



Minutes of Berneslai Homes Board held 10th June 2026

4.00 p.m.
(Virtual Meeting)

Present:

Ken Taylor (KT)	-	Chair
Tony Ellis (TE)	-	Board Member (from Item 3.1 on the Confidential agenda)
Richard Fryer (RF)	-	Board Member
Cllr Jayne Hulme (JH)	-	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) (Public agenda only)	-	Board Member

In attendance

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

Observing

Aisling McNulty	-	Audit and Risk Committee Co-optee
Tony Ellis (TE)	-	Observer until appointed at Item 3.1 on The Confidential Agenda

Welcome and Introductions	ACTION
KT Welcomed the new Board Members, Councillor Jayne Hulme and Councillor Neil Young. Tony Ellis the newly appointed Tenant Board Member was also welcomed. He observed the meeting until officially appointed at Item 3.1 on the Confidential agenda.	

<u>Item 1 – Apologies</u> There were no apologies.	
<u>Item 2 – Declarations of Interest</u> TE declared an interest in item 3.1 (Addendum to Governance Update report – appointment of Tenant Board Member).	
<u>Item 3 – CEO Presentation</u> SF presented the information summarising the key points. He began by thanking everyone for the warm welcome he has received since joining BH on 1 April, from both Council and BH colleagues. He noted the many positive comments from colleagues and noted their commitment to delivering strong services while continuing to improve. This had been a consistent theme during his first few weeks. Although there was some uncertainty ahead of the local elections, he was left with a positive impression and a clear sense of determination to move forward, further strengthening the relationship with the Council. Board members were referred to the third slide, which highlighted the key areas of focus. While the content was familiar to existing Board members, it was noted that the information would be useful for new members. Practical priorities include empty homes, repairs and maintenance and Awaab’s Law. Wider organisational priorities include making better use of data systems, maximising existing resources and opportunities, managing transformation effectively, and ensuring resources are used efficiently, including through investment that delivers longer-term savings. He also emphasised the importance of organisational culture, noting that it needs to become more contemporary and better aligned to the delivery of services. This will require a significant amount of work. Slide 4 outlines the emerging issues, including a summary of the elections. It also highlights the ongoing challenges linked to the Middle East crisis, particularly in relation to potential fuel shortages. Work has been undertaken jointly with the Council, and although no issues have materialised to date, contingency plans are in place. A staffing update was included. Recruitment has been made to some key posts including the Executive Director of Property Services, hopefully starting at the latest in September; the Head of Finance, commencing in August and an Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance has also been appointed for the remainder of the calendar year. Board were informed that Rachel Taylor is currently absent and will be for a few weeks. SF is keeping in touch with Rachel to manage her absence. DF, SR and SF will be covering Rachel’s reports on the agenda today.	

He advised that the Green Project is progressing well and on track in relation to the consultation period. This should hopefully be agreed shortly which is a positive for all concerned. Excellent progress has been made on sickness absence. Today's agenda has a strong focus on year-end information, alongside key asset management priorities, including building safety, empty homes, and strategy. Governance also features prominently, particularly in relation to the Board changes, which are due to be formally approved today. RF asked what support SF expected from the Board in relation to the areas of focus. SF advised that success would depend on the effectiveness of the relationship between the Board, EMT and SMT, with all parties working collectively. He added that constructive challenge and input would be welcomed. NY commented that he was interested in BH from a tenant perspective, including how it operates compared with previous arrangements. He noted that, while there would be a learning curve, he found the role interesting and would be happy to support where possible. The Board resolved that: the update was noted.	
<u>Item 4.1 – 2025/2026 Year End Performance</u> DF presented the 2025/2026 year-end performance report to Board, highlighting key areas of performance and inviting questions. The report included the draft KPI targets at Appendix C, for sign-off. Key strengths were noted in building safety compliance, repairs completed on time, complaint response times, rent collection, and reduced sickness absence. Empty homes remained an area for improvement and would be considered further under a separate agenda item. RF referred to paragraph 4.3.1 and queried the properties falling out of decency at year end, noting that 67 were due to no access and asking for the reasons relating to the remaining 37. RTh advised that details are contained in the Health and Safety Compliance report on the agenda, but are in relation to component replacements. RF also asked how aligned teams were in managing no access cases, including whether there was a central record and whether wider factors such as vulnerabilities or mental health were being identified. RTh advised that no access remained a consistent challenge across workstreams, including gas, electrical safety and Awaab's Law. The No Access Policy is currently being reviewed and will be informed by consultation with colleagues across the Company to provide a more coordinated and consistent approach.	

