><b>Financial Position</b></p> <p>The Board was advised that the forecast outturn for the BCH Budget was a £32,000 surplus against an original break-even budget at Quarter 3.</p>	

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<p>Mr Dunstan reported that the increased cost of personal protection equipment (PPE) had been offset by reduced travel and subsistence costs. He added that the projected outturn for the HRA Budget was a negative variance of £277,000 due to a shortfall in rental income and the continued moratorium on legal proceedings for all social housing rent arrears during the pandemic. Mr Dunstan informed the Board that the 2021/2022 BCH Budget would be presented to a future Audit Committee meeting.</p> <p><b>Rent Collection</b></p> <p>The Board was advised that the acting Rents Team Leader had indicated that they did not wish to be considered for the permanent position and the position would therefore be advertised externally.</p> <p><b>Anti-Social Behaviour and Neighbourhoods</b></p> <p>Mr Dunstan reported that transitional arrangements within the estate management operations were progressing well and it was the intention to submit the service for accreditation by the Housing Quality Network (HQN), an approach taken across Housing Services.</p> <p><b>Equalities</b></p> <p>The Board was advised that an initial meeting had been held with the Council's Equalities Manager, Mr Divall on 21 January to commence the audit process, which would take approximately six to eight weeks. Mr Dunstan acknowledged that a number of equality policies needed amalgamating and revising and Mr Dunstan had sought Mrs Upton's assistance as the equalities champion. He agreed to share the outcome of the audit with the Board at a future meeting.</p> <p><b>ICT</b></p> <p>Mr Dunstan highlighted the increased ICT development projects, which included the introduction of a new asset management system, an enhanced website and an upgrade of the existing financial system. He added that the existing ICT Manager was due to retire so succession planning was ongoing to ensure that the finance team had adequate skills going forward and the possibility of the Council introducing a new finance system in the next one/two years.</p> <p>In response to a question from Mr Disley, Mr Dunstan reported that the Performance Team was due to undertake an internal review of the Empty Property Service. Mrs Cornall added that during lockdown, a number of resources had been moved to void properties, which had resulted in an</p>	<p>SD</p> <p>SD</p>

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<p>increase number of voids available to let, but due to social distance restrictions, properties could not be let. On a positive note, she reported that the average costs for void properties, which was a Board priority, was currently below the target of £2,500 at £2,300. Mrs Cornall added that she welcomed the internal audit of the service</p> <p>Mr Donnellon explained that some properties e.g. Dunsop Court and steel framed properties had remained void for strategic reason, but accepted that the scorecard needed further improvements and more information to provide the Board with an accurate viewpoint.</p> <p>In response to a question from the Chair, Mrs Cornall reported that the Company had been profiling residents/tenants for a number of years to identify those who were vulnerable or at risk of falling into arrears due to self-isolation or illness, but this information had not been collated on the scorecard since June 2020. She added that a 360-degree dashboard of tenants would be introduced as part of the ICT upgrades, which would prompt residents to update their contact information. The Chair commented that this information remained relevant, as the real impact of the pandemic had yet to be seen.</p> <p><b>The Board agreed:</b> To note the Director of Resources' report.</p> <p><b>8. Director of Operations' Report</b></p> <p>Mrs Cornall, Director of Operations', presented her report to the Board and provided the following updates.</p> <p><b>Repairs Operations</b></p> <p>Mrs Cornall reported that the Performance Team would be undertaking a review of the Empty Homes Service and the outcome would be presented to the Audit Committee for consideration. She added that a positive HQN re-inspection of the responsive and void repairs service had taken place, the Company had subsequently been requested to provide details of its job-costing model, but the outcome of the inspection was expected prior the next Board meeting.</p> <p>The Board was informed that the Capital Team would be extended in order to provide a more streamlined approach to the kitchen and bathrooms programme and assist with the full recovery of all management costs. Mrs Cornall explained that this would be a positive impact on the budget as well as reducing void loss.</p>	<p>MC</p>

