



**Minutes of Berneslai Homes Public Board held 23rd February 2023 at 4.00pm**  
**Virtual Meeting**

**Present:**

- Sinead Butters - Chair
- Richard Fryer - Board Member
- Adam Hutchinson - Board Member
- Mark Johnson - Board Member
- Councillor Kevin Osborne - Board Member
- Adriana Rustemi - Board Member
- Eric Smith - Board Member
- Jo Sugden - Board Member
- Councillor Sarah Tattersall - Board Member
- Mahara Haque - Co-optee of Customer Services Committee (Board observer)

**In attendance**

- Dave Fullen - Executive Director, Customer & Estate Services
- Arturo Gulla - Executive Director, Property Services
- Kulvinder Sihota - Interim Executive Director, Corporate Services
- Lee Winterbottom - Managing Director Construction Services
- Kathy McArdle - Service Director Regeneration & Culture (BMBC)
- Sam Roebuck - Head of Governance and Strategy and Company Secretary

	ACTION
<p><b><u>Item 1 – Apologies</u></b></p> <p>Amanda Garrard - CEO</p>	
<p><b><u>Item 2 – Declarations of Interest</u></b></p> <p>Interest declared by AR in relation to Item 4 – Governance Update.</p>	
<p><b><u>Item 3 – CEO Presentation</u></b></p> <p>DF summarised the headlines from a national, local and Berneslai Homes perspective. Board noted the focus on the regulatory journey and publicity. The work around consumer standards was also highlighted and the Better Social Housing Review. Board felt it would be useful if a report could be</p>	

<p>brought to a future meeting or alternatively a strategic session be arranged to debate the position BH wish to take on the recommendations.</p> <p>From a local perspective DF was pleased to report that in recent announcements Barnsley has been awarded £10M of levelling up funding. He advised of the agreement made at today's full Council meeting to the 6.5% rent increase – this is positive news in relation to the investment it will enable to be brought in i.e. £30M for EPCC works, benefitting both the stock and tenants. Board were advised of the significant work undertaken on the cost of living and hardship fund. In January alone £100K was awarded to those tenants worst affected and as part of the budget settlement with the Council it has been agreed that this fund will be extended up to £500K for the coming year.</p> <p>Discussion followed on potential implications/concerns of a 6.5% rent increase. DF advised that BH have been working with the Council on budget modelling. To stand still 5.5% was required to protect jobs and services at the current level. BH acknowledge that the Council may set challenging efficiency targets, but the additional 1% will enable borrowing, helping lever in additional investment.</p> <p>Board was assured that measures have also been put in place as part of the restructure to address the additional support that tenants will need as a result of the increase.</p> <p>The activities from a BH perspective were noted. Discussion followed on this around Berneslai Homes approach towards the impact inflation has on costs of construction materials and the potential shortage of supplies. The work BH has undertaken was outlined, including that on the zero-based budget, Repairs First, medium term planning etc. Work will continue to take place with Construction Services to maximise returns from both a financial and staffing perspective. CS are in a good a position as they possibly can be, engaged in the procurement framework, however, they do acknowledge the challenges.</p> <p>AGu stressed the importance of making sure data collection is correct and that inspections are planned properly. Good partnership arrangements are in place, and all are aware of what is coming up to ensure procurement takes place accordingly.</p> <p>Board referred to social media, in relation to tenants using this to air their grievances and how BH mitigate. DF advised that in these instances the Customer Services Team monitor accounts and if any negativity is seen will reach out to that person, requesting them to send a direct message. BH will then follow through offline on a one-to-one basis.</p> <p>The priorities were noted.</p> <p>Board was informed that the staff conference has been pushed back to November</p>	<p>DF/AGa</p>
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<p><b>Resolved</b></p> <p><b>Board received the update</b></p>	
<p><b><u>Item 4 – Governance Update</u></b></p> <p>SR presented the report and highlighted the key areas around succession planning, the extension of the term of office for AR, the rotation of new tenant board members and the appointment of trainee board members etc.</p> <p>The skills matrix and the Board training and development plan have been reviewed as has the BMBC role profile which the Council are happy for Board to approve.</p> <p>Board noted that RF is working with the Head of Governance and Strategy on succession/forward planning with regard to recruitment, the skills matrix and any areas for development, as Chair of Remuneration Committee, to ensure visibility is maintained</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board approved the 12-month term of office extension for Adriana Rustemi.</li> <li>• Board approved the recruitment of a trainee tenant board member to commence in March 24 to succeed Adriana Rustemi in September 2024.</li> <li>• Board approved the refreshed skills matrix following the recent pilot in 2022 and note the resulting balance of skills across the board.</li> <li>• Board Approved the refreshed BMBC Role Profile.</li> <li>• Board approved the 2023 Board Development plan.</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Item 5 – Board Self Evaluation</u></b></p> <p>SR presented the report and outlined the key areas. The outcome of the evaluation is positive, giving a helpful picture of how Board is performing. Responses reflect the consensus that Board recognise the improvements made. The evaluation has identified further areas for development which have been added to the Action Plan, with a couple of areas also being picked up in the development plan. SR took the opportunity to thank Board for their contribution</p> <p>Board noted the comments in relation to the strategic/operational focus during meetings. It is felt that the ALMO is generally recognised as an operational organisation and it is therefore inevitable that discussion will sometimes slip into operational areas and usually relates to the need of ensuring quality services are maintained.</p>	

