hebridean housing partnership

ITEM NO 3.1

HEBRIDEAN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP
Board Minutes of Meeting held via Microsoft Teams on Tuesday, 11 February 2025 at 5.30pm

PRELIMINARY ITEM	
ATTENDANCE & APOLOGIES	
1	**Attendance & Apologies** **Attendees via MS Teams** Gordon Macleod (Chair) Alison Maccorquodale Calum Mackay Duncan Macinnes (Joined the meeting after Item 6.1) Fiona Macleod Helen Mackenzie Norman Macdonald Valerie Russell **Apologies Received** Iain M Macleod **Apologies Not Received** Gary Lamont **Staff & Consultants in Attendance** Dena Macleod (Chief Executive) Donald Macleod (Director of Finance & Corporate Services) John Maciver (Director of Operations) Angus E MacNeil (Assets & Contracts Manager) Monika Fortagh (Debt Management Officer) Iona France (Governance Officer) Joel Martin (Corporate Services Officer) Michael Libby (Corporate Services Officer – Minute Taker) **In attendance for Public Items Only** Angus Smith (Corporate Resources Manager) Donalda Mackinnon (Area Manager) Gary Macleod (Digital Transformation Manager) James Morrison (Finance Manager) Katrina Rowlands (Service Development Manager) Katie Walker (Area Manager) Sawan Morrison (Development Manager)
PRELIMINARY PROCEDURAL MATTERS	
2	**Declaration of Interest** **Calum Mackay declared an interest in item 6.4.**
3.1	**Minute of Board Meeting 19 November 2024** **The minute of the Board meeting of 19 November 2024 was submitted and approved as a true and accurate record.**
3.3	**Action Sheet** The Chief Executive advised there were no updates to report on the Action Sheet. The Director of Operations advised the Board of FES having been acquired by OCS, a large international Facilities Management company. Business has continued as normal with no advised changes in management arrangements, reporting arrangements, or local autonomy in decision-making. A meeting was planned with Alec Blakely, FM Director with FES and following this meeting an update would be provided to the board. **The Action Sheet was noted.**
4	**Date of Next Meeting** **The date of the next meetings will be Tuesday 25 March 2025.**
5	**Health & Safety** **Nothing to report.**

ITEMS FOR DECISION	
6.1	**<u>Business Plan</u>** **Duncan Macinnes joined the meeting** The Chief Executive presented the annual review of the Business Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29, incorporating feedback from tenants and the Board self-assessment. The new actions included rent guarantees, estate visits for Board members and further engagement with the Young Islanders Network. Work was concluded on the Culture Audit as well as a thorough review of the Risk Register which resulted in a new risk being added 'Long Term Financial Viability'. The Risk Appetite was updated with a focus remaining on poverty. Updates were made to the Investment Plan and the Development Plan. Tenants and Partners will be consulted before the final Business Plan is presented to the Board on 25 March 2025 Fiona Macleod suggested a system be in place to track board and partner comments, and if they have been incorporated into the business plan. Helen Mackenzie suggested we look at the option of using "Priority Search" approach to rate importance in the future rather than a traditional ranking method. She also asked that we consider including some "leading indicators" along with our current indicators which are all "lagging". **The Board approved:** **a) the draft 2025 update to the Business Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29 as the basis for the consultation document with a final Plan brought to the Board in March 2025; and** **b) the reviewed Risk Register 11 February 2025.**
6.2	**<u>Rent Setting & Cash Planning Limits 2025/26</u>** The Director of Finance and Corporate Services (DFCS) presented the Rent Setting & Cash Planning Limits report. The report included a proposed rent increase for house rents at RPI plus 1% (4.4%) and the same increase for garage and garage site rents. Other service charges were proposed to increase by 3.4%. There was a substantial increase in the number of responses for the rent consultation, rising from 16 responses in 2024 to 125 in 2025, primarily from tenant portal users. The cash planning limits were outlined. The total increase in dwelling rents, taking into account the increase in housing stock and the rent rise, is 6.7%'. There is a reduction of 9% in grant funding reflecting the closure of the RHI Scheme. The Chair commented that it was encouraging to see the dramatic increase in consultation responses due to the introduction of the Tenant Portal. **The Board:** **a) approved the cash planning limits;** **b) approved the increase of house rents for 2025/26 at RPI plus 1% (4.4%), an average increase of £4.18 per week to £99.19 per week;** **c) approved garage rents and garage site rents for 2025/26 be increased by RPI plus 1% (4.4%);** **d) approved all other services and charges for 2025/26 be increased by 3.4%(October RPI); and** **e) noted that detailed budgets will be submitted to the Board for approval on 25 March 2025.**
6.3	**<u>Appointment of External Auditor</u>** The DFCS advised the Board that due to ill health, the previous external auditor, CIB services had tendered their resignation, and a tendering process was conducted in November 2024 resulting in two responses. Members of the Audit & Risk Committee conducted a scoring exercise, and at the Audit & Risk Committee meeting earlier in the day, recommended approval of the appointment of CT Audit for a four-year period. This covers the audit of our Financial Statements ended 31 March 2025 through to 31 March 2028, and to provide tax services over the same period to the Board. Helen Mackenzie, Audit & Risk Committee Chair, highlighted the experience of CT Audit in the housing sector. **The Board approved the appointment of CT Audit for a 4-year period for the audit of Financial Statements ended 31 March 2025 to 31 March 2028 and to provide tax services over the same period.**
6.4	**<u>Disposals & Licence Agreement</u>** This item was taken in Private and Confidential.

