Minutes of Meeting

Meeting: Board Meeting
Date: Thursday, 25 March 2021
Time: 6.00pm
Venue: Via videoconferencing on MS Teams

Present:

Victor Breach
Victoria Dingle
Jennifer Ekelund
Dave Lakin
Nicky Mellings
David Mody
Harjit Sandhu
Hayley Smith
Kate Wareing
Lucy Weston

Apologies:

Tim Bolton
Nasreen Razaq Al-Hamdani

Also in attendance:

Lee Hayward, Director of Property Services
Nasreen Hussain, Director of Finance and Resources
Jude McCaffrey, Interim Director of Housing and Communities
Craig Dransfield, Head of Development
Dave Edge, Head of Business Transformation
Katie Legg, Head of HR
Marisa Elliott, Governance Lead & Company Secretary
Naomi Barrand, Members' Forum
Ann-Marie O'Sullivan, Members' Forum

Announcements

The Chair welcomed Dave Edge, Soha's new Head of Business Transformation, and Naomi Barrand and Ann-Marie O'Sullivan, members of the Members' Forum to the meeting.

Declarations of Interest

There were no new declarations of interest.

85a. Approval of Minutes	Actions
The minutes of the Board meeting held on 25 February 2021 were approved. **Resolved:** **That the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 25 February 2021 be signed as a true and accurate record.** **85b. SIB Property Board Minutes** In the absence of the Chair of SIB Property, the Chair of the Board asked members to note the minutes of the meetings held on 26 November 2020 and 25 February 2021. No questions were raised. **Resolved:** **That the Board notes the minutes of the SIB Property Board meetings.** **85c. Audit and Risk Committee Minutes** The Chair of the Committee advised members of some of the key highlights discussed by the Committee at their meeting on 10 March 2021. These were: a revised approach to bad debt provision, the Internal Audit recommendations, the Internal Audit Plan for 2021/22 and the External Audit Strategy. No questions were raised. **Resolved:** **That the Board notes the minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting.** **86. Matters Arising** Item 70 – Matters Arising (CEX Key Issues) The Governance Lead confirmed that a meeting had been held earlier this week to review the extended scope for the mock IDA documentation. This now includes the Consumer Standards elements taken from the Social Housing White Paper, the Code of Governance 2020, HOS Complaints Handling Code and Together with Tenants and had been combined into one document. The next step is to gain assurance, or not, from SLT on whether we meet the standards and set out an improvement plan before the report comes to the Board in May. Item 70 – Matters Arising (Corporate Plan 2021-25)	

This item is on the agenda.

Item 71 – Action Tracker and Wallboard

This item is on the agenda.

Item 74 – Housemark Benchmarking

The Director of Property Services advised that a breakdown of our main repair KPIs by contractor is possible and will be provided in the next Performance Report at the May Board meeting.

Item 75 – Proposed KPIs 2021/22

The Director of Property Services advised that we will be able to separate out the average SAP rating for new builds from existing stock when we have installed some new software. It is anticipated that the installation work will be completed by the end of April.

Item 76 – Budget 2021/22

The Director of Finance and Resources advised that she didn't have this figure for the average cost of a third party service charge for those on a social rent available but would circulate to the Board before the next meeting. This has since been confirmed as £302 per annum.

Item 78 – Development Update

This has been actioned as shown in the revised Development Update cover sheet.

Item 82 – Minutes of the Personnel and Remuneration Committee

This item has been completed.

Reports

87. Action Tracker and Wallboard Ideas

Action Tracker

Item 126 – QL Project

It was noted that since this action was added to the Tracker in 2015, we have come a long way. The majority of the implementation work has been completed. It was therefore suggested that this item is removed from the Tracker and included as business as usual on a quarterly basis. This was agreed.

Item 145 – Review of IDA Documentation

This has already been discussed at item 86.

Wallboard

It was noted that work to deliver our ambition to be more accountable and transparent with our residents has begun and an options report will be brought to the Board in July.

It was agreed to remove all previous history from the action on Personal Evacuation Plans for those living in General Needs homes except the latest details. An update report will be provided in September 2021.

The Chief Executive advised that while we haven't sourced any more schemes similar to Dot, Dot, Dot, we have been working with Meanwhile in Oxfordshire to bring fifty vacant properties back into use across Oxfordshire. We will continue to seek opportunities and partners to provide these types of homes and the Chief Executive will update the Board periodically through her Key Issues report.

