

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF  
BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING LIMITED  
HELD AT COASTAL HOUSE, ABINGDON STREET, BLACKPOOL  
ON 16 OCTOBER 2024 AT 5.00PM**

**Present:**

Councillor N Brookes, Non-Executive Director (Chair)  
Councillor D Mitchell, Non-Executive Director  
Mrs M Thompson, Independent Non-Executive Director  
Ms T Johnson, Independent Non-Executive Director (Via Teams)  
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

Ms V Piper, Head of Housing  
Ms H Cassidy, Housing Standards and Compliance Manager  
Ms D Earnshaw, Company Secretary Designate  
Mr M Towers, Company Secretary  
Mrs J Stephenson, Assistant Company Secretary

Mr M Davis (Chair), Tower Scrutiny  
Mrs P Rawson, Tower Scrutiny  
Mrs J Wadsworth, Tower Scrutiny  
Mr C Robinson, Tower Scrutiny  
Mr D Shakespeare (via Teams), Tower Scrutiny

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence was received from Councillor J Hobson, Non-Executive Director and Mr A Szatkowski, Independent Non-Executive Director.

**2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

**3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 10 JULY 2024 AND WRITTEN RESOLUTION APPROVED 12 AUGUST 2024**

**The Board agreed:**

1. To approve the Minutes of the last meeting held on 10 July 2024 subject to the minor amendment to 'Mrs' Maggie Cornall, referred to as he rather than she;
2. To approve the written resolution approved on the 12 August 2024.

#### **4 MATTERS ARISING**

##### Minute 15 – Director of Resources Report

Mr Dunstan advised that the analysis report on the impact of workload on staff stress levels and their mental health would be presented at a future meeting.

The Board noted that the additional matters arising had either been complete or covered elsewhere on the agenda.

#### **5 TOWER SCRUTINY PANEL - RENTS AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION REPORT**

The Chair agreed to a request for the report to be presented to the Board earlier than scheduled on the agenda.

Mr M Davis, Chair of the Tower Scrutiny Panel presented the Rents and Financial Inclusion Report.

He reported on the findings and confirmed that tenants were aware of BCH staff roles and knew who to contact for support needs. He added, that overall, the Tower Scrutiny Panel believed that BCH was performing well.

During the initial investigations evidence suggested that key issues centred on unclaimed benefit and issues with Universal Credit (UC) which enabled the Panel to focus on those specific areas as part of the study.

He advised that the report, prepared in consultation with tenants, included surveys and BCH staff and management interviews, the initial results highlighted that tenants believed that they had the correct benefit allocation available to them. However, through further investigation it became evident that this had not the case.

The Panel concentrated on the unclaimed benefit and explored ways to support tenants understand their full entitlement. They provided information on the Benefit Calculators available online along with support to new applicants in their transition onto benefits and assistance to existing tenants in terms of benefit claims.

The Scrutiny Panel accepted that the specialist advice required on the benefit system should not sit with the BCH staff.

Board Members raised concerns about the possible use of loan sharks and illegal lending operators. Mr Davis reported that no evidence had been established in their investigation, however he raised concerns regarding ambulance chasers and personal injury lawyers.

The Panel raised additional concerns regarding the payment of UC in terms of scheduled and direct payments for vulnerable tenants.

The Board requested additional information from BCH regarding:

- the number of tenants who received the rent payment holidays;
- The effects on UC rent payments schedule when there was 53 weeks in the year;
- The payment scheduled for garages

Mr Dunstan thanked Tower Scrutiny for the insightful report and the recommendations received would be reviewed by BCH.

## **6 COMPANY SECRETARY UPDATE**

The Board noted that Mr Mark Towers was due to retire on 1 November 2024 and was therefore stepping down as Company Secretary of Blackpool Coastal Housing Company. Ms Deborah Earnshaw had been appointed by the Shareholder as part of the new arrangements following his retirement and would take on the role of Company Secretary with immediate effect from the conclusion of the meeting.

The Chair thanked Mr Towers on behalf of the Board for his support and guidance throughout his years of service.

Mr Towers expressed gratitude for the support and guidance from the BCH management team and Board Members in particular praising Mrs Fowler for her unwavering support.

