

BOARD UPDATE
BOARD STRATEGY AND DEVELOPMENT DAY
WEDNESDAY 13TH DECEMBER 2023



CUSTOMER STORY

Our December Board Strategy and Development Day opened with a story from a customer who was injured at work and subsequently received support to change his property banding to enable them to move to a property more suited to their needs.

The customer talked about how their situation had been improved by being moved to gold Homeseeker housing status from bronze and how their situation could affect any of GCH customers. The Board recognised the benefits of GCH employing their own Occupational Therapist and asked the Director of Housing to thank the customer for sharing their personal story with them.

GCH STRATEGIC PLAN AND OPERATIONAL CONTEXT FOR NEW STRATEGIES

The Chief Executive gave a presentation which provided a summary of all the positive change that had taken place in the previous year. This included transformation of the repairs service and subsequent satisfaction improvements; a new Customer Satisfaction team being established with a new design for handling complaints; the move of estate services in house and a new payment system now being implemented.

The meeting attendees were then split into three groups and were asked to review the Customer, Homes and New Homes Strategies in turn.

Following the group discussions, the meeting came back as a collective to share their discussions.

The Chair of the Board commented that there had been a huge amount of work undertaken within the organisation over the past 12 months. The Chair extended her thanks on behalf of the Board to the ELT team and along with other members reflected that the new strategies were a huge improvement over previous versions.

The Board agreed to then endorse the strategies and note that the finalised strategies alongside the associated delivery plans would be presented to the March 2024 Board Strategy Day.

RENT INCREASE

A report was presented to the Board recommending a rent increase for 2024/25. The report presented to Board had been amended following presentation to the Rent Task and Finish Group at its meeting in November 2023 – the Group was made up of a selection of Board Members and relevant officers.

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Given the business challenges alongside the verdict across the sector, the Group had agreed the recommendations to increase rent as outlined in the report.

The Group members explained that their decision had not been unanimous but had been a reflection of balancing the impact of the business plan against the compound effect of not complying. It was recognised by the Board that GCH rents, even with the proposed increase, could still not be considered excessive when compared to other providers in the county.

Board were advised that there were currently plans to establish a Customer Communications group and it was hoped the Group would have the opportunity to review the documentation prior to it being sent to customers, once it had been set up.

The Board APPROVED the following rent increases for 2024/2025, as recommended by the Rents Task & Finish Group:

- ***A 7.7% increase for all properties subject to the Rent Standard (social rent and affordable rent);***
- ***A 7.7% increase for Supported Housing properties excluded from the Rent Standard;***
- ***A 9.4% increase for those shared ownership properties where increases are based on September RPI, in accordance with the lease;***
- ***For shared ownership properties with increases based on the February 2024 RPI, that they be increased by RPI plus 0.5% in accordance with the lease; and increase garage rents by 7.7%.***

PAY AWARD 2024

Board were presented with a report which recommended a 5% pay increase to all staff with effect from April 2024. The report had previously been reviewed by the Colleague and Culture Committee who had supported the 5% increase following a review of various options.

The report included benchmarking which had been received from independent HR advisors who also recommended a 5% increase.

The Board APPROVED the recommendation from Colleague and Culture Committee of a 5% pay award for all colleagues with effect from 1 April 2024.

REVISED NEW BUILD DEVELOPMENT PARAMETERS

The Parameters were usually presented on an annual basis to Board in March. In March 2023, the decision on the Parameters by the Board had reserved the right to represent the Parameters to the Board following refinancing changes. The revised Parameters had been reviewed by the Homes and Communities Committee at its November 2023 meeting.

The Board APPROVED the parameters as requested.

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BUDGET REQUEST DECARBONISATION

The expenditure was being brought forward to deliver more decarbonisation works that had been identified to help GCH achieve Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) status quicker. The report had been reviewed by the Homes and Communities Committee (HCC) during its November 2023 meeting.

HCC had been supportive of the proposals and had been assured by officers that the Business Plan could accommodate.

Board recognised that the quicker this work was undertaken, the sooner improvements would be experienced by customers. The works would also be cost effective and non-intrusive to customers and could start straight away if supported by the Board.

The Board APPROVED the request for the decarbonisation budget to be increased.

GOVERNANCE DISCUSSION

The Company Secretary provided an update regarding changes to the Board following the retirement of three Board members in December 2023 due to their terms ending and the two new Board members that had recently been recruited.

A discussion would also be taking place early in 2024 to discuss the current Nerva Homes Board arrangements.

Board also discussed the requirements for finding replacement customer Board members during 2024 and the need to start recruiting early.

RETIRING BOARD MEMBERS

The Chair on behalf of the Board presented a gift of a print of the Gloucester city skyline to Board members Ann Cornelius, Dave Johnson and Tony Thomas who would shortly be retiring from the Board having served for the term duration of six years. The Chair thanked them all for their service to GCH and wished them well for the future.

Ann and Dave, who were both present at the meeting, commented upon the good work being done by GCH and the clear passion that existed within the organisation.

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