

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF
BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING LIMITED
HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS
ON WEDNESDAY 28 APRIL 2021 AT 6.00PM**

Present: Councillor Campbell, Non-Executive Director (Chair)
Councillor Hobson, Non-Executive Director
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
Mrs M Thompson, Independent Non-Executive Director
Mrs E Upton, Independent Non-Executive Director
Mr A Szatkowski, 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 K Rourke, Assistant Company Secretary

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1.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest made at this meeting.</p>	
2.	<p>MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON 3 FEBRUARY 2021</p> <p>The Board agreed: To approve the minutes of the Board meeting held on 3 February 2021 as a true and correct record.</p>	
3.	<p>MATTERS ARISING</p> <p>In relation to the report expected from the Council’s Chief Executive regarding how the two Housing Companies and Lumen Housing could work closer together, the Board was informed by Mr M Towers, Company Secretary, that it had not yet been published and there had not been a meeting of the Shareholder Advisory Board in April as expected. He understood that the options were actively being looked at and that a report would be published in the near future. Mr Donnellon added that he was also still in the process of identifying a date for the virtual session to review the recommendations from the HQN report.</p> <p>Mr S Dunstan, Director of Resources, reported that the finance teams’</p>	JD/Co Sec

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<p>resources were focused on the financial year-end and as a result, an overview of the company's insurance arrangements would be provided at a future meeting. The IT Strategy was to be presented in replacement of the insurance arrangements.</p> <p>The Board was informed that Mr Dunstan and Mrs Upton had had an update meeting with Blackpool Council's Equalities Manager, Mr Divall, in relation to the audit and equality policies. The team was commended on their equality practices, which included the composition of staff in terms of protected characteristics and how they consulted with staff and tenants. It was noted that further adjustments were needed in relation to the policies and procedures and areas had been highlighted for improvements, although the Audit Committee was making progress with that. Mrs Upton, in her role as the Board's Equalities Champion, added that Mr Divall had expressed that they had gone above good practice and considered at least two points as excellent practice, which the Board complimented. Mr Divall had suggested to Mrs Upton that once the report was finalised, he would present the findings in the report at a future Board meeting.</p> <p>The Board was advised that a proposal for extended provision at Mereside was still with the Council for consideration.</p> <p>All further matters arising from the previous minutes had been completed or were covered elsewhere on the agenda.</p>	<p>SD</p> <p>SD/EU</p>
<p>4. MINUTES OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 17 MARCH 2021</p> <p>It was noted that the Chair Mr A Szatkowski, had not been able to attend the last meeting of the Audit Committee and therefore Mrs A Mrs E Upton, Independent Non-Executive Director had chaired the meeting and she provided a brief overview of the items discussed at the Audit Committee Meeting. She reported that the Audit Committee had received a clear and concise assurance report from internal audit with no recommendations for action in relation to gas safety inspection compliance, this report along with the Gas Safe Audit provided assurance to the Board and she also stated that the internal audit topics for the year had been agreed at the meeting. The Audit Committee also received an extensive and comprehensive presentation of the new Asset Management Database information now installed on Orchard Assets, by the Assets Team.</p> <p>The Board agreed: To note the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 17 March 2021.</p>	