## **7 BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING ANNUAL BOARD AND AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT 2023/2024**

**The Board agreed:** To approve the Board and the Audit Committee's Annual Report 2023/24.

## **8 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Mr J Donnellon, Chief Executive, updated the Board on the current performance across several key performance areas.

Mrs Cornall explained the change in the Voids and Repairs performance indicators and advised that the void time had been presented as an average of both minor and major repairs. The current target for repairs remained at 25 days for minor repairs and 130 days for major repairs.

Mrs Cornall confirmed that a HQN inspection had been concluded and the report would be shared on the BCH SharePoint.

She advised that the results evidenced good responsive repair performance overall. There were however some concerns with the performance information and data sitting behind them. She stated that this would be investigated in considerable detail during the upcoming Performance Team review of the service. She stated that some initial probing

into the data had highlighted issues with interfaces between the core housing management system, the scheduling system and the new finance system, which was potentially at the heart of these concerns.

The Board noted that there had been a national increase in compensation claims within the social housing sector which had impacted on the overall company budget. Mr Donnellon assured the Board that BCH had improved the complaints and disrepair procedure and had established a good working relationship with the legal team to reduce the risk of compensation claims.

The Board raised concern with regards to carrying out major routine works within the void period. Mrs Cornall explained the rationale for the time taken to conduct routine works enabled BCH to provide a superior quality property at sign-up which in turn had increased the length of tenancy and reduced tenancy turnover.

Board Members requested a breakdown of the void data on empty properties and for the KPI data to be included on the BCH SharePoint.

The Board queried the presentation of the data and requested that the KPI data include the annual figure alongside the quarterly figure to provide context. Members requested the data be presented in graph format.

Mrs Cornall acknowledged a delay in presenting the quarterly KPI data due to the timing of board meetings.

Mr Donnellon assured the Board that all KPI's were monitored regularly by the management team to highlight any areas of concern.

**The Board agreed:**

1. To review the programmed dates of next year's meeting to see if data reporting dates and board meetings could be better synchronised,
2. To note the contents of the report.

**9 COMPLAINTS UPDATE**

Mr J Donnellon, Chief Executive provided the Board with a verbal update on the complaints. He outlined the actions being taken to manage the process and noted that the increase in scrutiny related to the Housing Act had resulted in a greater number of complaints.

Mrs Cornall advised that BCH had now embedded the improved Disrepair Case procedure and their relationship with the legal team had prevented complaints escalating.

The Board requested a breakdown in the true cost of complaints and disrepair claims including the actual work costs and compensation and legal fees.

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

## **10 COMPLIANCE AND CONSUMER STANDARDS**

Ms H Cassidy, Housing Standards and Compliance Manager and Mrs V Piper, Head of Housing provided the Board with an update on the collaborative work carried out by the Social Housing (Regulation) Act Working Group to identify areas of noncompliance with Consumer Standards, along with associated risks.

The Board was informed that Ms Cassidy had worked closely with BCH to provide a robust position statement in relation to company.

Overall, Ms Cassidy confirmed the company was in a good position, with a number of key areas identified as medium risk, with work underway to achieve compliance. The Board acknowledged that the actions required would be captured in the Risk Log and Action Tracker.

She presented an update on the regulatory inspection process and expressed the importance of staff understanding the data in order to answer any questions from the regulator.

The Board acknowledged the impact of the increase in workload on the team and the cost implication on the business.

Mrs Piper reassured the Board that whilst an increase in focus had been required, the work was not technically additional work as it is normal business and it was essential to enable staff to be fully conversed with the standards and for the regulations to become part of everyday working.

Board Members requested an update and breakdown of the information that would be monitored by the Board on a regular basis and how the data in the Risk Log and Risk Register for BCH would interlink.

The Board thanked Ms Cassidy and the Working Group for their hard work.

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

Mr J Donnellon, Chief Executive updated the Board on the significant developments that had arisen since the last Board meeting.

He acknowledged that the new Government Administration had indicated a commitment to affordable and social housing and the Budget on 30 October 2024 would provide a clearer direction to the housing sector.

In terms of leadership and succession proposals, he advised that plans had progressed to recruit the two Chief Operating Officers for BCH and BHC, with the aim to appoint before

the end of the year. With this in hand he advised that he would be setting his leaving date as 31st December 2024.

He went on to explain that the joint BCH and BHC Board away day would be held on 3 December 2024 with Mr A Lockley, Assistant Chief Executive / Director of Strategy and Shareholder Lead Officer would attend to discuss how the companies would work together.

