



**Minutes of Berneslai Homes Public Board held 30th May 2024 at
4.00pm Gateway Plaza**

Present:

- Ken Taylor - Chair
- Richard Fryer - Board Member
- Adam Hutchinson - Board Member
- Mark Johnson - Board Member
- Gez Morrall - Board Member
- Kevin Osborne - Board Member
- Eric Smith - Board Member (Co-optee to the Board)
- Jo Sugden - Board Member
- Sarah Tattersall - Board Member
- Rebecca Mather - Board Member (appointed to Board at Item 5)

In attendance

- Amanda Garrard - CEO
- Dave Fullen - Executive Director, Customer & Estate Services
- Arturo Gulla - Executive Director, Property Services
- Lee Winterbottom - Managing Director Construction Services
- Kulvinder Sihota - Executive Director, Corporate Services
- Sam Roebuck - Head of Governance and Strategy and Company Secretary
- Kathy McArdle - Service Director BMBC
- Sharon Bradley (for Item 3 only) - Head of Corporate Assurance BMBC

Observing

- CLlr R Franklin - Cabinet Spokesperson for Regeneration and Culture

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions followed

	ACTION
<u>Item 1 – Apologies</u>	
Mahara Haque – Independent Chair Customer Services Committee	
<u>Item 2 – Declarations of Interest</u>	
There were none declared.	

Item 3 – Corporate Assurance Approach

SB presented detailed information to Board on BMBC’s Corporate Assurance Team and approach. The main areas covered were team structure, the specialist functions and areas, the corporate assurance approach and plan, outlining an example using Strategy as the theme. The team mission was brought to the meeting’s attention, and she reiterated the importance of delivering a professional, innovative, insightful and client focused service, aligned to strategic objectives, strategies and priorities, achieved through an independent and objective corporate assurance, consultancy and advisory function. Specific attention was also drawn to the Audit and Risk Committee and the timetable for reports to be presented throughout the year.

AH as Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee summarised the process and referred to the opportunity at every meeting for members of Committee to speak with Internal Audit, without officers present, if required. He commented that Internal Audit provide a good service to Berneslai Homes with thorough established routines and processes in place. Any asks of them by Committee have always been actioned/responded to, an example of this was a request for 6 monthly anti-fraud updates to be provided. The Committee relies greatly on their assurance and feel the arrangement works well.

The Chair thanked SB for sharing the detailed presentation with Board and also extended thanks for the work they do which is very much appreciated

Resolved:

The presentation was received.

Item 4 – Customer First – Zero Carbon Video

AGu introduced the video which also provided an insight from a customer perspective.

The video was well received, and comments followed. Board were pleased with the work that has taken place and they felt that the positive feedback from tenants clearly demonstrates the benefits achieved. Aesthetically the work has also greatly improved homes. Seeing how people’s lives have been affected is very impactful and hopefully this will continue in the future. However, the challenges were acknowledged, particularly with regard to the significant stock number and the funding required.

Board asked that their thanks are passed on to the teams involved.

Board were asked if they would like any other videos to be produced on areas of particular interest to inform EMT, so these can be planned in.

Resolved:

Board received the presentation.

All

Item 5 – Governance Update

SR presented the report.

Attention was drawn to paragraph 1.2 which refers to the recruitment process to engage a new Tenant Board Member. Rebecca Mather is the successful candidate and Remuneration Committee has recommended the appointment to Board for approval. The appointment date is 30th May, subject to the required verification and ID checks. Board noted there will be changes in the procedure of the appointment of future Board Members and the procedure is currently being updated.

The report updated Board on the company law provisions in the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 and the changes to the appointment of Board members.

SR referred to paragraph 3 and the review of Delegated Decisions etc following the Board session facilitated by DTP. Work is taking place with the Council to have oversight on those requiring Council approval. Liaison will then take place with the Chairs to agree the format of reports at first and second hearing. Reviewed Delegations will be reported to the July Board.

Resolved:

- **Board approved the recommendation by Remuneration Committee that Rebecca Mather be appointed as the new Tenant Board Member at Board on 30th May 2024.**
- **Board noted the changes regarding Companies House.**
- **Board approved that the ID checks and verification be carried out by the Risk and Governance Manager on behalf of Board.**
- **Board noted that there will be a change in procedure for the appointment of future Board members and the procedure will be updated by the Risk and Governance Manager.**

The Chair on behalf of Board members formally welcomed Rebecca Mather to the Board.

Item 6 – Board Self Evaluation

The Chair outlined the annual Board self-evaluation this year facilitated by DTP. He referred to the work plan produced and the positive responses on governance received from Board members, demonstrating maturity, with a willingness to develop and progress. The areas identified for improvement were noted. The Chair felt it was a fair evaluation, reflecting where the Board are at currently and asked for any views.