The Director of Property Services advised that once we have the software installed to enable us to model our property energy performance, we will be in a position to identify the work required to bring all our properties up to a minimum EPC rating of C by 2035. However, it was noted that we will need some external support to help us achieve the ambition in the Corporate Plan.

It was agreed to remove this action from the Wallboard as it will be monitored alongside the other objectives in the Corporate Plan.

It was agreed to remove the action on domestic violence cases as this item is on the agenda.

Resolved:

That the Board notes the update.

88. CEX Key Issues Update

The Chief Executive provided an update on key external trends, internal issues and our ongoing response to Covid-19.

External Operating Environment

1. Covid-19

The Chief Executive advised that since the Government provided its roadmap out of the pandemic, not much has changed. However, the

ban on evictions has now been extended until the end of May. **2. Budget** The Chief Executive advised that the two main impacts for Soha from the Budget are the extension of the stamp duty holiday and the continuation of the £20 uplift in Universal Credit rates. However, the freezing of Local Housing Allowance rates is not so good for people privately renting, particularly those living in Oxford. **3. CIH Professional Standards** The Chief Executive advised that the CIH has published its seven professional standards which people working in the housing sector should demonstrate. It was noted that these standards are something which we already do and aspire to. **4. See the Person Publication: It's Not OK** The Chief Executive drew members' attention to a new See the Person toolkit on how to tackle stigma around social housing tenure. She advised that Soha has been featured in the publication and the leaders of See the Person are due to speak to members of the Members' Forum and other local housing organisations (including local authority housing teams) soon. **5. 'Breathing Space' Debt Legislation** The Chief Executive advised that the new 'Breathing Space' legislation comes into force on 4 May. It's part of the Governments' commitment to provide debt respite to those with problem debts. Housing associations will also be affected by these changes. <u>Internal Update</u> **1. Covid-19** The Director of Property Services confirmed that we are continuing to operate a full service. He advised that there are seven gas safety checks which are overdue (at the time of this meeting) and all cases have refused access due to self-isolation. The Chief Executive advised that we are still planning to re-open reception and some office/meeting space in mid-May in line with Covid secure work practices. We will also reinvigorate Phases 3 and 4 of the plan for the office including modelling some hybrid working. We will be asking staff for their preferences for how they want to work in the future. **2. People** The Chief Executive advised that we have already welcomed Dave Edge to the meeting and explained what this role will involve.	

She advised that we will shortly be advertising for the permanent role of Director of Housing and Communities. Jude will continue to provide interim cover until recruitment is complete. **3. Mount View, Henley** The Chief Executive explained that we will be reconvening the working group in the next six to eight weeks to consider how we proceed with the redevelopment/refurbishment of homes that are not being re-let. **4. External Representation** The Chief Executive advised that we've had a couple of speaking opportunities with the CIH and HQN this month. **5. Policies and Strategies** The Chief Executive asked the Board to note a delay in bringing the Gas Safety and Asbestos Policies for approval. These will come to the Board meeting in May following final sign-off from EDP, our health and safety consultants. She also asked the Board to note a revised timeline for approval of the new EDI and Communications Strategies. This will be May and July respectively. **6. Board Away Day – Friday, 23 April 2021** The Chief Executive advised that we are looking to hold the Board Away Day on the morning of 23 April. It will be a facilitated discussion on governance but framed slightly differently to the usual governance sessions. Board members will be working with external consultants to identify collective strengths and weaknesses together with overlaps and gaps in Board capabilities. There was some discussion on whether the BAD should take place on Friday or Saturday (the original date). It was agreed that the Governance Lead would canvass thoughts from Board members next week.	**ME**
7. Oxfordshire Community Land Trust – E-decision The Chief Executive advised that we are supporting OCLT with their development in Botley. They are in the process of registering as a housing provider with the RSH but are running low on funds and are unable to obtain further grant until they are registered. Soha is considering an 'on-lend' of £10k without security but we are expecting this to be repaid. We are seeking advice from our lenders and will also seek approval from the Board via an e-decision before any paperwork is drawn up. A member asked if there was a possibility that OCLT would request further monies from Soha as the £10k seemed to be reasonably moderate. There was also some concern as to whether £10k would be	

sufficient to 'get them over the line'. It was confirmed that £10k would assist them enough until their registration is approved by the RSH.