GP referred to paragraph 4.2.2 and congratulated staff on achieving 100% income collection against a 98% target, particularly given the challenging financial circumstances facing tenants. JS endorsed these comments.

Board noted that performance in the south of the borough appeared to be lower across a number of measures and asked whether there was any insight into the reasons for this. DF advised that there was no obvious single cause identified at this stage. However, Neighbourhood Teams would undertake more local engagement during the year, supported by local area plans developed with councillors and communities, to strengthen locality-based insight and engagement.

GM referred to the 1,200 tenant satisfaction surveys completed and asked whether this was considered a low response and what further activity was planned. DF confirmed that the response was sufficient for statutory purposes and met the Regulator's methodology and sample size requirements. For the coming year, a hybrid postal and telephone approach will be used by the independent research company, with the aim of improving response rates and broadening the demographics of respondents. The Customer Services Committee will monitor the impact of the revised approach and response rates. RF endorsed the response provided.

KT raised concern regarding tenants feeling safe in their homes and being kept informed, asking what action was being taken to improve these areas. DF advised that the measure relating to being kept informed was often linked to tenants awaiting updates on repairs and would be addressed through the repairs improvement plan being developed by RTh. It was suggested that the Customer Services Committee could consider this as part of its deep dive work, while noting that clarity was required by the Executive Team on operational responsibilities and the most effective route to improvement.

In relation to safety in homes, DF advised that work had been ongoing with BMBC's Safer Neighbourhood Service. The indicator remains challenging and is influenced by perception. DF noted that Barnsley's crime rate was comparatively lower than many neighbouring areas and that initiatives such as the Love Where You Live campaign, targeted work on hotspot areas, increased estate presence through additional Neighbourhood Team resources, and the environmental programme budget were expected to support improvement. The recent successful prosecution relating to a garden issue was also noted as evidence that concerns were being addressed. Board will be kept informed of progress, including the implications of the new Crime and Policing Act and any further opportunities arising from the Safer Neighbourhood Service work.

The Board resolved that:

- 1. the 2025/26 year end performance provided assurance and approved the publication of the TSM perception survey results noting the results will be submitted to the RSH by 30th June 2026.**
- 2. where performance targets have not been achieved, they were satisfied with the explanations provided and that there are adequate controls and actions in place.**

3. the Customer Services Committee would monitor the revised approach to tenant satisfaction surveys 4. the draft 2026/27 TSM Pulse and Council Pulse KPI targets be adopted.	
<u>Item 4.2 – PRIP Year End Performance</u> RTh presented the report and noted that the current RAG ratings do not fully reflect the sustained performance achieved by both partners. The PRIP Core Group is reviewing the ratings to ensure they more accurately reflect current sector conditions. GP thanked RTh for the detailed response to his queries on Decision Time. He highlighted the need for the Board to consider the PRIP contract review, action plan and Savills’ recommendations, noting improving performance and future opportunities for Board involvement to support better outcomes for tenants and value for money. PC confirmed support for the ongoing improvements, while noting the need to remain mindful of existing contractual arrangements. SF acknowledged the feedback on the PRIP contract and the current contractual position. It was noted that future arrangements will influence the short to medium term structure and continued alignment between both organisations. The focus must remain on improving services for tenants, underpinned by a shared commitment to service improvement. AH sought clarification on the reportable accident figures, noting a discrepancy between the combined figure of 1 and the detail stating that PS reported five incidents during the year. He also queried if this disparity was a concern. Russell advised that the incidents were minor and highlighted the need to reinforce good working practices. KT concluded by asking whether there were any areas the Board wished Customer Services Committee to review. The proposed deep dive on repairs was welcomed. RF advised that satisfaction measures would also be considered to identify the most appropriate indicators for an accurate performance picture, given the current range of competing measures. Communication will also be reviewed by the Committee. It was noted that BH, the Council and the Board will need to work collectively. Board to be kept updated. The Board resolved that: 1. they had considered Q4 2025/26 PRIP Performance Report update summary report. 2. they endorsed the controls and actions put in place to address non achievement of performance targets 3. more detailed consideration of the repairs service would be undertaken by Customer Services Committee.	