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<p><b>Assets</b></p> <p>Mrs Cornall reported that the Council’s European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funding bid for an environmental/energy efficiency project on Grange Park had been successful. This would part fund the solar panels and solar lighting on the Garstang Road West project and offset against the funding that had been set aside within the HRA capital programme. Mrs Cornall explained that the majority of the remaining funding would be used to support a Council housing new build project on Grange Park.</p> <p>It was reported that drone technology would be used for a pilot programme of roof inspections, the majority of which were between 70/80 years old. In addition, Sensor Technology would be used to monitor heat and humidity conditions (condensation/damp) and support early identification of potential future issues. Mrs Cornall informed the Board that Mobysoft (the provider of Rentsense) was developing new software that would predict repair reports and was currently at the testing of concept stage before possible implementation. The Board was advised that all three initiatives demonstrated commitment to the use of technology within the repairs and asset management services and would support predictive maintenance and it was hoped would alleviate disrepair claims.</p> <p><b>Young People’s Housing</b></p> <p>Mrs Cornall advised the Board that the Council’s Legal Team had confirmed that licences instead of tenancies could be offered to the young people residing at William Lyons House, but a further meeting had been scheduled for next week.</p> <p><b>Revoelution</b></p> <p>The Board was advised that Revoelution a community group operating from Ibbison Court in the Revoe ward supporting tenants and the wider community had approached the Company. Mrs Cornall explained that the group had received Big Local Lottery Funding for a ten-year grass roots project and had to spend its remaining funding within the next five years, but as it was not a legal entity in its own right could not manage the funding directly and needed an accountable body. The Board was informed that Revoelution’s current accountable body was the Football Trust and whilst both Revoelution and the Football Trust wished to continue working together, Revoelution believed that the Company’s priorities were more in line with their own and could offer it more community based advise.</p>	

	Actions
<p>Mrs Cornall explained that the risk to the Company was low and a small management fee to cover costs was available to the accountable body. She added that the group currently employed three employees, but that this would be reduced by one before any transfer if the Board approved the request. The existing building lease (church) would also transfer to the Company, but Mrs Cornall was of the opinion that the Company would be better able to provide advice on the level of building maintenance, utilising the Company's contractors and if necessary consider removal from the lease agreement.</p> <p><b>The Lakes</b></p> <p>It was reported that in partnership with the Library Service and LeftCoast, the Company had been looking to develop a community solution for the office on Langdale Place, which had been vacant since the departure of the Queens Park Residents' Association.</p> <p>Mrs Cornall explained that LeftCoast wanted to deliver a project similar to 'Kitty's Laundry' in Liverpool that would provide a community launderette within Mereside as well as a community facility. This could be combined with a library service, as its existing property on Langdale Road was not fit for purpose. She added that bringing the two groups together would provide a facility similar to that offered @The Grange, where basic housing enquiries could be dealt with and attract other community groups, such as care and share following the closure of the Sure Start Centre.</p> <p>The Board was advised that the Library Service would need to identify revenue funding to provide two members of staff and had drafted a strategic review, which included this project, for the Council to consider. Mrs Cornall added that some capital investment from the HRA Account, to adjust the building, would be needed and she agreed to provide the Board with future updates as negotiations continued.</p> <p>In response to a question from Mrs Thompson, Mrs Cornall explained that unlike gas servicing, electrical condition inspections were not covered by legislation and the Company had taken a risk-based approach to temporarily suspend inspections as access to more of the property was required, increasing the risk of transmitting the virus. She added that she was unsure whether the Risk Register had been updated to reflect this, explaining that the electrical condition testing took place over a longer programme (five years) than the gas programme and Mrs Cornall assured the Board that the work would be re-programmed once out of lockdown to remove the backlog. She added that all void properties were safety checked prior to being re-let.</p>	<p>MC</p>

