



# Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations



## Governance within community based housing associations: ready for the future?

GWSF membership  
research on current  
position with  
governing bodies

January 2022

## CONTENTS

## PAGE

Introduction	2
Section A: Findings	3-7
Section B: Implications for the future of community based HAs	8-11
Appendices	12-18

## INTRODUCTION

### Why we undertook the work

Since our original work on succession planning within member associations in 2017, we knew that the challenges of recruiting governing body members were only increasing, and not made any easier by the impact of Covid.

We were therefore keen to take a more forensic look at the issues members were facing, how they were responding to the challenges in the last few years, and what they felt the future prospects were for the community based sector as a whole.

### The interviews

During the second half of 2021 we carried out interviews with over 40 senior staff and governing body members from 29 member housing associations, including three fully mutual co-ops. Ten were from areas outwith Glasgow, 18 from Glasgow, and one with stock in and outwith Glasgow. Our sincere thanks go to everyone who took part.

We have no reason to believe that the 29 were anything other than a reasonably representative sample of what we might have found across our entire membership of 65 members, but of course we can't be 100% sure about this.

In many respects, with this 'snapshot in time' never having been done before, its value may be accentuated over time by carrying out periodic updates, at least on the main statistical indicators such as numbers on the governing body, proportion of tenants and proportion of local people.

We talked informally with a number of external organisations about the work, and in particular had a good discussion with the Scottish Housing Regulator. The findings, though, focus wholly on what our members told us about their experiences.

### Note on terminology

As covered in the report, the use of 'management committee' and 'board' was split pretty much 50/50 across the respondents. And so to avoid constantly referring to 'committees/boards' we have – somewhat reluctantly – opted to use the catch-all term 'governing body', as used by SHR.

Also, we generally refer to 'community based housing associations' (CBHAs) rather than 'community controlled housing associations' (CCHAs), as this term is preferred by a greater proportion of members, as also covered in the report.

## SECTION A: FINDINGS

### A1 Overall numbers on governing bodies

The average number of governing body members among the 29 associations was 11.8.

The two lowest were associations with 8 and 9 respectively, and the two highest had 15.

Most said around 12-13 would be their ideal number, with a couple saying they would always be keen to try to retain the maximum 15.

Whilst no associations were in any immediate danger of getting to the minimum number of board members (seven), a few were nervous about the possibility, especially where age and ill-health could potentially lead to the loss of a couple of members in a relatively short space of time. For most associations this is an ongoing risk factor that is constantly monitored.

### A2 Proportion of tenants on governing bodies

The average proportion of tenants on the 29 governing bodies was 47%.

Excluding the three fully mutual co-ops, all of whose governing body members must be tenants, the average was 40%.

Excluding the co-ops, the highest proportion of tenants on the governing body was 8 out of 11, and the lowest was 1 out of 12.

### A3 Proportion of local people on governing bodies

The average proportion of local people on governing bodies was 76.7%. Excluding the three fully mutual co-ops, the average proportion was 73.5%.

The figures for 'local people' are not always as hard and fast as those relating to tenants, as different associations had different approaches to defining 'local', given that only a small minority of associations retain geographical boundaries in their rules (as covered in section A4 below).

Local people other than tenants were most likely to be factored owners, along with other residents, including other owners and, in a few cases, tenants of other local associations.

Many associations were keen to emphasise that among those not living locally were a number of people with strong local connections, including those who had lived or worked in the area previously or had other obvious links with the area.

### A4 Limits/restrictions on shareholding membership

Of the 26 associations which were not fully mutual co-ops, six retained a geographical map which defined the area from which general members could be sought.

However, in one case the area was the entire local authority area, and in a further two cases, members were allowed from outwith the area if they were bringing specific skills being sought by the association.

One association which did not have a geographic restriction had three separate categories of membership – tenants, owners and others, to enable some additional checks and balances for the 'others' category. This was seen as a way of ensuring that all prospective members had the best interests of the association at heart.