8. Communications Update
An update is provided as Appendix A of the report.

Resolved:

That the Board notes the update.

89. Benefit Cap and Tenancy Abandonments

The Interim Director of Housing and Communities presented the report to provide the Board with information on the effects of the benefit cap and the impact of abandoned tenancies.

He took members through a table illustrating the impact of the cap on varying household sizes (from a single person through to a couple with two children) alongside the typical monthly cost of a Soha affordable and social rented property. He also provided a case study.

The Chair then invited comments from members.

A member asked how the monthly living costs are calculated or decides what the benefit system will pay. The Interim Director of Housing and Communities explained that the Government use their own information which appears to be reasonably fixed. Unfortunately, we are unable to influence what is considered to be an acceptable living cost.

The Interim Director of Housing and Communities advised that as an interim measure we can support families with our hardship fund but the only way out of the benefit cap is work or disability.

A member asked if we provide support for residents, who are subject to the benefit cap, to move. It was confirmed that we do via the tenancy sustainment fund but it can take some time to match people with the right property and one which they are able to afford.

A member asked if we had considered a portability element by allowing residents to move from one side of the road to the other in order to avoid the cost of an affordable rented property. It was noted that this wasn't possible.

The Chief Executive advised that we have choices to make in terms of providing more homes for social rent, particularly as interest rates are currently low. She suggested that we perhaps shouldn't look to have one development site which is for social rent only but look more widely at the rents we want and need to charge.

The Interim Director of Housing and Communities explained that we have seen an increase in the number of suspected tenancy abandonments. We believe there are currently five cases; two of whom are now engaging with us, one who was rough sleeping in Oxford but is engaging with us and two which we will be seeking legal possession of the homes. **Resolved:** **That the Board notes the report.** **90. Corporate Plan 2021-25** The Chief Executive presented the report and provided the final versions of the full Corporate Plan, the Corporate Plan poster and the 'Resident Promises' document. She advised that the full version of the Corporate Plan will be shared with staff, involved residents, partners and anyone involved with the workshops to develop the plan. The Resident Promises document combines content from the Corporate Plan and actions from the first two year action plan to enable residents to hold us to account for its delivery. The poster is a summary of the key themes and is intended for internal use only. The Board agreed that the documents were easy to read, especially for residents, and asked for thanks to be passed onto the Comms Team for their work on producing these. The Chief Executive then presented the action plan for delivery against the Corporate Plan objectives for the first two years. She advised that these have been considered by staff and SLT and asked the Board to approve the action plan. It was noted that progress will be reported to the Board on a bi-annual basis in the standard action plan format. A member questioned if all the objectives are SMART or achievable. The Chief Executive agreed to review the action plan again to ensure this is the case and will circulate accordingly. The Chief Executive asked the Board to note that Soha's company bonus payment for 2021/22 will be set at £500 again. The bonus will be payable in two halves if two targets are met. These are to achieve a resident satisfaction rate of 91% and for 80% of Corporate Plan actions to be on target or complete. A member asked if there was any movement allowed if the 91% resident satisfaction rate isn't achieved. The Chief Executive confirmed there wouldn't be unless there were extenuating	**KW**

circumstances. It was noted that achieving 80% of Corporate Plan targets was also reasonably ambitious but we want to have a focus for staff for this year.

Resolved:

That the Board:

1. **Approves the action plan to deliver the targets for the first two years of the new Corporate Plan for 2021-25 subject to a final review;**
2. **Notes the final versions of the Corporate Plan, the Resident Promises document and the Corporate Plan poster;**
3. **Notes how we are planning to share the new Corporate Plan with residents, staff, partners and all those involved in developing the plan; and**
4. **Notes the company bonus targets to be achieved in 2021/22.**

91. Development Update

The Head of Development presented the report to update the Board on progress since the last meeting.

He asked the Board to approve a S106 scheme at Brunel Rise in Didcot (adjacent to Great Western Park). The scheme comprises eleven units for affordable rent and generates a positive NPV.

A member queried what 'subsidiary contracts' mean as shown in the resolution section of the report. The Head of Development provided a couple of examples as employers' agent or consultants. It was agreed that the wording would be revised in future reports to make it clear what the contracted sum comprises.

