



**(Company number: 06972673)**

Minutes of meeting of the Board of Directors held at Gateshead Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead on Monday, 21 January 2019 at 2.30pm

**Present:**

**Ordinary Trustees**

Brian Kelly (Chair)  
Joanne Carr  
Anne Connolly  
Linda Hitman  
Jason Wylie

**In attendance**

Neil Bouch (TGHC Managing Director)  
Amanda Gallagher (Development and Investment Manager)  
Mark Banks (TGHC Finance Manager)  
Stuart Gibson (TGHC Governance and Risk Officer)

**Apologies**

Paul Foy  
Leigh Kirton

**1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No interests were declared.

**2 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of Keelman Homes held on 15 November 2018 were approved as a correct record.

**3 RENT AND SERVICE CHARGE PROPOSALS FOR 2019/20**

The Rent and Service Charge Setting Policy was submitted.

No changes to the Policy were deemed necessary for 2019/20 rent and service charge setting.

The rent proposal for 2019/20 was in line with the Welfare Reform and Work Bill of a 1% rent reduction. This was an average weekly rental reduction of £0.83 at

Kibblesworth (social rent) and £0.94 for other Keelman Properties (affordable rent), based on 52 weeks rental charges.

Keelman Homes Service charges were based on the actual costs of the service provided. There was no proposed increase to these service charges recommended for 2019/20. All other optional service charges such as the Furniture scheme and Gardening Service would be as per Gateshead Council's agreed fees and charges.

Rents for new build properties not yet completed and any Empty Homes property purchases would be determined by valuation on completion. They will be the subject of future board reports as the schemes progress throughout the year.

Every six to seven years, 53 Mondays fall in a financial year and this would be the case in 2019/20. As rent debits were raised on Mondays this meant that it would ordinarily benefit from an 'extra' week's rent when there are 53 Mondays in a year. This created two issues to be addressed:

- Compliance with the Welfare Reform Act 2016 to ensure 1% rent reductions. The definition within the legislation states that rent payable "in respect of that relevant year" shall be calculated on a daily basis and allows for 53 weeks to be charged as normal.
- UC claimants would not receive additional funding to cover the additional weeks charge. This issue has been raised with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to find a suitable long-term solution and the authority would make suitable arrangements once guidance has been received.

It was noted that this was a national issue and was currently being discussed with the Council. No decision had been taken yet in terms of resolving it.

It would result in an additional cost of approximately £1,500 to Keelman Homes. However, most of Keelman Homes' tenants were not on Universal Credit, therefore it would actually be a benefit in terms of the rent collected from these tenants.

The Board was informed that this was the last year of the 1% reduction in rent. In future, Keelman Homes was able to revert back to CPI plus 1%. It was noted that this had all been built onto the long term financial business plan.

RESOLVED – That the proposed rent and service charge changes for 2019/20 be approved.

#### **4 COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2019-21**

The current Strategic Risk Register relating to failure to maintain a positive reputation identified a planned control to develop and implement a Communications Strategy and further development of the Keelman Homes website.

A draft Communications Strategy 2019-21 was submitted. The Strategy sets out the approach Keelman Homes would take to ensure residents and other customers, staff, stakeholders and the general public understand its vision, values and objectives and what it was doing to achieve them so that it continued to build on its excellent reputation. By having a successful strategy in place, Keelman Homes could manage the way it communicated with its audiences,

demonstrated the success of its work and challenged perceptions where necessary.

Performance would be measured annually and would inform an annual review of the strategy.

The Board expressed some concern about the weaknesses and threats identified in the draft Strategy. It was felt that there needed to be more emphasis on Keelman Homes having its own brand and what it would be doing to deliver this, for example Keelman Homes carrying out its own customer satisfaction survey and better education for its tenants that it is separate from the Council and The Gateshead Housing Company. It was agreed that the Strategy be updated and brought back to the next Board Meeting for consideration.

RESOLVED – That the Keelman Homes' Communications Strategy 2019-21 be amended to reflect the additional comments made by the Board and an updated Strategy be brought back to the next meeting in March 2019.

## **5 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of Keelman Homes would be held on Thursday, 28 March 2019 at 2.30pm in Room S21, Gateshead Civic Centre.

## **6 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED – That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the remaining business in accordance with Categories 5 & 6 of the company's Access to Information Rules.