Minutes of Meeting

Meeting: Members' Forum Meeting
Date 13th January 2022
Time: 18:00 – 20:00
Venue: Zoom

Present

Margaret Buckell	Ann-Marie O'Sullivan
Trevor Brewerton	Kay Sentance
Vic Breach	Neelam Rutti
Bertie Doy	Trish Langford
Sue Such	Sue Such
Peter Haynes	
Gerald Prior	

Also in attendance

Andrea Bain, Kate Wareing, Matt Archer, Craig Dransfield
Michelle Pugh-Roberts, Lee Hayward & Jude McCaffery

1 Apologies for Absence

Edwina Lamond, Auroa Acone Deb Wills

2 Approval of Minutes - Approved by majority

Chairs report by Trevor Brewerton

Happy New Year to you all.
Once again I am sorry we are unable to meet in person. Let's hope that it changes soon.
We have another busy agenda, so I will keep this as short as possible.
Next year there will be a full election for a new Members' Forum. So we will all need to consider if we want to stand again for election, although we don't need to make up our minds until the end of the year.
I would like us to start thinking about how we can recruit new members, we are not at capacity at the moment. But given the issues we have faced over the past 2 years, you have all done a great job in supporting meetings and

making decisions together. I would like to thank you for that, as it has been a particularly difficult time.
I would like to suggest that we start promoting the option of observing Forum meetings wider, so that other members can see how we work and decide if being on the Forum might be for them. Jackie and Michelle will be putting together a training plan for residents who would like to understand more about Soha and hopefully feel encourage to join.
There will be more information on the election process later in the year.
I have received two motions from Sue Such, thank you Sue. Which Matt will address in item 7 on the agenda, Tenant Satisfaction Survey, Sue might want to make further comments once we reach this item? The two motions are:

Motion 1

No person whether it be a Soha employee or any Soha member that sits on any Soha committees shall participate in surveys relating to Soha's quality of service due to it being conflict of interest.
These very same people would be aware to use internal procedures to raise any issues they may have regarding poor service.
They can just as easily submit any praise to Soha.

Motion 2

If Soha is going to be using survey results in a positive manner, then it is essential the appropriate surveys are sent to the correct people. Before Soha send surveys, the appropriate group need to be correctly identified & ensure the questions are appropriate.

This evening's workshop will also be open to observers should they wish to stay. We are going to be discussing consumer regulations, what is important to you, feedback from as many residents as possible is important.
Matt will be introducing this agenda item. But I would like you to consider if you would like to be a member of a task and finish subgroup to look a bit deeper into the subject. It would only need to be 3 or 4 of us. The deadline for the survey being completed is 3 March.
Next, I will pass to Kate for her update. I hope you have had a chance to read Kates full end of year update that was also in your papers for this meeting.

Chief Executives update by Kate Wareing

Kate highlighted some key points from 2021. Despite being a difficult year for all, along the way we have managed to deliver an enormous amount. Both in terms of services to our residents but also in terms of welcoming new residents into Soha. Last year we let 516 new homes to residents, that adds up to about 1.5 thousand new residents to Soha in the last 12 months, given everything that has been going on, this is a great achievement and it make me extremely proud. In the last 3 years we have got 10% bigger as an association. This is a combination of the new homes being built by the development team and the new residents that joined us from Bromford. Kate thanked everyone for their roles that they have played in achieving this success over the last year.

I was fearful that at the start of 2022 we may have been overshadowed by many staff absences due to a new Covid variant, but this has been much better than I anticipated, however we have seen more pressures in the terms of availability of staff to do repairs. This is a combination of Two things:

1. Staff absences and self-isolation due to Covid ie 8 of 20 MD operatives were not available the first week back after new year and
2. Recruitment issues. We are starting to see it being much harder to recruit staff.

The beginning of this year has some big challenges attached to it, all of which we have been doing a lot of planning for.

Firstly being, managing those potential disruptions to our own staffing and our contractors staffing because of Covid and recruitment pressures' we have responded to that in two ways, 1st by looking at what it takes to make it more attractive to work for Soha and if our contractors need us to look at repricing to enable them to respond to the pressures in their supply chains. Secondly, we have been doing some contingency planning around what we will stop doing if we get to a point where we do not have enough staff to deliver the services that we normally do. Obviously, we would be prioritising anything that is an emergency, statutory and anything that keeps us running as an organisation.