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5.	<p>SHAREHOLDER'S ADVISORY BOARD</p> <p>Mr J Donnellon, Chief Executive, provided a brief overview of the matters discussed at the Shareholder's Advisory Board meeting. He informed the Board that the discussions around the company had been well received and that the Shareholder Advisory Board was pleased with the progress the company had made and expressed thanks to the company's staff and Board.</p> <p>The Board agreed: To note the extract from the minutes of the Shareholder's Advisory Board held on 16 March 2021.</p>	
6.	<p>PLANNING FOR THE HOUSING WHITE PAPER</p> <p>Mr J Donnellon, Chief Executive, outlined the key issues raised by the recent Social Housing White Paper (White Paper), highlighting that the White Paper had been heavily influenced by the Grenfell Tower tragedy and the need to respond to current and future issues raised through the public enquiry.</p> <p>The core objectives of the White Paper, including the key areas that required the landlords' focus which would form the basis for any future assessment or inspection, were summarised to the Board. Mr Donnellon reassured the Board that there was enough evidence through the company's current governance arrangements, performance and external scrutiny to recognise that the company was a good social landlord. He was of the opinion that as they were an established high performing landlord the measures detailed in the White Paper should not pose an issue. Nonetheless, it was decided that the company would conduct a review of the requirements of the White Paper, with the view to establish an action plan to test the company's compliance against those requirements. The company would work jointly with the sole shareholder, Blackpool Council, to carry out the review.</p> <p>In order to provide the necessary assurance that the company continued to supply high quality services, it was proposed that three work streams were set up that reviewed work in the key areas addressed in the White Paper, which would report to the Board and the Shareholder's Advisory Board. Those being safety, customer involvement and engagement and assurance and governance. It was reported that the outcomes being sought from the work streams were to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide the necessary assurance to the Board and Blackpool Council that the company would be well placed to meet any new demands arising from new legislation. • identify any areas for improvement and develop action plans that could be built into business planning. • make sure across the business, preparations were in place for an in 	

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7.	<p>depth assessment by the regulator.</p> <p>Mr Donnellon informed the Board that the work streams would produce an initial scope of the current provisions and delivery and then test that against new demands of the White Paper to produce an action plan if required. It was suggested that the work streams reported to the Board and Shareholder's Advisory Board over the next two to three Board cycles to ensure any changes proposed could be actioned prior to the White Paper becoming legislation.</p> <p>The Board agreed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To note the proposed methodology; and 2. approve the proposed plan to prepare BCH and Blackpool Council for the Social Housing White Paper being turned into legislation. <p>CHIEF EXECUTIVES' REPORT</p> <p>Mr J Donnellon, Chief Executive, updated the Board on the significant developments that had arisen since the last Board meeting with respect to the Covid-19 pandemic and the progress with agile working.</p> <p>The Board was informed that there had been a production of a national road map detailing the tests that were needed to be passed for the Country to transition out of the current level of restrictions, with a target date of 21 June 2021 for a potential return to pre-pandemic behaviours. On 12 April 2021, some restrictions were lifted which indicated that community centres could open, Mr Donnellon stated that the guidance surrounding the re-opening of the community centres was not concise and as such a decision was made that after reviewing the risks, the community centres would remain closed for the time being. In the meantime, trials were to be held to open the community centres for one or two small groups to enable robust risk assessments to be undertaken and to ensure safe and socially distanced management of the people in the groups. The company would monitor the trials with an expected review date of the position to open being the date of the next lockdown restriction review, 17 May 2021.</p> <p>Mr Donnellon summarised the company's current service provisions', stating that the majority of operations were working at pre-Covid levels and that services and staff had remained resilient and productive throughout the pandemic. Particular reference was made to the performance of the rents team, highlighting that arrears had been reduced to below 2% and were set to be reduced further with the housing benefit owed being passed across. He stated that the figures were a testament to the overall level of performance by the rents team.</p>	<p>JD</p> <p>JD</p>