<u>Item 4.3 - H & S Landlord Compliance</u> RTh presented the report. The Board agreed that performance was strong and that the scorecard reflected positive results. It noted that the few areas requiring close attention were primarily due to issues with access rather than system failure. The Board also noted that the scorecard is now presented by exception reporting. KT commented that this represented excellent performance and thanked the team. RF referred to the report's reference to changing the contractor for stock condition surveys and asked whether a new provider had been appointed. RTh confirmed that a new contractor is now in place and is progressing the work on the organisation's behalf. The Board resolved that : 1. consideration was given to the exception-based Building Safety information and the areas of focus.	
<u>Item 5 – BH Annual Business Action Plan Update</u> SR presented the year-end report and advised that good progress had been made against the agreed priorities. Where actions had not been achieved, explanations were provided within the report. AH welcomed the progress made and referred to the proposed implementation of the chatbot to support AI development. He noted the 18-month timeline and suggested this lacked ambition, given the pace of AI advancement. SR explained that the original target reflected resource constraints, but confirmed that good progress was being made within the existing structure, including consideration of an internal chatbot. SR acknowledged the timescale was lengthy but confirmed implementation would take place within the current financial year. AH emphasised the need to maximise AI opportunities in a controlled and considered way, particularly given limited resources, and requested sight of the roadmap for future opportunities. SR advised that she was developing this with the Council, drawing on their existing implementation and learning. Board resolved that: 1. they had scrutinised and commented on progress against the Annual Business Action Plan 25/26 at the year-end position.	SR

Item 6 - Annual Complaints Handling and Learning Report 2025 26

DF presented the report, which provided an overview of complaints handling and learning for the period April 2025 to March 2026.

Complaints handling remains a significant focus to ensure regulatory compliance. The Customer Services Committee receives quarterly updates, with full-year analysis presented to Board and the Council.

Board noted that complaints had decreased for the first time in five years, and that TSM complaints performance remained strong compared with peers.

The Council's Complaints Policy had been reviewed in detail by the Housing Ombudsman Service. Only minor changes were required and, following discussion with the Council and the Ombudsman, it was confirmed that the amendments satisfied the required standards.

RF welcomed the positive direction of complaints performance and emphasised the importance of learning from complaints. Referring to the 'Knowing Your Customers' project, which focuses on identifying and responding to vulnerabilities, he asked about timescales for completion and improved practice. DF advised that a working group was reviewing the information collected and how it is gathered, with a report and timeline due to be presented to CSC in August.

JS commended the team's performance, noting that meeting the target was a significant achievement. She asked whether Stage 2 escalations arising from unfulfilled Stage 1 commitments were linked to tenant communication, staffing, business processes or joint working. RTh acknowledged this as a weakness within Property Services and advised that learning from the severe Housing Ombudsman maladministration case had identified several improvements. He noted that cultural issues within Property Services were being addressed and agreed that clear communication and keeping tenants informed were critical.

PC agreed that improving outcomes for tenants must remain a priority, particularly in relation to compensation. He emphasised the need to handle complaints efficiently and apply learning effectively, while noting that the Ombudsman's minor policy recommendations demonstrated that the overall framework was robust.

SF reflected that, while the policy and process were strong, improvements were needed in both people and systems. He highlighted the need to use technology to maintain regular customer contact, provide multiple updates and identify potential risks, noting that culture and effective systems were both essential.

The Board resolved that:

- 1. they were assured by the strong complaints performance for 2025/26 and the continued positive progress in improving the complaint handing service within Berneslai Homes.**

2. they had considered the risks and actions contained within the report and recommended the revised Complaint Handling Policy to BMBC for approval and adoption.	
<u>Item 7 – Quarterly Risk Update</u> SR provided an update on the current risk position and progress against the refreshed risk management framework. The updated Strategic Risk Register and framework are presented to Board for approval. The report had been considered by Audit and Risk Committee, with its comments incorporated into the Policy. Board was asked to note the 15 active risks; although some were high, once controls were applied non rate higher than amber There are no contingent liabilities, and one severe maladministration finding has been recorded to date. AH confirmed that the Committee had reviewed the report and that its feedback had been incorporated. AH noted the inclusion of business continuity incidents, and the Policy’s response to them, reflected good practice. JS welcomed the progress made and asked whether Audit and Risk Committee would receive detailed updates from risk owners. SR confirmed this would occur and they would also be able to review the controls in place, alongside actions and targets, providing a more comprehensive overview. GP, as a member of Audit and Risk Committee, welcomed the new risk management software and the improved quality of information it would provide, describing it as a significant step forward. PC echoed these comments, noting the value of now being able to see mitigations and controls, which he had advocated for over some time. Board resolved that they:- 1. reviewed and commented on the Risk Management Quarterly Update. 2. approved the refreshed Strategic Risk Register 3. approved the refreshed Risk Management Policy 4. approved the revision to the Board Risk Appetite 5. approved the request to amend to the RAG alignment of risk appetite scores.	

