

SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR BOARD

Board Meeting 23 March 2020 by telephone

Present

George Walker (GW)	SHR Chair
Anne Jarvie (AJ)	SHR Deputy Chair
Andrew Watson (AW)	SHR Board member
Bob Gill (BG)	SHR Board member
Helen Trouten Torres (HTT)	SHR Board member
Colin Stewart (CS)	SHR Board member
Siobhan White (SW)	SHR Board member
Mike Dailly (MD)	SHR Board member

In attendance

Michael Cameron (MC)	Chief Executive
Iain Muirhead (IM)	Director of Digital & Business Support
Ian Brennan (IB)	Director of Regulation
Roisin Harris (RH)	Corporate Governance Manager

1. Apologies and declarations of interest

GW welcomed all present and thanked everyone for participating by telephone. The Board noted apologies from Ewan Fraser (EF) - SHR Board member.

SW declared that she previously taught some consultants who now work with Arneil Johnston, which is currently commissioned by SHR to carry out work on asset management. The Board noted the declaration.

There were no other declarations.

2. Consent agenda items

The Board considered the consent agenda items.

The Board agreed to note and approve the consent items including the:

- matters arising update;
- minutes from the 24 February 2020 meeting; and
- Chair's report & member activity.

3. Chief Executive's report

MC presented his report on issues and developments of significance in regulated bodies, the wider housing environment, and SHR.

He set out business continuity arrangements in place for SHR. MC highlighted the messages issued to landlords on how SHR is shifting its regulation to focus on the impact of the pandemic and that much routine regulation work such as the engagement plans ([planned for publication at end March]) has been paused.

MC also explained that SHR and SFHA have worked with Scottish Government colleagues to produce FAQs for the sector, which will continue to be updated and are liaising on an ongoing basis with SFHA, GWSF and ALACHO. MC updated the Board on a meeting he and the Chair had with the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning and reported that the Minister has asked the SFHA to convene a Resilience Group of key sector organisations including Scottish Government, SHR, ALACHO, WHG and GWSF. MC

welcomed the formation of a resilience group and explained the rapid pace of developments to the Board.

MC updated the Board on notifiable events that SHR has received from landlords around changes to service. MC also explained that SHR has sought to identify landlords that could face significant challenges in responding to the pandemic.

He reported that SHR is monitoring the impact for all landlords and will develop a proportionate way of gathering situation data that can be reported into the Resilience Group to help inform support.

MC also set out the challenges that landlords have reported around gas safety checks and homelessness services. He confirmed that it is out-with SHR's remit to suspend statutory duties. He reported that some RSLs are providing all their lets to councils to use for temporary and permanent accommodation for homeless people. He also reported that the Scottish Government has provided funding to the Simon Community Scotland for hotel accommodation for homeless people in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

MC also updated the Board on work with stakeholders to define housing key workers.

The Board also considered the CEO's other updates and discussed:

- services for homeless people and those fleeing abuse, noting the discussions ongoing with Scottish Government;
- rents, noting Scottish Government is seeking to support tenants and that social landlords have proactively stated there will be no evictions and that discussions will continue with the Resilience Group;
- UK Treasury support for businesses;
- a forthcoming meeting with UK Finance; and
- gas safety, noting current guidance to make best efforts to gain access, record any access issues and revisit at an appropriate point.

The Chair reported on his recent meeting with the Minister and emphasised the importance of a Resilience Group. The Board noted the process around Scottish Government's FAQs and welcomed that SHFA has agreed to convene the Resilience Group.

The Board noted the Chief Executive's report and asked him to keep it updated.

4. Budget 2020/21

IM presented the draft budget for 2020/21. He highlighted that even if SHR receives a capital allowance and funding as an area of know pressure it is still extremely challenging settlement.

He reported that SHR has made a business case to the Scottish Government for both capital and known pressure funding, but that due to current Covid-19 priorities there is no indication of the timescale of that process. IM explained that a small number of vacancies are contributing to the vacancy rate and that turnover would normally be expected in-year. IM reported that the Chair has meetings timetabled with the Director of Housing and Social Justice and the Minister for Local Government, Housing & Planning.

Then Board considered the proposed budget and discussed:

- the pressure on public funds in light of the current crisis;
- the vacancy rate assumptions that may balance SHR's budget, agreeing these are reasonable;

- the plans for capital spend to keep the business intelligence system running allowing SHR's to fulfill its statutory duties around data collection and monitoring;
- website hosting costs, noting the competitive tendering process and that the Scottish Government paid for this in 2019/20 and as agreed has now passed the cost onto SHR;
- previous correspondence from SHR Chair to the Minister around the budget and opportunities to discuss at future meetings; and
- the possibility of reduced staff turnover in 2020/21 due to the pandemic.

The Board approved the revenue budget for 2020/21 and noted the assumptions. It also approved the capital budget, noting this is subject to a business case which is with the Scottish Government and the revenue fall-back arrangement if the business case is not successful.

5. 2020/21 Operating Plan update

The Chair explained that he and MC had agreed not to propose a new operating plan for 2020/21 in light of the current situation and work priorities. He highlighted that this will mean SHR commencing the year without a full operating plan. The Board noted that a draft plan had been prepared for discussion at the meeting, but in the context of current circumstances the team will revisit it later when it becomes clearer what might be possible for the remainder of the year.

MC confirmed that the BI contract has been awarded and signed.

Board members noted that other organisations they are involved with have taken a similar approach and agreed being pragmatic made sense. It agreed not to consider the 2020/21 operating plan until later in the year and asked MC to keep it updated.

6. Any other business

The Board noted

- its next meeting is planned for 5 May, it agreed to add an additional meeting in April and asked RH to seek a suitable date; and
- the planned strategy event with staff in June has been postponed until October.

The Board noted that this was the last meeting for Deputy Chair Anne Jarvie who has been a member since 2013. It thanked Anne for her fantastic contributions and agreed to invite her back to mark this once the circumstances have changed. AJ thanked the Board and wished SHR and all the members and staff well.

12. Effectiveness of meetings and papers

The Board agreed that the meeting was effective and the agenda covered the right areas. It asked RH to explore if any alternative to telephone conference calls are available. The Board noted the range of platforms that are in use and that IM is discussing with Scottish Government what can be used on the network.

13. DONM

The Board will next meet during April 2020. Post meeting the Board agreed to meet on 14 April 2020.

Post meeting notes

From 24 March – 14 April 2020 the Board received information by correspondence on:

- 18 March statement to all landlords;
- 27 March business continuity update;

- 31 March statement to all landlords;
- Standards Commission March update;
- A letter from the Local Government and Communities Committee and related press coverage
- A new section on SHR's website to pull together all SHR's regulatory Covid-19 related advisory guidance