

Board Meeting Minutes

Minutes of a meeting held at 3.30pm on **Thursday 23 January 2025** via Microsoft Teams.

Present Gary Devlin (Chair), Ashley Campbell (joined meeting 3.35pm), Adele Erwin, Kathleen McAdams, Fraser Mitchell (joined the meeting 4.08pm), Christa Reekie, Rob Rowe, James Rowney (joined meeting 3.35pm), Alan Stewart, Margaret Whoriskey (joined meeting 4.35pm), Bryony Willett

In attendance Angela Currie (Chief Executive), Wendy Russell (Director of Business Support & Transformation), Esther Wilson (Director of Customer Services), Clare Dodd (Head of Investment & Sustainability) presenting Item 7.1 only – joined meeting 4.15pm, left meeting 5.05pm.

Apologies None

1. **Introduction & Apologies**
The Chair welcomed Board Members to the meeting. All Members were happy for the meeting to be recorded.
2. **Declarations of Interest**
Rob Rowe declared his interest (as a tenant) in Agenda item 5.1 Annual Rent Increases 2025-26. The Chair confirmed that he was happy for Rob to remain in the meeting for the discussion
3. **Minutes**
 - 3.1 **Board Minutes (BRD24 Nov 24)**
Decision The Board discussed the Board Minutes (BRD24 Nov24) and noted a couple of typing errors and an item that had been raised (item 8.5 Financial Control Framework – Scheme of Authorisation & Approval) requiring consideration regarding non budgeted expenditure limits being set at £100k for both CEO and Director of Strategic Finance as the Board felt that this was set too low.

The Board Minutes (BRD24 Nov 24) subject to changes made as noted above were agreed and **approved** as a correct record and signed by the Chair following the meeting.
Post Meeting Note:
The Board Minutes (BRD24 Nov 24) were amended accordingly, and Outstanding Actions updated to include non-budgeted expenditure limit for consideration.

JR & AC joined the meeting at 3.35pm
 - 3.2 **People Committee (PPL9 Dec24)**
Discussion The Chair provided a verbal update from the recent meeting.

Draft minutes are available to view on the Board platform. [Governance & Risk platform](#)

The Board discussed sickness absence levels and WR noted that sickness absence peaked over December and January which aligns with seasonal trends due to flu and other viruses. However, there are signs of improvement, particularly with longer-term absences decreasing. Many local authorities implemented mask-wearing in care

services during the peak, but infection control measures have now been scaled back as circulation levels decline. Remote working has also helped mitigate workplace spread.

Decision The Board **noted** the update.

4 Matters Arising

4.1 It's Good to Know

Report Summary This provided Board with an update on key issues happening in Hanover that are not included in Board papers through the formal Board or Committee meeting cycle.

Discussion None.

Decision The Board acknowledged the update.

4.2 Board Actions

Report Summary This provided Board with an update on outstanding Board Actions.

Discussion WR noted that a discussion in the November 2024 Board meeting highlighted concerns about the clarity of reporting timelines. A key has now been incorporated to provide clearer information.

WR explained that the two ongoing governance-related actions are covered in both the Governance Matters paper (item 8.1) and the proposed Governance Review paper (item 8.2) at today's meeting and noted that efforts continue to secure alternative Treasury support for the financial statements as current providers remain unresponsive. An update will be provided in the March 2025 budget paper.

DH

The Board noted that they would like to see an update on progress against the digital strategy and regular Board updates to track strategic objectives, even if no progress is made.

DH

WR provided an update on the Digital Analogue SWOT analysis noting that the project is progressing well. A licence agreement with Tunstall and Appello is nearly finalised, enabling analogue customers to transition to digital. Digital ARC implementation is expected within 4-6 weeks. Staff training and process documentation are complete. Testing will begin once the licence is agreed. The SWOT analysis remains scheduled post-implementation, keeping the project on track for May 2025 completion.

Decision The Board acknowledged the update.

5. Strategy Spotlight

5.1 Annual Rent Increase 2025/26

Report Summary This report set out the proposal for rent increases for 2025/26 in accordance with Hanover's Rent Policy, taking into consideration the key objectives of viability, affordability, and the results of the consultation with customers.

Discussion EW provided a brief overview of the 2025/26 rent consultation exercise and noted that the affordability assessment using the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) toolkit, showed that pensioner couples meet the 25% income threshold for housing costs, but single pensioners exceed it (30%). EW explained that single-person households are the most affected by spending more than 30% of their

income on rent. However, there's a challenge in accurately assessing tenants' income because not all sources, like private pensions or other financial support, are disclosed. The data used in the toolkit is an approximation based on national data, but it doesn't capture all variables, such as pension status or other income sources. There are limitations in how the data reflects individual situations, and the housing provider supports tenants through welfare rights services and financial assistance programmes. However, with our new customer personas, we may better understand affordability and individual challenges.

The Board discussed the consultation process and EW explained that, while the legal requirement is to inform and consult tenants about the rent increase, the focus has shifted towards ongoing dialogue about investment priorities rather than offering a choice between different manufactured rent options. This approach is in line with current practices across the sector.

The Board suggested that it would be beneficial to continue to review what approach we take to the consultation going forward.

MW joined the meeting (4.35pm) FM joined the meeting (4.08pm)

The Board discussed the consultation response rate (10%) AC noted that the 10% response rate was typical, and in previous years, they had higher responses due to a marketing campaign with financial incentives. This year, we chose not to use incentives and instead focused on holding focus groups to get more qualitative feedback from tenants.

