



Minutes of Berneslai Homes Board held 30th July 2026
4.00 p.m. Gateway Plaza

Present:

Ken Taylor (KT)	-	Chair
Richard Fryer (RF)	-	Board Member
Adam Hutchinson (AH)	-	Board Member
Gez Morrall (GM)	-	Board Member
George Paterson (GP)	-	Board Member
Cllr Neil Young (NY)	-	Board Member
Jo Sugden (JS)	-	Board Member

In attendance

Steve Feast (SF)	-	CEO
Dave Fullen (DF)	-	Executive Director, Customer & Estate Services
Russell Thompson (RTh)	-	Interim Executive Director, Property Services
Sam Roebuck (SR)	-	Head of Strategy, Governance & IT
Paul Clifford (PC)	-	Service Director BMBC

<u>Item 1 – Apologies</u>	
Councillor Jayne Hulme (JH)	
<u>Item 2 – Declarations of Interest</u>	
None were declared.	
<u>Item 3 – Tenants Voice – Independent Living</u>	
Positive video shared reflecting the role of independent living schemes and positive impact on individuals and communities.	
<u>Item 4 – CEO Update</u>	
SF presented the CEO update, highlighting significant activity across the sector and noting the positive profile and support being given to social housing, by the new Prime Minister.	

The Board noted that the organisation is now two years away from inspection and that the regulatory regime continues to evolve. Staff remain focused on preparation and ensuring the organisation is well placed to respond to future requirements. Positive progress was reported in relation to damp, mould and condensation, with improvements gaining traction. There is now confidence that 100% compliance can be achieved by the end of August 2026. Work is also progressing on Phases 2 and 3 of Awaab's Law. An update was provided on the Green Project. Although the process has been challenging, recent intervention has been positive, and the position is now on a more constructive trajectory. Discussions have continued regarding the benefits of the proposals, balanced against Trade Union views. Feedback is now positive and there is confidence that agreement can be reached. A staff survey/ballot will be undertaken to seek the views of the whole workforce, with the majority view informing the direction of travel. It was also noted that the 2025/26 pay increase has not yet been agreed, which continues to impact staff. The majority of affected members are represented by Unite, with some represented by Unison. It was noted that a small number of individuals will be disadvantaged in future as a result of pay protection arrangements, while others will either be maintained or improved. The Board requested that thanks be passed on to the relevant team for the progress made. RF welcomed the positive update and emphasised the importance of this group of colleagues to organisational performance. KT stressed the need to maintain positive engagement, improve longer-term relationships and support the wider organisational culture shift. Thanks were extended to SR, DF and RTh for their support, and to SF for his open approach and leadership during a challenging period. The Board resolved that: the update was noted.	
<u>Item 5 – Quarterly Risk Update</u> SR presented the report which had been considered by the Audit and Risk Committee. Committee feedback was noted and the risk scoring will be refined and work completed to distinguish existing controls and new actions. The report identifies 15 strategic risks, the majority of which are rated no higher than amber, providing assurance that risks are being managed effectively. There are no contingency liabilities to report.	

JS confirmed the detailed discussion that had taken place at the Audit and Risk committee. They welcome the changes and also noted that the assurance work would be beneficial. Thanks were extended to the team. RF referred to the Appendix 1 action relating to organisational culture and databased decision making, requesting clarification. SF explained that this relates to ensuring data sets are available to support sound decisions, rather than relying on assumptions. This includes measuring outcomes and strengthening accountability and responsibility. Further work will be undertaken at the Board Away Day to define the desired organisational culture. Board resolved that: 1. The Risk Management Quarterly Update, including the comments and scrutiny provided by Audit & Risk Committee be endorsed; and 2. the Strategic Risks and organisation's key risk exposures were reviewed.	
<u>Item 6 – Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report</u> AH confirmed that the Audit and Risk Committee has delivered on the remit of the Terms of Reference. He highlighted recent membership changes, including the appointment of a Cooptee as a new Independent Committee Member. Looking ahead, the Committee will proactively focus on identified areas for development. AH also expressed his commitment to supporting the development of the risk management suite and framework, alongside working on a DTP-inspired revision of the Committee's work programme. The Chair commented that it was an excellent report and recognised the vital work undertaken by the Committee. He praised AH's leadership as Chair, noting the assurance provided to the Board, and thanked him for his contribution. Board resolved that: 1. the Audit and Risk Committee Annual report 2025-26, providing assurance the Committee is fulfilling its remit be approved.	
<u>Item 7 – Annual Self Assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) Complaint Handling Code</u> DF presented the report and provided background information. This is an annual regulatory requirement that must be submitted to the HOS by the Council by 30 September. Board noted that the report does not constitute complaint analysis. Once approved, it will be published on the website.	

