

BOARD UPDATE
BOARD PERFORMANCE MEETING
WEDNESDAY 15TH MAY 2024



CUSTOMER STORY

Our May performance meeting opened with a story from a customer who had been the victim of domestic abuse and had been supported by the GCH Community Safety Enforcement Team to help resolve the situation. The video helped to reaffirm GCH's commitment to achieving Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation.

The Board commented upon the importance of staff being aware of the signs of domestic abuse and ensuring support was also available for staff who had been supporting those affected by domestic abuse.

The Board asked that their thanks be passed on to the customer for sharing their difficult story and for the customer allowing the video to be used for future staff training on domestic abuse.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT

The Chief Executive introduced the report and provided a verbal update which highlighted the headline themes across the organisation.

The Board questioned if there were likely to be challenges arising from new working relationships needing to be formed with the City Council following recent elections. The Chief Executive advised that good working relationships were expected to continue with both officer and new members.

The Board also praised the recent decision to join Placeshapers – a national network of place-based housing organisations.

BOARD ASSURANCE REPORT (INCLUDING NHF CODE OF GOVERNANCE)

The Company Secretary introduced the report and explained that updates from the Senior Leadership Team members had been included against the organisation's three corporate objectives. The report also contained the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) which the Board were asked to formally review.

Board discussed various elements of the report including:

- A TSM which related to the number of complaints in relation to the size of the landlord. This measure was per 1,000 units, but further benchmarking information was awaited to help assess this measure more clearly.
- Officers in the Asset team were starting to review recently released wave 3 guidance in relation to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.
- The risk of tenant arrears and potential increase in fraudulent activity.

- VAT recovery and ensuring this was maximised across the organisation, alongside the challenges of this.

Board noted that they would be received a new suite and format for future assurance reports from the July 2024 Board performance meeting.

The Board noted the report.

HEALTH AND SAFETY PERFORMANCE

The Executive Director of Customer Experience presented the report as the designated health and safety lead for the organisation.

Board discussed issues relating to no access alongside the challenges of electrical safety testing, which was a growing issue across the sector. Board asked if officers could review the data collected to determine the number of properties which were causing challenges in this area.

A Board member raised that they considered the reporting of disrepair cases and damp and mould cases should not be grouped together within the report as they were two separate issues. Officers confirmed they would review this.

Board members praised the performance statistics in relation to compliance and the mandatory training figures of staff in relation to health and safety.

Board noted that there had been an increase in near miss accident reporting over the last six months. This followed communication and publicity around reporting to all staff at events and had been prompted by previous low reporting of near misses.

The Board noted the report.

RENT SERVICE CHARGE SETTING POLICY

The Executive Director, Business Resources presented the report and advised that the report and Policy followed actions arising from the rent standard breach and the associated action plan that was implemented.

The Board questioned the use of the word tenants and if this could be changed to customers. The Board also questioned when the Policy had last been reviewed by customers and if any customer engagement had taken place since the last review.

Officers advised that the Policy had last been updated in 2022 by the then Rent Task and Finish Group and that the then Chair of the Tenant Panel had served as a member of the Group. Officers appreciated that more customer engagement was required going forward and that this was part of the action plan. Lessons learnt would also be reported back to the Customer Experience Committee in due course.

A member commented that they felt that communications around rent setting and service charges also needed to be reviewed further as there had been some negative social media engagement by customers around rent setting and service charge.

Board members also questioned if going forward, customers that were likely to be affected could be included as part of future conversations. Board recognised that service charges were very emotive, so consideration needed to be given about how changes in service charges benefitted residents and promoting this. A Board member highlighted that reference to 'affordability' was also a subjective term and should be rephrased to make clearer the organisation's position.

Officers responded that it was it was recognised that there were areas for improvements around service charges and that ultimately service charges were about recovery, but strong communications were needed around this.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the organisation was now intending take a more proactive approach in relation to customer engagement and could now look to build engagement into future processes.

Some Board members felt that the language used within the Rent Standard was very formal and questioned if a review could be undertaken to review this.

It was noted that the Rent Policy required an annual review.

The Chair summarised the discussion and points raised by members which related to the language used, the reference to adorability and the wider work going forward around customer engagement.

The Board agreed that they were happy to approve the Policy subject to the above points being considered going forward.

The Board approved the updated Rent and Service Charge Policy.

QUARTERLY MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

The Director of Finance presented the accounts which included an RAG status,

Board questioned if the spend against the budget being rated as green as the spend being lower than budgeted was a positive as this suggested that all the capital works planned had not been completed.

Officers responded that the organisation had delivered on capital works and that the underspend reflected on a dedication to achieve best value for money and this intention was supported by a calculated plan.

Board noted that the accounts were positive and the receipt gains from Right to Buys (RTBs) but that this was also a permanent loss of asset. It was however recognised that the RTBs included active asset disposals where a business decision had been made to dispose of assets, generally for financial reasons and that this would be separated in future reports to make clearer.

The Board approved the Management Accounts.

RISK MANAGEMENT QUARTERLY REVIEW

The Company Secretary RA presented the report and highlighted that a fraud deep dive referred to within the report would now be presented to the October 2024 Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee meeting.

The Chair questioned if a higher insurance premium had been budgeted for the 2025/26 renewal. Officers responded that the 2024/25 renewal premium had been within the uplift for 2024/25 and that support would be provided by consultants Gibbs Laidler in preparation for next year's budget.

ARAC had recently discussed the insurance risk and relevant officers had been asked to reflect further on the risk and to also look more widely at where risk scores were needed to be reflected in a potentially more accurate way.

An internal audit on Risk Management was being undertaken by RSM Auditors in May 2024 and would help towards future work around risk.

The Board noted the report.

COMMITTEE MEETING UPDATES

The Board received the following updates of the recent Committee meetings.

- Customer Experience Committee – February 2024
- Colleague and Culture Committee – February 2024
- Homes and Communities Committee – February 2024
- Nerva Homes Board – March 2024
- Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee – April 2024

The Board noted the Committee updates.

OTHER MATTERS

The meeting concluded with the Board reviewing the action plan and forward plan.