Next, the Head of Development asked the Board to approve a S106 scheme at Eynsham Nursery. The scheme comprises thirty nine affordable units of which twenty six are for affordable rent and thirteen are for shared ownership. It generates a positive NPV.

A member asked if there was an opportunity for some social rented units on this site. The Chief Executive noted that there is a broader conversation that needs to take place on how we use our surpluses across all schemes. It was suggested that Board members begin to consider what we can and should be doing with our surpluses including the provision of social rented homes, the environmental agenda and other large scale projects.

Finally, the Head of Development asked the Board to approve the re-development of an existing Soha land asset at Hagbourne Road in Didcot. The site comprises eleven units for affordable rented and generates a positive NPV. He asked the Board to note that this

scheme will achieve a 40% betterment over building regulations with regard to carbon emissions. A member asked if we would be applying for grant for this site. It was confirmed that we intend to bid for grant funding for both social and affordable rents. A member noted that the report mentions that the units would be suitable as a scheme for adults with learning difficulties and enquired if this need had been identified. The Interim Director of Housing and Communities confirmed that he had recently met with Oxfordshire County Council who are trying to place approximately 80 adults with learning difficulties so this scheme would be welcome. A member was concerned about the use of air source heat pumps particularly with its reliability and the future running costs. The Head of Development agreed to bring a report back to the Board on this issue.	**CD**
A member asked why Feltham Construction were chosen for the re-development. The Head of Development advised that they weren't the cheapest but were the most successful through the tender process. **Resolved:** **That the Board approves the development sites at Brunel Rise in Didcot, Eynsham Nursery and Hagbourne Road in Didcot.** **92. Domestic Abuse Services** The Interim Director of Housing and Communities presented the report to inform the Board on the number of domestic abuse cases reported during 2020/21 and the pandemic together with services offered by Soha. He explained that the number of cases reported to Soha has remained static over the last three years. Thames Valley Police (TVP) has recorded just over 2,000 incidents during 2020/21; an increase of 29% from the previous year. However, it was noted that the figures reported to Soha or the police don't compare with the national average. The Interim Director of Housing and Communities advised that this disparity is currently being investigated but it is believed that reports of domestic abuse are often miscounted or not recorded in a similar way. TVP is working with a neighbouring force who have piloted a software package that collates police data, third party data and open data to better map domestic abuse. Soha is supporting TVP to adopt this software and we will be able to report back on its success during the next financial year.	**JMC**

A member noted that the Neighbourhood Team know how to deal with domestic abuse incidents but asked if other teams were aware especially Customer Services. The Interim Director of Housing and Communities advised that we have run training in the past for Customer Services but this was probably two years ago. It was noted that we should perhaps broaden our approach and not accept everything at face value. A member asked how proactive we are in terms of communication. There are often barriers including worry or shame around reporting incidents. The Interim Director of Housing and Communities advised that we regularly post on Facebook about domestic abuse to let people know their options and how they can report to us or others. A member commented that this was a good report and asked for further updates on the number of cases and perhaps a case study including how and what we've done to help. This was agreed. **Resolved:** **That the Board discussed and notes the report.** **93. Audit and Risk Committee Terms of Reference** The Director of Finance and Resources presented the report to ask the Board to approve the proposed changes to the Terms of Reference for the Audit and Risk Committee. It was noted that the amendments were to 'tidy up' the wording in the ToR and that this was work already carried out by the Committee. **Resolved:** **That the Board approves the updated Terms of Reference for the Audit and Risk Committee.** ***All attendees except Board members, the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance and Resources and the Governance Lead were asked to leave the meeting.*** **94. Britwell Road, Watlington** The Chief Executive presented the report. **Strictly confidential items were discussed** and further information is contained within the Confidential Minutes. **Resolved:** **That the Board discussed and notes the report. The Board also notes a full review will be provided no later than the Board**	**JMC**

meeting in May 2021.

95. Any Other Business

Naomi Barrand commented that there appeared to be a lack of information on shared owners/ownership. The Chief Executive asked to take this point away and consider it further.

96. Date of Next Meeting

a) The date of the Board Away Day is currently planned for Friday, 23 April 2021 between 9.00am and 12.00pm for Board members only (it will be delivered virtually but will confirm whether Teams or Zoom nearer the time).

b) The date of the next Board meeting is Thursday, 27 May 2021 at 6.00pm via MS Teams

The meeting ended at 8.30pm.

Signed:__________________________

Date: ________________