

**GOVANHILL HOUSING ASSOCIATION
DRAFT MINUTES OF MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
WEDNESDAY 21st OCTOBER 2020 AT 6.30PM
ONLINE MEETING**

PRESENT: Annie Macfarlane
James White
Keith Kintrea
Barbara Robertson
Elizabeth Klein
Iain Doherty
Mujeeb Ur-Rehman

IN ATTENDANCE: John Quinn, Director
Alan McDonald, Head of Housing & Property Services
Shannon Watson, Head of Finance & IT (“HoFIT”)
Alison Kevan, Head of Corporate Services & HR

Jordan Henderson, Arneil Johnston
Liz Campbell, Minute Secretary

1. Apologies

John McLardie and Ghazala Hakeem

4. Rent Restructure Update – For Approval

It was agreed that this item should be moved up the agenda

HoFIT introduced this paper and explained that there were three possible options for how the rent restructure is phased in. The original plan was for this to begin in September 2020, but the implementation has been delayed due to the pandemic.

Jordan Henderson from Arneil Johnston gave a presentation on where we are with the rent restructure with a reminder of the stages that had been completed so far. The example used was that at present there are 221 different rent levels for 1-bedroom properties and the restructure aims to make the overall rent structure simpler, fairer and consistent. The rationale and methodology used for the restructure, tenant engagement and consultation events were highlighted in the presentation.

Each proposed model of implementation was discussed and the impacts of each were also shown. The main options for consideration were:

1. Big Bang Approach – Instant Implementation
2. 3 or 5 Year Phased Implementation Approach
3. Phased Increases with a £20 cap + Inflation
4. Freeze decreases until new rent met through inflation

The pros and cons of each of these proposals was given in slide by slide detail in the presentation and included the financial implications for the Association of each approach.

It was asked how this would impact new tenants and would they begin their tenancy on the new model rates? It was confirmed that this would be the case.

It was asked how many of the tenants who would face the largest increases were in receipt of benefits? The reply was that Arneil Johnstone were given a snapshot of information relevant at the time of their review and it would have probably already changed so a definitive number could not be given at the meeting.

It was also noted that there cannot be an assumption that benefits would automatically cover the increase rent costs. With many tenants moving onto Universal Credit and no guarantees that the Scottish Government would continue to mitigate the implementation of the bedroom tax it could not be assumed any increase would be covered by benefit claims.

The management team confirmed however that the welfare rights teams would work closely with the affected tenants to ensure that the benefits they accessed were maximised to reduce hardship for the tenants.

It was asked if the base figure used in the rent calculation model could be adjusted so that there was no difference to the Association's overall total income. Even though the increase to the rent roll in the current workings would only be 0.2% it is preferable that no difference at all to total income generated from rent is caused by the new rent setting model. **HoFIT agreed to review the rent setting model.**

It was asked how this information will be communicated to tenants and in particular to those who may be facing large rent increases. It was reported that this would be done well in advance of the changes being implemented. It was suggested that a working group including Management Committee members might be created to assist with the wording and ease of understanding of any communications. It was asked why the management team is recommending that the changes wait until September 2021 and why they cannot be implemented with the annual rent review timing. It was felt that January 2021 would just be too soon to write to tenants regarding these changes, especially those whose rents are increasing substantially to meet the rents paid by their neighbours, as we still don't know when the pandemic will be brought under control and the continuing levels of hardship being suffered by our tenants.

It was asked if kitchen standards would be updated as we go and it was confirmed that would be part of the asset strategy and would be a major piece of work to upgrade all kitchens so changes to rent levels would be done on an ad hoc basis.

At the next meeting the annual rent increase will be looked at as a separate issue. It was confirmed that this could mean there would be two separate rent increases taking place in one year.

Jordan was thanked for producing a clear and easy to follow report.

Jordan confirmed that the short-term plan would be to identify those who will be adversely affected by larger increases and ensure that they are given welfare advice and their income position is confirmed.

