

**CARE AND REPAIR FORUM SCOTLAND
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 15 APRIL 2011
AT EVH, 137 SAUCHIEHALL STREET, GLASGOW**

Present: David Belfall, Chair
Richard Grant, Vice Chair
Hanna McCulloch, SDEF
Stewart Wilson, Region 1
Beverley Jones, Region 3
Kay Hutcheson, Age Scotland

Robert Thomson, National Director
Valerie Sneddon, Scottish Government

1. Welcome and Apologies

David welcomed those attending. Apologies were received from Cllr Ronnie McColl, Cllr Karen Clark, Les Robertson, Mike Martin and Judith Leslie.

2. Declarations of Interest

Stewart, Beverley and Robert declared an interest in Agenda item 10 as they are members of the SFHA Pension Scheme.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes were agreed without amendment.

4. Matters Arising

It was noted that Midlothian Council has applied to the Change Fund to set up a Care and Repair service. Mike Martin has published an overview report on the applications. Most seem to take a broad brush approach and are lacking detailed proposals. Robert will provide a breakdown on specific Care and Repair bids after the current series of regional meetings. Stewart suggested that we write to Community Health Partnerships to raise our profile for the next round of bids. It was agreed to take stock of the situation at the next meeting and discuss a way forward.

Robert circulated a compilation of comments from the conference evaluation forms. It was agreed that the overall message from the conference is that localism prevails and there is little or no prospect of central funding/ring-fencing being re-instated for Care and Repair.

David advised that at his meeting with Jackie Baillie and Mary Mulligan, the National Care Service was discussed. Kay advised that Sir John Arbuthnot had spoken at Age Scotland's AGM and housing had a high profile in his address.

David requested that the website traffic report is circulated. Kay advised that Age Scotland had approved the use of their logo. Kay proposed that we submit an article about C&R to Age Scotland Advantage magazine.

Hanna advised that she is leaving her post with SDEF to work for Capability Scotland. Robert will liaise with both organisations to discuss Hanna's place on the board.

5. National Director's Report

Scottish Government

The year - end review meeting with Scottish Government took place on 8 April. Responsibility for Care and Repair within SG will move from the Housing Quality Team to the Housing Access and Support Division. Valerie clarified that this will take place over a six month period. This move is designed to align Care and Repair more with the Wider Planning for an Ageing Population agenda. It was agreed that CRS is on track to delivering the review findings within the agreed timescale. There was discussion about the implementation of the good practice guide and national standards. SG will look at endorsing the guidance and standards, as a replacement for the existing national standards. David asked for a specific date for the proposed transfer of responsibility so that we are clear about who is our sponsor within Scottish Government.

Office Lease

As previously advised, John Lewis Partnership bought 135 Buchanan Street in November. The company has now informed the tenants that they are looking at the building as a long term financial investment and do not intend to change its use. We were initially offered a new lease agreement of £6,000 for 10 years. Robert had discussed this with David and Valerie and John Lewis has agreed to revise the offer to a 5 year agreement with a mid-term break option.

Local Issues

Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire Councils continue to move towards an in-house service by summer 2011.

Orkney Council tendered the service and it was won by Orkney Housing Association. C&R staff and the association have asked for Robert's advice and support over the next few months to assist with the changeover.

Highland Council has given each office a one year contract on the understanding that it will tender Care and Repair services at the end of 2011 as a block tender. The tender will have a value of nearly £1 million. The council is committed to making the process transparent and it will become a standing agenda item on the Pan - Highland Care and Repair meeting.

Moray Council has issued a public statement that advises 'the care and repair project will continue until April next year when all assistance to care and repair clients will be provided by the home improvement team.' There has already been adverse reaction to the decision from community groups.

Inverclyde Council has reversed its decision to cut funding to Care and Repair following extensive lobbying of councillors and the service will continue as it is.

Clackmannan Council has also reversed its decision to close Care and Repair although officers have complained about the staff lobbying elected members.

Aberdeenshire Council will also continue to fund the service and is currently negotiating with the manager about the budget.

There was discussion about the possibility of local teams bidding for future EU tenders, to enable them to become independent. Robert advised that under current arrangements it would not be possible as Communities Scotland, in the past, gave full legal and constitutional rights to the managing agents. Robert was asked to gauge the appetite for independence through the regional meetings.

