



Minutes of the Board Meeting held on Tuesday 21 January 2020 at 4pm Link House, 2C New Mart Road, Edinburgh, EH14 1RL.

Present:	Mr R Martin (Chair)	In attendance:	Mrs H Bayne (Item 7)
	Mr C Allan		Mr C Culross (item 9)
	Ms P Biberbach		Mrs J Green (Item 8)
	Ms M Catterall		Mr N Hall
	Ms C Cuthbertson		Mr J Turner
	Mr I Dickson		
	Mr C Donaldson		
	Mr J Flaherty		Mrs J Ferri (Minutes)
	Mr D Mackie		
	Mr A Smith		

Action

1.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

2.0 APOLOGIES

None.

3.0 APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 NOVEMBER 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 19 November 2019 were approved.

Moved: Mr Mackie
Seconded: Mr Smith

4.0 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 NOVEMBER 2019

4.1 Corporate Transformation Programme

The Board noted that Larkfield was considering a potential transfer of engagements to Link. Mr Turner advised that further discussion would take place with the Larkfield Board soon.

Mr Turner further advised that he had attended a Horizon strategy day and that he and Mr Hall had attended West Highland HA's Board away day.

4.2 Standard and Poors (S&P)

The Board noted that Link had retained its A+ credit rating and the outlook remains as before, being a negative outlook.

It was further noted that S&P had indicated that it would wish to review the outlook in 6 months' time.

4.3 Larkfield Intercompany Loan

The Board noted that the intercompany loan documentation was duly executed and Link advanced £2.5M to Larkfield on 17 December 2019 and the loan from the Royal Bank of Scotland had been repaid in full.

It was further noted that all Larkfield's properties were now unencumbered.

4.4 Any other matters arising

None

5.0 LINK GROUP ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

6.1 Chairs Update

The Board considered and discussed the previously circulated report.

The Board agreed that it was a very comprehensive report and proposed that, going forward, the report could be produced in the format of diary entries and bullet points.

Board Remuneration

The Board noted that the question of extending Board remuneration beyond the chair had not progressed further. Given that the new intra group agreements provided for the chairs of the RSL subs to be on the Link Group Board it would be appropriate for a working group to be established with membership drawn from across the group to explore the principle of payment to group Board Members.

It was agreed that the working group would be established at the March Board meeting to progress the discussion of payment to Board office bearers. Volunteers for this working group would be sought prior to the meeting.

It was further agreed that the make up of the group should include up to three Board members from the Link Group Board and one from each of the remaining RSL Boards and Link Housing Association.

6.2 Chief Executive Update

The Board considered and discussed the previously circulated report.

Customer Engagement Workstream

The Board noted that Link was currently considering its various customer engagement channels and that this was a key element of the housing services strategy.

Trauma Skills Academy

The Board noted that LinkLiving had been asked to submit a proposal to establish a Trauma Skills Academy that would be funded by Fife Council.

Tenant App

The Board noted that there was good progress being made on signing customers up to the new 'Link App' and that there were now over 600 customers online. Mr Turner advised this number was expected to increase given that tenancy visits take place once a year.

New Group Finance Director

Mr Turner advised that there had been a good response to the Group Finance Director post. It was noted that Interviews had been scheduled and the outcome should be known by the end of the week.

Business Plan 2020

It was noted that the Business Plan for 2020 would not be significantly different from last year but would include sections related to:

- Blackwood Homes and Care
- Decarbonisation Strategy
- New Group Structure
- Housing Consultation 2040

GROUP SERVICES

7.1 FINANCIAL REPORT

The Board considered and noted the previously circulated report.

Mrs Bayne joined the meeting at this point.

7.2 UNITE PAYCLAIM

The Board considered and discussed the previously circulated report.

The Board noted that the pay claim was specifically related to the inflation related pay award and that in addition consolidated and non-consolidated pay awards are made also.

The Board agreed that in considering future pay awards further analytical information should be provided including detail on how non-consolidated payments are made and inclusion of Scotland specific data rather than UK data.

The Board considered and discussed the Unite pay claim in detail and noted that the Employers and Voluntary Housing (EVH) inflation related pay award was 1.6% and that current CPI was 1.3%

Mrs Bayne and Mr Turner left the meeting at this point.

The Board agreed to offer 1.75% as an inflation related pay award and in addition delegated further authority to the Chair to agree a settlement.

Mrs Bayne and Mr Turner re-joined the meeting at this point.

7.3 HUMAN RESOURCES SIX MONTHLY REPORT

The Board considered and discussed the previously circulated report

The Board noted that Absence rates were increasing slightly and Mrs Bayne advised that this was due to change in policy and focusing in on short term absence.

Mrs Bayne advised that while there was an increase in the number of employee relation cases, this was not a cause for a concern and was due to managers who had a more effective management style.

The Board noted that there had been an increase in head count and FTE and that staff turnover had almost doubled, with one of the reasons for this being due to the increase in employee relations cases.

It was noted that the level of Learning and Development across the group had significantly increased.

Mrs Bayne confirmed that Link had a policy on mental health and wellbeing and that a number of mental health awareness courses were carried out.

It was noted that as well as the training there were a number of channels open to staff with regard to mental health and wellbeing.

Mrs Bayne left the meeting at this point.

Mrs Green joined the meeting at this point.

8.0 HOUSING SERVICES

8.1 Rent Increase

The Board considered and discussed the previously circulated report.

It was noted that Link Group's rent increase had been below the Scottish Average for 4 out of the previous 5 years.

The Board noted that the recent Value for Money survey had indicated that 89% of tenants considered their rent to be "good" or "fairly good" which was a significant increase from 65% in 2017.