6.5	**<u>Void Properties – Decoration Allowance</u>** The Director of Operations proposed a revised and increased level of decoration allowances for void properties. The new allowances were increased in line with inflation and rounded up from previous amounts. An upper limit was proposed on the level of decoration allowance that would be paid for any one property. When determining the level of increase, the practices of other Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) were considered. Calum Mackay commented that this was the first increase to decoration allowance that he was aware of and expressed his approval of the revision. Alison MacCorquodale inquired about the re-use of items left by former tenants such as floor coverings. The Director of Operations advised that a revised approach to the re-use of items would be introduced from 31 March 2025 to allow certain items to be left, if they were determined to be in good condition. Helen Mackenzie raised concern for new tenants who may not be able to decorate due to age or mobility and asked if there was any support in this case. Ms Mackenzie also asked if funds would be paid to tenants in advance of decoration works or once works had been complete. The Director of Operations advised that payments would only be made to tenants once works have been finished, and acknowledged the challenge of those who may not be able to carry out decoration works due to age or mobility limitations. Ongoing efforts were being made to find ways to assist less able tenants, including potential community support. Alison MacCorquodale asked if assistance with decorations is something that could be looked at in terms of a community benefit provided by contractors. The Director of Operations advised that as part of the contract extension with FES FM, they have agreed to provide new tenants with decorating supplies such as paint brushes, rollers and dust sheets as part of their community benefit commitment. **The Board approved the proposed level of decoration allowances for 2025/26 of up to:** **a) £500 available to new tenants; and** **b) £700 for new tenants in difficult to let properties.**

POLICIES & STRATEGIES	
7.1	**<u>Special Leave Policy</u>** The Chief Executive presented the updated Special Leave Policy noting that although it was not due for renewal, changes were necessary around unpaid leave to ensure clarity. **The Board approved the Special Leave Policy.**

MONITORING REPORTS	
8.1	**<u>Quarterly Treasury Report</u>** The Director of Finance & Corporate Services presented the Treasury management activities for the third quarter of 2024/25 and confirmed our cash balances were £10.062M, a decrease of £1.392M compared to the previous quarter. All covenants were forecast to be complied with for 2024/25. **The Board noted the:** **a) quarterly report on the Analysis of Investment and Borrowing;** **b) outstanding loans at 31 December 2024 of 17M; and** **c) cash balance at 31 December 2024 of £10.062M.**
8.2	**<u>Management Report to 31 December 2024</u>** The Finance Manager presented the Management Report to 31 December 2024 highlighting a reduction in interest paid of £80K partially due to a recent reduction in the Bank of England base rate. No further issues were noted. **The Board noted the Management Report at 31 December 2024 and revised forecast out turn at 31 March 2025.**

8.3	**<u>Development Report</u>** The Development Manager provided an update on the following developments: Grimsay – Progressing with planning application and discussions were ongoing with the landowner regarding peat reclamation. Melbost West – Public Consultations were undertaken with positive feedback received as well as concerns regarding infrastructure. Scott Road – The first draft of the hydrology study was received which was generally positive, with some mitigations required. Helen Mackenzie emphasised the importance of considering the infrastructure and services that support housing developments, such as shops, doctors' surgeries, and schools. **The Board noted the Development Report.**
8.4	**<u>Investment Report</u>** The Investment Manager advised the current Investment Plan is due to complete by the end of March with the exception of one property which will be completed in April 2025. The Aids and Adaptations budget is now committed, and ongoing works are being managed with Occupational Therapy. **The Board noted the:** **a) progress on the 2024/25 Investment Programme; and** **b) update on Aids & Adaptations and the waiting list.**
8.5	**<u>Health and Safety Annual Review</u>** The Corporate Resources Manager presented the Health and Safety Annual Review noting that all staff training modules had been completed with further training to be scheduled for 2025. Helen Mackenzie emphasised the importance of capturing 'near misses' when reporting on health and safety issues. The Director of Operations advised that 'near misses' are recorded and would review the reporting on these. Helen Mackenzie commented on the importance of addressing driving safety, particularly during winter when the sun is low and suggested that a risk assessment and guidance should be provided for staff who are required to drive as part of their job, to ensure they are prepared for the challenges posed by low sun conditions. The Director of Operations advised a driving risk assessment is undertaken by staff and checks will be carried out to make sure that this covers driving in low sun conditions. **The Board noted the Health and Safety Annual Review.**
8.6	**<u>Business Plan Monitoring Report</u>** The Governance Officer presented the Business Plan Monitoring Report highlighting 90% of the business plan actions are progressing towards completion by 31 March 2025. **The Board noted the Business Plan Monitoring Report.**
8.7	**<u>CX Housing System Update</u>** The Digital Transformation Manager provided an update on the implementation of the Civica CX Housing Management System and its impact on operational processes. It was highlighted that the Tenant Portal which launched in May 2024 now has over 550 users and this, along with the CX Housing Management System had led to improved efficiency across departments. Efficiencies were achieved by introducing self-service options for tenants, reducing interactions with Customer Services, automation of account charges and the implementation of full electronic invoicing with FES FM. Helen Mackenzie acknowledged the efforts in getting the CX system and Tenant Portal live and emphasised the importance of continuing onto future phases to ensure the systems works to its full potential. **The Board noted the CX Housing System Update**
MEETING GOES INTO PRIVATE SESSION	

Chairperson Mr Gordon Macleod

SIGNED ……………………………………………………

DATE ……………………………………………………