

# ALBYN HOUSING SOCIETY LIMITED

## REPORT OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 10 SEPTEMBER 2013 AT 10:30 AM AT ALBYN'S OFFICES, INVERGORDON

### Present

Mr D Russell (Chair)	Mr G Sinclair	Mrs I McLaughlan (Agenda Items 1 – 4.8.4)
Mr B Summerfield	Mr J Oag	Ms M Smith (Agenda Items 1 – 4.8.10)
Ms K Williams	Mr T Solle	Mrs S Slimon (Agenda Items 1 – 4.8.10)
Mrs E Grant	Mrs P Dingwall	

### Visitors in Attendance

Ms J Dickie, Scottish Housing Regulator

### Staff Members in Attendance

Mr C Macaulay: Chief Executive	Mr R Nairn: Finance & Corporate Services Director	Ms H Barton: Customer Services Director
Mr D Lockhart: Asset Management & Investment Director	Miss C Lawrie: Corporate Officer (Minutes)	

## 1. APOLOGIES AND WELCOME FROM CHAIR

- 1.1 Apologies had been received from Mr Convery for this meeting.
- 1.2 The Chair formally noted the Society's thanks to the Board members who had stood down at the recent Annual General Meeting – Mrs MacRae, Mrs Cairney, Miss Cameron and Mr Kelman – for their many years of service.
- 1.3 The Chair welcomed the four new Board members to their first meeting – Mrs Dingwall, Ms Williams, Mrs Grant and Mr Solle.
- 1.4 The Chair thanked Mrs McLaughlan for her leadership of the Board in her role as Chair and welcomed her back as a Board member.
- 1.5 The Chair noted that in future Board and Committee meetings will have a standing item to allow Board members to declare any conflicts of interest.

## 2. PRESENTATION FROM MS JANET DICKIE, SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR

- 2.1 Ms Dickie thanked the Board for allowing her to attend today's meeting. Ms Dickie reported that she had met with Albyn's Directors at a separate meeting the previous day.
- 2.2 Ms Dickie said that the meeting with the Directors had been very helpful and had provided her with an update on various issues. This included the Scottish Housing Quality Standards; and data collecting services, reporting and updating. She understood that Albyn was still on track to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standards by November 2014.

- 2.3 Ms Dickie had also been updated on welfare reform and the challenges Albyn faces regarding this. Ms Dickie was pleased to hear about the funding that had been won to provide support resources on this issue, and that another lottery bid had progressed to the second stage.
- 2.4 She noted that the arrears figures have risen although Ms Dickie was pleased to hear from Ms Barton that the rate of increase had slowed. The trend experienced by Albyn was reflected in other Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).
- 2.5 Ms Dickie was interested to hear about the social enterprise items, such as the social enterprise hotel. Her role was to ensure that Albyn had considered and addressed any risks that such ventures produced.
- 2.6 The Annual Performance and Statistical Return had been discussed, the final year that this will be produced. Ms Dickie was pleased to note the positive customer feedback and the positive contribution to helping homeless people. She was also pleased to note that the income lost in terms of voids had nearly halved since the last financial year.
- 2.7 Ms Dickie noted the change in Board membership. She was pleased that a recruitment process had been used and that an appraisal system was in place. Ms Dickie commented that it was very important to receive training and to keep up to date with the key issues.

### **3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

#### **3.1 Minutes of Previous Meeting: 25 June 2013**

The minutes for the Board meeting were agreed as a true record.

##### **3.1.1 Action Items**

The Customer Services Director explained the background to the requirement to seek legal advice regarding enforcing entry for planned maintenance. It had been hoped to use the same process as that for gaining access for gas checks. After taking legal advice, minor changes will be made to the Tenancy Agreement to ensure that planned maintenance entry is included. In addition a consultation will take place with tenants in order to identify any issues in relation to the proposal for enforcing entry when needed for planned maintenance issues.

3.1.2 Ms Barton said that consideration will be given on a contract by contract basis and whether the work is essential to meet Scottish Housing Quality Standards (SHQS), or whether it is more “nice to have”. It was agreed that a sensitive approach will be taken, but bearing in mind there may be circumstances where entry will have to be enforced.

3.1.3 The Asset Management & Investment Director provided an update on the Aviemore biomass system issue. The rectification process is in two phases. In the first phase the leak was found and rectified. The second part of this phase is to remove the foreign bodies in the water which have been building up in the network and causing some of the problems experienced. A major flushing exercise is therefore taking place to address this issue.

#### **3.2 Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting: 10 July 2013**

The minutes were agreed as a true record. This meeting had taken place specifically to discuss the Aviemore biomass heating system and to agree future action to be taken to address the problems the system had faced.