Board noted that Berneslai Homes is fully compliant with the Code. Section 4.3 identifies areas for improvement, which are already being progressed. Since the report was written, the Ombudsman has been in contact to verify our annual maladministration data score of 35.1% for last year, compared with 60% the previous year, representing a significant improvement. RF outlined the process for final sign-off. He is currently the interim Board Member Responsible for Complaints and will meet with the Council's Cabinet Member Responsible for Complaints before preparing a response, which will need to be fed back into the process. RF considered the report to be strong, demonstrating good practice and full compliance, with clear supporting evidence. He also acknowledged the excellent maladministration result. It would be beneficial for SF/Chair to meet with the portfolio holder. PC to look into arranging. Board resolved that : 1. the draft self-assessment be approved and delegate authority be given to the Executive Director of Customer and Estate Services to make final amendments and sign off ahead of BMBC's final approval; 2. the Board Complaint Champion will meet with the Council's Member Responsible for Complaints and will draft their response to the self-assessment by 11th September 2026.	Service Director BMBC
<u>Item 8 – Disrepair Annual Report 2025/26</u> RT presented the report and apologised for an error in Table 5 relating to settlements paid since 2020, which should be £1.3M. The meeting noted that disrepair remains a significant and complex area of work, with ongoing financial exposure (£1.3M) up to the end of 2025/26, highlighting that ongoing resources are required. Board noted that some claims had been successfully defended, although a small number of historic closed cases had been reopened, resulting in additional costs. Work is underway to strengthen processes; improve learning and ensure the organisation is better positioned to manage and defend claims where appropriate. RF asked how learning from claims where liability had been found was being applied, and whether the organisation was being sufficiently robust in resisting and defending claims where it had legitimate grounds to do so. It was confirmed that learning is being applied through improved processes and closer working with Council colleagues, Legal and Finance. Members were advised that the approach is becoming more	

coordinated and robust, although this remains an ongoing learning process. JS expressed concern of the level of financial risk and questioned if there was sufficient oversight, stressing the importance of assurances being in place to demonstrate delivery. It was acknowledged that the current position provides greater transparency on the scale of the issue and the work required to address historic matters. AH suggested obtaining benchmarking information to help the Board understand the organisation's position, compared with others. It was agreed that benchmarking would be helpful, where available. AH queried the extent to which processes are supported by systems and workflow automation. It was confirmed that current arrangements remain largely manual, although improvements are being considered. The immediate focus is on damp and mould with disrepair process improvements expected to follow. NY asked whether claims patterns could be identified by area or property type and whether damp and mould cases were likely to increase future disrepair claims. Members noted that damp and mould could accelerate claims and that better use of data, including property archetypes and stock condition information would be important in identifying risk and targeting preventative action. RT reported on the work taking place jointly with the Council on the 5-year programme looking at data to support early intervention and inform future investment and repairs planning. GP noted that the issues are linked to delays in completing work and highlighted the need for a repairs service fit for purpose and appropriately resourced. Members acknowledged the pressures being managed and the importance of having strong processes in place to defend and review claims effectively. RTh referred to a number of action plans in place, including damp and mould, voids, disrepair. These are being consolidated into a single plan which will be brought back to the next Board meeting and will set out the issues identified, timescales, resource considerations and assurance arrangements. GM referred to the Green Project and discussion followed on culture change and the need to avoid an 'us and them' approach. The Board emphasised that the desired culture must be embedded throughout the organisation. GP acknowledged the work undertaken by RTh and team on the Green Project and noted that the challenges being faced are not unique to Berneslai Homes. Members noted the risk of momentum and knowledge being lost following RTh's departure.	ED PS
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KT requested monthly updates be provided on Empty Homes, Awaab's Law and Disrepair, with oversight from GP and relevant officers. He stressed the importance of reducing figures and ensuring delivery of the action plan in practice. Board resolved that: 1. the 2025/26 year-end position, including the live caseload, financial exposure and projected 2026/27 budget pressure be agreed; 2. the governance, reporting and cross-service working has strengthened during 2025/26, while recognising disrepair remains a high-risk area requiring sustained oversight; 3. the continued focus on prevention, early intervention, access resolution, case throughput, data quality and statutory compliance during 2026/27 be endorsed; and 4. the need for continued monitoring of financial exposure and delivery mitigating actions be agreed.	ED PS
<u>Item 9 – Q1 Update on Berneslai Homes 2026/27 Annual Business Action Plan</u> SR presented the report providing an update on the Q1 position not a year end update as contained within the report. Attention was drawn to Section 4.1.3 which highlights key areas, including empty homes, damp and mould. EMT are continuing to closely monitor performance in these areas. Data quality was noted as a positive area, although an issue has arisen in relation to Chatbot, where reduced Council support is being experienced due to structural changes, however transitional support remains. Board noted that the Savills' Review of governance mechanisms kick off meeting had taken place and that good progress has been made on rent convergence. RF highlighted that Voicescape has been a positive development, particularly in supporting income collection and members noted the potential to deploy the approach to other services. He suggested that for future reports it would be beneficial to include RAG ratings to provide clearer assurance on whether activities were on track and being delivered within agreed timescales. GM referred to the suspension of the Neighbourhood Plan work. It was explained that following significant changes in elected membership further consultation was required to ensure priorities remain aligned with localities and the strategic direction of the Council. Members noted the importance of avoiding misalignment and ensuring elected members	Head of Strat/Gov/IT