The Board was updated on the Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) team staffing issues and advised that BCH would work to develop junior members of the team into ASB roles. He added that career progression would be recognised with a salary increase for suitable employees, to encourage more interest.

The Housing Ombudsman Landlord Performance Report 2023/2024 had been distributed with the agenda and Mr Donnellon encouraged Board members to read the report.

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

Mr S Dunstan, Director of Resources, presented an update on the staffing issues that had affected the company since the last Board meeting.

Members discussed performance and acknowledged the pressures on the team following the introduction of the Compliance and Consumer Standards.

Mr Dunstan advised that the expected overspend forecast had increased to £300k and would be partly offset by savings, including secondments not backfilled. He added that repairs management would produce a business case for an adjustment to the management fee to address this issue and updated information would be sent to members outside of the meeting.

The Board was informed that a number of tenant meetings had been scheduled with regards to incidents of ASB on the KinCraig (Bispham) estate and a number of quick fixes had been identified.

The Board was informed that the service review on Repairs had been delayed pending the outcome of the HQN report.

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

Mrs M Cornall, Director of Operations, provided an update on the significant developments since the last Board meeting.

Due to the age of the housing stock and deteriorating electrical wiring, the Board was informed that full electrical rewiring would be undertaken during the void period to minimise risk of disruption and safety.

She noted that a strategic review of garages would take place, with a focus on individual rents and the condition of the stock. Following a recent water leak through a garage roof, wider issues had been highlighted in relation to the financial liability of garages. The issue had been discussed at the Joint Asset Management Meeting with the Council who suggested BCH undertake a strategic review of garages due to their age, condition and the cost effectiveness. The Board acknowledged that all garage tenants had been contacted to advise them to insure the contents of their garages and this was now incorporated in the licence agreement.

In terms of future audit, it was highlighted that the Gas Service would submit itself for a review by the national regulator, Gas Safe, in December 2024. The audit would involve BCH and its contractor, Read and Errington, to ensure processes are fit for purpose.

The Board was informed that the second batch of stock condition surveys have been undertaken, with the third batch would commence at the end of the financial year.

Mrs Cornall notified the Board that following recent Ofsted inspections of Bispham and Argosy House, the young people homes were now registered. The official notification and certificate would be given to Ms Earnshaw, Company Secretary.

She went on to confirm that the Positive Transitions Service would no longer house Looked After Children under the age of 18 within the general needs housing stock owing to legislation meant that the service would require Ofsted registration. In the meantime, the Positive Transitions Service would continue working under current arrangements.

With regard to the Recovery Hub, she advised that the legal team had been instructed on behalf of BCH to prepare a lease for the 'Freedom Building' on Church Street. In addition, a property on Lostock Gardens, had been identified as an ideal 4th Recovery House.

Mrs Cornall requested permission from the Board for BCH to enter into a lease for this building providing that it's financially viable to do so.

The Board discussed the ASB cases on Grange Park and Mrs Cornall explained that lessons had been learnt from the allocation process and the housing of a large number of vulnerable tenants in one area had been a key issue. She confirmed that the ASB cases had now stabilised.

**The Board agreed:**

1. To delegate the negotiation of the Lostock Gardens lease to the Director of Operations.
2. To approve Damp and Mould policy

**14 MEMBER RELATIONS**

The Board was notified that the Shareholder Meeting had been delayed and would now

Blackpool Coastal Housing Limited  
Company Number:05868852

take place on 21 November 2024.

#### **15 BCH WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25**

The Board agreed to note the current work programme and acknowledged that the programme would be reviewed at the joint away day scheduled for the 3 of December 2024.

#### **16 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There were no other business received at this meeting.

#### **17 MEETING SCHEDULE 2025**

**The Board agreed:** To approved the proposed Board meeting dates for 2025, subject to any changes arising from the joint away day on 3 December 2024.

- 19 February 2025
- 16 April 2025
- 23 July 2025
- 8 October 2025
- 3 December 2025

#### **18 DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 11 DECEMBER 2024**

The Board agreed: To note the date of the next meeting as 11 December 2024, 5.00pm at Coastal House.

The meeting ended at 19:20pm

**Signed by the Chair**

.....  
**Councillor Neal Brookes**