- 3.2.1 The Board asked about progress on learning lessons from this issue. The Asset Management & Investment Director responded that once the rectification work is complete he will be carrying out a review.
- 3.2.2 Work is progressing within budget. Tenants are being kept involved, with staff visiting the users to ensure that access is gained to all the properties to install the new equipment required. Users are also being compensated for not being on the heating system. The whole system is receiving a health check.
- 3.2.3 The Board asked if the Society was confident that this work would resolve all the problems. Mr Lockhart responded that the experts involved are very confident that the remediation works programme will be successful. The design also needs to be revisited and improved and a suitable payment system is required.
- 3.2.4 Mr Lockhart will provide the Board with an action plan on the lessons learned in due course.

#### **4. DECISION MAKING PAPERS**

##### **4.1 Election to Committees and External Bodies**

- 4.1.1 The Board noted that two tenants had each expressed an interest in joining one of Albyn's Committees. It was agreed that in the first instance the Chief Executive will meet with each of them to discuss this further with them. If they do wish to join, this will initially be as an observer.
- 4.1.2 The Board members discussed and agreed their membership of Albyn's Committees as follows:
- Audit Committee: Messrs Convery, Solle, Sinclair and Oag
  - Performance Committee: Mrs McLaughlan, Mrs Slimon, and Messrs Oag, Russell, Summerfield and Convery
  - Health & Safety Committee: Mrs Slimon, Mrs Dingwall and Mr Summerfield.
  - Staffing Committee: Ms Williams, Mrs Grant, Mrs McLaughlan, Ms Smith, Mrs Slimon, Mr Sinclair and Mr Russell.
- 4.1.3 The Board members discussed and agreed their representation on the following external bodies:
- Highland Small Communities Housing Trust: Mr Oag
  - Employers in Voluntary Housing: Mrs Slimon
  - Scottish Federation of Housing Associations: Mrs McLaughlan
  - Albyn Enterprises Limited: Ms Smith will be Albyn Housing Society's representative, and Mrs Dingwall will join the Board of AEL
  - Tenant Participation Advisory Service: Mrs McLaughlan
  - Rural & Islands Housing Association Forum (RIHAF): Mrs Slimon
  - Highland Housing Alliance: Mr Macaulay

##### **4.2 Society Membership: Applications and Cancellations**

- 4.2.1 Mr Macaulay's paper sought approval to cancel a number of memberships from those members who have had no contact with the Society for a period of five years. In addition, one member had passed away. There is also one application for membership to be considered.

4.2.2 The Board approved the cancellation of the memberships and approved the membership application.

#### 4.3 Training Requirements for Board Members

4.3.1 The paper detailed the proposed plan to address the skills and knowledge gaps identified through the recent Board appraisals and skills audit.

4.3.2 The Board approved the proposals for training and events.

#### 4.4 Mid-Market Rent Conversion: Property in Nairn

4.4.1 The Finance & Corporate Services Director's paper requested approval to lease one property to Albyn Enterprises Ltd (AEL) under the mid-market rent scheme. At their meeting on 5 September AEL had agreed to take this forwards if approved by Albyn Housing Society (AHS).

4.4.2 The Board approved the proposal.

#### 4.5 Eviction Approvals

4.5.1 The Board was asked to endorse the Chair's approval for the enforcement of court decrees for repossession of tenancies due to rent arrears.

4.5.2 The Board discussed the cases before them. The Board members endorsed the Chair's approval for the enforcement of court decrees for repossession of tenancies.

#### 4.6 National Housing Trust – Registered Social Landlord Variant: Balvonie Guarantee

4.6.1 The Finance & Corporate Services Director's paper sought "in principle" approval to sign the Guarantee and associated legal work regarding the bid to build properties at Balvonie in Inverness.

4.6.2 The Board gave "in principle" agreement to sign the Guarantee and associated legal work.

#### 4.7 Factoring and Service Charges

4.7.1 The Finance & Corporate Services Director's paper sought approval to grant aid to Albyn Enterprises Limited (AEL) so that they may employ two members of staff to implement the business plan for the transfer of the factoring and service charge activity from AHS to AEL.

4.7.2 The Board approved grant aid to AEL to enable them to employ two members of staff.

#### 4.8 Investment in New Build Development

4.8.1 The Asset Management & Investment Manager's paper sought approval from the Board to undertake work on a number of sites as part of the development programme agreed with Highland Council and Scottish Government. The paper also sought approval to increase the budget.

4.8.2 The Chief Executive said that the unit grant funding levels had recently increased and this had meant that Albyn's capacity to build had improved. In addition, sometimes land became available during the year which also impacted on the development programme. The costs of site preparatory works will be returned in the form of grant payment, once approved.

