

## LEASE - The Leasehold Advisory Service

### Minutes of the Board Meeting held on Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024 online via Microsoft Teams

#### Present:

Martin Boyd (MB) Victoria Elvidge (VE)

#### In attendance:

Alice Bradley (AB), Sally Frazer (SF) CEO), Nicolette Davis (Note taker)

**Observer:** Malachy O'Grady (MO), Melanie Harris (MH), Mohammad-Ali El-Zein (ME), Razeeb Ahasan (RA) (DLUHC) Richard Hand (RH) LEASE Staff Member

#### 1.0 2024/01/1 Welcome and apologies for absence

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were no apologies.

#### 2.0 2024/01/2 Declarations of Interests

2.1 MB declared that he is Chair of Trustees for Leasehold Knowledge Partnership (LKP), he is also Chair of the RMC at Charter Quay, Kingston.

2.2 VE declared that she is on the Board of Westminster Community Homes, she is also a long leaseholder.

#### 3.0 2024/01/3 Confirmation of the Board meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2024

3.1 The Minutes of the Board meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2024 were approved as a true and accurate copy. There were no matters arising from the last meeting.

**It was agreed to change the order in which items were considered at the meeting. Item 5 on the agenda was taken as the next item. The minutes reflect the order of the meeting.**

#### 5.0 2024/01/5 Oral/tabled update from Accounting Officer & CEO – finance update, Business Planning, and next year's budget planning process

5.1 SF reassured the Board that future meetings will receive a fuller set of papers - today they will be provided with an oral update - with management accounts to be sent to the Board early next week once we have received the actuals (**Action SF**)

5.2 SF notified the Board that introductory meetings with LEASE staff are ongoing, and the feedback received from staff regarding the organisational transition has been positive. We have been focusing on our budget bid, key elements to include: reasonable pay for staff (who appear to be below industry standard); budget for four new legal advisers to help deal with the expected demand resulting from the reforms of the bill; and, an increased policy and customer team (likely to include one new policy and one new outreach role). We are working towards a digital transition which will help improve the functionality and efficiency of the organisation by an estimated 22% - 25%.

In the short term we are focusing exploring quick win improving website content and accessibility, refining the phone system for better functionality, and reassessing our KPI's to provide more value insights into the organisation's performance.

5.3 As accounting officers we are working with the sponsorship team to ensure that we have the correct governance systems in place and on functional compliance.

5.4 The Board were notified that there was underspend in the last financial year; however, based on management accounts there was no underspend projected for this year. Despite the underspend in the last financial year the organisation will be bidding for the full amount, with no underspend expected. The CEO's have collaborated with HR and requested additional funds for the six new posts, including finance to address the new transformation and CEO roles.

5.5 We have explored with the department whether there is any inflationary uplift which can be accessed, given that our non-pay services will be subject to inflationary pressures. Unfortunately, there is no inflationary uplift, and this is across the board with all the department's partners.

5.6 Staff and the Chair have stressed the importance of training across the board, and we will look at the details of what a fair training offer looks like to an organisation of this size.

5.7 The Board will be forwarded a copy of the bid before it is sent to the department (**ACTION AB**)

- 5.8 The Board were notified that the digital transition funding is separate from the bid and being processed through the Department.

**It was agreed to change the order in which items were considered at the meeting. Item 6 on the agenda was taken as the next item. The minutes reflect the order of the meeting.**

#### **6.0 2024/01/6 Review of Performance Report**

- 6.1 The Board noted that the paper shows a continuing increase in volume of enquiries to the organisation. They were informed that the dashboard would be revised before the next meeting in April to ensure the information shared is clearer, allowing us to gain a better understanding of the data.

The Board were invited to give feedback on what they would find helpful to be on the dashboard to better understand the organisation.

- 6.2 A discussion took place regarding the timing for finalising KPI's for the next business plan, and if there is any flexibility, it was agreed that this would need to be addressed in a separate conversation.

The Board further discussed the best way to create a robust framework for recording and utilising KPI's to better reflect the job that staff perform.

#### **4.0 2024/01/4 An oral update from the Chair**

- 4.1 The Chair raised concerns that LEASE's profile within the sector has been diminished over the years. However, with our expanded remit enabling the organisation to be more proactive, he noted that it may be necessary to reduce some of the services due to resource constraints, he advised that this would need to be monitored very carefully.

- 4.2 MB emphasised that while the organisation had a substantial amount of work ahead, it was important to recognise that it could not all be completed within the next year. However, we need to work at pace to achieve LEASE's goals. There is a meeting with the sponsorship team this afternoon, to begin those discussions.

- 4.3 The Chair notified the Board that Non-Executive Directors (NEDs) interviews have now been completed and we are currently waiting for the Ministers decision.

- 4.4 It is proposed that following the appointment of NEDs an onboard day will be organised, MB extended an invitation to VE. The NEDs will be introduced to CEOs and the senior management team. Staff will get to meet NEDs at the next away day.

- 4.5 The Board discussed the previous review processes which had taken place at LEASE, AB confirmed that any Government or Cabinet Office review processes are outside the direct control of the Board and the organisation. It was emphasised that any potential further reviews should not be construed as an indication of any concerns or issues – there is a rolling programme of ALB reviews. It was noted that while staff had engaged with previous reviews, the subsequent lack of action following a decision had an impact on moral.

#### **7.0 2024/01/7 Any Other Business**

- 7.1 VE thanked everyone at LEASE for an interesting time and she expressed delight that the Secretary of State's support for the organisation. She acknowledged that LEASE is moving forward in a positive direction and wished organisation and the Board luck on their journey. MB and AB thanked VE on behalf of the organisation and her valuable contribution to LEASE over the years.

- 7.2 RH raised questions from LEASE staff relating to the timings and process for business planning and a potential pay review. The Board will commence work on the business plan upon their appointment. This will be produced by the CEOs in collaboration with the senior management team and in conjunction with the sponsorship team. LEASE staff will be consulted. The finalised plan will then be submitted for approval by the Board.

Pay review is likely to be considered in two stages. There was a hope that a degree of pay uplift could be granted fairly early in the next financial year – with some aspects of the broader restructuring potentially beginning in the same period. However, currently there are no specific time frames for the completion of the restructuring or pay review. Both remain dependant on finance settlement from - and agreement with - sponsor Department.

- 7.3 RH enquired about the possibility of providing office space for staff who prefer a remote work setup near their homes. LEASE is currently operating as a virtual-only organisation, prioritising pay and terms, however CEOs are aware that working from home all the time may not suit all staff and will consider options and look to pilot touch down spaces. Budget agreement dependent – but new CEO's plan to have quarterly staff get-togethers and use 2MS as constructively as possible.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 13.40.

**Next meeting date and time Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024 at 12.30**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Paul D.', is located in the upper left quadrant of the page.