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<p>As a result of the new shielding letters having been sent to the most vulnerable tenants, the company had noted a slight increase in gas servicing access numbers. Although, tenants who had received the new shielding letters had been reassured that the company had robust working methods in place to protect them, which was evidenced by the company's performance in comparison to other peers in the market.</p> <p>A brief overview was provided in relation to the recommencement of external capital works at Troutbeck and Garstang Road and it was reported that significant progress had been made on the proposed development of social housing on Grange Park. The next step of the Grange Park development was to submit planning applications, copies of which would be circulated to the Board.</p> <p>Mr Donnellon reported that the company had been shortlisted for two awards at the 2021 Northern Housing Awards, for tackling homelessness and Covid resilience. He praised and extended thanks to the staff for the efforts made over the last twelve months, pointing out that the being finalist was recognition of the hard work that had been done in challenging circumstances. The Board congratulated Mr Donnellon and the staff for the shortlisting achievement.</p> <p>In relation to agile working, surveys had been undertaken to gauge staffs views on working from home and their desired work patterns once restrictions were fully lifted. Mr Donnellon reported that there was an overwhelming support to adopt a more flexible approach to work patterns and as a result, measures had been made to enable a spilt of working patterns, 50% of time would be office-based work and the other 50% of time would allow staff to work from home. The Senior management would attend team meetings for Q&A's to review the new measures put in place.</p> <p>Mr Donnellon made reference to the success of the virtual Board and Audit Committee meetings over the past months and indicated there was a need to consider how agile the company's governance operations were, specifically, how meetings would be conducted outside of the pandemic. He expressed the views of the Senior Management Team, being that a more flexible approach could be adopted in relation to Board and Audit Committee meetings and invited Board Members to discuss their views on how future meetings should be held.</p> <p>Discussions were held in response to Mr Donnellon's invitation with Board Members favouring a flexible approach of face-to-face and virtual meetings. Mr Towers commented on the virtual meetings informing the Board that Blackpool Council was testing a system which was integrated into the meeting room's screen and zoomed in on the individuals speaking in the room, which</p>	<p>JD</p>

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<p>was a more personable approach. He recommended the system as an option for hybrid meetings and advised that Mr Doyle the Council's Head of IT could provide further information, it was agreed to follow up this technology with Mr Doyle. Board Members' were in agreement that a flexible approach, consisting of face-to-face and virtual meetings would be preferred, although a decision would not be made until the Government had addressed the last stage of the national road map on 21 June 2021. The Board Members' were under the impression that some elements of social distancing could still be upheld past 21 June and as a result may not be viable to hold face-to-face meetings, straight away.</p> <p>Mr A Disley, Independent Non-Executive Director, sought clarification in relation to the options the company had for the interaction with tenants and whether there were elements in place to offer a flexible approach to meetings with the tenants. He emphasised that, not only should the Board consider the internal options for agile working but also that there should be a variety of options for the customers to be able to contact the different services. In response to Mr Disley's query, Mr Donnellon explained that the company offered a variety of ways for customers to contact the company and that recent surveys indicated customers were content with the mixture of communications. As a result, no further action had been taken to amend the communication streams for customers' at this stage. Examples were given of when the company had had face-to-face contact, WhatsApp video calls and zoom conferencing with customers. He added that should the company consider and adopt further measures in relation to the communications with customers, they would need to be confident that customers' were able to access that.</p> <p>The Board agreed: To note the Chief Executive's report.</p> <p>8. DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES' REPORT</p> <p>Mr S Dunstan, Director of Resources', presented to the Board his report outlining the recent activity in the Resources directorate. He asked Board Members to consider and approve the Blackpool Coastal Housing ICT Strategy 2021/2024 (IT Strategy), the ratification of the Audit Committee's recommendation to approve the 2021/2022 BCH budget and sought support for the assisted gardening service provided by Redeeming Our Communities (ROC).</p> <p>A summary was provided in relation to the financial position of the company and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) draft outturn. Mr Dunstan reported that the HRA draft outturn had a surplus of £400,000, which the timing delays on Troutbeck due to the pandemic and the capital programme had impacted</p>	

