

Readers may note that some information within these documents have been omitted / redacted.

Some information has been omitted / redacted as disclosure may prejudice the commercial interests of Irvine Housing Association trading as Riverside Scotland.

We recognise that the commercial sensitivity of information may decline over time and the harm arising from disclosure may be outweighed by the public interest in openness and transparency. We commit to review the redaction of any such information from time to time.

Some information has been redacted as it contains personal data which identifies an individual. Disclosure of this information would place Irvine Housing Association t/a Riverside Scotland in breach of the Data Protection Act 2018.

THE RIVERSIDE GROUP LIMITED

IRVINE HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Special Meeting of the Board held at 9.30 a.m. on
Saturday 26 October 2024 at 44-46 Bank Street, Irvine and via MS Teams

Minutes

Present: Mr J. Strang (In the Chair), Mrs M. Burgess, Mr G. Darroch, Mrs J. Deans-Regan, Mrs J. Galbraith, Mr P. Mason, Mr J. Miller, Mrs S. Petrie and Mr B. Sadler (T).

In attendance were Mrs D. Boyle, Ms H. Duff, Mrs P. Forrest, Ms M. Turner and Ms L. Worrall.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Ms S. Greene and Mr P. New.

Declarations of Interests

Nil.

1. **Apologies of Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Ms S. Greene and Mr P. New.

The Chair advised that Mr New had announced that he would shortly retire from his role as Executive Director, Customer Service at Group which would consequently mean that the role Parent Nominee Board Member would become vacant. A proposal regarding this appointment would be discussed later in the meeting under Any Other Business.

The Chair then thanked Mr New for his stewardship during his time on the Board and offered best wishes to Mr New for a happy retirement.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests to declare.

3. **Annual Assurance Statement – Deep Dive Update: Verification of Contractor Data**

Mrs M. Hutchinson advised that the report presented the results of the deep dive of Contractor Data which was one of three requested by Board to be carried out during the year to provide assurance in this business area.

Mrs Hutchinson highlighted that the paper detailed the various methods being used to check and verify the data provided by the contractors for first time fix, appointments and post inspections. The Board confirmed they were pleased to see the positive results of the sample testing and commented that Group colleagues' involvement in the reviews, provided an additional level assurance which they had also received for the other 2 deep dives previously reported.

The Board thereafter NOTED the outcome of the deep dive into the Verification of Contractor Data and expressed its thanks to the Asset Team and Group colleagues for their work in this area.

4. **Annual Assurance Statement**

Mrs M. Hutchinson advised that the deadline for Annual Assurance Statement submission to the Regulator was by 31 October 2024. The Audit & Risk Committee had previously considered the Regulatory Compliance Assessment Report in detail and the content of the draft Annual Assurance Statement at its meeting earlier in the month. The Senior Management Team had previously reviewed the report and judged the Association to be fully compliant with the Scottish Housing Regulator's (SHR) Regulatory Framework. There were some areas where officers had highlighted that service could be improved on further and these were detailed within the proposed Action Plan. The remaining few actions which had not been completed from the previous year's Action Plan would also be transferred on the 2024/25 Action Plan.

Mrs Hutchinson advised that as part of discussions at the Audit & Risk Committee meeting, deep dives for the coming year were proposed on the Freedom of Information service. Mr P. Mason stated that the Committee had also discussed the possibility of having a deep dive of the Complaints Handling process and data during the year, to follow up on items highlighted in the recent internal audit of this area. The Board discussed this suggestion and noted the negative comments relating to complaints in the customer consultation of the Association's assurance process and agreed a deep dive in this area would provide further assurance to them as part of the compliance assessment process in the coming year.

Mr Mason reported on the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting and highlighted that the Committee had taken assurance from the volume of evidence provided in the assessment report, the strength of the Internal Audit carried out of the Association's assessment process and the results of the deep dives carried out throughout the year. The Committee had also suggested the inclusion of an executive summary of the assessment report in future years.

Mr B. Sadler queried the Association's approach to complaints reporting to Board. Mrs Hutchinson confirmed that the Association reported annually to the Board on complaints.

