

MINUTES OF THE **VIRTUAL** MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT OF WHITEINCH AND SCOTSTOUN HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD HELD AT 6.15PM ON WEDNESDAY 31st MARCH 2021

Present : C Watson (Chairperson)
C Ennemoser
L Stevenson
B MacDonald
R Hunter
L Mimmagh
A Bruce

In attendance : I Morrison Chief Executive
K Szulc HR & Support Services Officer (Minutes)
A Reid Financial Services Manager
J Gordon Property Services Manager
K McQueen Deputy Chief Executive
J Calderwood Housing Manager

1. **APOLOGIES**

D Keaveney, R Carrigan and S Leighton who is on a leave of absence.

2. **CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS/COMMITTEE – STAFF NEWS**

The office will be closing at 3pm on Friday 9th April 2021 for an Easter Quiz for staff to attend.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

4. **MINUTES OF MEETING OF 24th FEBRUARY 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of 24th February 2021 were approved by R Hunter and seconded by L Stevenson.

5. **MATTERS ARISING**

The Deputy Chief Executive (DCE) said that in relation to the bulk uplift consultation with owners there were no closes with majority to opt out except for the houses in Edzell and on that basis we would be proceeding with the proposal. One member of staff has been appointed and one was due to be appointed by WSES, a new van has been purchased and the service should commence next week. A Committee Member asked if there had been a good response and the DCE said yes, that the default position had been yes and although there had been some objections, most respondents thought it was a great idea while the no's had largely been on principle.

In relation to salary negotiations for WSHA staff the union agreed to 0.8%, as did employers. The DCE said that the Staffing Sub-Committee had agreed to the recruitment programme for Jim Calderwood, Housing Manager's replacement following the announcement of his retiral. The adverts would be placed over the next few weeks with a view to a replacement coming on board in late-June.

6. **MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

None (Staffing Subcommittee held back for later meeting).

7. **FINANCIAL PROJECTIONS**

Members were advised that, unfortunately, during the copying of papers some pages had been omitted. In apologising for this oversight, Committee were asked to note that under normal circumstances, with staff operating from the Office rather than remotely, it is likely that this would have been picked up earlier. Members accepted the apology and with all but one available for the following Wednesday, 7th April, it was agreed that full papers be distributed and the budget considered then.

8. **POLICY REVIEW: COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE**

The Chief Executive (CE) referred to the report and accompanying policy booklet apologising for its size. This was because it had to follow the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman's (SPSO) Model with only minimal changes allowed. Since the SPSO produced the 2012 model, they have tried to revise it so that all public organisations in Scotland have the same approach to dealing with complaints. The Customer Facing Guide, section 5, summarises the approach well and can be largely read as the Policy. There are not many significant changes in the main, but there is more emphasis on front line resolution (included in the original model this is when a complaint is handled immediately to the complainer's satisfaction). However, the CE suggested that it would be better to record these as complaints, which would allow possible trends to be identified and lessons learned.

The new model stresses that contractors should be made aware of our complaints handling process and we should know theirs too but this is something we already do. Perhaps the major impact of the new model is in highlighting that more of an emphasis needs to be placed on outcomes, being more proactive via newsletters and the website, as well as in reporting to Committee A Committee Member said that it would be good to find out what type of complaints we get and if there is anything we can do to pre-empt issues, tying in with the newsletter, e.g. having a "you said" and "what we did" section. The DCE said that having a complaints tab on the new website had benefitted us and we can clearly see the complaint and how to deal with it appropriately, allowing tenants to complain more easily. The CE said that if complaints do not produce trends, there is little we can do, while sometimes mistakes are down to simple human error. We can though learn from repeated or similar complaints. In line with the recent internal audit exercise more training will take place on the back of this new policy. The Internal Auditor suggested we focus complaints through the front desk, but we are not proposing that, it is not an instantaneous task for CSA's to be able to do that, they need other people's input and they have other duties such as answering the phones etc. And a benefit of directing the complaint to the right person/department is that they can handle the front line resolution as they take care of the issue itself. There were no further questions and the Committee were happy to adopt the policy in the new format.

9. **FORMER TENANT ARREARS: PROPOSED WRITE-OFFS**

The Housing Manager (HM) said that the quarterly report showed final write-offs for this year of £8,724. Committee had approved a budget of £74k last May for the annual write off and this request brought the overall total to £68,995 (i.e. within the provision) The Committee approved this.