Board felt it was a positive assessment. They referred to face to face engagement and felt this could be increased. The Customer Services Committee being held in the community has been positive and does promote

<p>Board members, increasing their visibility, which was felt important. Other opportunities need to be explored with both tenants and staff.</p> <p>The importance of regular external governance reviews was highlighted, and Board felt this needs to continue to be a key focus area.</p> <p>It was agreed that EDI requires more focus with greater insight. The Chair referred to the NHF Chairs Challenge around EDI, which he thought would be a good framework to use. He said he would be happy to lead but feels a Champion for EDI is required from Board. If Board agrees he suggested JS for this role, due to her knowledge/experience in this area. Board noted that there is no cost or timescale to complete, it is a continuing process. Board agreed with the Chair's proposal and JS agreed to take on the role of EDI Champion. Board requested that a 6 monthly report/update be provided to on the tool kits with suggestions how tenants and Board members can support. AGa suggested using the Board Away Day on the 11th July to establish the vision for EDI in the first instance with an external facilitator. AGa to approach Mushtaq Khan (HDN) on his availability.</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board discussed and approved the evaluation of the board self-assessment. • Board approved the action plan to strengthen the Board governance arrangements • As part of this report, Board considered any further areas where the Governance Team could support Board members to further develop and embed our governance arrangements. • Board agreed to sign up to the NHF Chairs Challenge around EDI and agreed that JS take on the role of the Board EDI Champion. 	AGa
<p><u>Item 7 – Gender Pay Gap (referred from Remuneration Committee)</u></p> <p>KS advised that this was the statutory report and had been considered and discussed in detail at the last Remuneration Committee. They have referred to Board for approval. RF as Chair of Remuneration Committee confirmed their satisfaction with the report and support the action plan.</p> <p>KS brought to the meeting's attention the key information contained within the Executive Summary and provided assurance that the gender pay gap will continue to be addressed to create a better gender balance, improve recruitment and selection and encourage a better work life balance.</p> <p>Although Board agreed it was a positive report, they felt that BH need to continue to be mindful of the known bonus scheme risks and the prevalence of males in the scheme (paragraph 4.5 of the report).</p> <p>KMCa to update Board on how this compares with the Council's Gender pay Gap report</p>	KMCA

<p>Resolved:</p> <p>Board approved the report.</p>	
<p><u>Item 8 – Repairs and Maintenance Policy</u></p> <p>AGu presented the report which is a policy for managing repairs and maintenance. It aims to ensure compliance with statutory requirements and the new standards. The main focus of the policy is around ensuring homes are safe. The policy has been developed in consultation with customers and aligns with the Strategic Plan and the vision of Barnsley 2030. ST provided assurance to Board of the detailed discussions she has had with tenants when out in the community. Although the policy requires approval of Board, it will be subject to the Council’s governance processes which could result in further amendments.</p> <p>Board referred to the implementation of Awaab’s Law, delayed until after the general election. This may have to be revisited as it progresses to reflect any amendments that may arise.</p> <p>Board recognised the challenging timescales and questioned if these could be met. AGu provided Board with assurance on the categories, of which BH are in the top quartile. However, there are issues around planned repairs and backlogs linked to prioritising budgets which is a contentious area.</p> <p>A Councillor briefing will be taking place on new procedures and a request made that information be shared with them on timescales for repairs, as it is felt critical that councillors are well briefed.</p> <p>The Policy will be presented to White Cabinet on the 26th June.</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <p>Board approved the Repairs and Maintenance Policy.</p>	
<p><u>Item 9 – Quarterly Risk Update</u></p> <p>SR presented the report which was considered in detail at the last Audit and Risk Committee. They have recommended to Board to approve.</p> <p>Board were asked to note the Operational and Fraud issues and concerns and that Audit and Risk Committee were satisfied that the strategic risks cover the range of risks facing the organisation currently.</p> <p>The Corporate Assurance review of the annual self-assessment to measure compliance against the NHF Code of Governance was noted by Board. This concluded in a substantial assurance opinion with no findings or implications raised.</p>	

Board were advised that the 2023 /24 self-assessment action plan was reviewed in April 2024. The Committee had queried if resources could deliver the activity scheduled for April. Clarity was provided that this was not as a result of the self-assessment, it was activity scheduled, in line with the start of the new financial year.

Audit and Risk Committee reviewed the Risk Appetite Statement following a zero based risk appetite exercise undertaken by Board in February and did not make any recommendation for changes.

Board acknowledged the risk on the organisation and on the sector, highlighting that of the 8 critical risks, 4 relate to resources, with the HRA being unable to fund what is required and they questioned the solution to this. AGa advised the Berneslai Homes have met with the Council on the HRA and General Fund. Conversations will be taking place with the NFA, LGA etc as there is currently no single voice for Council homes. Savills are also undertaking some work for the LGA and NFA jointly and Barnsley will be a case study. Evidence is required for the new government to show the HRA cannot currently meet current and future needs nationally.

A Board member referred to some local public events taking place over the summer period and suggested BH attend to provide advice on damp, mould and also engage with tenants and residents.

Resolved:

- **Board reviewed and commented on the Quarterly Risk Update**
- **Board reviewed and commented on the Strategic Risks**
- **Board approved the current version of the Risk Appetite Statement to ensure that it remains fit for purpose until the review in June 2025**

Item 10 – BH Annual Investment Strategy (Referred from Audit & Risk Committee)

KS presented the report which was discussed by Audit and Risk Committee who recommended to Board for approval

The report was prepared by BMBC and covers investment priorities, strategy, scheme of delegation, policy statement, credit worthiness policy, a summary of cash management for quarter 3 and an investment portfolio overview.