## A5 Rules on the make-up of the governing body

Seven out of the 26 associations which were not fully mutual co-ops had some kind of stipulation in their rules on the make-up of the governing body, with 19 having none. The specific stipulations for the seven associations were:

- Tenant majority (two cases)
- Tenant/factored owner majority (but only one factored owner allowed)
- Must include two local authority nominees (this was a stock transfer HA which had reduced the LA nominee requirement from the original figure of four)
- Must include one local authority nominee (not a full stock transfer HA)
- One association active across a number of council areas had a rule stipulating an overall tenant majority and on a regional split among the eight tenant members
- Four places appointed by the board and not by the membership (this HA retains a geographical map in its rules and so guarantees a majority of local people)

One of the associations with a tenant majority specified in its rules said it may need to review this in the foreseeable future if attracting new tenant members continued to prove challenging.

A number of associations with no restrictions in their rules said they nonetheless hoped to retain a tenant majority long into the future, if at all possible.

Having 100% tenants on their governing bodies, fully mutual co-ops are under particular pressure to ensure that they can maintain sufficient numbers. Two were more confident than the third on the long term prospects of achieving this.

## A6 Levels of shareholding membership

We did not always collect precise figures on general membership, as some associations were awaiting their autumn AGM before carrying out the annual 'cleansing' of the list in accordance with the five-year rule. Also, membership levels can be set against either stock numbers or general population numbers, and so caution is needed over comparisons.

Looking at membership levels set against stock numbers (excluding the co-ops), these varied from around 3% to 50%.

Almost all associations reported a steady fall in membership levels in recent years, citing a combination of the five-year rule and a broad feeling that 'selling' the benefits of membership was not easy.

Associations with low and/or falling membership levels did not believe that this impacted detrimentally on their prospects of attracting future governing body members: if a potential candidate emerged, for example through a scrutiny group, shareholding membership could easily be arranged as necessary.

Many associations said their front line staff were primed to try to sign up new tenants as members, and to be on the lookout for potential governing body members among existing tenants, but passive recruitment efforts such as items in newsletters were not generally seen as productive.

The difficulty of persuading people to become members meant that overall, further efforts to increase membership were not a high priority for the majority of associations at the current time. Our sense is that this issue has not been 'pushed' by SHR as a particular priority for associations in recent times.

A particular challenge for fully mutual co-ops was that with shareholding membership being naturally high, this had implications for achieving quorum at AGMs.



## A7 Challenges of attracting new governing body members

For a variety of reasons, attracting and retaining new governing body members is becoming more challenging, but whilst the proportion of tenant members has historically been falling, and governing bodies often now have a different mix/balance, the significant majority are still local people.

Most members recognised that there would be ongoing challenges with recruiting. Many of the concerns voiced echoed those expressed in our research on succession planning carried out in 2017. The most commonly cited reasons for it being more difficult to attract tenant members to replace those leaving (or dying) were:

- The lack of a crisis or major problem to solve, as compared with the position when the association was first set up
- The increasingly challenging financial and regulatory environment, which put the emphasis on the strategic rather than the operational and which, if one is being realistic, often made meetings quite dull or 'heavy' for most or all participants

These wider concerns alluded to 'bigger-picture' reflections about how people now live their lives, including work patterns and other commitments society, and – crucially - the implications of these changes for volunteering and the capacity to 'get involved'.

### One member commented:

*"We've got to understand that it's not the same as it was 40 years ago. People have got busy lives, insecure jobs, different working patterns, childcare problems. Not to mention some of the problems they are facing in terms of poverty, food insecurity. So, it does make it more challenging for us definitely, but we've got to keep trying [to recruit]."*

### Another observed:

*"The world has obviously changed, and the motivation to serve on a committee has*

*significantly reduced over the years. And maybe we [CCHAs] are a victim of our own success. Most people are happy with their homes, with their areas, with the services we provide. And the 'protest' element of why people got involved...campaigned... all those years ago is gone."*

Another significant challenge identified by members was the difficulty of making the prospect of becoming a governing body member attractive. Key issues here include:

- It being a 'hard-sell' to get new governing body members, to whom the prospect could often seem daunting rather than attractive.
- This was often linked to the level of scrutiny and skills required, coupled with the need to understand complex and often 'dry' information.
- Increased emphasis on compliance/regulation was also seen as off-putting for governing body members.

