



Minutes of Meeting

Meeting: Members' Forum Meeting
Date: **16 September**
Time: 18:00 – 19:30
Venue: Zoom

Present

Margaret Buckell	Ann-Marie O'Sullivan
Trevor Brewerton	David Peedle
Edwina Lamond Co-Optee	Gerald Prior
Naomi Barrand	Trish Langford
Sue Such	Sue Such
Peter Haynes	Vic Breach - Co-Optee
Gerald Prior	Val Kir
Kay Sentance	Neelam Rutti
Deb Wills	

Also in attendance

Jackie Logan, Andrea Bain, Kate Waring, Craig Dransfield
Michelle Pugh-Roberts, Jude McCaffrey

1 Apologies for Absence

Bertie Doy, John Smelt, Aurora Acone

2 Approval of Minutes 15th July – Approved

Chairs report by Trevor Brewerton

I have quite a short report for this meeting.

Welcome to our observers, Angela Harding

It was good to see some of you at the Board AGM last week. Congratulations to Vic for completing your 9-year term on Board, although you will now be stepping down, I have a feeling that you will not be stepping back from Soha, hopefully you will now have time to be involved in other ways? Congratulations to Naomi Barrand on being voted onto Board.

As you will see from the agenda, the majority voted for us having a workshop about how the Forum represents resident and community interests in Soha's business and promotes the benefits of mutual membership.

I hope you have had time to think about this, but if not, we will have a 20 break out session in this agenda item so we can think about it and discuss.

We can use our November workshop to look at how we monitor the Communities Strategy. Jackie will be updating us on that in agenda item 8.

As the workshop is only for Members' Forum to discuss I am afraid that I will need to ask observers to leave the meeting before this point.

Once again, we are not entirely sure if we will be able to meet again in person in November. Although I am feeling more hopeful that we will, we know that things can change. A bit nearer the time Michelle will be contacting you to find out if you are happy to come into Soha offices for a Forum meeting.

That is the end of my update, So I will now hand you over to Kate.

Chief Executives update by Kate Wareing

Externally, we are now as a staff member's meeting in person, so you should see much more of our staff back out in your community's and your homes should you wish us to visit. We are really starting to enjoy more time together but there is still a note of caution sounded by the government. There is talk of fire breaks rather than lockdowns possibly in the autumn. They will be keeping a close eye on hospitalisations and infection levels to make sure that things are going in the wright direction. One of the other options they have talked about is that they may request that people work from home again if they can. We are monitoring this closely, but at the moment we have our office open and encouraging more staff to come back to the office.

Many of you will remember that Universal Credit had an extra £20 a week applied at the beginning of the pandemic. This will be removed from the 6th October so for residents that are in are in receipt of UC will see the incomes reduced by £20 from that date. There has been a lot of political coverage about this and there was a vote in the House of Commons yesterday for that not to go ahead, however this was only an advisory vote so it will still be going ahead. Another announcement yesterday was, we now have a new sectary of state for housing communities and local government, basically, a new person in charge of housing policies. His name is Michael Gove. I think from a sector perspective he is someone that likes to think big, so there will be a lot more profile on housing issues which we think is quite a good thing.

Inflation is increasing. The inflation figures we saw yesterday showed CPI (Consumer price index) is running at 3.2% that's the highest monthly increase in inflation on record since when the bank of England became independent in 1997. This is a 1.2% increase in inflation in 1 month. Another inflation is expected again next month. People are seeing fuel bills increase. The reason that impacts on us is partly because from an organisational perspective, we are seeing a lot of

increases in our costs particularly timber, insulation, bricks, and all building supplies but also in the terms of staff salaries, the cost of haulage and drivers, so there lots of things are going up.

It also directly impacts on the rent increase we are allowed to charge to our residents. The Government caps our rent increase at CPI + 1%

CPI+1% is measured at the end of September. That could mean that we are allowed by law to put our rents up by over 5% this year so we really would like to work with you and think is that something we need to do? As an organisation our costs are going up very quickly at present and we are estimating that we will see an increase of about 8% for cost in the next year. For everyone all costs are going up so we will be bringing a proposal to the forum in November before it goes to Board, to see if we really need to up our rents. There will be more legislation on fire safety. This is a long delayed piece of legislation after the Grenfell Tower fire.

Internally, we are implementing a new cloud-based phone system. This means we will get much better information than we do from our current phone system and be able to flex more people in at peak times and it will also give us better management information as we go forward. New on call music is soon to be put in place as we know this has been raised before. This will be put in place on the 21st October.