<p>Clarification was provided on Section 1.3 which relates to the responsibility/relationship between BH and BMBC. A workshop has been arranged in March to discuss this. BMBC are involved. A further session is taking place in May specifically to look at the roles and responsibilities of Board members. KMcA suggested involving the Council's consultant who understands the clienting role.</p> <p>Board feel thought should be given on how to capture views of other stakeholders, including the thoughts of the Executive Team. Further discussion to take place between Chair and Head of Governance.</p> <p>Key areas on the action plan are around hearing the customer voice, ensuring delegations are correct, and roles and responsibilities.</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Board discussed and approved the combined evaluation of the Board self-assessment.</b></li> <li>2. <b>Board approved the action plan to strengthen the Board governance arrangements</b></li> <li>3. <b>Board will identify any further areas where the Governance Team can support Board members to further develop and embed our governance arrangements</b></li> </ol>	SB/SR
<p><b><u>Item 6 – BH Annual Investment Strategy</u></b></p> <p>KS presented the report which was considered in detail by Audit Committee in January 2023. The report sets out the annual investment strategy and policy statement which is managed by BMBC. Investments priorities are based on security, liquidity and yield. KS confirmed this low-risk approach aligns with the risk appetite.</p> <p><b>Resolved</b></p> <p><b>Board approved:-</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Investment Strategy.</b></li> <li>• <b>The investment limits set out in paragraph 3.4.</b></li> <li>• <b>The instruments list set out a paragraphs 3.9</b></li> <li>• <b>The scheme of delegation outlined in Appendix A and the Policy Statement outlined in Appendix B</b></li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Item 7 – Audit Committee Annual Report</u></b></p> <p>AH presented the report which provides an annual overview of the activities undertaken by Audit and Risk Committee and provided assurance on the governance arrangements in place. He took the opportunity to thank officers and attendees for their support and commitment throughout the year which is much appreciated.</p>	

<p>Focus areas for 2023 were highlighted and detailed within Section 7 of the report.</p> <p>It was noted that the report was later than usual due to the new Chair handover and the change in the committee members.</p> <p>Board requested that future IA reports include a high-level summary of IA assurances with rag ratings attached.</p> <p>KMcA referred to the briefing session arranged for the 8<sup>th</sup> March where budget setting responsibility with regard to the HRA, Capital Programme, Management Fee, PRIP contract and relationships etc will be discussed and whether the Council's Section 151 officer was involved. KS confirmed that Neil Copley will be joining the session to provide additional assurance to Board.</p> <p><u>Post Meeting Note</u> The briefing session on the 8<sup>th</sup> March has been rearranged to take place on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 2023</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b> <b>Board approved the report, including the Terms of Reference, as recommended by Audit Committee on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2023.</b></p>	SR
<p><b><u>Item 8 – Repairs First Update</u></b></p> <p>KS provided an update since the last Board meeting in December.</p> <p>Progress has been made on the development of phase 1 – testing and training is well under way.</p> <p>Some risk areas have been identified on Job Manager, the majority are low/medium risk and these issues have been resolved. However, there is 1 high risk area that has not been resolved to date. This is around the amber, purple and asbestos warning flags. Upgrades to the system have resulted in the system not pulling the flags across through the modules. BH are working with the supplier on a resolution, including a work-around solution to reduce the risk level. The outcome of whether this can be fixed will not be known until the 10<sup>th</sup> March and a decision will then be taken. Due to the significance of this risk to staff, there is the potential that that the system is piloted on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April, restricting it to areas where risk is low i.e voids and gas certificate work. Daily project meetings are now taking place to monitor the situation and to make a final decision regarding the go live of April.</p> <p>The financial impact was outlined – minimum cost in relation to the project team. There could be potential costs with regard to One Consulting who provide project management support. However, they have already commenced work on Phase 2, if there is a delay BH will request them to pick up both Phase 1 and 2 together, hopefully the increase in costs would therefore not be significant.</p>	