One committee member pointed out:

*"I think that the level of knowledge and understanding you need has increased over the years. And you're dealing with complex information, and making crucial decisions. All of this can be very challenging for new board members."*

Some associations say they would have sought to change the mix of skills and experience on their governing body regardless of the difficulty of attracting new tenant members, in response to the more complex environment.

Whilst caution is needed on this point, a number of associations felt that the socio-economic profile of an area could have an influence on the ability to attract tenant members. In a mixed area, it is more likely that existing and new tenants will come from a greater variety of backgrounds, including a range of professional backgrounds.

So whilst tenant representatives in any area

will have (or have had in the past) different occupations which have given them skills and experience, the extent to which this is a factor will be greater in a more mixed socio-economic area. Generally, associations operating in these areas were somewhat more confident about continuing to be able to attract new tenant members.

## A8 Committee or board?

52% of associations use the word 'committee' or the term 'management committee', with 48% using 'board'. Two had changed to the latter very recently, and some others had changed in the last few years.

Some said their committees felt that 'committee' was more in line with the spirit of community activism and involvement. Others retained a strong resistance to using 'board' as they felt it represented a kind of professionalisation and was 'doing what SHR wants us to do' rather than being the association's own choice. One said 'committee' was less intimidating to prospective new members.

Among associations which had converted to 'board', some said it felt more modern or more 'professional-sounding', but a number said the decision was based around 'board' sounding more strategic and less operational. One said 'management committee' had long given members the impression that they should be involved in operational matters and could give prospective new members the same impression.

At least one association used 'board' but retained 'sub-committees'.

## A9 Community controlled or community based?

28% of associations said they preferred the term 'community controlled HA' as it was appropriate given that local people (or in some cases tenants alone) were in a majority on the governing body.

36% had a preference for 'community based HA', with some saying this avoided getting into arguments about exactly what 'community control' meant. A few which did not have a significant majority of local people said they could not justify using the term 'community control' without such a majority.

One said they wanted to avoid giving governing body members the impression that 'control' meant involvement in operational matters.

The remainder (36%) either had no strong views, or tended to focus on just being 'local' associations.

## A10 Long service and the nine year rule

This issue probably gave rise to the strongest views expressed during the interviews, albeit the views were still mixed.

In terms of statistics, the 29 associations had an average of 2.4 governing body members who had served more than nine years. The average number who had served more than 20 years was 0.7.

One association had a strict nine-year rule, i.e. this was the maximum time that any governing body member could serve. This had been introduced recently, with the association feeling it was a way of avoiding difficult

situations and also guaranteeing 'freshness' through turnover in the future.

Every association we spoke with had a process of annual reviews or 'conversations' with governing body members, and whilst we did not ask the question explicitly, we got the impression that for many, if not most, some form of regular review or conversation would take place whether or not the nine year rule continued to exist.

Many associations said they tried hard to keep the reviews/conversations positive, putting the emphasis on how the individual could be supported to make the best possible contribution.

A minority of associations said they were 'fine' with the nine year rule or 'could live with it', and many said they had no issue with the importance of all governing body members needing to be effective.

But around 80% said the nine year rule was arbitrary as they felt effectiveness was an issue however long or short a time someone had served, and that some longer serving members had felt insulted by the inferences behind the rule. Many associations felt that this had been a crude tool and had not respected the commitment of volunteers.

Three associations specifically said that with newer governing body members having been recruited recently, and many of them not being tenants (and some not local either), they felt it was especially important to still have members who knew and understood the history of the area and of the association.

One association said it took time for new tenant members to gain the experience and confidence to consider serving as an office bearer, and that this did not seem to be understood by SHR.

