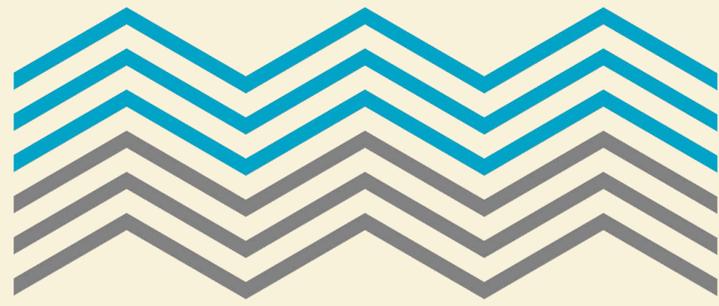


2020
2021



Blackpool Coastal
Housing

BCH

BOARD MINUTES

14.10.2020



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF
BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING LIMITED
HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS
ON WEDNESDAY 14 OCTOBER 2020 AT 6.00PM**

Present: Councillor Campbell, Non-Executive Director (Chair)
Mr A Disley, Independent Non-Executive Director
Mr N Herring, Tenant Non-Executive Director
Councillor Hobson, 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

		Actions
1.	<p>Apologies for Absence</p> <p>Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Tenant Non-Executive Directors, Ms Derby and Mrs V O'Shea.</p>	
2.	<p>Declarations of Interest</p> <p>None.</p>	
3.	<p>Minutes of the last meeting of the Board held on 23 July 2020</p> <p>The Board agreed: To approve the minutes of the Board meeting held on 23 July 2020 as a correct record.</p>	
4.	<p>Matters Arising</p> <p><u>Any Other Business</u></p> <p>Mr Szatkowski commented that at the last Board meeting it had been agreed that a review would be undertaken of the scorecard to establish which KPI indicators were customer focused and the Board be made aware. It was noted that as no action had been allocated it had unfortunately been overlooked, but would be addressed at the virtual Away Day sessions.</p>	SMT

		Actions
5.	<p>Non-Executive Director Positions</p> <p>The Board noted that the Council, in its role as member, had extended the terms of office for Mr Alan Disley and Mrs Elaine Upton for a further 12 months until 1 December 2021.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Mr Disley and Mrs Upton for their continued commitment to the Company, which provided valuable consistency in the current circumstances.</p>	
6.	<p>Minutes of the Audit Committee held on 2 September 2020</p> <p>The Chair of the Audit Committee, Mr Szatkowski presented the minutes highlighting the key areas of discussion:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Draft Audited Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2020</u> – The Committee had recommended the approval of the draft accounts, which were to be considered later on the agenda. 2. <u>Audit and Scrutiny Action Tracker</u> – The Committee had noted the pleasing results that the Company had completed 90.3% of recommendations. 3. <u>Draft Policy Framework Tracker</u> – The Committee had been presented with a draft tracker and work was on going to identify which policies required approval by the Board, its sub-Committees or the Senior Management Team. 4. <u>Strategic Risk Register and Deep Dive Briefings</u> – Two ‘deep dives’ had been presented to the Committee and Mr Szatkowski had discussed the annual review of the Strategic Risk Register with Mr Donnellon and it had been agreed that this would be discussed as part of the virtual Away Day sessions. <p>Mr Szatkowski informed the Board that Mr Towers had delivered a separate training event to both Audit Committee and Board Members regarding the roles and responsibilities of the Audit Committee members, which had received positive feedback.</p> <p>Mr Donnellon reported that the Committee had also discussed Community Centres, which had remained closed. Mr Donnellon explained that a number of requests had been received from third party organisations and the Senior Management Team was of the opinion that provided those organisations could satisfy COVID safety requirements should be permitted to use the Centres, but sought the Board’s opinion.</p>	SMT