EW noted a key takeaway from the focus groups seems to be the importance of inclusivity in our refurbishment programmes, particularly in how aspects of housing design—like kitchen worktops, cupboard heights, and bathroom fittings—are considered. EW plans to explore this feedback further in future programmes.

Decision

The Board:

- **Noted and considered** the output from the 2025/26 rent consultation exercise.
- **Approved** the proposal to increase rents by 5% in 2025/26.

6.

Happy Customer

6.1

Happy Customer Update

Report Summary

This report provided an overview of key areas of strategic operational focus in the care and support function of the Customer Services directorate.

Discussion

EW provided a brief update on the care and support services, specifically following a re-inspection of the Care at Home service in the North area in December 2024.

The Board queried how Care Inspectorate recommendations were tracked and WR explained that they are not currently reported to the Audit, Performance & Risk committee but are shared with the Board. She added that before covid, the service was consistently rated Grade 5, but post-covid inspections have shown areas for improvement.

The Board suggested setting up a system to track Care Inspectorate recommendations, similar to internal audit recommendations, to ensure proper oversight. WR agreed and said we could work on this, ensuring

the right level of reporting. A proposal will be brought to the APR committee in February 2025.

Post Meeting Note:

Proposal was taken to APR Committee meeting on 12 February 2025.

CD joined meeting at 4.15pm

The Board suggested that it would be helpful to get a clearer picture of the care and support contracts, when they expire, and any risks. This information would help the Board understand the issues.

EW

The Board discussed the use of agency staff and EW explained that some services rely heavily on agency staff, while others manage with minimal use. Staff absences (sickness, holidays) contribute to the issue.

The Board discussed funding pressures and noted the need for better oversight and strategic understanding of local authority commissioning for care and support services. EW noted that a training session or briefing is being planned to bring board members up to speed on these issues.

Post Meeting Note:

Most Board members attended a Breakfast Learning Session on Care & Support on 14 February 2025, 8-9.30am.

The Board requested an update on contract management at the next Board Meeting (20.3.25) and AC agreed that a larger session at the Board strategy day in June 2025.

EW

Decision

The Board **considered** and **commented** on the priorities and risks identified.

7

Desirable Homes

7.1

Development Assets Update

Report Summary

This report provided an update on all functions within Asset Management.

Discussion

CD provided a brief overview, and Board discussed the Capital Progress Report 24/25. CD explained that some projects show full budget allocation but less than 100% progress which is due to projects spanning multiple financial years or large projects naturally face delays or extra work, causing variations in progress. CD noted that reporting will be adjusted to make this clearer.

The Board discussed the gas safety compliance fails and WR noted that there have been improvements in gas safety including clearer staff roles, better training, a new tracking system, earlier inspections, and regular contractor meetings to ensure compliance.

The Board discussed funding for home adaptations which has been cut, leading to a growing waiting list. The Board suggested an update to the previous adaptations report be given to Board to get sight of the impact on tenants, including potential health risks and EW agreed to share this with the Board. This will be done by mid-February 2025.

It was agreed that the Adaptation Paper that was shared with the Audit, Risk & Performance Committee (APR) would be shared with the Board.

Post Meeting Note:

Adaptation Review paper was shared with the Board via email/Board Platform.

The Board discussed the Asset Dashboard and BW agreed to discuss potential improvements with WR.

WR/BW

The Board discussed empty property costs which have surged unexpectedly, and AC explained that efforts are underway to understand and control the issue.

Decision

The Board **considered** and **commented** on the:

- Current development update
- Update on progress within the customer safety compliance service
- Update on Planned Maintenance & Capital Programme
- Update on Net Zero & Sustainability
- Update on Reactive Repairs, Available Homes & Adaptations

CD left meeting at 5.05pm.

8.1

Governance Matters

Report Summary Discussion

The Governance Matters paper sets out updates and decisions required on various governance topics now and for the year ahead. WR provided a brief overview of the paper and noted that the Board (via the Board Platform) had queried settlement agreements and WR explained that no additional financial compensation beyond statutory requirements have been provided, explaining that these agreements are required by solicitors to protect both the organisation and the departing staff member.

WR

The Board suggested that the People Committee could have a paper on Leaving Hanover Policy and how settlements agreements are used at their next meeting in March 2025.

WR

The Board discussed the Board Member Recruitment and KM and BW volunteered to be on the interview panel. This would be dependent on whether the current Chair, GD, was involved in recruitment.

KM/BW

Decision

The Board:

Considered and **Commented** on the:

- Notifiable Events Update
- Duty of Candour Report 2024
- Board Member Recruitment Plan and nominate members to be part of the interview panel
- Confirmation of review of Membership Policy

Approved the:

- Plan for Board Meeting venues for the 25-26 schedule
- Membership Application
- Protocol for Alleged Breach of Code of Conduct for Board Members

8.2

Proposed Governance Review

Report Summary

This paper sets out the background and context for our current governance arrangements and proposed that an External Governance Review be conducted in 2025-26 to provide additional assurance for Board and support the new Chair to take the Board forward to the next stage.

Discussion

WR provided a brief overview of the proposed governance review, and the Board discussed the companies that undertake reviews. The Board

suggested that the proposed review would cover governance policies, assurance process and annual appraisals.
WR noted with regard to the assurance process, Henderson Loggie are planning to conduct an audit on this in the 2025-26 programme which will be presented to the Audit, Risk and Performance Committee meeting in February 2025.

WR agreed to bring a Governance Review Scope to the Board meeting in March. (20.3.25)

WR

Decision

The Board:

- **Approved** the proposal for an External Governance Review and fed back comments on the process.

9.

AOCB

Discussion

None

Chairperson: Gary Devlin

Date: 23/01/2025