Another association said that the most important criterion was that people still cared about the association and really wanted to continue contributing.

Three associations said a long serving member had left, either 'probably' or 'definitely' because they did not feel they should be subject to an appraisal-type process.

One association with an above-average proportion of longer serving members said that even if addressing the issue had been very important to them, doing this during the pandemic would not have been a priority, partly because of other priorities but also because putting any pressure on people to stand down during a period of greater social isolation was not something the association wanted to do.

This issue can be looked at through a variety of lenses, and there was a greater spread of views on this than on some other issues. The resentment that the regulatory approach has generated among a number of associations is not in doubt.

However, one potential view of the outcome is that the rule has, to a degree, achieved at least some of what it might have been intended to – i.e. put a greater emphasis on effectiveness and on people getting the right support to be effective.

## SECTION B: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY BASED HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

### B1 Overview

As well as capturing a current snapshot of what is happening on CBHAs' governing bodies, we also wanted to use the research to explore members' views about the future.

The fundamental question we asked was 'Do you think CBHAs/CCHAs can thrive into the future?' As component parts of that question, we looked at addressing challenges with recruiting, and whether the continuing evolution of governing bodies to include a greater mix would still see 'local people leading' at its core.

### B2 Recruitment and retention challenges

Most members indicated that they were constantly proactive in their approach to both recruitment and retention. However, there was a real recognition that sector-wide challenges with governing body recruitment would persist and that CBHAs would have to 'keep on top of this' in order to engage local people particularly.

It seemed clear that some practices which were less developed and less in use a few years ago when GWSF carried out its initial work on succession planning are now more common and, indeed, seen as the norm. Targeted advertising, approaches to preparing people to join a governing body and then supporting them through the process of joining, now seem more widespread.

There has sometimes been a perception that any process of recruitment – especially through advertising – will only bring in 'outside' people. But members' experience suggests that publicity can often attract owners, business people or others who live or work in the

area, alongside people who are indeed from outwith and likely to be bringing specific skills being sought.

There is also a greater prevalence of staff members from one association serving on the governing body of another. Some members – probably a majority – indicated that they thought this was a positive thing since knowledge could be shared and spread throughout the sector, and that housing professionals brought skills and familiarity with key issues which could only strengthen boards.

As one member explained:

*"I think it's definitely a bonus having staff members from other associations, bringing their knowledge and understanding of the key issues. And obviously, if they have expertise in one area then that's even better. It makes total sense, especially if we are looking to get a greater mix on the board. It's not about replacing local people, but augmenting that local knowledge."*

However, some other members were less enthusiastic and felt that it could lead to the sector 'regulating itself', with one commenting:

*"There are definitely worries. We need to be careful about increasing involvement of professionals: for some it's career development so the motivation may not be right.."*

Overall, apart from the obvious boost to the supply of people willing to serve, the prevailing view was that as long as this was done in a proportionate manner, it provided a wider, benchmarking-type input to a governing body alongside the career development factor for the individual. [And with a 'bonus factor' if the person in question was living locally.]

In our 2017 work we featured a number of good practice case studies, including the (still ongoing) training scheme for prospective new



tenant committee members run by Glasgow West HA. In this work we came across further initiatives, including:

- The FLAIR Academy – a joint initiative from the six Renfrewshire associations to provide regular training programmes for prospective new committee/board members
- Govan HA – Mandatory one-year training programme prior to new members joining
- Ardenglen HA's overall strategy on succession planning

These are featured as case studies in the appendices to this report, with our thanks to the associations in question.

Perhaps unexpectedly, one sensitive issue raised by several members in relation to recruitment/retention was the idea of paying governing body members. This issue is sometimes about relatively large annual sums being paid to (primarily) chairs, as is done in some larger associations outwith GWSF's membership.

But almost all members who raised the issue of payment were instead wondering if making a modest annual payment (e.g. £2,000-£3,000) might just make the difference in supporting people – and particularly tenant members – to serve.