	Actions
<p>He explained that the Senior Management Team had agreed for the Police to use a Community Centre for restorative justice sessions and a Special School, which was required to relocate, had been granted short-term use of a Centre for classrooms. Mr Donnellon added that a further request from a former Age UK employee was being considered regarding the provision of a socially distanced luncheon, but there was some concern whether they could satisfy the COVID safety requirements. The Board was informed that further requests would be considered on a case-by-case basis.</p> <p>In response to a question from Councillor Hobson, Mr Donnellon confirmed that the Company would seek guidance from Dr Arif Rajpura, Director of Public Health if the Blackpool area was placed in the Very High Risk Tier as to what was considered safe operating practices.</p> <p>Mr Donnellon reported, in response to a question from the Chair, that a Health and Safety plan had been devised for the reopening of Community Centres when it was deemed safe. He added, in response to a further question that those Centres that were self-serving and managed by community groups had been notified of the Company's intentions, but due to the impending second wave, the number of requests to use the Centres had decreased.</p> <p>The Board agreed: To note the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 2 September 2020.</p> <p>7. Draft Audited Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2020</p> <p>Mr Dunstan presented the draft Audited Accounts explaining that a surplus for the year of £99,000 would have been reported without the pension liability and the contribution to Blackpool Council (£500,000). He added that the Council had agreed to underwrite the Company as a Going Concern operating within the management fee.</p> <p>The Board was informed that this had been Smith Craven's first audit as the External Auditor and it had been a positive experience.</p> <p>In response to several questions from Mrs Thompson, Mr Dunstan explained that it was difficult to assess the impact of the pension liability going forward reporting that the liability considered the likelihood of the entire pension contributions being payable e.g. in the event that the Company ceased trading, adding that the accrual variations also moved significantly year on year. Mr Dunstan reported that as a wholly owned company, the Council had provided confirmation of its continued support and assured the Board that the underlying business model was sound.</p>	

	Actions
<p>The Board agreed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. With the judgement of the auditors, Smith Craven and senior management, that the Company would continue as a going concern. 2. That the accounts gave a true and fair view of the Company's assets, liabilities, financial position and profit and loss. 3. To approve the Statutory Accounts made up to 31 March 2020 and duly authorise the Chair to sign the balance sheet and directors' report on behalf of the Company. 4. That the accounts, once signed, be filed with the Registrar of Companies. 5. To approve the Letter of Representation as submitted and authorise the Chair to sign the letter on behalf of the Board. <p>8. Appointment of Data Protection Officer</p> <p>Mr Towers advised the Board that all wholly owned companies were being asked to consider the appointment to the statutory role of Data Protection Officer (DPO) in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). He explained that initially the Council, as part of a shared service with the Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, had appointed Mrs Trish Butcher and Mr Pickup had been appointed as Deputy DPO. Mrs Butcher had previously been appointed as DPO to Blackpool Coastal Housing and all the other wholly owned companies.</p> <p>Following a review by the Council in April 2020, Mr Pickup had been appointed as the Council's DPO with the Trust providing some support. Mr Towers explained that for consistency, all wholly owned companies were being asked to appoint Mr Pickup, to replace Mrs Butcher. He added that Mr Pickup had previously had responsibility for the direct liaison with the Company, Senior Management Team and the Board and had extensive knowledge, experience of data protection legislation and was very knowledgeable of the workings of all the Council's companies.</p> <p>The Board agreed: To appoint Mr Jonathan Pickup as the Company's Data Protection Officer, with immediate effect.</p>	<p>Co Sec</p> <p>External Auditor/ Co sec</p>
<p>9. Agile Working</p> <p>Mr Donnellon reported that the enforced lockdown in March 2020 had required the Company to alter drastically the way it worked, with reasonable success. The change had provided some positive benefits including an increase in productivity, staff satisfaction and a reduction in sickness absence. However, it was acknowledged that in order to successfully embed the good practice,</p>	

