

MINUTES OF THE 7TH FINANCE, AUDIT & CORPORATE SERVICES (F.A.C.) SUB COMMITTEE MEETING OF WILLIAMSBURGH HOUSING ASSOCIATION, HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 7TH FEBRUARY 2024 AT 6.00PM (HYBRID).

PRESENT:	M. Symons Cllr. M. MacLaren A. Ballantine R. Coelho C. Henry	Convenor
OBSERVER:	██████████	
IN ATTENDANCE:	L. Ramsay J. Grant L. Fleeting H. Burns ██████████	Head of Finance & Corporate Services Chief Executive HR Manager Finance Officer Alexander Sloan, Internal Auditor (Agenda Item No.8)

1. (a) Apologies

Apologies were received from J. Scott, ██████████ and ██████████ (submitted to G. Corry).

(b) Declarations of Interest

Cllr. M. MacLaren declared an interest in the items involving Renfrewshire Council and the Common Allocations Policy.

8. Audit Report

In a change to the agenda running order, M. Symons invited ██████████ from Alexander Sloan to provide an update to Committee on the four internal audits completed during 2023/24. ██████████ updated with the following comments:

Complaints Handling: audit carried out in November 2023 with the object of audit to assess how the Association manages complaints from customers and operates under the guidance from the Ombudsman. Overall, the policy is good with recommendations for improvement made on Reporting to tenants and record keeping of actions required and evidence stored. ██████████ acknowledged that L. Ferrie, Head of Housing has agreed to implement further reporting to customers and also strive to improve record keeping.

Void Management: audit carried out in November 2023 with no noted issues in the operational processes. Minor recommendation made to have written procedures in place that set out the process and the responsibilities at each stage.

Tenant Participation: audit carried out in August 2023 with no noted issues and strategy is up to date. Minor recommendation made for the strategy to include a budget and resource responsible for delivering the strategy.

8. Audit Report Contd.

Housing Options: audit carried out in August 2023 with no noted issues and commented that the application form and process was fair, reasonable and complies with legislation. Minor recommendation made to include KPI reporting against the target of 28 days to process an application to be made to Committee and recommended a regular review of the waiting list.

A committee member asked how W.H.A. compared to its peers, in relation to the standard of this year's completed audits. ██████████ advised that W.H.A. compare very well, particularly on the more important areas such as Void Management and Housing Options.

██████████ left the meeting at this point.

2. (a) Minutes of the F.A.C. Meeting No.6: 1st November 2023

The minutes of the Finance, Audit & Corporate Services Sub Committee meeting held on Wednesday, 1st November 2023 (No.6) were proposed correct, on a motion proposed by Cllr. M. MacLaren, seconded by R. Coelho.

(b) Matters arising

L. Ramsay updated the Committee regarding the use of WhatsApp in the Association to communicate and gather information from tenants. It was stated at the last meeting that W.H.A. did not use the App for this purpose, however this was incorrect, the App is used by the Housing team, however, only on the request of tenants. A review of policies and procedures and updated privacy notices has taken place with our external Data Protection Officer and staff updated on new procedure.

3. Financial Reports to 31st December 2023

L. Ramsay presented the report on the performance of the Association for the 9 months to December 2023. Income is in line with budgeted levels and costs are below budget by £0.2m due to cyclical projects not yet underway together with savings in staff and overheads. This has been partly offset by increased reactive and void repair costs to date, although following procurement and increased void process scrutiny, costs are starting to reduce.

Net Surplus for the 9 months to date at £1.2m has further benefitted from additional interest income (£140k) with cash held in deposit accounts.

L. Ramsay noted Planned maintenance programmes for Windows, Kitchen and Bathrooms are well underway and the contractors are on track to deliver the budgeted programmes by 31st March 2024, although some spend will be physically paid for in the new financial year.

3. Financial Reports to 31st December 2023 Contd.

Development update noted that the likely ownership of the land at Cartha Crescent will now be early March pushing the site start date to nearer end of March. It was also noted that the Association is still waiting on formal offer of grant from the Scottish Government and a full update would be given to the Management Committee meeting on 14th February 2024.

L. Ramsay noted the closing cash position, as at 31st December 2023, was £11.2m.

L. Ramsay noted the Treasury deviations to Policy. Bank of Scotland account now opened and holding a £2m deposit, however, we await opening of a Santander deposit account with compliance checks still ongoing. An account application has also been made to Charity Aid Foundation bank deposit platform.

L. Ramsay discussed the application that had been made to Charity Aid Foundation which provides charities with a platform for cash deposits and loans. This will give access to more than 100 deposit account from an extensive panel of banks through a single application and take advantage of the Financial Services Compensation Scheme protection level of £85k per provider, allowing W.H.A. to spread risk with cash deposits.

L. Ramsay noted that, a change to the Treasury Management policy to include the CAF bank is also being presented for decision. A committee member asked if this decision had been discussed with J. Scott to take advantage of his professional experience in the banking sector to which L. Ramsay confirmed it had.

L. Ramsay presented the summary of the latest forecast for the 12 months to 31st March 2024, reporting that Income is in line with expectations and costs are expected to be marginally below budget, with additional interest income bringing forecast surplus to £1.4m - £0.2m above budget.

A committee member asked what the average time people can be on W.H.A.'s waiting list for a property. J. Grant advised that he would find out and update at next meeting.

Cash levels are projected to be £10.5m, however, is dependent on timing of payments to suppliers for planned maintenance programmes and the office refurb which may be made in the next financial year.

