

Minutes of the Eighty-Second Board Meeting

Held on 29 April 2015 at 5.30 pm
In Room 1, Rowan House
Sheepen Road, Colchester CO3 3WD

Present:

Anne Grahamslaw (Chair)
Nigel Chapman (Vice Chair)
Alan Blois (Vice Chair)
Michala Carey
Ray Gamble
Tina Graves
Glenn Houchell
Mike Lilley
Julie Parker
Dionne Philp

In Attendance:

Greg Falvey
Karen Loweman
Brian Richardson

Matt Armstrong (Item 5)
Kathy Healy (Item 8)
Karen Williams (item 7)

Berkeley Young (Minutes)

Observing:

Merle Johnson (TLCC)
Graham Lewis (CBC)
Jan Sexton (TLCC)
James Watson (TLCC)

1. Apologies and Quorum

- 1.1 Apologies had been received from Geoff Foster and Nigel Offen. Anne confirmed that the meeting was quorate.
- 1.2 Anne welcomed guests and members of the TLCC to the meeting, and noted that Jan Sexton would be presenting the group's comments on one agenda item.

2. Declarations of interest by board members and officers

- 2.1 There were no new declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the meeting held 24 February 2015

- 3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.
- 3.2 Advertising Revenue – at the last Board meeting, members had queried whether the website terms and conditions would need updating before introducing advertising on the CBH website, but this had not been minuted. Berkeley Young confirmed that Gerardine Murphy was reviewing these and would email the members concerned when the review was complete. **Action:** Berkeley Young to email Geoff Foster and Glenn Houchell after the review.
- 3.3 Voice Your View – Mark Wright confirmed that the repairs and maintenance actions relating to Mary Frank House had been completed.

4. Voice Your View

4.1 No one had requested to voice their view.

5. Asset Management Strategy

5.1 Matt Armstrong introduced the new Asset Management Strategy for Board to adopt, prior to the formal Portfolio Holder decision to adopt it.

5.2 Item 3.2 – Matt confirmed that the effects of inflation and borrowing costs on the resources available to fund the investment programme would be reported to Board as part of the Housing Investment Programme report each January/February.

5.3 The action plan was ambitious, but Matt was confident that it was deliverable. A number of the projects within the action plan were already underway.

5.4 Members unanimously adopted the Asset Management Strategy.

6. Risk Management Strategy

6.1 Brian Richardson introduced the Risk Management strategy. The strategy had been scrutinised by the Finance & Audit Committee, who had made no changes.

6.2 The Board unanimously approved the Risk Management Strategy.

7. Customer Service Strategy

7.1 Karen Williams introduced the Customer Service Strategy, which had been reviewed and updated.

7.2 Customer Service Charter – It was queried whether customers expected a faster response to emails than the proposed commitment of five working days. Karen responded that this had been considered, but because housing officers were often working in the community it was not always possible for them to respond rapidly. However, most emails were answered well within the five-day target. During consultation, tenants had been clear that CBH should retain the five-day target to allow sufficient time to respond.

7.3 The Board unanimously approved the Customer Service Strategy.

8. Communications Strategy

8.1 Kathy Healy introduced the Communications Strategy, which had been reviewed and updated.

8.2 Jan Sexton presented the TLCC's comments on the strategy. The TLCC welcomed the updated Communications Strategy and were very pleased to note the savings made with the production of *Housing News & Views*.

- 8.3 While the appended Media Protocol outlined who could respond to media enquiries, there was no reference to this in the aims and objectives of the strategy. **Action:** Kathy Healy to articulate this in the aims and objectives and to circulate the change to Board members by email.
- 8.4 With the above addition, the Board unanimously approved the Communications Strategy.

9. Board Members' Expenses Scheme

- 9.1 Berkeley Young introduced the report on the updated expenses scheme.
- 9.2 The Governance & Remuneration Committee had discussed the proposed amendment to the scheme and approved the payment in full of the membership fee of one professional institution per board member where the Chair of the Board considered the membership to be of benefit to the company.
- 9.3 The opportunity had been taken to update the wording of the scheme where terminology was out of date.
- 9.4 Berkeley confirmed that Board members' expenses would be published on the website shortly.
- 9.5 It was noted that Board members could have their expenses paid into their bank accounts directly by BACS transfer. Berkeley had added this to the induction checklist to ensure that all new Board members were aware.
- 9.6 Members discussed whether an allowance should be paid to members who used their own internet connection for board business. It was agreed that if an individual member was having difficulty maintaining internet access, an allowance could be arranged. However, members were not in favour of an allowance being offered unless board activity increased the cost of internet access.
- 9.7 The Board unanimously approved the Board Members' Expenses Scheme.

10. Code of Governance Review and Update

- 10.1 Brian Richardson introduced the revised Code of Governance and Principles for Key Policies.
- 10.2 Members discussed whether the phrase 'legal liabilities' should be expanded to 'legal liabilities and obligations'. It was agreed that the phrase should remain as it was as almost all policies involved legal obligations.
- 10.3 Members discussed the process for determining whether a policy should be brought to Board where there was uncertainty. If there is any doubt over whether a policy should be brought to board, the final decision rested with the Chair of the Board. It was noted that Board members could ask for any item to be discussed at the Board. **Action:** Berkeley Young to add a paragraph to the *Principles for Key Policies* document.