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<p>whilst guarding against negative consequences, it would be necessary to engage with stakeholders and a number of staff surveys had already been undertaken looking at moving to agile working. He sought volunteers from the Board to be involved in a Task and Finish Group and reported that Mr Disley had already provided some useful advice.</p> <p>In response to a question from Mr Disley, Mr Donnellon explained that whilst the initial focus had been on staff, the focus would now be on customers and Mr Andrew Walker, Head of Housing Services, was leading a project to look at customer satisfaction of the repairs service. Mr Disley volunteered to join the Task and Finish Group.</p> <p>Mr Donnellon reported in response to a number of questions from Mr Herring, that the Company had not focussed on staff fulfilling their core hours and had adopted a flexible approach with managers discussing productivity with their staff. He provided an example of a member of the Rents Team who worked more efficiently in the evening, whilst dedicating her time during the day to her family. It was explained that whilst it may be necessary to rewrite employment contracts, Mr Donnellon hoped to be able to avoid this and work within the existing contracts. It was reported the staff had been encouraged to take annual leave, which was good for their mental health and there had been little reluctance to the proposal. Mr Donnellon added that if staff did build up annual leave, they would not be forced to take leave within the usual specified timescale, if required the amount of time needed to use carried over leave would be extended. The Board was informed that Mr Dunstan lead a mental health support group, Time to Change, which had continued to operate throughout and was open to all employees. Mr Donnellon added that since the reopening of Coastal House a number of staff had been identified as using the office more frequently, potentially due to feelings of isolation or stress and managers continued to monitor the position. It was reported 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.</p> <p>In response to a question from Mrs Thompson, Mr Donnellon advised that it was not the intention to involve staff in the Task and Finish Group as the purpose of the group was to consider the management of the project work streams. However, staff would be involved in focus groups and the Senior Management Team would communicate with staff regularly. He added that one-to-one meetings were due to commence next week for all staff to establish their views on agile working.</p> <p>Mr Donnellon explained, in response to a question from Mr Disley, that he was unsure whether the Council was considering adopting a similar approach, but</p>	

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10.	<p>he was aware that Bickerstaffe House had been reopened for flexible use. Mr Towers added that the Council's current priority was its response to the pandemic, but there was an acknowledgement for future agile working.</p> <p>In response to a question from the Chair, Mr Donnellon explained that as the staff surveys were anonymous it was difficult to identify those individuals that were dissatisfied with remote working arrangements, hence the importance of the one-to-ones to determine the individual issues/concerns.</p> <p>The Board agreed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To appoint Mr Disley to the Task and Finish Group to review progress of the project. 2. To note the update report <p>Chief Executive's Report</p> <p>Contract Review</p> <p>Mr Donnellon apologised for Mr Jack's absence due to his involvement in COVID discussions with the Government, that evening. He explained that the HQN report, commissioned by the Council, had been received in March, but had been inevitably delayed due to the Council's need to respond to the pandemic. The report was due to be considered by the Shareholder's Advisory Board, which he and the Chair would attend, on 20 October.</p> <p>The Board was informed that the report was positive and recommended the Company's contract be extended for a further five years. Mr Donnellon explained that the report would also feed into the discussions about more formal joint working between the two housing companies and Mr Jack would provide the Shareholder's Advisory Board with potential options. It was suggested that Mr Jack or Mr Lockley be invited to attend the December Board meeting to provide an update and if appropriate the options identified for joint working.</p> <p>In response to a question from Mr Szatkowski, Mr Towers agreed to circulate a copy of the HQN report and feedback from the Shareholder's Advisory Board, but reminded Members that the report would be considered in private session as the recommendations were still 'open' and not currently in the public domain.</p> <p>Mr Donnellon reported, in response to a question from Mrs Upton, that he was unsure if there was an intention to reinstate the joint working group and would raise the matter with Mr Jack. However, he was of the opinion that Mr Jack</p>	<p></p> <p>Co Sec</p> <p>Co Sec</p>

	Actions
<p>would want to involve both companies Board Members in the process due to their collective knowledge.</p> <p>Mr Donnellon summarised the remainder of his report, reporting that the vast majority of service delivery had recovered to pre COVID levels and he was pleased with performance, financial performance and output, but the widely anticipated threat of a second wave was being monitored. He added that tenants, particularly those that had been required to shield, were nervous and if a further lockdown was imposed this would affect service delivery.</p> <p>The Board expressed its appreciation to Senior Management Team and staff for their hard work and continued support to the Company during the unprecedented times.</p> <p>Business Planning</p> <p>In response to further clarification from Mr Szatkowski of the Business Planning process, Mr Donnellon explained that he was of the opinion that it was not an appropriate time to make major changes, but focus on risk in line with service performance. He proposed two or three short virtual sessions to discuss key areas. Mr Donnellon welcomed Mr Disley's suggestion to seek input from the Council to understand its challenges/ strategic issues, adding that it would also provide an opportunity to discuss strategic economic development, which could be included in the Business Plan.</p> <p>Mr Donnellon explained, in response to a question from the Chair, that the virtual sessions could be held prior to the next Board meeting. He added that Mrs Fowler would make the necessary arrangements.</p> <p>The Board agreed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To hold a virtual Away Day prior to the next Board meeting, comprising of three sessions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Content – Council Lead b. Risk c. Business Plan 2. To note the Chief Executive's report. <p>11. Performance Report</p> <p>The Board was informed that the performance data had been separated from the Director of Resource's report and Mr Donnellon apologised for the late circulation of the Quarter Two performance scorecard and September updates to the HouseMark COVID specific scorecard, which had only been finalised</p>	<p>SF</p>