Those in favour of doing so felt that in a changing world, this was an option which deserved reconsideration by the sector. Some interviewees thought payment could be a pragmatic, potential solution for attracting and retaining people.

One member summed up their thoughts on the issue as follows:

*“Paying tenant board members could help attract more people – their input is worth paying for, if you can get the right people (say for £3,000). Charity law stipulates you can't pay more than half your board, so this is a barrier, on top of the perception that paying board*

*members is taboo in our sector. But it needs to be set against the prospect of a diminishing number of willing volunteers.”*

Surprisingly perhaps, some long-standing governing body members who had previously been opposed to payment now believed that it could be a crucial factor in helping to recruit:

*“It's not like it was back at the beginning, we ask a lot of committee members. And people have so many other commitments and I think anything that attracts people, recognises their contribution should be looked at. Other charities do it [offer payment] as a matter of course.”*

One chief officer did raise the issue of paid chairs:

*“Long term I see it as a fully recruited, more professional board. You don't do it if housing's your main interest as that's more operational. I can see the merit of an independent, externally recruited chair, probably paid. Recruitment would need the right processes, of course, e.g. in relation to the role of the CEO and Chair.”*

GWSF believes that this would be a minority view within the sector at present, but it is arguably a sign that a new 'breed' of chief officer, alongside ongoing difficulties with recruitment of local people, could mean greater debate around this issue in the coming years.

In relation to retention of governing body members, participants' views echoed the findings from our 2017 succession planning research, i.e. with the focus very much on robust support mechanisms and 'buddy' and mentoring systems for all governing body members, alongside opportunities to keep skills and knowledge up-to-date.

One comment captures the importance of this issue:

*“We need to support committee members throughout their time on the committee. And this means ensuring they know they can ask any questions. We have a 'buddy' system which*

*involves longer-serving committee members being assigned to newer members. And, of course, continued updating of skills/knowledge is key."*

Some associations said they had found that taking proactive retention measures had been more difficult during the pandemic.

### **B3 Will CBHAs/CCHAs still operate with 'local people leading?**

Most members felt that having a greater mix on governing bodies was already a fait accompli, both in terms of local people not necessarily being tenants alone, and in terms of a mix of local people and externally recruited professionals. So for many associations, managing different and changing balances on governing bodies has become a normal part of running the organisation.

Members strongly believed that regardless of the mix around the table, the dynamics of a governing body and how it interacted were the crucial elements that made it function well. There was a consensus that a commitment to the work and ethos of the association, and to the local area, was the fundamental 'ask' of any governing body member, whether a local resident or from outwith the area.

But in this greater mix, will local people remain in the majority? In Section A we covered in some detail the reasons why many member associations agree it has become increasingly challenging to recruit new tenant members. But it was significant that most participants believed local people would still remain in the majority on their governing bodies. Indeed, members felt confident that the longer term picture would look similar to this snapshot of the current position.

The overall consensus was that the mix on governing bodies would continue to encompass a majority of local people and (normally) a minority of externally recruited professionals. But there was still a strong sense from most

members that their association, and the sector in general, would have to work hard in order to keep local people in the majority. This would mean continuing to be proactive in terms of recruitment and retention of local people.

As noted earlier in section A7, several members highlighted the fact that some CBHAs are based in areas which are more 'mixed' than others, for example in socio-economic terms, and that it was important to consider the implications of this when it came to recruiting local people.

A quote from one member based in the west end of Glasgow illustrates this:

*"I mean we're sitting in an area which includes a greater mix all round. We have affluent retired people who want to get involved, as well as students, and community activists. We also have a range of ethnicities, and this all means that we have an advantage in terms of getting local people on our board. I know that's not the same in every area for every association."*

### **B4 So can CBHAs continue to thrive into the future?**

To some degree, views varied on the extent to which CBHAs could continue thriving longer term with full, strong governing bodies, given that CBHAs had more to lose from the greater difficulties in attracting tenant members.

There was an obvious awareness of a few cases where the lack of a strong governing body had been one of the main factors in associations choosing to partner/merge with another association, albeit often in conjunction with other factors (such as inadequate investment in stock).

But whilst many associations had some anxiety that the challenges would be greater for CBHAs, there was a general consensus that the solution may largely lie in continuing to focus efforts on recruiting a wider range of local people, widening out from a focus primarily on tenants.

What was not in doubt was a sense that without a majority of local people on the governing body, CBHAs would start to lose their USP and would be in danger of looking significantly less different to other types of association.

There was a sense among some associations that the pace of retirements of longer serving chief officers and recruitment of new ones may have particular implications for the community based sector. Not all senior officers (and, to an extent, fewer governing body members), were seen as being steeped in the community based 'ethos' as would probably have been the case previously, and there was some concern that this might make partnership/merger moves within the sector more likely in the longer term.

Members did not view governance challenges in isolation from wider challenges facing the entire social housing sector. The key factor was that even with strong governance, coping with challenges such as pandemic recovery, supply chain shortages, the retrofit/net zero agenda and rising poverty levels would be difficult. So any association facing these issues with governance problems would be especially vulnerable to potential loss of independence.

But whilst many felt that the balance on governing bodies would continue to shift, there was a good level of faith that local people would still predominate, allowing associations to continue to flourish and the CBHA model to survive and thrive.

Reasons given by members for their confidence in the future of the CBHA model included:

- The success and longevity of the model over the last 50 years, which proves that 'it's still here because it works'
- The continued vigilance and effort of the CBHA sector overall to protect the model, and especially to ensure that local people still remain in the majority on governing bodies

- The agility and flexibility of the sector in terms of new approaches to recruitment and welcoming a greater mix onto their governing bodies.

## B6 Reviewing this snapshot picture

The Forum intends to periodically review and update the position with members' governing bodies – perhaps every two or three years – so that trends can be measured over time.

We are confident that such reviews will demonstrate ongoing adaptation to changing circumstances, but with a strong emphasis remaining on ensuring wherever possible that the governing bodies of community based housing associations contain a majority of local people.

## Appendix 1

# GOVAN HA'S INDUCTION PROGRAMME FOR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

## Overview

Govan Housing Association's induction programme for new board members has been running for around 6 months (since mid-2021) and builds upon the Association's previous induction programme.

The current version is more comprehensive in scope and aims to support new board members by giving them the knowledge and skills they need to be effective, and to make things less daunting for them overall.

The programme provides a robust introduction to the world of social housing and encompasses regulation, legislation, and the general practices of the sector.

## How it works

All new board members are required to do a year's training, during which they shadow an existing board member and also complete the various elements of the induction programme. This incorporates finance, governance, SHR, development and other key issues.

During this period new board members are co-optees, and on completion of the 12 months' training they become full members at the AGM.

The programme explores one topic a month, in depth, to allow new board members the time and space to develop their knowledge and understanding of a particular issue. It's also quite flexible, in that if one topic seems more relevant at a specific time the programme can be re-ordered to accommodate this.

Govan works with SHARE to deliver the training in-house, and also encourages new board members to sign up for SHARE's courses for all board members in the sector.

Caron Quinn, Director of Corporate Services/ Deputy CEO at Govan HA, explained:

"We like board members to get out and about, to meet board members from other areas/ associations. We like them to sign up for SHARE's courses. We feel that this gives them the opportunity to develop a wider 'world view' about the sector. So, both the in-house training and external events are part of our overall induction package."

## The story so far

To date, four new board members have participated in the induction programme and provided the Association with positive feedback on their experiences. The general consensus is that they have found the process extremely supportive and crucial in helping to build their skills and knowledge.

The Association is planning to formally evaluate the programme at the end of the 12 month period and is happy to share the results with GWSF (who will subsequently disseminate the findings to members).

Caron Quinn commented:

*"We are really keen to hear what they [participants] thought worked and any suggestions for improvement. We're also looking at different ways of learning that we can incorporate, for example online courses that board members can work on themselves to augment their skills."*

## The potential benefits for both new board members and for the association

For new board members the key benefits of the induction programme are: the opportunity to build up the confidence, skills and knowledge

crucial to their role; and the space and time it creates to do this systematically over the course of a year.