10.4 With the above addition, the Board unanimously approved the Code of Governance and Principles for Key Policies.

11. Implementation of new CBC/CBH Management Agreement – Progress Report April 2015

11.1 Greg Falvey introduced the report, which reflected the positive relationship between CBH and CBC. The report had been shared with the Housing Portfolio Holder and would be circulated to colleagues at CBC. While there had been some difficulties during the implementation of the new management agreement, the report overall vindicated the council's decision to delegate services to the ALMO.

11.2 The report raised concerns about the lack of staff accommodation in CBH offices but no actions had been identified to address these. Greg Falvey confirmed that a project team would be set up within the year to look at this. **Action:** Gerardine Murphy to amend the report to reflect this action.

11.3 The outstanding workstreams reflected ambitions within the Medium Term Delivery Plan that had not been taken forward or were on hold. The Operations Committee received a quarterly update on the delivery plan. **Action:** Highlight these at the next Operations Committee meeting and report to the Board through the Performance Assurance Report at June's Board meeting.

11.4 Concern was expressed about the effect on tenants of significant cuts to the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) budget. Karen Loweman informed members that CBH and CBC were working together to make best use of the limited resources available. DHPs were transitional benefits and had been awarded to recipients for a short period only (three or six months) to avoid dependence. Cases had been reduced and the majority of recipients were those whose circumstances were unlikely to change, due to disability or illness.

11.5 It was proposed that the report be circulated to all CBC councillors. **Action:** Greg Falvey to discuss proposal with Gareth Mitchell.

12. Finance Assurance Report

12.1 Brian Richardson introduced the report.

12.2 Capital works – The overspends within this budget resulted from works agreed by the CBH/CBC Capital Monitoring Group within the year and recharges would be credited to the account in due course.

13. Performance Assurance Report

13.1 Karen Loweman introduced the report, circulating an up to date version of the performance slides (copy in minute book).

13.2 Homeless cases prevented – this was now green following the inclusion of cases prevented by external agencies that are grant-funded by CBH.

- 13.3 Households in temporary accommodation – these figures have increased due to two accommodation units being out of action. However, the number of households in bed and breakfast accommodation has declined.
- 13.4 Percentage of homes underoccupied – steady progress has been made towards the target figure of 23%.
- 13.5 Number of tenancy audits completed – the first-year target of 2,000 audits had not been met due to a late start to the programme, but CBH was confident that the three-year target of 6,000 audits would be met.
- 13.6 Former tenant arrears – a number of tenants with high levels of arrears were evicted in mid-March, and these arrears could not be collected within the year.
- 13.7 Members discussed the potential impact of Universal Credit on the number of evictions. Karen Loweman noted that the number of evictions was very low and most occurred after the tenant had left of their own accord. CBH was preparing for the introduction of Universal Credit by working closely with the Jobcentre Plus and through early intervention to prevent arrears getting too high.

14. Committee Minutes

Operations (12 February 2015)

- 14.1 Members discussed the impact of issues brought to light through the tenancy audit process. Karen Loweman noted that any remedial work identified during the tenancy audit would have been picked up as part of the voids process, so there was no real additional cost to CBH. However, the work to inspect and remedy alterations was putting pressure on capital and day-to-day expenditure. Where tenants have made unauthorised alterations, they are given the opportunity to put these right before CBH did the work and recharged. Where work was of a sufficient standard, retrospective permission was given.

Finance & Audit (10 March 2015)

- 14.2 Nigel Chapman reported that the committee considered the insurance cover for CBH for the first time. This was a useful exercise and would be repeated annually.

Governance & Remuneration (24 March 2015)

- 14.3 No comments.

Operations (9 April 2015)

- 14.4 Alan Blois reported that the committee considered the annual report from the Community Budget Group. As chair of the group, he was happy to report that the £40k budget had been fully spent on community projects, and the group had received the same level of funding for 2015/16.

15. Forward Look

- 15.1 No items were raised.

16. Any Other Business

Chief Executive's Report

- 16.1 Item 3 – Greg Falvey reported that CBH had been working with Colbea on developing a business case for providing project management and professional construction services to the market. After DMT had reviewed the business case, it would be presented to the Business Opportunities Panel on 13 May, Finance & Audit on 4 June, and the Board on 17 June.
- 16.2 Item 4.4 – It was noted that the furniture provided in John Bird Court and Creffield Road would remain in the rooms. Some temporary accommodation was unfurnished, where tenants with furniture were housed.

Board Members' Activities

- 16.3 Anne Grahamslaw had attended an Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) course, which was useful for her role as Board Health & Safety Champion. Anne would be attending the closing meeting of the OHSAS 18001 audit to demonstrate the engagement of the Board.

Older Persons Services update

- 16.4 Yvonne Day reported that the refurbishment of Enoch House had begun and work was underway to improve the facilities at The Cannons extra care scheme, where 17 people were on the waiting list for accommodation in the 34-room scheme.
- 16.5 The Housing Related Support contract was being reduced from April 2016, so CBH had a year to plan how to deliver services in the new funding environment. ECC would also be reviewing the provision of extra care during the year and the contract with Swan to provide care at The Cannons expired in 2016.

The Care Act 2014

- 16.6 The implications of the Care Act would be significant in many areas of work. Where care was provided, staff would need to be trained and buildings certificated, and this would likely be extended to support staff.
- 16.7 CBH had carried out an adult safeguarding self-assessment against the Care Act statutory guidance, and had met all the criteria. The Safeguarding Policy was due for review in 2017.

The meeting closed at 6.40 pm.