

LEASE - The Leasehold Advisory Service

Minutes of the Board Meeting held on Wednesday 11th September 2024 at Broadway House, Tothill Street Marsham Street

Present:

Martin Boyd (MB) Wendy Wilson (WW), Paula Higgins (PH), Emer McNally (EM), Kim Caddy (KC)

In attendance:

Alice Bradley (AB), Sally Frazer (SF) CEOs), Gabrielle Owtram (GO) (COO), (ND) (Notetaker)

Observer: (AT) LEASE Staff Member

1.0 2024/11/1 Welcome and apologies for absence

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

2.0 2024/11/2 Confirmation of the Board meeting held on 8th May 2024

2.1 The Minutes of the Board meeting held on 8th May 2024 were approved as a true and accurate copy. There were no matters arising from the last meeting.

3.0 2024/11/3 Chairs update

3.1 The Chair notified the Board that he had a positive formal introductory meeting with the Minister who is keen on understanding how LEASE can help the department with future legislation, the minister highlighted that he is keen to work on the commonhold project that he sees as coming forward within this parliament, it is not something that they are rushing, this will give LEASE the opportunity to be involved. As parliament is still settling in, the Minister has not yet had a chance to review LEASE's updated strategic plan, amended articles and framework documents. The chair has asked the CEOs and sponsorship team to help ensure these documents approved ASAP. The chair suggested CEOs would need to chase the sponsorship team to get those documents approved.

4.0 2024/11/4 Update from Committee Chairs

4.1 Change

EM updated the Board that there have been three Change Management Group meetings to date, she noted that good progress has been made, with a positive start which created a high-level initial roadmap which has generated good debate, and it has been recognised that the organisation is not resourced to deliver the key to unlocking the next phase of change for the organisation is resourcing.

EM noted that cultural change was needed alongside the technological change as well as the skills sets to support both, she highlighted the committee's acknowledgement that in the journey of delivering change, there is also the need to keep the organisation running, she noted that progress is been made on recruitment. EM stated that resourcing and multiple demands on CEO's has been a challenge and suggested that to make good progress time should be allocated accordingly. EM noted that she understands why the confusion over the release of funds arose, however hoped for more clarity at the November Change Committee.

4.2 Pay & Remuneration

WW updated the Board that there has been one formal meeting which took place in August and an informal meeting. She noted that Korn Ferry have done initial benchmarking work. ON the basis of the finding a pay flexibility case is being put together, however a key part of that is the equal pay audit which Korn Ferry will carry out, which can be done in three weeks. The Board were informed that LEASE does not currently have on its systems all the required data for Korn Ferry to carry out the audit, CEOs assured the Board that the relevant data will be collated urgently, possibly manually as staff profiles on BrightHR do not have the necessary fields.

CEOs clarified to the Board that the pay flex case would mainly focus on advisers pay.

MB notified the Board that the Minister is aware of LEASE's pay issue.

KC - Suggested as LEASE is a small organisation equality data could be collated relatively quickly.
WW – Asked if at the point of recruitment whether more staff data would be gathered? She also suggested data gathering as an annual exercise. CEOs confirmed that this is an objective to be completed.

KC – Asked why one Korn Ferry recommendation had been rejected, CEOs informed the Board that due to the skill set and staff within the organisation, it was felt that it would cause disproportionate disruption, however as there is an interim structure, it can be revisited later should it be appropriate.

MB would like to understand how the horizontal element of the organisational structure would work going forward as a non-legal set of skills come into the organisation, he stated that the addition of these new roles should be seen as supporting the legal element of the service at a policy level.

CEOs noted that once the equalities audit is complete they will be in a position to share with staff more details of the benchmarking. It was reiterated that the Board feels strongly about ensuring that the pay issue is brought to the attention of Ministers, they confirmed that more clarity will be provided to the staff reps by the end of the month.