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<p>on. He clarified that the negative variance in rental income was also due to the delay with Troutbeck, the development on Garstang Road West and the number of void properties, not as a result of collection on rental income, which had exceeded performance. It was noted that those factors could not have been avoided and that services would need to manage day-to-day voids to compensate and prevent future losses.</p> <p>In relation to the 2021/2022 BCH Budget (Budget) Mr Dunstan informed the Board that a draft version the Budget had been considered at the recent Audit Committee Meeting held 17 March 2021. He advised the Board that, the original Budget approved at the Audit Committee was essentially the same budget going forward for the next twelve months, when in fact essential management fees had increased due to an increase in Blackpool Council's service level agreement charges and funding for additional services. Those items were not reflected in the approved Budget and as a result, Mr Dunstan requested the Board ratified that decision. The Board also noted the small agreed uplift for national increases to the salary of lower paid staff in the budget. With regards to expenditure breakdown, he reported that no significant reallocations of the budgets were proposed.</p> <p>An overview was provided around the role and services of Redeeming Our Communities (ROC) and how that had benefited the company. It was highlighted that there had been an exceptional social value generated by the services and that ROC trained and developed its volunteers. He informed the Board that the service had previously been in house until the service had grown and it was then transferred to ROC. The Audit Committee had previously reviewed the report at its meeting and expressed its support of ROC, as such, the Board was requested to consider and approve the dispensation not to obtain quotes from other providers and a make a direct award to ROC.</p> <p>Board Members' were informed that, following consultations between the Senior Management Team and the company's ICT service, an amended IT Strategy had been developed for Board consideration. The key aspects of the IT Strategy were summarised to the Board, with Mr Dunstan highlighting that the proposed IT Strategy had a deliberate broader focus so that it was not just isolated to the requirements and plans of the ICT team, but also captured those requirements and plans of the other teams and partners of the business. Additional changes had also been made that included a corporate assessment of ICT related risk appetite and the consideration of climate change. The Senior Management Team was mindful of the rapid and unforeseen changes that would affect the strategy and as such, would keep the IT Strategy under regular review. Mr A Szatkowski, Independent Non-Executive Director, expressed that, following Mr Disley's comment to digitalise the</p>	

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<p>communications with customers, it would be beneficial to document some data in respect of that in the IT Strategy. He also wondered and suggested whether the Board could take advantage of other opportunities in relation to MRI software given that the current provider, Orchard, had been taken over by an international firm.</p> <p>The Board was provided an update on the developments in the other housing service areas, which included the introduction of local service standards, a short life working group being established at the Blackpool Safeguarding Adults Board to tackle hoarding and the commencement of work to procure a cleaning contract. Mr Dunstan added that an annual report on Housing Services activity in 2020/2021 providing more detail on service performance would be brought to the next Board meeting for review.</p> <p>Mr Dunstan presented the performance scorecards for 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 which included the improvements and additional information the Board requested. He added that the service review of empty properties continued. Mr Szatkowski made suggestions to improve the performance scorecards in which he would detail further in an email and circulate separately. He expressed that in his opinion, there were too many void indicators, the RIDDOR indicator would be better of being swapped out for a fire risk indicator given the sectors risks' and asked that Mr Dunstan considered a different indicator for complaints as he thought it did not capture the satisfaction of the customer.</p> <p>In relation to the HMRC visit, after a random inspection from HMRC querying the impact, if any, the Left Coast and More Positive Together Services had on the company's VAT status, it was reported that the programme did not affect the VAT status and no further action was to be taken.</p> <p>Discussions were held in relation to equality and the company's outcomes from the Time to Change campaign, which promoted awareness of discrimination and stigma relating to mental health. The Board was informed that after 15 years' the campaign had closed on 31 March 2021, although the company would continue to maintain a group of staff mental health champions. Councillor Hobson, Non-Executive Director, referred to an article he had read which indicated individuals with silent disabilities, specifically social anxiety, had been excluded from the workplace and queried whether the company had reflected and addressed that. In response to his query, Mr Dunstan expressed the view that the company would adapt and have adapted to individuals situations, albeit they would not favour strictly home working, they recognised the benefits and importance of agile working for individuals and advocated that message.</p>	<p>SD</p> <p>AS/SD</p>