Mrs Hutchinson referred to the results of the customer consultation on the compliance assessment process, where certain comments gave some cause for concern. Unfortunately, the survey was anonymous, which meant that officers were currently unable to follow-up with the customers to resolve the issues raised. The Chair suggested that the Association consider options to encourage the customers who provided the negative feedback to come forward in order for the Association to resolve the issues detailed. A discussion followed on the theme of some of the negative comments made as part of the consultation process and suggestions were made regarding a review of future consultation exercises to ensure that specific questions were asked to ascertain meaningful feedback and that customers were encouraged to provide their contact information, if raising issues, to allow officers to make contact and work to resolve them.

The Board discussed the current ways in which the Tenant Partner Team were ensuring they were visible and available to customers on the estates

[REDACTED]

Mrs P. Forrest advised that one of the key priorities for the organisation moving forward was customer engagement and gathering both individual and community views. The Service Improvement Group was currently carrying out a scrutiny review of the complaints handling processes.

[REDACTED]

The Board welcomed the proposals described and requested a further update on this process as plans were developed further.

Following consideration of:

- a) the requirements of the Annual Assurance Statement set out the SHR's Statutory Guidance,
- b) the outcomes of the self-assessment process set out in the Regulatory Compliance Assessment Report and the associated Improvement Plan,

the Board commented that it was satisfied with the robustness of the assessment process and the supporting evidence and thereafter:

- a) APPROVED the Annual Assurance Statement for submission to the SHR.
- b) APPROVED the Regulatory Compliance Action Plan for 2024/25.
- c) AGREED that deep dives on Freedom of Information and Complaints Handling should be carried out as part of the 2024/25 compliance assessment process.

The Board commented on the quality of the report and supporting information provided and requested that their thanks were passed on to the staff involved in the self-assessment process.

5. **Rent Consultation**

Mrs M. Hutchinson advised on the current challenging environment where the Association was being asked to do more during the cost of living crisis, where it had to balance keeping its rents affordable to customers whilst at the same time ensuring the business remained viable.

Mrs Hutchinson reported on the expectation on the Association to consult with its customers on options for the proposed rent increase to take effect from 1 April 2025.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The Board noted the intention to present the draft budget to the November meeting. Mrs Hutchinson advised on the history to the rent harmonisation process which was currently in place, and which had been frozen for the previous 2 years, again due to the cost of living crisis, and requested that the Board consider whether the rent harmonisation process should be reinstated in the next financial year given that CPI was currently at a low level.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A discussion followed on measuring customer affordability and Mrs Hutchinson advised that this was currently measured against the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations affordability toolkit. The Board agreed that it should consider options deemed reasonable to apply which provided the Association financial capacity to improve its services further for customers, whilst also remaining in line with rent levels of its peers.

The Board agreed that whilst CPI was the metric required to be used when setting rent increases, it wasn't a relevant metric for the business, given it didn't reflect the Association's cost base.

[REDACTED]

The cuts to disabled adaptations funding from the Scottish Government were also discussed and the Board remained keen for the Association to be able to carry out the adaptations required for customers by self-funding any shortfall in costs for these works. Mrs Hutchinson confirmed that budget allocation was being made in the draft budget being worked on. The Board requested that this was communicated as part of the customer consultation exercise.

The Board discussed the rent harmonisation process and agreed that the Association should recommence the harmonisation process, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Following full discussion, [REDACTED] the Board:

- a) AGREED that the Association should consult with its customers on proposed rent increase levels of 2.7%, 3.2% and 3.7%.
- b) AGREED the reintroduction of the rent harmonisation supplement at a maximum of £1.50 per week.

Mrs Hutchinson advised that the consultation would be carried out during November and December, with the results of the consultation being presented to Board at its January meeting, when Board would be asked to make a decision on the rent increase to be applied from 1 April 2025.

6. **Any Other Business**

a) **Parent Nominee Board Member**

The Board discussed and agreed in principle to the proposal for Cris McGuinness to join the Board as the Parent Nominee Board Member following Patrick New's planned resignation from the Board and thereafter DELEGATED AUTHORITY to the Chair to formally approve the proposed appointment of Cris McGuinness under Chair's Action Procedure.

- b) [REDACTED]

7. **Date of Next Meeting**

263rd Board Meeting – 5.30 p.m. on Thursday 21 November 2024, at Riverside Scotland’s offices, 44-46 Bank Street, Irvine, KA12 0LP and via MS Teams.

D MacLean
Secretary
28 October 2024
DMcL/db

.....

Date