4.8.3 In answer to a query, it was confirmed that there is a demonstrable housing need in the identified areas.

4.8.4 The Board approved work to be undertaken on a number of sites as part of the development programme agreed with Highland Council and Scottish Government and the Board approved an increase in the budget.

#### 4.9 Help to Buy (Scotland) Scheme

4.9.1 The Asset Management & Investment Director's paper sought approval for Albyn Enterprises Ltd to act as Agent for the Help to Buy (Scotland) initiative.

4.9.2 Mr Lockhart confirmed that in principle agreement had already been given to the Government by AEL to act as agent, although it was noted that this was without knowing the cost implications and any income streams. Mr Lockhart believed that in the long term this scheme would benefit the affordable housing sector.

4.9.3 The Board approved Albyn Enterprises Ltd to act as Agent for the Help to Buy (Scotland) initiative.

### 5. **POLICY PROPOSALS & REVIEW**

#### 5.1 Tenancy Abandonment

5.1.1 The Customer Services Director's paper sought approval for the Tenancy Abandonment Policy for a further five year period.

#### 5.2 Adaptations to Existing Properties

5.2.1 The Customer Services Director's paper sought approval for the proposed revisions to the Adaptations to Existing Properties Policy.

#### 5.3 Customer Involvement: Strategy Review

5.3.1 The Customer Services Director's paper asked the Board to consider and approve revisions to the Customer Involvement Strategy.

#### 5.4 Information and Advice Remit

5.4.1 The Customer Services Director's paper sought the Board's approval of revisions made to the Information and Advice Remit. These amendments reflect recent structural and service changes.

5.5 The Board approved the undernoted:

- Tenancy Abandonment Policy for a further five year period
- proposed revisions to the Adaptations to Existing Properties Policy, with one minor amendment
- proposed revisions to the Customer Involvement Strategy, with the one minor addition
- proposed revisions to the Information and Advice Remit

## **6. MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

### **6.1 Albyn Enterprises Limited: 27 June 2013**

6.1.1 The minutes of the Albyn Enterprises Ltd Board meeting were noted.

### **6.2 Performance Committee: 6 August 2013**

6.2.1 The minutes of the Performance Committee meeting were noted.

### **6.3 Annual Report from Audit Committee**

6.3.1 The Audit Committee's Annual Report was noted.

## **7. STANDING ITEMS**

### **7.1 Updates from Chief Executive**

7.1.1 The Chief Executive had provided a written update on the implementation of the organisational review; Calbyn; and two recent Notifiable Events which related to a complaint dealt with by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and the new Chair elected at the Annual General Meeting.

7.1.2 The report also referred to the recently released Model Code of Conduct for Board members produced by the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA). The Board approved the Code of Conduct, which will now be implemented. The Chief Executive was tasked to produce a suitable Code of Conduct for staff by January 2014.

7.1.3 The Board noted the report.

### **7.2 Welfare Reform**

7.2.1 The Customer Services Director had provided a written update on this issue. She updated the Board on what has changed since the report was written, including a significant increase in the discretionary housing payment fund for the region. This increase is particularly to recognise the challenge for rural areas to meet the under-occupancy issues.

7.2.2 Ms Barton updated that Albyn had been successful in achieving Scottish Legal Aid Board funding of just under £200k. This will support two and a half dedicated advice worker posts and a dedicated Housing Options officer. This is in partnership with the Highlands-based RSLs and Highland Council. The staff will be based across the Highlands.

7.2.3 Ms Barton reported on the £1m Lottery bid made on behalf of the Housing Association Group. This is for four and a half years' worth of additional staff to deal with Universal Credit. The outcome of this bid will be known in January 2014.

7.2.4 Ms Barton noted that Inverness had been chosen as a pilot for Universal Credit. The practical implications are still to be determined. The pilot will apply to new claimants. The Inverness job centre covers a wide area outwith the city and it is not yet known how many Albyn tenants will be included. The pilot is due to start some time in November.

7.2.5 The Board noted the report.

## **8. HEALTH AND SAFETY**

8.1 There was nothing to note on this item.

## **9. LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

9.1 There were no requests for a leave of absence for the Board Strategy Day taking place on 22 October.

## **10. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS**

### **10.1 Board Meeting Schedules: 2014 & 2015**

The Chief Executive noted that the schedules had been adjusted from previous years to take into account changes in the reporting cycle and to ensure that there is no more than one meeting per week.

### **10.2 Organisational Change**

It was noted that the Management Team is due to hold a one year review of the organisational change and the outcomes of this will be fed back to the Board. It was agreed that a staff survey will also be carried out.

## **11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

11.1 The next meeting, a strategy day, is due to take place on 22 October 2013.