

**PUBLIC**  
**DERBY HOMES BOARD**  
**THURSDAY 28 MARCH 2024**  
**MANAGING DIRECTORS REPORT –**  
**FREQUENCY OF BOARD MEETINGS**



**ITEM NO. Enc.4**

**Report of: Managing Director**

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**PRESENTED BY:**

Maria Murphy

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| <b>1</b>   | <b>SUMMARY</b>   |
| <b>1.1</b> | This report provides board members with updates on the following strategic issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Telephony and website – Digital helpers</li><li>• Member for Complaints</li></ul> |

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| <b>2</b>   | <b>RECOMMENDATION(S)</b>                                   |
| <b>2.1</b> | To note the update on digitalisation of customer services. |
| <b>2.2</b> | To approve a Member for Complaints.                        |

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| <b>3</b>   | <b>REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)</b>                                       |
| <b>3.1</b> | To ensure that Board Members are kept fully briefed on key strategic issues. |

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| <b>4</b>   | <b>MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION</b>   |
| <b>4.1</b> | <b>Telephony and Website – Update</b>  |
| <b>4.2</b> | In November 2023, a report detailed the early experiences following the deployment of new technology to enhance the telephone and website services for the Council and Derby Homes; for Derby Homes, this has been the through the introduction of 'Ali' an AI, (artificial intelligence), digital helper. |
| <b>4.3</b> | Despite some initial negative press coverage around the introduction of the AI system, there has been good progress in developing and enhancing the technology.  |

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| 4.4  | Customer feedback has been taken on board, and adjustments are made in a timely manner to improve the overall service experience. Having listened to feedback from our customers, we have moved homelessness and urgent/emergency repairs to an auto-transfer option. This means that the customers who use the key phrases are automatically put through to the customer services team.  |
| 4.5  | The website helper was introduced in April 2023, and the telephony helper in May 2023; this is cutting edge technology, with DCC being the first council in the UK to replace its main switchboard with a phone-based AI assistant, proficient in council services.   |
| 4.6  | Whilst we remain committed to developing a culture of self-service for those customers who are able, we equally understand that not all customers are digitally enabled, or confident in using such technology so we retain the option of human interaction for those circumstances.  |
| 4.7  | Phase 2 of the AI project was approved at Council Cabinet in December 2023. As part of this, a compliance board has been established to monitor the progress of the programme and make sure the use of AI tools is fair, legal, and considerate to everyone; we are engaging with this board, and a wider range of forums to ensure services are accessible for everyone.   |
| 4.8  | <p>Areas planned for improvement include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ability to ask multiple questions on a topic</li> <li>• Improved ability to handle short and long queries</li> <li>• Simple and faster workflows for call options</li> <li>• Improved workflow for urgent calls</li> <li>• Improved routing and call transfer</li> <li>• Increased automation to increase self-service options</li> <li>• Multi-language, real time, translations to improve accessibility.</li> </ul> <p>Alongside this, we will also be updating our main housing management and maintenance system from Open Housing to One Housing, and again we will be seeking to maximise the benefits for our customers through improved technology.</p> |
| 4.9  | I would usually provide the Board with details on our call handling performance but due to the implementation of a new platform and associated reporting tools I am not able to do so at this point. Staff are working on this, currently, and this data will be provided to Operational Board going forward.   |
| 4.10 | <b>Member for Complaints</b>  |
| 4.11 | Board Members are aware that the Housing Ombudsman has been reviewing the Complaints Handling Code.   |
| 4.12 | One of the outcomes of this review is that organisations must appoint a member for complaints.  |
| 4.13 | In Councils, this will be an elected member and in registered providers a board member. Of course, arm's length organisations are somewhat of a hybrid model and further clarification has been sought by the National Federation of ALMO's.  |

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| 4.14 | The response is that in the case of an ALMO, there should be a Council member and ideally a board member responsible for complaints.  |
| 4.15 | The responsibilities of the member for complaints can be summarised as follows:<br>To promote a culture of openness and transparency, where complaints made by residents are seen as a form of insight into how the organisation is managed; to provide assurance, that systems are in place to capture learning from complaints and that governing bodies are engaged with this; to ensure senior level ownership of learning and accountability stemming from complaints. |
| 4.16 | Our current arrangements include a board member champion for Customer First, which has included oversight on complaints handling; this role is currently held by Bob MacDonald, Tenant Board Member and Vice-Chair of the Board. Bob also chairs the Operational Board, where reports on complaints handling, and performance are presented.  |
| 4.17 | We have also agreed that from April 2024, further information will be presented to the main board on complaints, and cases referred to the Housing Ombudsman.   |
| 4.18 | My proposal is that our current arrangements for the oversight and member direction on complaints handling is already well handled by the board member champion, and we should look to develop and enhance this role, rather than introduce a new framework. The current board member is welcomed to continue in this role; if this is not possible, a wider discussion is required to identify a named person.   |
| 4.19 | The member responsible for complaints will continue to be supported by Officers, and reports will be produced on their behalf.  |
| 4.20 | A separate briefing will be provided to the Cabinet Member, with responsibility for housing, to discuss the Council's obligations and agree a framework for how these will be delivered.  |

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| <b>5</b> | <b>OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED</b> |
| 5.1      | None.                           |

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| <b>6</b> | <b>IMPLICATIONS</b>   |
| 6.1      | Council   |
| 6.1.1    | Work continues with Council Officers, to discuss the regulatory requirements and ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities. As detailed in the report, the member for complaints role will be discussed with the Cabinet Member with responsibility for housing. |
| 6.2      | Risk  |
| 6.2.1    | The Board will receive high level reports on complaints handling and cases referred to the Housing Ombudsman, to ensure appropriate assurance and oversight.  |
| 6.3      | Legal and Confidentiality   |
| 6.3.1    | Board members have ultimate responsibility for directing the activity of Derby Homes, ensuring that it is a well-run organisation, delivering the outcomes for which it has been set up; effective control, decision making,  |

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|  | and business planning are reliant on the availability of robust data, advice, effective risk management and mitigation strategies. |
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**Equalities**

**Financial & Business Plan**

**Health and Safety**

**Consultation**

**Personnel**

**Environmental**

**Policy Review**

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| <b>7</b> | <b>BACKGROUND INFORMATION</b>   |
| .        | <a href="https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/centre-for-learning/key-topics/mrc/#:~:text=The%20role%20of%20the%20MRC,and%20the%20Housing%20Ombudsman%20Service.">https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/centre-for-learning/key-topics/mrc/#:~:text=The%20role%20of%20the%20MRC,and%20the%20Housing%20Ombudsman%20Service.</a> |

**This report has been approved by:**

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| Managing Director                    | Maria Murphy | 11.03.2024 |
| Finance Director & Company Secretary | Michael Kirk | 14.03.2024 |
| Governance Manager (checked)         | Jane Haywood | 14.03.2024 |