As it will be next year before the proposed rent restructure is implemented it was agreed that in particular the timing of the phased introduction commencing would be kept under review and brought back to committee before it is started.

It was agreed that the 5-year phased implementation would be the preferred option for the rent restructure and the revised date of implementation of September 2021 was also agreed.

Management Team also asked for approval for them to review the costs of services provided to tenants and how these are charged for in addition to rents, and to implement changes as appropriate at the same time as the Rent Restructure implementation. Approval was given for this.

Jordan left the meeting at 7.20pm.

2. Declarations of Interest

None

3. Minutes of the Management Committee meeting held on 2nd September 2020 and Special Management Committee Meeting held on 30th September 2020

It was asked if the minute of 2nd September 2020 could make clear that Mujeeb Ur-Rehman and Ghazala Hakeem were required to stand down as the rules stated that members should stand down after 9 years of continuous membership.

With this change in mind the minutes were proposed by Mujeeb Ur-Rehman and seconded by James White.

The minutes of the meeting held on 30th September were proposed by Keith Kintrea and seconded by James White.

5. Sale of Land Enquiries – Merrylee – For Approval

The Association has been approached regarding the purchase of a small piece of land between 10 and 12 Kinalty Road in Merrylee and received an enquiry regarding open space at the northern railway side of the communal car park in Muirskeith Crescent, also in Merrylee.

At second stage transfer from Glasgow Housing Association, these areas were not identified as being transferred to Govanhill Housing Association as part of the conveyancing. Information received from the Registers of Scotland advise otherwise.

Discussion took place about the disposal of the pieces of land if it is found to be in the Association's ownership. From photographs and google maps both pieces of land appear to be well maintained. It is not known what the development plans are from the initial enquiry that has been made. A member stated that they felt if land was to be sold then there should be a community benefit in doing so and if it is sold then the Association loses control over how it is developed. The consensus was that members would be against selling it and the areas should be retained as greenspaces for the benefit of the local residents.

Our legal advisors have been approached for guidance and assistance on this matter and it is hoped that an update can be provided at the next meeting. Once ownership is determined committee may be asked to make a formal decision on the two purchase enquiries that have been received.

6. Management Committee – Continuing Virtual Meetings – For Information

This is an update from an issue raised at Finance & General Purposes meeting. The management team are looking at several issues around the platform used for virtual meetings and papers.

There are cost implications around changing subscriptions, but one possibility is using Microsoft Teams. Another possibility is the use of tablets that would allow notes to be written onto the papers. Head of Finance and IT stated that the software was easy to use.

A member stated that it was useful to speak to staff from the IT department. It was reported that the Committee members survey is almost complete.

A number of members volunteered to try the new tablets and software. HoFIT will get the tablets out to members and arrange a time with them for training on its use.

There is a good deal available on a SIM and smartphone for MC members and a trial of that kind of system may also be undertaken.

It was asked if staff could be thanked for their work on this and that it was pleasing to see action being taken on the points raised.

7. Covid-19 Update – Christmas and New Year Opening

The management team have been looking at current restrictions and are also preparing for service provision over the winter months.

Committee are asked to consider closing Samaritan House for two days between Christmas and New Year to reduce the risk of transmission of Covid-19 and maintain an emergency service provision only.

Staff have been asked to use up their annual leave and some do not have any holidays left for these additional days. It is suggested that staff be given an additional two days leave in recognition of their hard work, but they would be required to take it at this period. This would mean that everyone is being treated the same whether they celebrate Christmas and whether they have been furloughed.

Approval was given to grant 30th and 31st December as additional leave days to all staff for this year.

8. Minutes of Sub-Committees – For Information

Audit & Risk meeting held on 19th August 2020

F & GP meeting held on 26th August 2020

Housing Services meeting held on 26th August 2020

Special GCDT meeting held on 2nd September 2020

SGM meeting held on 24th September 2020

AGM held on 24th September 2020

The minutes from these meetings were noted.