Regional Meetings

Regional meeting dates are:

Perth 18 April

Selkirk 28 April

Glasgow 17 May

Highland to be agreed

6. Contact Consulting Report

Robert advised that Nigel Appleton's wife was admitted to hospital which has delayed the completion of the report. The sections still to come are:

- Accreditation of Care and Repair
- Guidance to offices involved in the pilot phase
- Cost benefit multiplier

During the discussion the specific points raised by Board members were:

Bev generally supports the direction of the document and thinks the proposals smooth out the differences between C&R offices. Her only reservation is on the IT side of collecting the information.

Kay is interested in seeing the cost benefit proposals. Also is unsure about the emphasis made in the report about the differences between C&R offices and wondered if this is something we should encourage or not.

Valerie would like to see an indicator that reports on the condition of the property. There is a danger of emphasising care issues at the expense of repair.

Stewart thought the report is well structured and delivers what we asked of Nigel. He thinks that most C&R offices can adapt their information systems to collect the necessary data. The report is asking C&R to compile information that many local authorities are now asking for.

Hanna asked if we will still be able to monitor who has access to the services.

Richard thought that the report is thoughtful and imaginative. He is keen to hear feedback from the regional meetings about how workable it will be at a local level. The pilot period should enable most issues to be sorted.

David concluded that there is general support for the report. Robert will discuss the report with the regional groups and provide feedback to the board. David and Robert will arrange a meeting with COSLA to discuss the report and the implementation plan. Jim Grant will play a leading role in the implementation process but some continued involvement of Nigel would be helpful. At this stage it was thought that Nigel's further involvement should not require more than 3 to 4 days at a maximum cost of £3,000.

Stewart asked if Western Isles could be part of the pilot. Bev advised that East Lothian would not be able to participate. It was also agreed that it is a big step to move from the pilot phase to full implementation, so a seminar will be arranged for all staff to allow feedback and questions from the pilot.

Valerie advised that local authorities are developing a reporting form for Scheme of Assistance cases and she will forwards a draft to Robert.

Robert asked Stewart and Bev to comment on the process of officers signing off cases. It was agreed that small repairs officers could find this problematic and it will have to be carefully monitored during the pilot.

7. Financial Statement

The statement showed expenditure from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011. The statement had also been discussed at the year-end review meeting with Scottish Government. The Board noted the statement. Robert will produce and circulate a budget for 2011/12. Kay asked about Board members' expenses and Robert advised that these are included under the headings Travel and Training.

8. The SFHA Pensions Scheme

David and Robert attended the seminar held by Spence & Partners on 4th February.

The consortium of organisations led by ODS consultants have received a QC opinion on the SFHA Pension Scheme decision.

As a result of this legal challenge there has been a slight shift in position by SFHA Pension Trust Board. Susan Wardlaw, Scheme Secretary, has written to advise us that we can continue to offer the Final Salary 60th scheme throughout 2011/12 financial year. There will however be a covenant review that will assess the financial strength of each participating employer. Should, as part of this process, any employer be identified as a high risk to the Scheme, security of members' benefits and the other participating employers, then it will be required to adopt the lowest risk accrual basis, CARE 120ths from 2012/13, unless it can provide security to the extent of its full buy out debt cost. If an employer refuses to adopt the CARE 120ths benefit option and is unable to provide the necessary security the Pensions Committee may exercise its power to terminate the employer's participation in the Scheme.

Robert was asked to leave the room to allow discussion. It was decided that Care and Repair Scotland would continue to participate in the current final salary benefit option for 2011/12. However, David will write to Susan Wardlaw and make it clear that we have strong reservations and concerns about the earlier decisions to distinguish between participating employers according to whether they own 100 or more houses, and to require those who do not, such as Care and Repair Scotland, to offer only the CARE 120th option to our staff.

9. A.O.C.B.

Kay advised that Age Scotland has recently changed its grant scheme to allow application from organisations with an interest in older people. It is likely that Care and Repair would qualify.

10. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Friday 1 July at 1.00am, with the venue to be confirmed nearer the time.