

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF
BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING LIMITED
HELD AT COASTAL HOUSE, ABINGDON STREET, BLACKPOOL
ON 11 DECEMBER 2024 AT 5.00PM**

Present:

Councillor N Brookes, Non-Executive Director (Chair)
Councillor J Hobson, Non-Executive Director
Councillor D Mitchell, Non-Executive Director
Mr A Szatkowski, Independent Non-Executive Director
Mrs M Thompson, Independent Non-Executive Director
Mr N Herring, Tenant Non-Executive Director

In attendance:

Mr J Donnellon, Chief Executive
Mrs M Cornall, Director of Operations
Mr S Dunstan, Director of Resources
Mr A Lockley, Assistant Chief Executive/ Director of Strategy Shareholder Lead Officer,
Blackpool Council (*Via Teams*)
Mr A Walker, Head of Housing (*joined the meeting at item 11 only*)
Mrs J Stephenson, Assistant Company Secretary

		Actions
1.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Ms T Johnson, Independent Non-Executive Director, Ms V Piper, Head of Housing and Ms D Earnshaw, Company Secretary.</p>	
2.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.</p>	
3.	<p>MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 2024</p> <p>The Committee agreed: To approve the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 16 October 2024 as a true and correct record.</p>	
4.	<p>MATTERS ARISING</p> <p>All matters arising from the previous minutes had been completed or would be covered elsewhere on the agenda.</p>	

		Actions
	<p><u>Item 4 – Matters Arising</u> The Board expressed concern that the analysis report on the impact of workload on staff stress levels and their mental health, which was expected to be presented at the meeting, had still not been completed.</p> <p>Mr Dunstan provided an update on the current staffing level and advised that short term options were available to support the team. In addition the Management Team would be investigating the possibility of additional resources.</p> <p><u>Item 5 - Tower Scrutiny Panel - Rents and Financial Inclusion Report</u> Mr Dunstan would circulate the report outside of the meeting.</p>	<p></p> <p>SD</p> <p>SD</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>MINUTES OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD ON 9 OCTOBER 2024</p> <p>The Board agreed: To approve the Minutes of the last meeting held on 9 October 2024 as a true and correct record.</p> <p>Board Members discussed the ‘Gas No Access’ cases and enforcement powers available to the Company for non-compliant tenants. Mrs Cornall confirmed that the Company used housing access powers and possession orders to gain access. Members acknowledged that the legal route often proved lengthy.</p> <p>The Board was reassured that any concern raised in respect of a suspected gas leak would be immediately dealt with by Cadent who had the legal powers to access a property.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>JOINT HOUSING GOVERNANCE UPDATE</p> <p>The Board agreed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To note the appointment of Ms Claire Stone and Mr Karl Tupling who had been appointed Non-Executive Directors by the Council in its role as Member with effect from 28th October 2024, 2. To note the Written Resolution - Appointment of Mrs Vikki Piper as Chief Operating Officer (Housing Management) of Blackpool Coastal Housing Limited, approved on 25 November 2024, 3. To note the Written Resolution - Appointment of Mr Antony Lockley as Chief Executive Officer of Blackpool Coastal Housing for an initial twelve month period, approved on 5 December 2024. 	
<p>7.</p>	<p>PERFORMANCE REPORT</p> <p>Mr J Donnellon, Chief Executive provided an overview of the Performance Report.</p>	

	Actions
<p>The Board was notified that damp and mould case volumes remained high, but cases were being resolved quickly. The Repairs performance indicators had dropped slightly short of target and would be reviewed in the near future.</p> <p>The Board discussed the various solutions available to address damp and mould issues; trickle vents, communal drying areas and ventilation to bathrooms and kitchens. Mrs Cornall advised that any property deemed unfit for purpose would be inspected by a specialist contractor who would provide feedback to BCH.</p> <p>In respect of budget pressures, the Board acknowledged the increased external charges, rising sub-contractor costs and the static fee levels. In the medium term a combination of efficiency savings and shared services would be considered to maximise budget efficiency.</p> <p>Mrs Cornall advised the Board that BCH had experienced an increase in the number of properties being handed back in poor condition at the end of a tenancy. BCH attributed this to the increase in vulnerable and homeless tenants being housed. A detailed investigation would be undertaken to establish trends and motives for this behaviour, a report would be presented to the Board in due course.</p> <p>Mr Donnellon provided an update on the development of the shared services. A formal project plan had not yet been developed, Board members emphasised the importance of ensuring staff morale would be maintained during the process.</p> <p>Mr Antony Lockley in his role as Chief Executive Officer of Blackpool Coastal Housing advised that a detailed report on the Joint Housing Board and shared services would be presented to the first Joint Housing Board meeting scheduled for 18 February 2025.</p> <p>The Board raised concern in respect of the use of subcontractors and the associated costs. The Joint Housing Board would investigate possible cost saving across the shared services, but highlighted the distinct roles of each housing company and the specialist contractors required for each individual project.</p> <p>Mrs Cornall highlighted that subcontractors were often reluctant to take on responsive works due to the unpredictable nature of the work. Members requested that the Joint Housing Board considered the potential of establishing a direct labour team at a future meeting in 2025.</p>	<p>MC</p> <p>AL</p> <p>MC</p> <p>SMT</p>

