



**Minutes of Berneslai Homes Public Board Meeting held 27<sup>th</sup> February 2025**

**4.00 p.m.**  
**Gateway Plaza**

**Present:**

- Ken Taylor (KT) - Chair
- Richard Fryer (RF) - Board Member
- Adam Hutchinson (AH) - Board Member – (joined virtually)
- Kevin Osborne (KO) - Board Member
- Jo Sugden (JS) - Board Member
- Rebecca Mather (RM) - Board Member
- Sarah Tattersall (ST) - Board Member

**In attendance**

- Amanda Garrard (AGa) - CEO
- Dave Fullen (DF) - Executive Director, Customer & Estate Services
- Arturo Gulla (AGu) - Executive Director, Property Services
- Sam Roebuck (SR) - Head of Governance and Strategy and Company Secretary
- Ed Long (EL) - Head of Finance Berneslai Homes
- Paul Clifford (PC) - Service Director BMBC

The Chair welcomed Paul Clifford to the meeting and introductions took place.

	<b>ACTION</b>
<p><b><u>Item 1 – Apologies</u></b></p> <p>Mark Johnson (Board Member), Gez Morrall (Board Member) Rachel Taylor (Executive Director Resources BH), Sarah Clyde (Head of Strategic Housing BMBC)</p>	
<p><b><u>Item 2 – Declarations of Interest</u></b></p> <p>There were none declared.</p>	

<p><b><u>Item 3 – Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report 2024</u></b></p> <p>AH summarised the report presented for Audit and Risk Committee. This outlines how the Audit and Risk Committee have discharged their responsibilities and delegations over the past year. The report was presented to the last Audit and Risk Committee where they focussed on the ongoing actions, areas of activity and plans for 2025 as outlined in Section 7 of the report. They will be looking at implementing the recommendations from the DTP review and assisting EMT in undertaking a thorough review of the strategic risks.</p> <p>Board commented on the excellent, comprehensive report, accurately reflecting the Committee’s work. The Chair extended thanks to the Committee for all the work undertaken.</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Board received the Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report for 2024 (Appendix A) which provides assurance the Committee are fulfilling their remit.</b></li> </ol>	
<p><b><u>Item 4 – Governance Update</u></b></p> <p>SR presented the report . The main focus is on the recruitment process and the scope of the DTP Governance Review.</p> <p>The Councillor advertisement has been placed, the closing date is Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> March. The successful Councillor will shadow ST for a period of 6 months. KO mentioned that some Councillors have expressed an interest in the role.</p> <p>The scope of the Governance Review has been agreed by DPT and is included for reference.</p> <p><b>Resolved:-</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Board noted the update on the Councillor Board Member recruitment and Board responsibilities under the NHF Code of Governance.</b></li> <li><b>2. Boad noted the scope provided for the DTP Governances support</b></li> </ol>	
<p><b><u>Item 5 – Value for Money Strategy</u></b></p> <p>EL presented the refreshed iteration of the Strategy taking it forward to 2027. While there are not many changes from the previous version, it has been updated to reflect the changes in the organisation and environment in which BH operates. He brought Board’s attention to the key elements contained in the Executive Summary of the report, highlighting the</p>	

importance of Value for Money (VfM) being embedded in the day to day running of the organisation, and included in other strategies.

PC made an observation that he felt the links were not evident in the report on how the organisational strategies interface with the overarching need to be financially sustainable. EL/PC to discuss.

Discussion followed around the VfM culture and JS queried whether this was embedded within the organisation. AGa advised that the recent 'face to face' leadership sessions have focused on the financial status and the impacts over the next 2 years. AGa stated she was confident that everyone has an understanding of the situation, and that information is disseminated. Heads of Service are currently looking at savings, and there is a plan for this year's requirements.

AH referred to the Strategy presented to the Audit and Risk Committee. The Committee felt that the version they received did not fully reflect the changed circumstances and requested this be strengthened to reflect the cashable savings element. AH is pleased that the version presented today has been updated and sets out the purpose of value for money being delivered in the financial capacity. AH appreciates the Committee's suggestions/ observations have been taken on board and actioned.