<p>LW outlined the impact on efficiencies in relation to the delay of DRS. However, this would be offset by the efficiencies created on delivering void works. The risk would be minimised on the flags. Originally productivity efficiencies would have been gained in earlier months, increasing job numbers and being less reliant on sub-contractors/agency. Nevertheless, staff safety is a paramount. The delay may also have an impact on the 10% value for money target, but until the scale of the problem is known is unable to quantify.</p> <p>Board expressed their concern in this development. They referred to their challenges to the Executive Team when delays have occurred. However, they stressed that the priority is to ensure staff are not put at any risk. They are keen to see the launch but support the Executive in ensuring the system is right before this launch takes place. They also felt care needs to be taken on any work-around solutions. They also acknowledged the complexity in a development such as this. They felt from a staff perspective it is important they be kept positive through the journey. KS assured Board this would continue. From the start of the project users from service areas have been involved, some have been trained as super-users and will drive the system forward, developing training guides etc. She also advised Board of the workshops that have taken place, leadership updates, bulletins etc. Discussions continue to take place with relevant teams on a regular basis. The Comms Team are also heavily involved.</p> <p><b>Resolved:-</b></p> <p><b>Board noted the update.</b></p>	
<p><b><u>Item 9 – Resource Information Papers</u></b></p>	
<p><u>Item 9.1 – Q3 Performance Report</u></p> <p>MH Chair of Customer Services Committee advised Board that at the last Committee meeting in February they discussed complaints and spent a considerable amount of time on the deep dive into this, which included looking at the journey map. They also discussed the issue of damp and mould and felt assured that comprehensive works are taking place to address the backlog. The Committee were concerned about performance monitoring in relation to the red flags around tenants’ satisfaction and they are monitoring this. There was a considerable amount of healthy challenge made by the Committee.</p> <p>DF summarised the situation on complaints – this year they have increased by 110% in comparison to last year. However, a further comparison in relation to HouseMark shows that ALMOs/LAs are averaging an 180% increase. BH acknowledge that Stage 1 and 2 response time could improve and although the report shows Stage 1s at 68%, the average response time in days is 11. The majority of complaints relate to held back repairs, damp and mould and repairs and maintenance issues. Therefore, an additional team member has been allocated to this service area which hopefully will result in improvements. The budget approved by the Council and the extra</p>	

<p>resources should result in BH making inroads to tackle the backlog. BH are satisfied that the policies and procedures comply with the Ombudsman Code. Mandatory refresher training is also underway for all staff on complaints handling and the culture of putting the customer first.</p> <p>Board were interested in the number of damp and mould complaints escalated to the Ombudsman and the reputational effect this could have on the organisation. DF confirmed that some of those escalated are in relation to damp and mould. The main risk is in relation to the time take to resolve, which may result in a negative outcome. BH are not aware of any having severe detrimental health impacts.</p> <p>Board requested a detailed report on damp and mould be presented to the next Board. They also requested that in future performance reports Ombudsman information be included i.e. how many cases, determination etc. It was agreed future reports to CSC will cover all 'Your Comments Count' information and this will be brought into Board.</p> <p>KMcA suggested undertaking a deep dive into all referrals to the Ombudsman as both BH and BMBC could be affected reputationally with any relating to communication and the contact centre, damp/mould/repairs. This would provide a good understanding of the issues over the past year.</p> <p>Board expressed their concern on what they are seeing, not only on the time taken to respond to complaints, but also on the performance of the Contact Centre with regard to the difficulties customers are experiencing in trying to get in touch.</p> <p>KMcA assured Board that customers are able to contact Berneslai Homes/BMBC. She also referred to the first quarter contact centre performance, where significant improvements had been seen. Unfortunately, since then the contact centre has had major changes, with staff having to be recruited, retrained etc which has resulting in the decrease in performance. DF concurred with this. He advised that the trajectory from January to February had improved, the general repairs line is now averaging 2.28 minutes. Improvements have also been seen in the grade of service between Q3 and January and it is hoped this will continue. Board were asked to note that one third of repair calls are chase ups. The Repairs First system will be fundamental in improving self-service and tracking repairs, so that calls are not required. A Board member fed back negative comments on her recent personal experience of the contact centre and does not feel assured that the training is currently having any impact. KMCA felt it does not suffice to pass messages on, it does not provide the customer with reassurance. She advised that she would discuss this feedback with the responsible officer.</p> <p><b>Resolved</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Board considered and commented on the performance of the organisation during the third quarter of the financial year.</b></li> <li><b>2. Board confirmed they were satisfied that where performance targets have not been achieved that the issues causing this are clear and</b></li> </ol>	<p>AGu DF</p> <p>DF</p> <p>KMcA</p>
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<p>that there are adequate controls and actions in place to address the reasons for this.</p> <p><b>3 Board should identify any areas where they feel as though more detailed consideration is required by Customer Services Committee - requested deep dive into all referrals to the Ombudsman</b></p>	DF
<p><u>Item 9.2 – Quarterly Risk Update</u></p> <p>A suggestion was made by Board to introduce rag rating when comparisons are made against the Sector Risk profile as any concerns are unclear.</p> <p><b><u>Resolved</u></b></p> <p><b>1 Board review and commented on the quarterly Risk Update.</b>  <b>2. Board reviewed the Strategic Risks</b>  <b>3. Board reviewed and comment on the RSH Sector Risk Profile Self-Assessment carried out by BH.</b></p>	SR
<p><u>Item 9.3 – VFM Annual Report</u></p> <p>Board requested information on Berneslai Homes’ plans to deliver against the management fee target set by BMBC. Board requested confirmation of how this is achieved and whether high level efficiencies. This will be covered in the 22/23 value for money report to Board.</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b></p> <p>Board noted the report</p>	KS
<p><u>Item 9.4 – Gender Pay Gap</u></p> <p><b><u>Resolved</u></b></p> <p><b>Board noted the Gender Pay Gap figures for 2022 and the actions contained within Section 12.</b></p>	