

Annual Report from the Chair of the Board 2021-2022

Board activity during the year

There is a formal report included with the Annual Accounts. What I'm going to say here is intended to supplement that report and give a more personal view.

In the year April 21 to March 22 there were 10 volunteer Board members for all or part of the year. Nine of those were elected members, and one was co-opted during the year. Four of those members attended all the Board meetings for which they were eligible, and three of them only missed one meeting. Board meetings usually last about 2 hours, and I want to record my thanks to my colleagues on the Board for their dedication and hard work during the year. There were 8 regular Board meetings, in different places as constrained by Covid, and online, as well as extra meetings when urgent issues cropped up. Much of the Board focus during the year has been on governance and the Scottish Housing Regulator's regulatory standards. The Board commissioned an external consultant to help us demonstrate our assurance to the regulator, and finally, at the end of the year, the regulator agreed that Viewpoint was compliant with the standards. Given all the things that have happened in the last 2 years this recognition is a major achievement for our chief executive and her team. Two other major items on the Board agenda have been influenced by the Covid pandemic. The first of these is Care staff recruitment. Viewpoint has three care homes, and maintaining staffing levels during the pandemic, when the NHS has been desperate to recruit anyone it can, and Brexit has made it more difficult to recruit from overseas, has been a major headache for our care management team. The Board has considered a variety of options, but this continues to be a difficulty for us. Our other major concern has been housing voids, in other words the length of time between someone leaving a property and it being relet to a new tenant. Part of this has been due to people's reluctance to move during the pandemic, and part of it has been the extended time it has taken to get renovations done to prepare the property for new occupiers. The result for Viewpoint is a loss of rental income for the period the property is empty. In normal times the length of time a property is empty averages around 40 days, whereas last year our average was more than 140 days. The Board's Operations Committee undertook a detailed examination of this issue to understand what was taking so long, and what could be done about it. I'm pleased to say that this situation is now improving. The Operations Committee continue to receive regular updates on this.

Board Committees and Working Groups

The Board has three permanent committees, the Risk and Audit Committee, the Operations Committee and the Remuneration Committee. In addition there are various short life working groups which have been formed to deal in detail with particular issues: for example we have a financial resilience short life working group to keep a check on the financial impact of Covid on the organisation, and in particular on the care homes. The Risk and Audit Committee is responsible for our relationship with our internal auditors, Wylie and Bisset, for monitoring the risk register, and for monitoring the Health and Safety aspects of Viewpoint and Landlord Health and Safety. During the year our internal auditors examined Housing Allocation and Management, Repairs and Maintenance, and Procurement. My aim as Chair is to keep the Board operating at the strategic level, and the Operations Committee helps in this, as it gives Board members the opportunity to look in greater detail at the operational aspects of the Viewpoint business. In the past year the Operations

Committee has received major reports on Housing Operations, Care Operations and Asset Management. There was also a short life working group (SLWG) devoted to improving operational governance and assurance. This followed up the reports of weaknesses in controls and policies and monitored the plan to put things right. This group, having completed their work has now disbanded and the Operations Committee will now oversee this.

Board Strategy Day

At the beginning of June 2021 Board members and the senior management team had a strategy day together to set the strategic direction for the next three years. This was valuable time together, and after the separation of the Covid times helped us all to come back to a common purpose and form a team once more. After a period of seeing colleagues only on a screen, it was a joy to be able to discuss strategy face to face. The outputs from that time together enabled the executive team to prepare a draft business plan, the successor to this is now available here and on the Viewpoint web page. This gives the whole organisation a clear sense of direction.

Executive Team

In November we welcomed Tom Hailey as Assets Director. There are significant challenges in making some of our properties comply with modern energy efficiency standards, and Tom has brought a new focus to this. We have undertaken a new stock condition survey and implemented a new assets IT system to capture all the data about our properties. This will help us decide what steps we need to take to achieve EESH2, the SHR efficiency target. In January we welcomed John Bain as Business Support Director, following the resignation of Helen McMorran. John brings with him a wealth of HR and Governance experience in the housing business.

Regular business

The past year has seen restrictions which were caused by the pandemic being slowly lifted, enabling a more normal mode of operation. Routine building maintenance has resumed, and the organisational design project has restarted. The housing support service has been reviewed and redesigned, and the @home service transferred to another provider. As in previous years some tenants were involved in the preparation for the annual rent and service charge consultation. Other aspects of tenant participation have restarted with face to face meetings becoming possible following the reduction of the Covid threat.

Risk

The review of risks and the risk register is a regular Board activity. Changes in government policy concerning care and care homes staff represent a risk to our care business, for example. Other areas of concern include the availability of care staff, the vulnerability to cyber crime, and the risk to tenants and staff from any health and safety shortcomings. Our role is to ensure that there are appropriate mitigations and contingency plans in place to prevent a risk turning into a disaster for the organisation.

Board Membership

At this meeting two Board members are retiring. I want to thank Caroline Jardine and John Muir for all they have done for Viewpoint. Caroline was drafted in three years ago when our Board needed strengthening with someone of her experience in the sector. She is the CEO of another housing association and has helped us tremendously with issues of governance and relationship with the Housing Regulator. John Muir has been a tenant board member for three years, having been chair of the Fife Forum of tenants, and has kept us in line with what our tenants want from us.

Thank you to both of them for their service to Viewpoint.