The Chair expressed concern on the containment of the apprenticeship scheme. AGa clarified that within Property Services this has not changed, it is the future graduates' scheme and office apprenticeships that will be affected, but not those currently in post. However, future restructures may consider if graduates or Apprentices are suitable for some roles. The current office apprentice and graduate scheme are funded from reserves, which BH can no longer afford

DF referred to the Pathways to Work pilot scheme. This is in the final stages of the delivery plan and contract negotiations with the Council. BH will receive £350K of grant funding for this work stream which will enable BH to keep the temporary workers, with new targets, working with tenants and supporting the Council in their key objectives. The terms and conditions and the process for the monitoring funds are being finalised.

**Resolved:-**

- 1. Board approved the Berneslai Homes Value for Money Strategy 2024 – 2027.**

**Item 6 – Resident Insight and Engagement Strategy**

DF presented . This was developed and approved by Board in the summer of 2024. Following this approval a small number of engaged tenants did not feel it reflected their views and asks. BH listened to their concerns and worked with BMBC's Head of Strategic Housing and team to redevelop the Strategy. A key action is to meet the requirements of the consumer standards, particularly around transparency and accountability. Following the Grenfell tragedy the government will set out measures to strengthen the tenants voice even further.

<p>Further consultation on the Strategy took place as outlined in Section 5.2 of the report, going out to a wider group of tenants. TPAS were also involved and provided positive feedback, offering some suggestions which have been incorporated.</p> <p>While the revised Strategy was being developed, the action plan continued to be progressed, in particular around some new areas i.e.. the gypsy traveller community, young care leavers, check and challenges, Voicescape etc.</p> <p>The Strategy is integral to the Council’s compliance with the Consumer Standards and the Board recommends the report to the Council and Cabinet so that it is adopted by both organisations.</p> <p>RF commented positively on the document and the process, emphasising the importance of committing to a forward plan for tenant engagement activities so that the connection can be seen. Reference was also made to mainstream activities, highlighting that tenant engagement is everyone’s business and should be considered by everyone as part of their responsibilities.</p> <p>DF referred to BMBC’s ‘Love where your Live’ branding, in response to the incidents that occurred last year. BH will be involved in this initiative, including how it is developed etc. A Steering Group has been established, and DF will be attending, representing BH. Regular updates will be provided to the Customer Services Committee.</p> <p>ST observed that ‘Your Community, Your Say’ had not been mentioned. DF advised this had been an oversight and would amend the document before submitting it to the Council.</p> <p>PC referred to the need to be mindful of consultation fatigue. It was agreed BH and BMBC need to collaborate closely on forward planning and enhancing visibility.</p> <p><b>Resolved:-</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Board recommended the Resident Insight and Engagement Strategy 2025-2028 for approval by BMBC Cabinet.</b></li> <li><b>2. Board endorsed the updated action plan to support the Insight and Engagement Strategy 2025-2028.</b></li> <li><b>3. Board noted the soft approach to launching the Strategy with the focus being on continued publication of outcomes for tenants.</b></li> <li><b>4. Board supports the continued presentation of a summary of Insight and Engagement outcomes at each committee with an annual progress report on actions and impact being presented to Board and BMBC Cabinet.</b></li> </ol>	<p>DF</p>
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**Item 7 – Void Plan**

The void plan was presented to Board for approval by AGu as a direct result of a request from Board. The plan has set a target to reduce voids by 50% in 2026. A Task and Finish Group has been established, and progress will be monitored by the Board and BMBC.

Key elements to achieve this reduction include financial resources of £5.1M, recommendations from the PRIP Review to streamline processes etc. and ensuring adequate contractor resources are in place, including sub-contractors.