		Actions
8.	<p>COMPLAINTS UPDATE</p> <p>Mr J Donnellon, Chief Executive reported on the current position with complaints and the actions being taken to manage the process following the greater scrutiny being given to complaints and regulation as a result of the Housing Act.</p> <p>The Board was informed that in general BCH had performed well in respect of complaint handling and a greater number of complaints were being resolved at stage one.</p> <p>The Board praised the staff for the hard work and dedication shown to improve customer service, the focus on “right first time” and an overall good complaints handling system.</p> <p>Mr A Szatkowski, in the role of Complaints Champion for BCH, would support the complaint update delivery at future Board meetings.</p> <p>Mr Szatkowski conducted a review of a number of randomly selected closed complaint cases and provided feedback. He highlighted that in respect of the appeal responses completed by the Directors, were thorough and professional, although he felt more detailed work could have been undertaken by the service managers at stage 1 to stop the escalation to the Appeal.</p> <p>The Board agreed: To note the report.</p>	AS
9.	<p>COMPLIANCE AND CONSUMER STANDARDS</p> <p>The Board was provided with a verbal update on Compliance and Consumer Standards.</p> <p>Mrs M Cornall, Director of Operations advised that BCH wanted to conduct a mock inspection to establish best practice. She highlighted an aspiration to work with Housing Associations who had already been inspected to achieve this.</p>	
10.	<p>CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT</p> <p>Mr J Donnellon, Chief Executive reported that following the general election the new government had acted favourably in respect of Housing and had already implemented change to the Right to Buy process.</p>	

		Actions
<p>11.</p>	<p>BCH had provided support with the Council’s Selective Licensing application, which would help to underpin the regeneration programme. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had indicated continued support for Blackpool.</p> <p>The Regulator of Social Housing had published a headline report which highlighted trends and median performance figures. The report indicated that Blackpool TSM scores overall had been above the national median, with the exception of the number of ASB case per 1000 properties. The ASB figure had been consistent with previous monitoring and could be attributed to the vulnerabilities and poverty in the town.</p> <p>The Board was informed of the sad passing of two tenant representatives, Mr Dean O’Shea and Mr Jamie Stirling who had contributed a huge amount of their time and skill to help shape and improve BCH services and provide an independent tenant voice in the complaints hearings, both of whom would be sorely missed.</p> <p>DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES' REPORT</p> <p>Mr S Dunstan, Director of Resources provided an update on the current financial position of BCH. The pressures on the repairs budget continued to lead to an overspend on the overall budget at year end but efforts were being made to find savings.</p> <p><i>[Mr A Walker, Head of Housing joined the meeting]</i></p> <p>Mr A Walker, Head of Housing provided an update on the Furnished Tenancy Offer (FTO) and confirmed that BCH had managed to hit the target of 30 properties earlier than anticipated. The pilot had received positive feedback from tenants.</p> <p>Board Members discussed the potential correlation with the FTO and the condition of properties at the end of tenancy, Mr Donnellon confirmed that in past cases, better quality housing and environments had a positive impact on the quality of life.</p> <p>Mr A Lockley, Chief Executive advised that a financial update would be presented to the February Board meeting.</p> <p>The Board agreed: In respect of the Furnished Tenancy Offer (FTO), to endorse the Capital Model option, which would be a continuation of the current service and would require further capital funding to continue.</p>	

		Actions
12	<p><i>[Mr A Walker, Head of Housing left the meeting following the FTO discussion]</i></p> <p>DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS' REPORT</p> <p>Mrs M Cornall, Director of Operations provided an update on the significant developments since the last Board meeting.</p> <p>She advised that the Repairs review continued, initial findings had highlighted a lack of resource within the team.</p> <p>The Team had identified that the various ICT interfaces had not been working collectively as they should. BCH had requested an urgent meeting with the company who provided the scheduling system and would liaise with the Council in respect of the finance system aspect.</p> <p>Members discussed the rationale in respect to conducting major capital works during the void process and requested additional narrative at the next Board meeting.</p> <p>Mrs Cornall provided an overview on the request from the Council for BCH to extend the Emergency Housing Service into the Chapel Street site. She confirmed that BCH had been working on a financial appraisal for the service and that further information would need to be investigated, in particular any TUPE implications, as Board members raised concerns regarding the potential two-tier workforce and requested additional information be provided.</p> <p>Mrs Cornall reported that in respect of Jobs, Friends & Houses locating to 1 Lostock Gardens, BCH had agreed to purchase the property at a reduced rate of £225k.</p> <p>The Board was notified of the death of a tenant who had been living in poor conditions. Mrs Cornall advised that the property had been previously highlighted as a concern and the relevant agencies had been involved in bringing the property up to an appropriate standard and the family had been discharged from services in 2023. A Police investigation was underway. BCH confirmed that it had made a recent attempt to gain access to the property for the annual gas check but had been unsuccessful. Board members were assured that the Gas Service check on the empty property would be completed at the earliest convenience.</p> <p>The Board agreed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To agree in principle that BCH should investigate the proposed takeover of the Chapel Street hostel if the financial appraisal allows, 2. To receive a further update in respect of the Chapel Street hostel 	

		Actions
	<p>proposal when appropriate, to include staff TUPE options and terms and conditions,</p> <p>3. To provide a void management report at the next meeting with more narrative in respect of the capital works during void process.</p>	
13.	<p>MEMBER RELATIONS</p> <p>The Board was notified that the Shareholder Meeting had been delayed and would now be held in the new year.</p>	
14.	<p>BCH WORK PROGRAMME 2025</p> <p>The Board agreed: To note the current work programme.</p>	
15	<p>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</p> <p>The Board noted that Mr John Donnellon was due to retire at the end of the year. The Chair thanked Mr Donnellon on behalf of the Board for his hard work, support and guidance throughout his years of service.</p> <p>The Board was informed that Ms Deborah Earnshaw, Company Secretary, had handed in her notice due to ill health.</p>	
16	<p>JOINT HOUSING BOARD MEETING SCHEDULE 2025</p> <p>The Board agreed: To note the proposed Board meeting dates for 2025:</p> <p>18 February 22 April 15 July 8 October 2 December</p>	

The meeting ended at 18:45

Signed by the Chairman

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Councillor Brookes