The Committee were asked to note the results for the 9 months to 31st December 2023, the treasury management policy variations and the opening of a CAF bank account. The approval of the Q3 forecast to be the latest projection of the financial results were approved on a motion, proposed by Cllr. M. MacLaren and seconded by A. Ballantine.

4. Policy Review

Treasury Management Policy

L. Ramsay presented the report noting that there are only minor amendments to the policy, as it was updated, in detail, last year to reflect the SFHA model policy from the CIPFA treasury code. The changes are mainly the addition of CAF bank to the deposit holder approved list and to the maximum amount of cash to be held with one provider (except main bankers) to be reduced to £2m from £3m.

4. Policy Review Contd.

Salary Sacrifice Policy

L. Ramsay discussed a change which is required to the policy in line with Management Committee's decision, as part of the pension consultation. Effective from April 2024, the employer's national insurance savings made by W.H.A., as a result of staff participating in the salary sacrifice scheme, will be passed to the employee by means of an Employer Added Voluntary Contribution (AVC)".

HR Policies

L. Fleeting summarised the following five staff related policies, noting that all policies have always been part of the Conditions of Service and as part of the ongoing staff consultation via the forum, it has been agreed to remove elements of the terms and conditions to their own policy and have a summary within the Conditions of Service that highlights where to find more information on each section:

Annual Leave Policy

Committee were advised that the main amendment to this policy relates to carry forward leave - one week leave to be pro-rata for part time staff. This was discussed with all part time staff in April 2023 at the start of our leave year and agreed.

Special Leave Policy

L. Fleeting noted that, whilst special leave has always been an option, this policy introduces some amendments and improvements to special leave for staff. In summary, the policy provides some clarity around Fertility treatment, Bereavement leave, Parental Bereavement, Miscarriage and Domestic stress. L Fleeting advised that previous wording referred to a member of staff only qualifying for 5 days leave if they were arranging the funeral, therefore, this has been amended to a week's leave for staff, if they are either a close relative, **or** have the responsibility for arranging the funeral.

A Committee member asked if the language around "dependents" can be amended to a more generalised nature, L. Fleeting agreed to amend.

A Committee member asked if this policy would apply for family scenarios of domestic stress to which L Fleeting replied, yes this is at managers' discretion and list is deliberately not prescriptive.

A Committee member asked is this policy covered Social purpose /volunteer leave in line with community regenerating work to which L. Fleeting replied, yes W.H.A. is open to support staff in this manner, advising that we currently have a few staff members accessing this policy.

A Committee member asked if this benefit was promoted to staff to which J. Grant responded that this would be taken forward and promoted to staff.

4. Policy Review Contd.

Adoption Policy

L. Fleeting advised there are no changes to terms and conditions for staff and the wording has been agreed with the staff forum.

A Committee member asked if a situation arose whereby a family member took on caring responsibilities for a child/children, would W.H.A. consider leave under the adoption policy. L. Fleeting advised that whilst this is not covered under the law, we would absolutely work with the member of staff in supporting the new family environment/dynamic and ensure that whichever family friendly policy might be the appropriate policy would be implemented.

Shared Parental Leave Policy

L. Fleeting summarised that the policy changes reflect the period of paid leave to be the same for Shared Parental leave (as recently negotiated between EVH and Unite). Should any staff member wish to utilise Shared Parental Leave, they are encouraged to discuss with their Line Manager and HR, at the earliest opportunity, to ensure they are aware of all the options.

Maternity, Pregnant Parent Leave Policy

L. Fleeting advised that the policy had been updated to have more inclusive together with highlighting that there is an option to receive a lump sum payment of the contractual pay element upon returning to work as opposed to receiving pay throughout. This has never been used by a W.H.A. employee, however, is an agreed term via EVH and Unite so has remained in the policy.

All policies were approved, on a motion proposed by C. Henry and seconded by A. Ballantine.

5. Procurement of Internal Audit

L. Ramsay discussed the report which detailed the recent internal audit procurement exercise and advised that Wylie & Bisset LLP scored the highest out of the four returned tenders.

The decision to award Wylie & Bisset LLP the new internal audit contract was passed, on a motion proposed by Cllr. M. MacLaren and seconded by C. Henry.

6. Key Performance Indicators

L. Ramsay presented the KPI report stating that any amber colour coded measures were being worked on. Committee noted the content of the report.

7. Data Protection Report

This report was presented by L. Ramsay, who advised that the organisation is continuing with Records Management/Data Retention which staff are all involved in. Committee noted the content of the report.

8. Audit Report Contd.

L. Ramsay presented the Audit Report summarising that of the 15 audit actions included in the report, seven had been completed this quarter, six had been added, following the two latest internal audits and only two other outstanding actions will be carried forward to 2024/25.

L. Ramsay also informed Committee that external auditor CT are currently working on the interim audit and the fieldwork for the annual accounts was scheduled for early June.

Committee noted the content of the report.

9. HR Report

L. Fleeting presented the HR Report, advising on the status of the current recruitment positions including the high volume of applications being received for the estate management posts. Furthermore, L. Fleeting updated Committee on recent external recruitment exercise, which resulted in three internal candidates being appointed.

L. Fleeting advised of ongoing Absence Management procedures in place to support a member of staff on long term absence, to return to work shortly.

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

10. Any Other Business

L. Ramsay advised that a representative from external audit CT would be in attendance at the next meeting, to discuss audit plan and be available for any Committee questions.

11. Date and Time of Next Meeting

M. Symons thanked everyone for their attendance and advised that the next scheduled meeting of W.H.A.'s Finance, Audit & Corporate Services Sub Committee would be held on **Wednesday, 1st May 2024 at 6pm (Teams).**

CONVENOR:

DATE: