

LEASE - The Leasehold Advisory Service

Minutes of the Board Meeting held on Wednesday 2nd July 2025 at The ODI, 90 York Way, London, N1 9AG

Present:

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

In attendance:

Alice Bradley (AB), Sally Frazer (SF) CEOs, Gabrielle Owtram (GO) (COO), Millie Roberts (MR) (note-taker), Alero Orimoloye (staff rep) (Malachy O'Grady (MO)

1.0 Welcome and Apologies:

1.1 None.

2.0 Chair's Update:

- **Approval of Budgets:** MB announced that the budgets and delegations have been approved, marking a significant step forward for the organisation. Agreement has been reached with MHCLG on pay - after a long journey – thanks to CEOs on their work on this. LEASE is also beginning to get moving on the digital transformation - with a website agency appointed.
- **Systematic Decision-Making:** MB stressed the importance of systematic decision-making and efficient implementation of the business plan now we had it agreed.
- **Government Complications:** MB acknowledged the complications and inefficiencies when dealing with government processes compared to the private sector. They emphasized the need to work with a private sector mindset within a public sector environment to achieve better efficiencies.
- **Business Plan Implementation:** MB reiterated that the team should work on the assumption that decisions have been made and budgets decided, focusing on implementing the business plan unless formally asked to make changes by the government.

3.0 Committee updates:

- **Change Programme:** EM presented the Change committee update. Discussed the successful recruitment drive, onboarding several new positions, and the positive impact on the change programme. She also mentioned the appointment of a new digital agency and the progress on various projects, including data analysis and AI technology.
 - **Successful Recruitment:** Three new hires have already started, with two more expected to join soon. These new hires bring a blend of commercial

and government backgrounds, which is expected to positively impact the change programme.

- **New Digital Agency:** EM mentioned the appointment of a new digital agency, which is expected to drive progress in digital projects. The agency's appointment followed a rigorous selection process, and the team is optimistic about the outcomes.
- **Data Analysis Project of lease expiry data (with HMLR):** project underway, which is expected to provide valuable insights. Although it is a short piece of work, it is seen as a taster for more extensive data analysis efforts in the future.
- **AI Technology Pilot:** EM highlighted the piloting of AI technology for potential public engagement and to assist advisors and relieve the burden of writing up calls. This initiative is part of the broader effort to leverage technology for improved efficiency and service delivery. EM happy with progress.

- **P&P:**

- **Pay agreement:** WW confirmed that the pay offer for staff has been agreed upon with MHCLG, subject to preconditions and union ballot approval.
- **Interim Organisational Structure:** The team discussed the interim organisational structure, noting that it is subject to further information on roles, particularly within the advice team, and the proposed triage advisors. The structure aims to improve efficiency and clarity in roles.
- **Staff survey:** Have some good results - however clear areas need to be addressed. These are L&D, change communications and workload. They highlighted the need to address staff concerns and support them through the ongoing changes in the organisation.
- **Development Plans:** Emphasised the need for all staff to have development plans in place as part of their performance management review. This is crucial for identifying learning and development needs and ensuring staff growth and engagement.
- **Office space:** GO provided an update on the office space. It has been extended by 3 months. Desks are being reduced from 12 to 8 as the office is not full. Can be increased on short notice. New starters are using the office more.

ACTION: A staff survey action plan is to be developed by the end of July, and paper to be presented at the next change committee meeting to ensure staff are engaged and informed with change.

- **ARAC:**

- **Annual Audit:** KC reported that the annual audit conducted by Beavers and Struthers went well, with all necessary information provided in a timely manner. There were a few outstanding points and queries on the accounts, which are being addressed but no issues raised by auditors.
- **New Contracts Tracker:** KC highlighted the progress made with the new contracts tracker, which is seen as a positive step forward in managing contracts more effectively.
- **New Auditor Appointment:** The team agreed to appoint a new auditor, Gravita, to bring a fresh perspective and maintain independence. The details of the new auditor will be circulated to the group.
- **Management accounts:** Some actuals are not fully reported this month - due to absence at MHA (book keeper on A/L). Management accounts will be circulated for full Board scrutiny shortly.
- **Importance of Finance Hire:** KC stressed the importance of the new finance hire for the organisation's resilience. This hire will address the current knowledge and skills gap in accounting, bookkeeping, and finance, and will also support governance and HR-related contracts and policies.

ACTION: GO to circulate information on Gravita.

- **3.0 Action Log Review (moved around on the agenda):**

- **Outstanding Actions:** MB and the team reviewed the action log, identifying actions that are still in progress and those that need to remain open. They discussed the importance of tracking and completing these actions to ensure accountability and progress.
- **Forward Look:** The team discussed the importance of having a forward look across all committees to ensure there are no gaps or duplications in their work. This involves consolidating forward looks from different committees into a single document for better oversight and planning.
- Action 11, 16 and 19 should not be closed.
- Action 22: (Re run mystery shopper). Board agreed there was a need for improved level of detail on content accuracy and new provider should be procured.

- Action 24: open, discussed at P&P and ARAC. Pressure on advice service, needs recruitment which will be progressed urgently.
- **5.0 Progress report 25/26:**
 - **Wait Times:** SF noted that the wait times for direct advice inquiries are currently longer than the target of 10 working days. This is due to pressure on the advisory team and the need for additional recruitment and resources. There is a drive to reduce direct advice by 25% and support more people through the website – this will require our customers’ service expectations to change and would take some careful managing.
 - **E-Learning Registrations:** Highlighted that e-learning registrations are below target. The team has not yet publicised the new e-learning offer extensively, but plans to focus on this area should boost registrations, particularly for new modules on fire safety and right to manage. RH leading new RTM e-learning.
 - MB noted some metrics are obsolete. We can reach more people through newspaper articles e.g. Alero & Daily Mail than actual outreach programs. LGA is an underused resource. SF discussed need for the website to be improved before we sign-post people to some parts of it.

ACTION: CEOs to circulate budget with change actuals to board.

- **Forecasted Spend:** AB reported that the organisation is operating close to its forecasted spend, with a slight headroom available due to a correction in the NI forecasts.
- **Budget Reallocation:** The team discussed the possibility of reallocating funds from the change budget to cover core budget needs. This reallocation may be necessary to ensure that all critical projects and initiatives are adequately funded.
- **Capital Expenditure:** AB stressed the importance of planning capital expenditure to ensure that the available budget is fully utilised. The team aims to have a clear plan for capital underspend by the beginning of September to avoid underspending.
- **6.0 Staff rep reflections & questions:**
 - AO thanked the board on behalf of the staff for recent pay offer. AO stated that whilst everyone was enthusiastic about supporting the Change agenda, it is still

quite overwhelming, and people will need time to adjust to a new way of working.

- **7.0** **AOB**

None.

Additional Actions:

- **Recruitment:** Rapidly recruit additional advisors to address the pressure on the advisory service. (CEOs)
- **Learning and Development Plans:** Check with managers to ensure every member of staff has a learning and development plan in place. (GO)
- **Finance Hire:** Circulate the plan detailing the new finance hire's role, migration from MHA, and associated costs.
- **Capital Budget:** Ensure the capital budget for this year is fully allocated and spent by the beginning of September.
- **Forward Look:** Bring together the forward looks for all committees and the board into one place and circulate. (CEOs, MR support)
- **Mystery Shopper:** Commission a new quality and consistency check across the service instead of rerunning the existing mystery shopper.
- **Website Metrics:** Investigate the reasons for the decline in website hits and develop strategies to increase traffic.