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<p>Mr Dunstan made reference to the Climate Change Action Plan in which progress had been delayed as the company was required to address the needs that had arisen from the pandemic. It was intended that a review would be conducted to check whether any actions were missing from the plan before continuing with the implementation.</p> <p>The Board agreed to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. approve the Blackpool Coastal Housing ICT Strategy 2021/2024, together with the suggestions indicated at the meeting; 2. ratify the Audit Committee’s recommendation to approve the 2021/2022 BCH budget; and 3. support and award the assisted gardening service to Redeeming Our Communities. <p>9. DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS’ REPORT</p> <p>Mrs M Cornall, Director of Operations’ provided an update on the significant developments since the last Board meeting and requested the Board recommended to Blackpool Council to agree to provide match funding for the new More Positive Together project from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).</p> <p>In relation to the More Positive Together project, Mrs Cornall informed the Board that the Local Strategic Partnership had issued a call for funding which would create a new More Positive Together service under a different area of European Funding after the current programme ended in December 2021. It was requested that the Board recommend Blackpool Council match the funding of £570,000, although following a review, the majority of that would have been made from ‘in kind payment’ and as result there would not be a cash burden on the HRA. She added that there could also be potential for an extension of the current provision of More Positive Together under the current area of European funding and that work with Active Lancashire was being undertaken to develop budgets before a change request was issued. It was thought that the current services in the programme could continue under the current match funding already agreed with Blackpool Council’s HRA. Councillor J Hobson, Non-Executive Director, expressed his support of the More Positive Together Project and questioned the likelihood that the project would continue. Mrs Cornall expressed the view that it would be very likely, the EU funding was available until December 2023 and bids had been specifically made from the national pot with the intention it be used for the project.</p> <p>The repairs operations were summarised with a positive re-inspection report from the HQN reported. It was noted that the performance team had commenced the review of the Empty Homes Service and would take the next three months to complete with initial feedback of the review being positive.</p>	

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<p>Mrs Cornall provided further brief updates in relation to the use of drone technology and the new building supplier, Huws Gray, having taken over the predecessor. The Board noted that Huws Gray was on the same procurement framework and had no contractual issues.</p> <p>Mrs Cornall made reference to the contract that had been entered into with Mobysoft around predictive repair technology, advising that the contract had break clauses to allow termination of the contract should the service not offer the efficiencies and improved customer service as intended. Board Members' were informed that the predictive repair technology still in a proof of concept stage and therefore the company would be piloting it, although they were reassured as Mobysoft already provided the predictive RentSense technology to the company. Mr Szatkowski supported the contract, praising the potential of the new technology and queried whether a good deal had been secured. In response, Mrs Cornall advised that a good deal had been made for the early stages of the technology with the hope to see savings from the approach while making sure we did not have a long-term commitment to unproven technology.</p> <p>An update was provided around the Garstang Road West improvement project with work expected to last the majority of the year. Emphasis was made around the look and feel of the development with a view that it would be of the highest standards and would include glazing windows, solar panels to provide electricity to communal areas, external wall insulation and internal upgrades.</p> <p>The gas servicing programme continued to maintain performance despite the national lockdown and the gas safety inspection undertaken by internal audit was deemed fit for purpose with only two minor recommendations.</p> <p>Mrs Cornall reported on the progress that had been made within the supported housing service. In respect of emergency housing, it was noted that the Council still had around 30 people were still in bed and breakfast accommodation, albeit not ideal it was an improvement on the height of the pandemic numbers, being 190. The new Resilience Housing Service to support individuals' with entrenched homelessness had progressed and had approximately 17 tenants and further referrals from the Housing Options were in the pipeline. Board Members' were informed that the company was considering the development of new schemes at various sites following the review of the sheltered housing service, in which it identified a majority sheltered of the housing did not meet accessibility standards.</p> <p>The Board was updated on the property at 331 Bispham Road with the view that the property would be transferred from Blackpool Council into the HRA for</p>	