Board’s attention was drawn to the graph in the Executive Summary demonstrating voids tapering month by month across 2025/26. The run rate at the end of this financial year is 150, which should reduce to 100 from 26/27, which is below sector average.

This is a company wide priority issue which is being tackled together to achieve the target. DF referred to the significant role for his teams in Lettings and Neighbourhoods who are focussed on supporting the plan. Everyone involved is totally committed and with this commitment AGu feels confident the target will be achieved.

Additionally, BH have also been working with ARCUS to ensure there are good quality surveys in place to achieve correct costings.

KO emphasised the importance of communication, so that people understand issues, like ageing stock and refurbishments not taking place due to tenant refusal, resulting in more detailed/costly works being required when they become vacant.

All Member seminars are taking place, and this is an issue that will be covered.

**Resolved:-**

**The Board:**

- 1. Considered the Berneslai Voids Plan (Appendix A) to commence in April 2025**
- 2. Noted the intention to reduce voids by 50% by 31.3.26 within the agreed budget**
- 3. Approved the draft void plan.**

AGa/AGu

**Item 8 – 2024 Tenant Satisfaction Results and Actions**

DF presented the report which includes the outcomes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of the TSM survey and the combined results of Wave 1 and 2, which will be submitted to the regulator. It is critical for regulatory compliance to do this

correctly as Council's are being awarded a 3C if these have not been carried out properly.

An outside agency is used to ensure full compliance with statutory requirements. The outcomes were presented to Board/BMBC/staff at a recent joint session. Last week's Customer Panel also considered the findings and discussed realistic TSM targets for 2025/26. R. Vella (BMBC) was in attendance to inform the decision process. The action plan is in draft, requiring further work and SMT are finalising this over the next few weeks.

Board noted some areas with lower scores and DF advised of the difficulty in make significant improvements on these because of the decisions that have had to be taken, for example, ceasing the environmental improvement schemes, with the funding being redirected to clearing the backlog. Joining forces with the Council on the 'love where you live' initiative is beneficial due to these limitations.

Discussion followed on the satisfaction measure regarding people feeling safe in their homes. DF advised that it is felt it relates more to community safety, anti-social behaviour, defensible space etc rather than factors inside their home (e.g. gas, electricity). Other surveys by the Barnsley Partnership has shown that half those surveyed do not feel safe on the community elements. It was suggested that a focus group with tenants may be beneficial. DF advised Board of the significant amount of communication, done in partnership with the Council, as the lead on community safety.

AH referred to the Corporate Assurance report produced on TSM's last year, some were around perception surveys, with management taking responsibility, and not relying on the external research company to do. It was confirmed that all management actions have been completed.

The Chair inquired about strategies for targeting the under 50 age group, which has the highest complaints, low satisfaction levels. DF explained that historically older people have always scored higher in satisfaction surveys compared to younger people. The main driver for tenant satisfaction overall is their most recent repair experience, so addressing the backlog is crucial as this will have the biggest impact, especially for younger people. At the recent Customer Panel it was suggested trialling an online event to try and attract a younger age group. DF also mentioned opportunities with the Pathways to Work initiative in increasing engagement. RM made some additional suggestions, and it was agreed DF/RM explore these further.