We have new staff joining Soha and continue to recruit. We are looking to recruit a new Complaints Office to join the CEX team and also a HR Business partner.

Next month we will be changing our heating contractor from Bridge Heating to K&T Heating. They will not just be responsible for repairs but also our planned maintenance installation along with all our servicing.

We have started to see our main contractors struggle to appoint staff and also in terms of getting supplies. So, if there are delays on repairs, please accept our apologies.

Staff are really looking forward to seeing each other at the team away day. It has been a long time since we have all been together.

We have started the refurbishment to the first floor of our building. We are looking forward to inviting everyone back. The idea is that the working space will be much more open, lighter, and flexible. There will be a variety of meeting rooms, desks, sofas and a kitchen area. This will be a good space for us to all come and collaborate, and we anticipate it to be completed by mid-November.

We have done some re development on some of our land for market sales, so basically, we have been building houses for market sale under the commercial Soha subsidiary. The reason for that is to generate profit which enables us to build more homes on that land than what we had originally. We have just sold our last property at a development at Sydenham Grove for the full asking price of £995,000. This means that that this scheme in SIB will have generated a profit of

over £680,000 for Soha. This money will then obviously be put straight back into Soha for our future development programmes. We have not got any more of these in the pipe line at present but it is something we would consider in the future.

Development Strategy Consultation by Craig Dransfield

Work is well under way with the strategy. Our senior leadership team have crafted the questions that we need to address and answer in order to formulate our strategy. We had Two meetings with the Members Forum subgroup in August to discuss these questions and we are hoping for this to come to Board in November with a completed strategy and Forum prior to that.

To summarise, I would like to talk about a few key contextual issues of whats going on in the environment around us that we need to consider and take into account in our strategy. We have the Carbon Agenda. The Government wants us to be Carbon neutral by 2025, we have also had the terrible duo of Covid and Brexit. As Kate mentioned earlier that inflation is rising by about 3% so it's not beyond the realms of possibility that we could be facing a recession. This will bring both opportunities and challenges for us. Primary challenge, the house builders that we buy house off, may well slow down the rates that they build, therefore there will be less opportunity for us to get planning game or section 106 homes but on the up side of that equation, land may well become cheaper so we may well be able to go out into the land markets and buy land and do our own developments.

There are a couple of other factors that we really need to think about as well, other the past several decades as a nation we have built far too few homes resulting in a housing shortage. We have also got quite acute affordability issues in Oxfordshire. Market rents have been going up as a consequence affordable rent have been going up however incomes have been reduced or people have been Furlough so incomes are falling.

We have certain targets set to achieve with in the Corporate plan with regards to development.

- Build 200 new homes each year and also meet the needs of those that are excluded from affordable house
- Maximise Grant
- Build more social rent housing
- Address the Green Agenda

Craig went on to give a summary of the Subgroup consultations that recently took place. The below was suggested and will be presented to the Board in November to help shape the Development Strategy

- To cap the level of risk by doing land led development at 30%
- Support community land trusts, who are small local organisations fledgling housing associations who want to build their own developments. We could lend aid, in terms of expertise or management services.
- Prioritise developments that have Green credentials
- Prioritise re generation over new build. To look after existing residence first.

EDI Strategy 2021 – 24 by Jude McCaffrey – Approved

Equality Diversity Inclusion Strategy – We have and EDI Strategy previously that came to a close earlier this year, so this is the new Draft Strategy which looks forward over the next Two years. The reason why have and EDI Strategy is really to bring diversity into what we do, how Soha make decisions, the services we offer, the homes that we build, who we employ and the communities we are serving. By listening to a broad range of people as possible we can have very inclusive decision making. From the previous strategy we had 47 actions and we achieved 39 of those. So, there was about 8 we did not achieve and all of those clustered around one area which was data. This is something that we are quite conches of that we do not hold enough data for protected characteristics and protected groups so this is something we would like to take forward with our new strategy to increase this data.

We achieved lots of good things with the previous strategy. We became dementia friends, we became a disability confident employer, formed lots of partnerships with different organisations, provided housing for young people living care, rough sleepers and even for people with no recourse to public funds i.e. refugees or asylum seekers. With the new strategy we are looking to have 6 overarching themes and the first of which covers that data gap. We will start to look more at sexuality, ethnicity, religion etc. One thing we did find was that our disabled residents were less satisfied with our service last year than our non-disabled residents. We know this as we held the data to show us that, however we couldn't tell that from people from different religious groups or for people with different sexualities for example so this is something we will be working on over the coming year to improve our data in those areas.