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<p>after the publication of the agenda.</p> <p>Mr Donnellon reported that overall performance was good, but there had been an increase in rent arrears, which was currently £100,000 higher than 2019, but it was anticipated that this would be offset by the Housing Benefit repayment. He added that the potential of a second wave could affect the level of arrears.</p> <p>It was reported that the number of void properties had increased, which had resulted in a delay in lettings, but action had been taken and plans had been put in place to rectify the position.</p> <p>In response to a question from Mr Herring, Mr Donnellon explained that it was hard to predict whether the cessation of the furlough scheme at the end of October would affect the position in Quarter 3. He added that Blackpool had a seasonal economy and its residents had a resilience to deal with the peaks and troughs every year, but potential delays in payment of Universal Credit could affect rent payments. Mr Dunstan added that the Company had prepared for the end of the furlough scheme by proactively contacting tenants who were paying their own rent to offer financial health checks. He reported that the Company had ceased recovery action and a meeting was scheduled with Mr Thompson, Director of Resources, Blackpool Council to discuss income streams.</p> <p>Mr Dunstan reported that the Performance Team had almost completed its review of the Rents Service and its findings would be presented at a future Audit Committee meeting for consideration.</p> <p>Mrs Cornall informed the Board that the More Positive Team had continued to operate throughout the pandemic and whilst it had helped to underpin other Company services had continued to find employment for tenants. This totalled 199 to date with a further 18 months of the project remaining. She added that the Team had recommenced their normal duties and would be working with the Rents Teams to contact tenants who were at risk of rent arrears to offer support.</p> <p>The Board agreed: To note the update.</p> <p>12. Director of Resources' Report</p> <p>Mr Dunstan presented his report to the Board and apologised for the late circulation of two appendices, which had only been finalised after the publication of the agenda. He highlighted a number of key areas.</p>	<p>SD/Co Sec</p>

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<p>Financial Position</p> <p>The Board was informed that the management fee included in the Quarters 1 and 2 summaries had increased by £280,000 due to running costs related to the William Lyons House facility, increases in Council SLA's and an additional contribution to the Left Coast consortium. Mr Dunstan reported that at the end of Quarter 2 the BCH budget was in surplus by £35,000 and there was a variance of £200,000 on the HRA Budget, but this was expected to be offset by the Housing Benefit repayment mentioned earlier.</p> <p>Staff Consultation Group</p> <p>It was reported that the Staff Consultation Group, which now met virtually, had moved from quarterly to monthly meetings since the office closures in March and was open to all staff. The main topics of conversation were issues arising from staff who were normally office based including the quality of the ICT infrastructure, DSE workstation issues, claiming tax deductions and the impact on wellbeing of limited work based social interaction.</p> <p>Climate Change</p> <p>Mr Dunstan informed the Board that he had attended the Council's Corporate Climate Change Group earlier in the day and was pleased to report that the Company was slightly ahead of the Council in terms of progress. He added that it was a challenge as available funding was unclear and welcomed the Board's input.</p> <p>Strategic Risk Register</p> <p>Mr Dunstan was of the opinion that the Strategic Risk Register was fit for purpose, but was happy to discuss in more detail at the virtual Away Day.</p> <p>Corona Kindness 'Legacy'</p> <p>The Board was informed that staff from Care and Repair and the Neighbourhoods Team continued to work in partnership with Groundwork to deliver a 'meals on wheels' service on Grange Park. In addition, the Company continued to provide support to the Mereside Care and Share Group, which had sustainability challenges, enabling its work to continue.</p> <p>In response to a question from Councillor Hobson, it was reported the decision not to proceed with technology provided by Energiesprong had been taken due to costs and the lack of benefits to tenants. In response to a further question, Mr Donnellon explained the Red Co-op offered a similar product,</p>	