<u>Item 8 – Corporate Governance Annual Report</u> SR provided an overview of the annual governance activities, including the Board's annual review of governance indicators relating to performance and effectiveness. The report also includes the annual review of the register of interests, the outcome of the self-evaluation, and the annual self-assessment against the NHF Code of Governance, which identified a small number of areas for strengthening. RF noted that the comprehensive report provided significant assurance and thanked Claire Denson for her work. KT agreed and also welcomed the feedback on the 360 approach from EMT and the Board, noting its value in supporting governance improvements and demonstrating organisational maturity. KT proposed establishing a Task and Finish Group to consider how governance could be strengthened and how the Board, EMT and SMT could work more effectively together. JS and RF volunteered to participate. KT will discuss this with SF to progress the group as soon as possible, alongside the wider governance discussion. KT noted that, as part of the Task and Finish Group, he would like to review committee membership and structure to identify suitable members. With new members including JH, NY and TE, he felt this was an appropriate time to undertake the review and progress it ahead of the next round of meetings. SF reflected that the report contained a significant amount of information and was the strongest he had seen, while recognising the continued ambition to improve and drive further progress. Board resolved that : 1. they reviewed and commented on the annual governance performance data included in the report. 2. they agreed to the continued collection of the governance indicators and for the information to be published on the Berneslai Homes' website. 3. they agreed to the establishment of a Governance Task and Finish Group to develop and agree actions in response to areas identified for improvement through the self-evaluation feedback (Appendices C and D). 4. the Governance Task and Finish Group will consider whether to align the board diversity targets to the associated BH customer data.	KT/SF
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5. they agreed the proposed areas of non-compliance and the actions set out in the self-assessment against the NHF Code of Governance 6. they agreed that a statement of compliance with the NHF Code of Governance be included into the Annual Accounts on a comply or explain basis.	
<u>Item 9 BH Annual Investment Strategy</u> SF introduced the report, prepared by RT and considered at the previous Audit and Risk Committee. AH advised that the Committee had reviewed the report, providing assurance to Board. He noted the comprehensive nature of the policy and the quality of information presented by BMBC, with the Committee receiving assurance throughout the year that investments are delivered in line with the strategy. The Committee endorsed the policy and recommended it to Board for approval. The Board resolved that they approved:- 1. the Investment Strategy. 2. the investment limits set out at paragraph 3.4. 3. the instruments list set out at paragraph 3.8. 4. the Scheme of Delegation outlined in Appendix A and the Policy Statement outlined in Appendix B.	
<u>Item 10 – Equality Diversity and Inclusion – Equality Pay Gap Reporting and Be Inclusive Action Plans</u> DF presented the report and highlighted the Chair’s commitment to actively driving equality, diversity and inclusion through the Chair’s Challenge in 2024. The 2025 position was positive, with a small overall gender pay gap and progress in disability pay outcomes. Areas for continued focus include the increase in the ethnicity pay gap and the disproportionate receipt of bonus payments by male employees, although this is expected to be addressed following completion of the Green Project. Occupational segregation also remains an issue, exacerbated by changes in senior staffing. The Board’s attention was drawn to page 12 of the pack, which provides a helpful definition of ‘mean’ and ‘median’ pay gaps. Section 4.2.1 outlines the equality actions completed during the year and refers to the Be Inclusive Steering Group, which has helped shape the action plan. Delivery of the plan supports strong compliance with the Consumer Regulatory Standards, particularly the transparency, influence and accountability standard.	

GP referred to paragraph 4.2.4 and the proportion of women in construction, which is 2.1% against a target of 15%. He questioned whether the target was realistic and whether it should be reviewed or the relevant roles redefined. The target and eligible roles will be reviewed. KT also questioned whether the target was feasible. GP queried the purpose and value of the target, including whether it could be counterproductive, and noted that further consideration was required. JS to discuss with SF. The Board resolved that they:- 1. approved the publication of the Gender, Ethnicity and Disability Pay Gap report 2025 on the Berneslai Homes website. 2. acknowledged the progress made on the 2025/26 EDI action plan. 3. acknowledged the 2026/27 Be Inclusive Action Plan.	JS/SF
<u>Item 11 - Probation Policy and Procedure</u> DF presented the report seeking approval to amend Berneslai Homes' probation period in response to changes introduced by the Employment Rights Act 2025. The Board was asked to approve a reduction in the probation period from six months to four months, in line with the Act. As this change will amend the terms and conditions for new staff, Board approval is required. It was agreed that the proposal would be presented to the next TU Liaison meeting as a courtesy. Board resolved that: 1. they approved the change to the Probation Policy, reducing the probation period from six months to four months with no extension, in line with the Employment Rights Act 2025.	
<u>Item 12.1 Board Fact Sheet</u> Board resolved that: 1. they noted the fact sheet.	