We want to make the best use of the people that work for us, their talents, perspectives and insights and make sure there is more cross working and involving people with different characteristic amongst Soha staff and in projects and decisions making. We want to make sure the EDI is at the centre of what we do from the top down, Board, SLT, and wright the way down through Soha. When looking at new policies and Strategy's we will make sure the EDI is part of this going forward.

We want to look and pro-actively act and listen to groups that are underrepresented at the moment. We are pleased to have a Seniors group and a Disability Group; however, we do not have similar groups for black and Asian minority ethnic groups or LBGT Plus community's so this is something we are working towards to improve on and to foster good relations and promote cohesion.

Communities Strategy by Jackie Logan - Approved

At the last Board meeting we asked members for an extension on the existing Communities Strategy by a further 12 months. The last 18 months has been very strange times for all of us so and due to this we have not quite achieved what we set out too originally. We also asked for an extension so it will allow us time to work with members to co-create possibly a new strategy because since it was written a lot has changed. We will be looking at what we have done already and what we would like to do going forward. In November Trevor has agreed that the

next workshop can be based on the Communities Strategy, so if you could agree to be involved at some point, if it's convenient for you, we would very much appreciate your commitment. Another point we would like to cover in November is "How will the Forum Monitor the Strategy?" as one of the forums main aims. These are a few things to think about as prior to the next Members Forum meeting where we can all hopefully meet face to face at Didcot Civic Hall.

Community Hero's – Thank you project by Andrea Bain

About a year ago, this topic came to the Forum in September. We put together a criteria for people to vote for Community's Stars in their neighbourhood. We had 5 categories'

1. Best Neighbour (Which of your neighbours do you really appreciate and goes that extra mile in your street or block)
2. Some one that has made a difference in your community (i.e someone that has organised an event, a celebration, a litter pick, created a community garden to bring people together)
3. Young Volunteer (someone who really stands out from the rest and shines through)
4. Unsung Hero (someone that does good daily, however have not been recognised)
5. Covid 19 Champion (collecting prescriptions, food shopping, walking dogs or simply calling for a chat to check in on you etc)

We have been asked by a resident if we could run something similar to this again this year. Andrea asked the Forum if we should use the same criteria or should a new one be created. The Forum agreed they were happy with the criteria however we need to make it clear that this is not just directed at Soha tenants, it could be a non Soha tenant or even a charity or business etc

We will be promoting this through tenant times, hometalk and possibly a direct mail shot with a flyer.

AOB – Portfolio Holders update by Gerald Prior

Gerald Prior updated the Forum as the Estates and community's Portfolio holder.

We have managed to continue to hold a regular portfolio meeting although a bit reduced and we are still receiving the relevant reports from relevant departments that we are involved with. Craig had already given a good idea of how Development is doing and as you can see they are performing quite well despite all their problems and have a good log of potential projects to keep them going for the next few years. I am delighted to see the Syden Grove project completed. Neighbourhoods still report to us and continue to do very well, however the numbers they are dealing with have risen quite considerably. They have also taken on more work due to working with the homeless scheme. Cases with evictions have not risen yet but courts are slowly opening back up so they will have a large back log and this will be around for some time.

We also continue to be involved in the CAT programmes, which continue to provide improvements across the areas. We are currently working on about 10 sites this year.

Ground's maintenances continue to have their labour problems. The estates teams are having regular meetings with the contractors to monitor this. I'm sad to say we will be losing Rob Lowe who has been working for various contractors on the ground's maintenance for many years, as he is due to retire. Regarding the Forums estate improvement budget, we continue to administer this on behalf of the Forum. We are currently halfway through spending this year's budget and one thing we are concerned about is the majority of the applications we received come from extra care and sheltered schemes. Whilst all application are welcome, I would just like to remind you this is the Forums budget, so please if there is any community projects or improvements that you can see in your area's let me know.

Finally, I am pleased to report that myself and Bertie have resumed our estate visits. We recently had a walkabout in Cholsey where we were able to identify several problem areas and quite a few venerable tenants in need of help. In all, it was a very worthwhile exercise and indeed very good to be able to meet people face to face again and talk about their problems.

Jackie Logan congratulated Naomi Barrant and said as this would be Naomi's last meeting, she would like to thank her for her work with the Forum and looked forward to working with her as a Board member.

ENTER DATE

Signed..... Date.....
Chair of Members' Forum