	Actions
<p>which had been trialled by Stockport Homes and appeared more feasible. The Board was advised that Mr Weston, Head of Assets and Services, had arranged a meeting with Red Co-Op to discuss potential properties that could be modified.</p> <p>Following a question from Councillor Hobson, Mr Dunstan offered to ask Mr Weston to provide further information regarding the comment in the Climate Change Action Plan regarding an allowance in the HRA budgets to undertake carbon-reducing works.</p> <p>In response to a question from Councillor Hobson, Mr Dunstan confirmed that an internal Climate Change Working Group had been established and it was the intention to utilise internal and Council expertise before recruiting a consultant, but the Company would continue to use the Carbon Trust as a 'critical friend'.</p> <p>Mr Dunstan confirmed, in response to questions from Mrs Thompson, that the Strategic Risk Register had been reviewed prior to the full extent of the second wave of COVID-19 being apparent. He agreed to update the register to reflect the continued risks and as previously offered, agreed to review the register, including dates for risks to be reviewed as part of the virtual Away Day sessions.</p> <p>In response to a suggestion from Mrs Upton that the Company should work in partnership with Lumen and the Blackpool Housing Company (BHC) to develop a Carbon Friendly Design Guide (Action Plan). Mr Dunstan reported that Ms Sarah Speakman from BHC had attended the Council's Corporate Climate Change Group, mentioned earlier and had agreed to meet to see how the companies could work together.</p> <p>The Board agreed: To note the Director of Resources' report.</p> <p>13. Director of Operations' Report</p> <p>Mrs Cornall, Director of Operations', presented her report to the Board and provided the following updates.</p> <p>Repairs Operations</p> <p>It was reported that there had been an increase in the number of void properties, but this had improved over the last week and a number of properties had been handed over to the Lettings Team.</p>	<p>SD/JW</p>

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<p>Mrs Cornall reported that it had been almost 12 months since the HQN inspection of the responsive and void repairs service. She explained that significant progress had been made on the recommendations made last year and in preparation for the re-inspection in November, the focus was on job costing and Health and Safety.</p> <p>The Board was reminded that the Company had experienced difficulties sourcing building supplies at the start of the lockdown as its main supplier, Fylde Coast Builders Supplies had closed with just 24 hours' notice. Mrs Cornall reported that consequently the Company had established a relationship with Wolseley Building Supplies who were able to source the specified bathrooms at a significantly reduced cost. She added that Fylde Coast Builders Supplies had since improved their service offer and had now connected to the Company's Repairs Scheduling system enabling more accurate job costing.</p> <p>Assets</p> <p>Mrs Cornall reported that the Assets Team had re-started the preparation for the Garstang Road West project and completion was anticipated within the next financial year.</p> <p>Compliance</p> <p>It was reported that the Internal Audit of Statutory Property Compliance was due to recommence shortly and would review gas safety, electrical safety, asbestos management, legionella management, fire alarms and emergency lighting. The Audit Committee would consider the final report and monitor any identified recommendations.</p> <p>Emergency Housing</p> <p>The Board was advised that the Company was working with the Council's Legal Services to consider the types of tenancy agreements available for the young people residing at William Lyons House. Mrs Cornall explained that the tenancy agreements for temporary accommodation was subject to Homelessness legislation, but different legislation was required for longer-term rentals.</p> <p>Mrs Cornall informed the Board that she had requested Children's Services to pay the shortfall of the costs to provide the service amounting to £93,500. The Council's Client Officer was aware of the need to fund BCH for this service from either the General Fund or Housing Revenue Account and therefore there would be no risk to the Company.</p>	