have the opportunity to contribute. It was confirmed that area-based plans were also being considered, with a view to aligning the workstream. An all-member briefing will be taking place to support new members, building on earlier engagement already undertaken. It was further confirmed that community representatives are being kept informed through local meetings. AH referred to the IT roadmap and discussion took place on the importance of ensuring that IT systems support future service delivery. Members noted the need to develop a clear future vision, identify the systems required, including financial and ensure effective implementations. The Board also noted the importance of taking colleagues through the change journey and learning from previous experience. The Board considered the role of Data Champions and JS queried how achievements would be measured. It was noted that data-logic would identify any errors requiring correction which would then be referred to Data Champions and, a record of outcomes from the use of the tool is maintained and reported to the Information Governance Board for oversight. The Chair emphasised that IT would be a key driver for the organisation and that it was important to establish the correct framework. It was suggested that an external perspective should be sought to support this work. Board resolved that : 1. they had scrutinised and commented on progress against the Annual Business Action Plan 26/27.	CEO
<u>Item 10 – Employee Health and Safety Performance 2025 to 2026</u> SF presented the report which provides an overview from last year and highlighting current issues. Board was asked to approve and sign off the refreshed policy. The policy has been reviewed by a health and safety professional, with external support from the council, and only minor changes have been made. Attention was drawn to Section 6 within the reported actions, which highlights an increase in threatening behaviour incidents. GM noted the number of accidents did not appear particularly high. Board discussed the accident reporting process, noting the increase in RIDDOR reportable incidents, which may reflect either a rise in incidents or improved reporting across the organisation. GM requested that future reports include information on mandatory health and safety training,	Head of People/Culture

recognising that requirements vary by staff group. RF agreed that the current report does not provide sufficient assurance that mandatory training has been completed. Board also discussed contractor health and safety performance and whether they are keeping themselves and tenants safe. SF advised that this sits within the PRIP contract management. Board requested consideration be given to enhancing future reports to include contractor performance. KT referred to Table 5 and queried whether the figure accurately reflects the workforce. He also raised concerns about emotional wellbeing within teams, noting the reported upward trend in mental health absence in 5.7.2. He asked if a response on this could be provided by Head of People and Culture. Board agreed the recommendations, following SF confirmation that the policy had been reviewed by a competent person. Board resolved that: 1. they had scrutinised the current health and safety practices and 2025-26 performance data; 2. they approve and signed the refreshed Health and Safety Policy for 2026-28 3. they approve the key actions to strengthen health and safety policies, procedures and practices in Section 6	Head of People/Culture Head of People/Culture
<u>Item 11 – Date of next Meeting</u> Thursday 24th September.	

At the conclusion of the meeting the Chair acknowledged the significant work currently underway and commended the excellent progress being made. He noted that it was positive to see a clear plan in place for moving forward.

He also took the opportunity to thank RT for his contribution over the past year, recognising his energy and efforts in helping to progress key areas of work, which had made a significant difference. On behalf of the Board, he extended best wishes for the future.