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<p>Mrs Cornall reported, in response to a further question from Mrs Thompson, that a similar approach had been taken with the Adaptations Service due to the increased risk to the occupational therapists, although small number of adaptations had been carried out. She added that a meeting had been scheduled with the Council later that week to discuss the potential of carrying forward any under spend into next year's budget to assist with the backlog. Mr Donnellon added that alongside other frontline staff, the two occupational therapists had been vaccinated and could undertake risk assessments and where essential, adaptations would be undertaken.</p> <p>In response to question from Mr Herring, Mr Donnellon reported that whilst the repair costs for the steel framed properties were expected to be expensive due to the intrusive nature of the work, they were necessary and upon receipt of the consultant's report a programme of works would be developed and go out to tender. He added that as some properties were Council owned, privately owned (right to buy) and privately rented a comprehensive approach would be taken. Mr Donnellon confirmed in response to a further question that the work had been included in the HRA budget.</p> <p>At the request of Mr Szatkowski, Mrs Cornall agreed to include updates on IT strategy plans/new software in future reports to the Board.</p> <p><b>The Board agreed:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To approve that the Company act as the accountable body for the Revoelution community project.</li> <li>2. To note the Director of Operations' report.</li> </ol> <p><b>9. Any other business</b></p> <p>There was no other business.</p> <p><b>10. Date of next meeting – 28 April 2021</b></p> <p><b>The Board agreed:</b> To note that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 28 April at 6.00pm via Microsoft Teams.</p>	<p><b>MC</b></p>

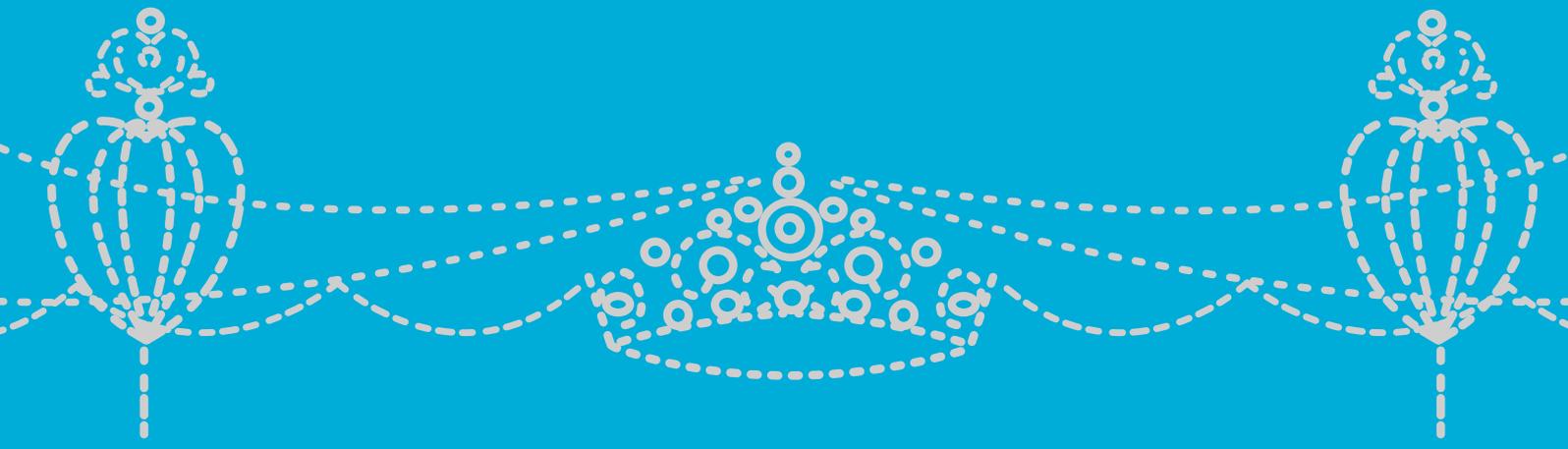
The meeting ended at 7.06pm

**Signed by the Chair**

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**Councillor Gillian Campbell, 28 April 2021**

Blackpool Coastal Housing Limited  
Company Number: 05868852



## **Blackpool Coastal Housing**

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