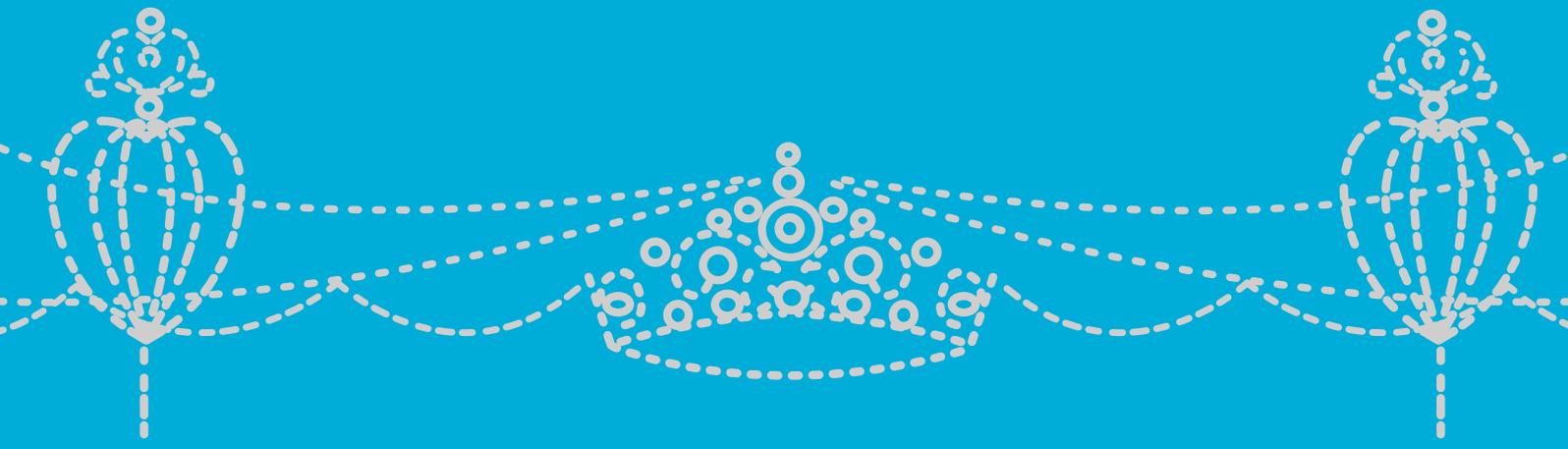
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<p>Sheltered Housing</p> <p>As reported earlier, the majority of the Community Centres had remained closed however; Mrs Cornall advised the Board that discussions were ongoing with the Council’s Learning Disability service to open the Cherry Tree Community Centre. This would enable them to provide their services to service users, but they would be responsible for ensuring that the building was COVID secure and for the safety of its service users whilst inside the centre.</p> <p>Young People’s Housing</p> <p>Mrs Cornall explained that the Council was keen for the Company to utilise the building at 331 Bispham Road to operate a similar service to that offered at Clare Street. She reported that she had spoken with the Council’s Property Services and work was ongoing to co-design the service and the Assets Team was reviewing the work required for the building. There was also the potential of the Company taking over responsibility for other Council owned properties.</p> <p>Care and Repair</p> <p>It was reported that there was a backlog of adaptations, but the intention was to provide additional temporary resources.</p> <p>Jobs Friends & Houses</p> <p>The Board was informed that Jobs Friends & Houses (JFH) continued to operate successfully and had almost paid off its debts. The next stage would be for its Board to review the strategic development of the service.</p> <p>In response to a question from Mr Szatkowski, it was reported that there had not been a significant number of complaints. Mr Donnellon added that Ms Lamprey, Customer Engagement and Communications Manager was aware of the revised Complaint Handling Code that had been published by the Housing Service Ombudsman in July 2020 and the requirement for the Company to undertake a self-assessment. He was mindful that pre-COVID it had been agreed that performance data on complaints would be brought to the Board. He offered to arrange for Ms Lamprey to attend a future Board meeting to provide an overview of complaints handling.</p> <p>Mr Dunstan explained, in response to a further question from Mr Szatkowski, that tenants involved in the TOWER Scrutiny Panel had been trained to work remotely and would resume its work shortly.</p>	<p>JD</p>

		Actions
14.	<p>The Board agreed: To note the Director of Operations' report.</p> <p>Any other business</p> <p><u>Company Secretary</u> Mr Towers informed the Board that Ms Rourke, the Assistant Company Secretary to the Board had recently given birth to a baby girl and for the next 12 months, Miss Burnett would provide the Company Secretary support.</p>	
15.	<p>Date of next meeting</p> <p>The Board agreed: To note that the next meeting would be on Wednesday 2 December 2020 at 6.00pm via Microsoft Teams.</p>	

The meeting ended at 7.29pm

Signed by the Chairman

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Councillor Gillian Campbell, 2 December 2020



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