10. **CURRENT LEASES**

The HM said that Lease Policy was under review and that this stated that Committee should receive an annual update on current leases but that this had not taken place in recent years, following a review of the volume of Committee papers. To be consistent with policy an annual report on leases should be re-introduced, starting with the meeting tonight. The report gave an overview of current leases, including the number of individual agreements, properties and agencies involved. Initial lease periods were

generally for between 12 and 18 months but could automatically renew on an annual basis if both parties were agreeable. A Committee Member asked if a tenancy could be given to a responsible tenant of a lessee. The HM said that this was generally not the case other than in relation to accommodation leased to Glasgow City Council (GCC) as temporary furnished flats for homeless people. A residency can flip from lease to tenancy if the landlord is agreeable to this usually with a further leased property being made available to GCC. Generally, the process is that after a period in temporary furnished accommodation, the person is referred to an RSL for a permanent let, the temporary furnished accommodation then being available to the Council for another homeless household. It was then asked if we had any convertible properties now. The HM said that we had some, but none so far have been converted and that we do not have to if we do not want to. The people living in leased properties generally stay with the agencies that support them and that is why these leases are made available to the specialist support agencies concerned. The same Committee Member said that he was keen to go down the route of changing a leased property to a permanent tenancy as it ties in with the strategy of providing homeless accommodation, especially where there is sustained length of temporary accommodation and no ASB issues. He asked how it had helped with the homeless policy of allocating 90% homeless to properties. The HM said that we have always housed homeless in permanent lets and historically we have been willing to offer more than the Council could supply. We have been advised that it is likely that all Glasgow RSLs will be asked to offer 60% of lets to homeless referrals this year, but the HM confirmed that we missed the 40% target in previous years, as often we did not get quality referrals from Glasgow City Council.

11. **UPDATE ON SUSPENDED HOUSING APPLICATIONS**

The HM said that at the 16th December 2020 meeting, it had been agreed that he would introduce a report on suspended applicants to be reported quarterly. Committee were given an update of the number of suspensions, reasons why, and a summary as at 31/12 to keep in line with the KPI reports. There were 37 applicants suspended as at 31/12/20. 23 of these for arrears or other tenancy debt with 14 being suspended for other reasons. This includes ASB on previous tenancies and refusal of two reasonable offers within 12 months (which leads to a six month suspension, followed by re-interview and clarity on what they want for future offers). We have written to the suspended applicants to ask if they still want to be on a list but many did not respond and have therefore been removed, so the current number of suspensions is sitting at 4. The Chair asked if the letter to the suspended applications goes to caseworkers or individuals. The HM said that not all applications have support needs, so we correspond directly with the applicant. In order for them to be put back on the list for an arrears suspension, they need to show reasonable repayments towards arrears for three months. When we get a tenancy reference which shows debt with no arrangement in place, we would suspend and inform the applicant and these are reviewed annually. We may for example cancel an application because we get no response, then they make contact to say they did not receive any correspondence and we are able to reactivate their application as we keep records. The Chair asked if the suspensions are for six months.

The HM said that six-month suspension is in relation to refusal of two reasonable house offers. We then re-interview to clarify what exactly they want accommodation-wise and what they need to change in their application to save us wasting time in offering more accommodation that is inappropriate. It is a way of streamlining the process so that the offers are made to reflect who wants and needs an available property.

12. **AOB**

Ian Morrison said that he had received correspondence from the Regulator (embargoed until today) showing us on the lowest point of engagement and that they do not need anything more than normal regulatory returns. The engagement plan is therefore as

before; the list would be published by the Regulator tomorrow.

Committee were reminded that because of the Money & Debt Advice service offered by the Association, we were required to be registered with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). We have now been advised that they need specific details from Committee Members if we are to be able to continue with these services. This includes either a passport or National Insurance Number and date of birth and time on the Committee (the latter being information already provide for other regulatory needs). Committee was advised that this requirement, due by next week, has only been realised; it is considered that the FCA have not adequately publicised this, as we are aware that with many other similar organisations are also just finding out. And efforts to seek advice from the FCA has shown them not to be very helpful.

Members then discussed this matter and in answer to questions were informed that this was to be an annual submission and it was currently unclear as to what would happen if all the data was not provided (although the broad understanding is that we would not be able to offer the advice service). Some Members then expressed some concern about providing these details with one saying that while uncomfortable they would, if it were needed. It was agreed that to try to upload the return even without full data while we would ask members what they could provide. In addition, we would also try to find out more detail from the FCA.

13. **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that HRSSO would contact Committee Members to agree Budget Meeting for item 7. (This was subsequently scheduled for 6.30pm on Wednesday 7th April 2021.)