DF/RM

**Resolved:**

- **Board noted the TSM survey results and draft action plan.**
- **Board offered comment on the emerging issues and associated actions, and noted the increased risks of delivering service improvements due to budget and resource availability.**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Board noted further consultation with tenants on actions arising at the February Customer Panel</b></li> <li>• <b>Board note that once fully verified the results will be presented to BMBC and submitted to the RSH ahead of the June deadline.</b></li> <li>• <b>Board noted whilst we can influence TSM targets for 2025/26, they are for BMBC to set.</b></li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Item 9 Q3 Performance Summary</u></b></p> <p>DF Presented the report which was also considered in detail by the Customer Services Committee at their last meeting. In addition, the Head of Service responsible for the contact centre Rachel Ruston also attended Committee to understand the approach and outline the long term improvements for the Contract Centre.</p> <p>The key strengths in performance were highlighted such as building safety, rent collection and the Contact Centre. The main concerns are rent loss and sickness rates. JS expressed particular concern around sickness, questioning the current efforts and their effectiveness. Audit and Risk Committee also shared this concern. AGa suggested bringing into Board a sickness reduction plan for a better understanding of the issues. Despite various efforts, including looking at the Council's best practice, the issue persists. The Chair suggested obtaining external support and AGa was tasked with discussing with RT, Exec Director, Resources</p> <p>Included in this report at Appendix B is also a summary of in-house and Wates' performance in relation to the PRIP contract.</p> <p>Board were asked to note the positive impact seen of technology on income collection. The additional £2000 per week being collected on Former Tenant Arrears was highlighted and there is also positive activity on Current Tenant Arrears. A year-end cost appraisal of the difference the technology had made will be carried out and presented to Customer Services Committee. Additionally, PC expressed an interest in learning from VoiceScape and DF agreed to share a report and arrange to meet to discuss further.</p> <p>The number of red rag ratings were observed by the Board. However, despite the ambitious targets, performance is very favourable, for example achieving 99.99% against a target of 100%. Performance is also favourable when compared to the Housemark peer benchmarking group.</p> <p>Clarification was requested on the Housemark benchmarking group BH measure against and the process. DF explained that BH are in a group of 23 like for like organisations across the country (excluding London). The group are selected by BH and Housemark and agreed with the Council.</p> <p>The Decent Homes improving position was discussed and the question raised on the prognosis for year end with regard to addressing the 127 non-decent properties. AGu provide an updated. These are properties</p>	<p>AGa/RT</p> <p>DF/PC</p>

<p>identified by Penningtons and may not all be non-decent. They need to be validated. Any properties that are non-decent are all in works programmes.</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Board is asked to consider quarter three performance for both Company and PRIP performance.</b></li> <li><b>2. Where performance targets have not been achieved, Board should ensure they are satisfied with the explanations provided and there are adequate controls and actions in place.</b></li> <li><b>3. Board should identify any areas where they feel more detailed consideration is required by Customer Services Committee.</b></li> </ol>	
<p><u>Item 10 – PRIP Review Update</u></p> <p>AGu presented an updated on the review of the PRIP Contract by Savills, commissioned by the Council. Savills are collaborating with the Council and its partners to examine processes, finances, capital work streams etc. They are currently conducting interviews with BH and Council staff. Although the timetable is set for April, AGu feels it may extend beyond this date. The Chair emphasised the importance of adhering to the timetable and asked PC to support on this matter.</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Board considered the contents of the report.</b></li> <li><b>2. Board continues to receive timely updates on the progress of the Savills review and specific progress of Berneslai Homes</b></li> </ol>	
<p><u>Item 11 – Quarterly Risk Update</u></p> <p>SR presented the report highlighting key information. There are 15 active strategic issues and concern, outlined in Appendix A. Attention was also drawn to the Annual Self-Assessment against the Sector Risk Profile at Appendix B.</p> <p>The report has been considered by the Audit and Risk Committee, where some changes were requested and implemented.</p> <p>Board was pleased that the report provided positive assurance, confirming risk is being managed in line with regulatory requirements.</p> <p><b>Resolved;-</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Board reviewed and Commented on the Risk Management Quarterly Update</b></li> </ol>	

<p>2. Board review and commented on the Strategic Risks.</p> <p>3. Board reviewed and agreed the contents of the self-assessment against the Sector Risk Profile.</p> <p>4. Board reviewed and comment on the action plans being monitored as part of this report.</p>	
<p><b><u>Item 12 – Minutes/Actions and Debriefs</u></b></p>	
<p><b><u>Item 12.1 Board Mins and Actions from meeting held 5/12/2025</u></b></p> <p><b>Resolved:</b></p> <p><b>The minutes were approved as a true and accurate record and the actions were noted.</b></p>	