Caron Quinn sums up the benefits to the association as follows:

*“For the Association it will ultimately benefit us by ensuring that we have a Board that’s interrogating, challenging and making sure that collectively we’re making the right decisions; and crucially to be able to demonstrate that we’re operating with a high standard of governance.”*



## Appendix 2

# THE FLAIR ACADEMY

## FLAIR

FLAIR is The Federation of Local Housing Associations in Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire. The partnership of six associations comprises Barrhead, Bridgewater, Ferguslie Park, Linstone, Paisley and Williamsburgh, who have been working together under the FLAIR banner for over 30 years.

## The FLAIR Academy - background

The FLAIR Academy was established in 2018 and has run twice yearly since then (with the exception of 2020 due to Covid).

The Academy has two main objectives: to attract potential new board members for the six FLAIR associations, and, through exploring a range of key topics, to provide participants with an overview of the community based housing association sector and the role of board members.

Kathleen McCutcheon, Director at Paisley HA, explains:

*“FLAIR associations, along with others, have found it increasingly difficult to attract tenant board members. People are generally happy with both their homes and the services they receive. We’ve tried to attract people through scrutiny panels, walkabout groups, other ways and it doesn’t work. So I think we recognised that you have to have an ‘offer’ for people. The Academy is free, there’s no big commitment and participants gain knowledge about the sector. It can be useful for people’s CVs and CPD. I think it’s appealing to people.”*

Kathleen was also keen to highlight the supportive learning environment that the Academy provides:

*“As well as the knowledge that people gain, the Academy also provides a supportive environment because you have a cohort of people that are all learning at the same pace, and you have that group as you move forward.”*

## How does it work?

The Academy is advertised widely by the six FLAIR members and is open to anyone: there is no geographical or tenure requirement. Participants initially have to complete a Register of Interest form in which they provide information about their background, and their interest in housing and their local community.

At this stage, participants also indicate their housing association preferences; i.e. which association’s board they would like to serve on. These preferences are then matched up with available vacancies.

Participants attend nine weekly sessions, each of which lasts around 90 minutes, and they receive copies of all the presentations. Existing board members too have the opportunity to join for specific topics if they want to refresh their knowledge in that area. The sessions cover -

- Governance (two sessions)
- Housing
- Technical
- Finance
- Factoring
- Wider role and Community Regeneration
- Development
- All about FLAIR

## The story so far

To date 44 people have gone through all or part of the programme, and 37 participants have gone on to become board members. Feedback from attendees has been hugely positive, as demonstrated by comments from some:

- “The Academy will improve my understanding of board meetings.”
- “It has given me a better understanding of the challenges we face.”
- “It has encouraged me and made it clearer about my role as a board member.”
- “It has enhanced my capability to contribute to key matters and issues at board meetings.”

As well as benefiting attendees, the Academy has also proven to be extremely valuable for the FLAIR associations on several fronts. Key benefits include:

- A successful approach to attracting and retaining new board members
- Shared costs and shared responsibilities – different sessions delivered in-house by senior staff
- ‘Casts a wider net’ and therefore attracts a more diverse mix of participants (people from different sectors – e.g. the social care and private sectors)

## Wider implications for the sector

Kathleen McCutcheon indicated that she thought things would change in terms of length of tenure on boards, and that the diverse new cohort of members coming through the Academy wouldn't serve for long periods

such as 20 years, and that fundamentally this wouldn't be a bad thing.

Kathleen believes that many associations will continue to struggle to get local board members, and that there is no ‘silver-bullet’ which will solve the problem. However, she suggests that taking a pro-active approach, with initiatives like the FLAIR Academy, is the best way forward for the CBHA sector.

Kathleen was keen to point out that the Academy model was easily replicable and that FLAIR were happy to share the key elements of the model with other associations.