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<p>Blackpool Coastal Housing to control. The assets team had developed a proposal to bring the property up to date and the resettlement service would take on the facility of the property. The Board was also made aware that the tenancy issue at William Lyons House had been resolved and that work was ongoing with the local ward Councillor to resolve the neighbourhood complaints.</p> <p>Mrs Cornall summarised the Troutbeck redevelopment and the master planning process for the Grange Park estate, informing Board Members' that first handovers at the Troutbeck redevelopment were due to commence over the coming weeks. The Grange Park housing office was to be moved into the @thegrange for a joined up and wider community focused service as other facilities, such as Ground Works, the Police and Public Health, were based in @thegrange which would provide comprehensive services to customers' at one location. Following the move, the Grange Park housing office site could be released and included in the development.</p> <p>A brief overview was provided in relation to the Revoelution Project and how BCH could assist linking the work into the Council's plans around the Central District resort. In addition, an update was provided on the Mansfield Road Learning Disability Unit, with work commencing to adapt the building to cater for an individual with significant physical needs.</p> <p>Mr N Herring, Tenant Non-Executive Director, made reference to the Social Housing White Paper and linked in with the Decarbonisation Agenda and Fire and Building Regulation to query how the company was going to deal with those requirements' and the associated impact on the company's financial resources. In response Mrs Cornall explained that the company was building to a higher standard than required and was confident that those would meet the emerging tighter building regulations, specifically the safety standard. She added that there was a significant amount of work still to do to achieve carbon zero and there would be a need for emerging technology. The Garstang Road West project was testing out new technology that included upgraded and more efficient heating systems, landlords renewable energy lighting and solar panels. She highlighted that the main issue in which the housing provider sector was all facing, was the emerging technology to become carbon zero and eliminate gas boilers. At the current time, air and ground source technology was not practical on a large scale and although the gas industry was working on new hydrogen technology, it was not yet ready for market. Mr Donnellon commented in response to Mr Herring, that in his view the Board needs to be aware and vigilant of the market and that being carbon neutral would not be resolved from in house resources', it would need national investment.</p> <p>The Board agreed to:</p>	

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10.	<p>1. note the Director of Operations' report; and</p> <p>2. recommend to Blackpool Council to agree to provide match funding for the new More Positive Together project from the Housing Revenue Account.</p> <p>WHITSLEBLOWING POLICY</p> <p>Mr S Dunstan, Director of Resources provided an update on the company's Whistleblowing Policy and recommended that the Board considered and approve the Blackpool Coastal Housing Company Whistleblowing Policy March 2021 (Whistleblowing Policy).</p> <p>The Board was informed that it had been identified at the Audit Committee that the Whistleblowing Policy required an update as procedures detailed in the policy were outdated. Mr Dunstan had made amendments to the Whistleblowing Policy to bring that up to date, which included the introduction of a procedure for reporting whistleblowing matters relating to the Chief Executive.</p> <p>The Board agreed: To approve the Blackpool Coastal Housing Company Whistleblowing Policy March 2021, as submitted.</p>	
11.	<p>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</p> <p>Councillor Robertson, Non-Executive Director, reported that it had been brought to his attention that a tenant was unaware and unable to contact the company on a Saturday to report a water leak that had occurred to the property. He sought clarification around the procedures in place for tenants to contact the business for out of hours repairs. In response to his query, Mr Donnellan explained that tenants were provided a list of contacts upon their tenancy and information on how to report repairs, whether in business hours or out of hours. Those numbers were also available on the company's website and social media. Mrs Cornall added that an out of hour's call handling service, Vitaline, was used to co-ordinate emergency repairs outside of usual business hours and to avoid confusion they used the same number as the one used during normal business hours.</p>	
12.	<p>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</p> <p>The Board agreed: To note that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 21st July at 6.00pm via Microsoft Teams.</p>	

The meeting ended at 7.10pm



Signed by the Chair

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Councillor Gillian Campbell