4.3 **ARAC**

KC thanked the CEO's and relevant staff on a clean and well managed audit, ARAC are satisfied that there is a suitable control environment in place, although there are some gaps. The committee is now focused on supporting the CEO's improving those controls and getting in place a strong government structure. CEOs confirmed that work needs to be done to improve the stability of LEASE's controls and compliance systems.

4.4 KC confirmed that LEASE have their first meeting with MHCLG ARAC covering fraud and whistle blowing which both her and WW are attending, on 12th September, KC will report back at the next Board meeting. MB suggested that other Board members should be attending meetings that focus on support systems within government. **(ACTION KC)**

4.3 MB requested that all committee minutes note which members were in attendance of meetings. **(ACTION CEOs)**

4.4 EM confirmed that there needs to be tighter controls around penetration testing and noted that the follow through on actions had been missed on occasion.

4.5 MB reiterated the importance of the change group staying focused on high-level strategic issues and not getting bogged down with operational issues. CEOs noted that change group had focused on operational issues as it was necessary to attain some of those quick fixes, however the Change Committee is in a better position to be more focused.

4.6 The Board confirmed that the LEASE website subgroup would still go ahead outside of the Change Committee but should have a clear end goal then stand down (re-badge as task and finish – and Paula to seek closure/end point on actions in group).

5.0 **2024/11/5 Final Annual Accounts sign off**

5.1 The Board approved the Annual accounts for publication which need to be laid before Parliament before December, CEOs suggested, if necessary, removing the strategic plan from the accounts if it has not been approved by Ministers. MB requested that CEO's chase RA from the Department, to get both accounts and strategic plan approved before December.

KC – raised that the auditors fees did not appear in her copy of the accounts, COO would double check to ensure it was present. **(ACTION COO)**

6.0 **2024/11/5 Performance and Metrics – inc. sign off of new Metrics**

6.1 CEOs notified the Board that the metrics have been updated to include “would you recommend this organisation to friends” which is comparable with other organisations. Red highlights what will

published annually along with the business plan, they are strategic objectives which cover the last 6 months of this year.

CEOs added that these metrics should be seen as the first set of metrics that support LEASE's change.

KC – suggested that internally the organisation should start thinking about how we can be of assistance to the department in helping with legislation.

The Board had further discussion around metrics and the best way to set them and record them.

EM – suggested drawing inspiration from the CAB's metrics as they are interesting.

CEOs updated the Board that performance against the current KPIs are mainly fairly static on most measures this month. KC raised concern with the decline in written scores which is reflected month on month and in the year to date. CEOs explained that this was due to the shift to non-advisory time and striking a balance with both written and phone enquiries, as well as a reduction in advisory staff. KC asked for reassurance that the quality of advice received by clients had not deteriorated. CEOs clarified that as quality assurance is not done in a formal way this information was not available, however the system for customer service experience and quality assurance is being worked on.

The Board requested that the quality of written enquiry advice is monitored and reported back at the next Board meeting. **(ACTION COO)**

6.0a 2024/11/6a Update from staff

6.1a Staff representative reflected on the decline of written enquiries and stated that the organisation is two advisers down and although we have one new adviser it takes time to train them and get them up to speed on the phones and answering enquiries. She noted that staff are grateful that the Board are reviewing pay and working towards getting it resolved.

Staff welcomed the idea of a super authority or consultant that all advisers can go to when they are struggling on a point of law.

CEOs acknowledged that it has been a struggle bringing in non-advisory time and confirmed that SMT is looking at the best way to move forward with the allocation of written enquiries.

7.0 2024/11/7 AOB

7.1 EM – queried if the actions had been completed from the last meeting. CEOs confirmed a log was now saved in the Board file and Paula's action was now closed. Only outstanding action not yet due. KC – Asked if there would be another round table planned and if so when. MB stated that he will organise one.

WW – notified the Board the first caseworker forum is on Dec 4 NK will do a session on service charges and forthcoming changes.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 10.05.

Next meeting date and time 15th January 2025