9. Reports From Other Organisations – For Information

Employers in Voluntary Housing (EVH)

Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations (GWSF)

SHARE

Nothing to report

10. Documents for Formal Execution

None

11. Correspondence – For Information

The Letter received from Kevin Stewart, Housing Minister will be discussed at Housing Sub Committee first.

EVH are negotiating pay increases with Unions and they negotiate on Association's behalf.

Further information on that will be circulated when it becomes available.

12 A.O.C.B

Raffle from AGM

The raffle was drawn in reverse order and the winners were:

3rd Frank Meagher
2nd Angus Campbell
1st Agnes Kinsella

Head of Housing & Property Services reported that negotiations are still taking place with Glasgow City Council regarding funding for South West Govanhill works. **Further updates will be provided when available.**

MEARS have been in contact to let the Association know that they have taken ownership of the former James Shields Centre and will be using it to house Asylum seekers. It was asked if this impacted on the furnished flats provided by the association, but the reply was that it did not affect that.

A member raised an issue that he had while trying to get a new back door key. They also witnessed some confusion of other tenants also trying to access the office.

It was explained that a time to collect the key should have been confirmed and access was limited and by appointment only. We have tenants approaching the office despite the information given and signage displayed. It was reported that a newsletter was sent out last week and this reaffirms how to get in touch and lists Housing Officer direct dial numbers for information. It was reported that even in normal circumstances the Association has a much higher footfall of customers than other associations.

The Head of Development has submitted a formal application to retire in 6 months' time. This will allow time for a formal handover to take place. The consultant currently working in the department will finish his contract mid-December.

A meeting has been arranged with Scottish Government regarding South West Govanhill funding and Annie Macfarlane will be in attendance.

13. Appeal Against Refusal for Rent Rebate

Discussed at separate meeting at 6pm 21st October 2020

14. Pensions Consultation

Head of Housing & Property Services and the Director left the meeting at 8.15pm

Head of Corporate Services gave an overview of the paper which was largely a copy of the previous paper when Committee made their original decision. The following points were highlighted:

- 14.4 – The results of the EVH formal consultation is new information and contains overall responses and comments made. A comment about disparity between staff who had transferred to Govanhill from Glasgow Housing Association was made and is acknowledged. Discussions will take place with those staff to try to agree a way forward.
- A comment was made on the change to disability cover. It is correct. New scheme cover would not go as far as what is currently offered but is all that is available
- The comment regarding contribution rates would be addressed over the next 3 years
- A Salary sacrifice scheme could sit alongside the new scheme
- Formal notice is required to be given to staff of any changes. If staff were to raise a formal grievance regarding this the process of pension change would be halted until the grievance was resolved

James White, Barbara Robertson and Wilma Logan volunteered to be part of the panel if appeals were raised.

There were no questions raised so Head of Corporate Services & HR and Head of Finance and IT left the meeting at 8.20pm before the matter was discussed by members.

Discussion took place and it was stated that it appeared most staff seemed to accept that change was needed.

Committee agreed that pension provision for all staff should be moved to the DC scheme.

Within the sector the standard transitional relief given in this situation is that the employer would pay the employees' defined pension contributions for a set period. This has traditionally been for a maximum of three years (or until a staff member's employment comes to an end, whichever is earlier) and is linked to the period of time for which an employee has been a member of the final salary scheme. This is not a situation that is unique to the Association and is a reasonable and fair arrangement.

This would mean that the Association would be paying 13.45% of salaries instead of 12.6% as the employer contribution. It was emphasised that, if they wish to, the employee can still make their own contributions during this period. This gives parity to what was offered to staff of GCDT when they had to move from the DB pension scheme.

A salary sacrifice scheme should be explained/offered so staff can have that alongside the DC scheme.

Permission was given for Head of CS&HR and Head of Finance & IT to prepare communication to staff regarding this.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 18th November 2020 at 6.30pm

The meeting closed at 8.30pm