The strategy is based on statutory guidance and CIPFA best practice. The investment priorities adopted for investing prudently is based on security, liquidity and yield.

Board were referred to Appendix D showing the £2.8M invested in the approved 'A' rated establishments.

<p>AH, Chair of Audit and Risk advised Board of the good presentation by BMBC at the last Committee.</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <p>Board approved:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Investment Strategy. • The investment limits set out at paragraph 3.4. • The instruments list set out at paragraph 3.9 • The scheme of delegation outlined in Appendix A and the policy statement outlined in Appendix B. 	
<p><u>Item 11 – 2023/2024 Performance Summary</u></p> <p>DF presented, summarising the key points.</p> <p>Board noted the strong performance on building safety measures which has consistently been maintained. The number of successful hardship fund applications awarded was highlighted and Board were advised of the process and the analysis that has taken place. This funding, however, ceased on the 31/3/24. The improvement in rent collection was also noted.</p> <p>The main areas of focus are void rent loss, void turnaround and meeting the complaint handling code standard.</p> <p>The full report was considered in detail by Customer Services Committee, and they felt assured with the measures in place to address areas of under-performance. Complaints were also discussed in detail at that Committee and they were satisfied with the plan in place to address the issues. They did request this be monitored and reviewed by EMT throughout the year. This is a key area of focus. The Committee also raised the importance of staff satisfaction as this could impact on performance.</p> <p>Attention was drawn to the summary against performance targets. A new set has been agreed with the Council for 2024/25 which are more realistic, taking into consideration the situation within the sector and the external context.</p> <p>DF advised that since the report was produced void rent loss has continued to be an area of focus. Complaints also continue to increase and be carefully monitored. On a more positive note, rent collection continues to improve against the new targets, 1.2% better than at the same time as last year.</p> <p>Board felt the report was good and positive comments were made on the format. Staff satisfaction was discussed, Board being particularly interested in the areas of dissatisfaction. DF advised these are mainly around pay, against austerity which is difficult to address. However, BH do promote the positives and wider benefits of working for BH and the schemes in place, flexible working etc. . AGa stressed the importance of supporting managers</p>	

<p>to help staff with change and referred to the IIP survey which was undertaken when going through a significant restructure and latterly the Repairs First process/implementation. The pressure colleagues are facing with regard to the increase in complaint volumes was explored at Customer Services Committee and they felt assured with the actions in place. One of the actions was for temporary additional staff to be recruited in Property Services and Customer Services Teams which has been actioned, highlighting to staff that EMT have listened.</p> <p>An observation was made on the number of targets being reduced in 2024/25. A detailed explanation was provided illustrating that current year targets are based on the most recent TSM and Housemark benchmarking data.; The STAR survey is also currently being undertaken and results will be reported to Board on the results and TSM data.</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board considered year end performance. • Board were satisfied with the explanations provide where performance targets have not been achieved that there are adequate controls and actions in place. • Board did not identify any further areas for consideration by Customer Services Committee 	
<p><u>Item 12 – Fire Safety and Building Safety Update</u></p> <p>AGU presented the information, bringing to Board’s attention the key points within the report, outlining the recent improvement works and the actions to note from the Building Safety Act 2022 and the Fire Safety Act 2021.</p> <p>Board expressed concern where some tenants are refusing the installation of sprinklers in the high rise buildings and queried whether this could be enforced. AGU advised that as sprinklers are a secondary system, with compartmentalisation in place enforcement is not possible. Tenant champions have in some instances been successful in changing some tenants’ opinions. Where not successful, sprinklers are installed once the flats become void. BH acknowledged compartmentalisation continues to be assessed under the FRA inspection programme.</p> <p>A member reported on a recent visit to Buckley and Britannia House flats and was impressed with the work undertaken. Conversations also took place with residents which was very positive. A suggestion was made for a visit to be arranged for Board members.</p> <p>There was a query on the frequency of the fire risk assessment programme, from 2 years to 3 years for low risk flats. Board were assured that this decision had been made based on a risk approach based on sector best practice which recommends a 3 year FRA programme.</p>	

<p>Resolved:</p> <p>Board noted the contents of the report and did not identify any concerns or risk to escalate to BMBC.</p>	
<p><u>Item 13 - Resource Information Papers</u></p> <p><u>13.1 Board Members Fact Sheet</u></p> <p>Board felt the fact sheet was very useful.</p> <p>A suggestion was made that due to the significant activity taking place in the sector it may be beneficial for a succinct overview briefing note be produced for Board, covering the Social Housing Regulation Act, definitions etc in a similar format to the Board Fact Sheet.</p> <p><u>Post Meeting Note</u> AGa to discuss with JS and SR.</p>	<p>AGa</p>
<p><u>13.2 Innovation and Technology Strategy</u></p> <p>The report was noted</p>	