## Appendix 3

# ARDENGLEN HOUSING ASSOCIATION

## BRIEFING NOTE ON SUCCESSION PLANNING, DECEMBER 2021



This note provides a short summary of our new approach to succession planning, developed by a short life working group of our Board as part of our 'Big Conversation' programme.

### 1. Statement of Board Excellence

This is a high-level statement adopted by the Board and includes:

- A commitment by the Board to ensuring that its membership will be made up of people who have the values, skills and insights needed to achieve Ardenglen's objectives on behalf of tenants and the community.
- Six guiding principles that describe how the Board would meet the commitment. The principles cover things like:\ Making sure the Board knows what skills and experience Board it already has, and then using this knowledge to identify any gaps or areas to strengthen

- Making sure the Board carries out its responsibilities effectively and that it is a strong team
- The support Board members can expect in developing their skills
- Offering choices about how people can be involved in Ardenglen's work, whether this is as a Board member or in another role
- Promoting Board membership in the community, and how Ardenglen would seek to fill any identified gaps in the Board's collective skills.

- A commitment to taking a **"golden thread"** approach so that Ardenglen's management of Board membership, appraisals, skills assessments, training, and the business plan all work together in a seamless way.

## 2. Succession Planning Strategy

- The Succession Planning Strategy describes in greater detail how Ardenglen would put into practice the principles in the Board Excellence Statement. The contents include:

- What Ardenglen will do to keep and to support existing Board members
- How Ardenglen will decide if new Board members are needed and how that would be done
- What Ardenglen needs to do to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements.

## 3. Policy on Recruitment Initiatives (recruiting people with particular skills)

This Policy would be used if the Board decided to carry out recruitment to attract a new member(s) with particular skills. The Board would be fully in control of all parts of the process and it would appoint a Recruitment Panel to take things forward. The Policy also describes the practical aspects of appointment/election following a recruitment initiative, noting that a new member would be co-opted to the Board in the first instance.

## 4. What will happen next? Some key points

### Board appraisals

Board approval triggered a number of practical changes, the first change would be what gets covered at annual appraisal meetings.

The new appraisal system is now fully in tune with the Board Excellence Statement. The main areas of change are:

- **Members will be asked to provide some information about their experience outside Ardenglen**, for example from work, volunteering, or community activities. This will give a better overall picture of the experience of the Board as a whole.
- There will be a **clearer way of asking members to complete self-assessments**, to make responses more consistent and realistic than was previously the case. The new approach will be based on the idea of “essential skills” – skills that Board members should have or be working towards and describing these as clearly as possible.
- The appraisal meetings discuss **how each Board member sees their involvement with Ardenglen developing in the future**.

We are all individuals and we each get satisfaction from different things. Some people enjoy reading board papers and deciding what questions to ask! Others might find being involved in a different way more fulfilling – so what are the options for that?

In discussing this issue, the Board Working Group was very clear that this is not about losing people or their involvement. So it is best seen as something that could offer positive choices for Board members.

## **Board Skills Matrix and Succession Plan**

The appraisal results helped us build a skills profile for the Board as a whole, which was compared with the priorities the Board sets in the new Ardenglen Business Plan.

A Skills Matrix has been prepared, and this states the priorities for the next three years for promoting Board membership within Ardenglen's area and for attracting new Board members who can offer any specific types of skills that the Board has decided are needed.

A Board Succession Plan will be approved by the Board each year. This would be used to allow the Board to track progress and to decide the actions needed in the year ahead to fill Board places locally and from any external recruitment that is taking place.



Glasgow and West of Scotland  
Forum of Housing Associations

GWSF is the leading membership and campaigning body for local community-based housing associations and co-operatives (CCHAs) in the west of Scotland. The Forum represents 65 members who together own almost 88,000 homes. Along with providing this decent, affordable housing CBHAs also deliver factoring services to around 33,000 owners, mostly in mixed tenure housing blocks. For over 40 years CBHAs have been at the vanguard of strategies which have helped improve the environmental, social and economic wellbeing of their communities.



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07936 152193