It was further agreed to engage with Link Housing Association's Board earlier in the process with regard to future rent increases and that it may be appropriate to start the consultation earlier in future years.

The Board approved the recommendation to implement a 2.5% rent increase from April 2020.

It was further agreed that feedback would be provided in the spring tenant newsletter and to the Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) as to how tenants' views were taken into account in the Link Group Board decision on the rent increase.

8.2 Housing With Heart Strategy

Mrs Green gave a presentation which provided an overview as to how housing services would be delivered in the next 3 to 5 years.

The Board noted that the next phase of this was a meeting taking place on Friday 21 February 2020 with all the RSLs across the group

It was suggested that the word "customer" was no longer appropriate and should be reviewed and replaced. The Board further considered that the use of the word "subsidiary" should also be replaced with "group member" or similar term.

The Board thanked Mrs Green for an informative presentation.

Mrs Green left the meeting at this point

Mr Culross joined the meeting at this point.

9.0 COMMERCIAL SERVICES

9.1 Commercial Services Restructure

The Board considered and discussed the previously circulated report.

Mr Culross advised the Board that the report sets out the proposal to simplify Link's current operating structure in the delivery of its non-charitable (commercial) activities by grouping them in one commercial focussed subsidiary.

The Board considered that the proposal set out good opportunities for Link.

It was agreed that it was essential to have the right balance of skills and experience on the Board of the new company.

9.2 Development Sub Committee

The Board considered and discussed the previously circulated report.

The Board noted that the Development Sub Committee had approved the following 8 projects:

- **Pre Acquisition & Tender Risk Assessment – Tinker's Lane, Motherwell**

The Committee approved the request to enter into a golden brick purchase agreement and enter into a subsequent Design and Build contract with Dundas Building Co Ltd for the delivery of 68 flatted units, 52 for social rent and 16 for NSSE at Tinker's Lane Motherwell for the sum of £8,739,746.

- **Pre Acquisition & Tender Risk Assessment – Carlowrie Avenue, Blantyre**

The Committee approved the request to enter into a purchase of the site at Carlowrie Avenue, Blantyre and enter into a subsequent Design and Build contract with Building Craftsmen (Dumfries) Limited. The proposals will deliver 24 social rent units, comprising 6 one-bedroom, 9 two-bedroom flats, including 2 wheelchair exemplar flats and 9 three bed houses for the sum of £3,467,898 including the land value of £360,000.

- **Pre Acquisition & Tender Risk Assessment – Laxford Place, Coatbridge**

The Committee approved the request to enter into a purchase of the site at Laxford Place from North Lanarkshire Council

and enter into a subsequent Partnering (PPC(S)2000) contract with JR Construction (Scotland) Ltd for the delivery of 36 units, including 18 flats and 18 houses, for social rent, for the sum of £5,322,224 for the PPC(S)2000 contract and £nil value for the land from North Lanarkshire Council.

- **Pre Acquisition Risk Assessment – Riverside Walk, Paisley**

The Committee approved the request to purchase completed new build units at Riverside Walk, Paisley from Nixon Blue (Old Sneddon Street) Limited in the sum of £2,192,400. The off the shelf purchase will deliver 16, 2 bedroom new build units within a flatted development with associated car parking and amenity space.

- **Pre Acquisition & Tender Risk Assessment – St Ninian's Crescent, Paisley**

The Committee approved the request to enter into a Partnering (PPC(S)2000) contract with JR Construction (Scotland) Ltd for the delivery of 23 social rented; semi-detached, terraced houses and cottage flats at St Ninian's Crescent, Paisley for the sum of £4,447,899.76.

- **Pre Tender Risk Assessment – Millarston Drive, Paisley**

The Committee approved the request to enter into a Partnering (PPC(S)2000) contract with McTaggart Construction Ltd for the delivery of 99 units for social rent including 41 flats and 58 houses at Millarston Drive, Paisley, for the sum of £17,061,623.

- **Pre Tender Risk Assessment – Kilsyth Road, Kirkintilloch**

The Committee approved the request to enter into the Partnering (PPC(S)2000) contract with CCG (Scotland) Limited, for the delivery of 23 units for social rent at 38 Kilsyth Road, Kirkintilloch for the sum of £3,065,900

- **Pre Tender Risk Assessment – Broomhill Hospital, Kirkintilloch**

The Committee approved the request to enter into the Partnering (PPC(S)2000) contract with McTaggart Construction Ltd, for the delivery of 33 social rent and 12 mid-market rent units at the former Broomhill Hospital site, Kirkintilloch, for the sum of £5,056,306.

Mr Culross advised the Board that a tour of development sites was in the process of being arranged for Development Sub Committee

members and if any other Board members were interested to contact Mr Culross.

Ms Catterall left the meeting at this point.

9.3 PSL Write Offs

The Board considered and discussed the previously circulated report.

The Board approved the write-off of former PSL tenant arrear balances totalling £401,521.

PSL Contract

Mr Culross advised the Board that Link was one of two suppliers that had tendered for the PSL contract. The Committee was due to meet on Thursday and the preferred supplier was Link.

The Board congratulated Mr Culross on the successful tender exercise.

Mr Culross, Mrs Donaldson and Ms Biberbach left the meeting at this point

10.0 BUSINESS CONTINUITY POLICY

The Board considered and discussed the previously circulated report.

The Board approved the updated Business Continuity Policy.

11.0 OPERATIONAL CHANGE PROPOSAL

The Board considered and discussed the previously circulated report.

The Board approved the proposed Diary dates and noted with effect from May 2020 the meetings would take place at 10am instead of 4pm.

12.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

13.0 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 17 March 2020 at Link House, 2c New Mart Road, Edinburgh, EH14 1RL

The Meeting closed at 6:20pm.