A key factor that impacts on Soha is how fast inflation is rising. Since we last met inflation rates were at just over 3% as of the end of December.
The inflation rate has risen to 5.1%. This impacts on Soha in 3 ways
a) the possibility of increasing staffing costs. Directly employed staff or people employed by our contractors
b) inflation on prices for building costs, raw materials etc going up
c) Interest rates on debt repayments rising

So, with that in mind we have been doing a lot of financial modelling in preparation for and **if** inflation rates keep on rising and how we would deal with that.

Craig is increasingly looking for land for us to build our own houses on. This is important to us for 2 reasons. If you look at the medium to long term, we think that the ability for us to keep doing what we do now, which is buying houses off builders, but because of S106 planning rules, it is potentially not as secure as what we have been used to it being for a long time.
Building homes on our own land means we can deliver houses that would not be being built otherwise. These houses will be built to a future standard and more environmentally friendly. These homes will be built at a net carbon zero, meaning that we will not have costs of improving those homes in the future.

We will be looking at moving to locality working. This is about how we work together as teams to serve people who live in particular places. We are hoping by doing this it will give more staff the ability to solve more at the front line and work closely with residents in communities.

We will be carrying out a Soha census to make sure that the data we hold for our residents is as accurate as possible and that we are delivering high-quality services and meeting the needs of our residents.

Main reception will hopefully re open in a matter of weeks depending on government guidance. I am very much looking forward to seeing people again and working in the newly refurbished office. We have invested quite heavily into some good technology to support hybrid meetings meaning that if you do not want to go back to Forum meetings in person you will be able to dial in online and join the meeting.

Customer Services update by Lee Hayward

This area has been under pressure leading up to Christmas. There are several reasons for that. The loss of 2 members of staff, implementation of a new phone system and there for training required which has undoubtably had a knock-on effect. We have also seen that our contractors have some resource issues. It would also appear that calls taken during the Covid period have taken more time to deal with.

We have acted quickly to resolve this issue as a business priority so, anybody that has called the Customer Service centre post-Christmas will have hopefully seen an improvement. We have now re recruited two new members of staff to back fill the two that left prior to Christmas. We are looking at recruiting a further 2 as well. We have a number of Customer Service agents with in Soha that have been assisting whilst busy. This is not their normal day job, however, they have been assisting to help with increased calls. There is now a duty staff member in each team to assist with particularly tricky calls in repairs, neighbourhoods etc so we then know there is a specialist member of staff to refer that call to quickly to free up the Customer Service advisors to take more calls.

One of the benefits of the new phone system is that it has got a module called work force management. Which will enable us to do over the next few months is to see where peak times during the week. We know that Monday and Friday mornings are busy but when we start looking at the data we might find that there is other times of the week or day that are particularly busy so we can then up scale the recourse to manage that peak demand.

The future looks bright with this new phone system now we are all fully trained however I'd like to apologise to anyone that had to wait in a que to have their call answered before Christmas, the services was under high pressure, but this has now been taken control of and we are in a much better place.

Tenant Satisfaction Survey by Matt Archer – For voting

As many of you may know we employ a company called MEL who call a random selection of our residents to ask them their views on a range of questions all about how satisfied they are with us as a landlord and the area they live in etc. That data is useful to us to highlight were there might be issues that need addressing.

One of our Forum members had recently received a call from MEL, which in turn has raised the question – Should residents that are engaged with Soha by the means of being on a committee/ panel or employed by Soha or by other means, should those residents be taken off the MEL contact list? Should they be included or excluded?

Comments raised

Vic Breach – it occurred to me when I read the email that its worded slightly different and the conflict of interest was not raised but if this outside firm wants views and opinions from Soha tenants, then to actively stop Soha tenants from giving their views would seem to be a bit counterproductive? There is also the suggestion that, if you are on a committee and have been involved with Soha for some time, you may have a deeper understanding and give a balanced view. Taking Sues point, if you are on a committee and are being asked questions that are too difficult to give a balanced view you could reframe from taking part. I do not really see any need to bar people. Surely it would be up to the integrity of the people being questioned?

Margaret Buckell – I have had several of the calls re the survey. Most of the questions are on a 1 to 5 scale, I don't not think that compromises any one's integrity, so you simply answer honestly. This is not a conflict of interest. The other option is to not give your opinion if your moral stance stops you from doing so

Neelam Rutti – Being on a committee, we give the opinion of best interest of everybody. When we are doing a survey, they are asking for our personal opinion. My personal opinion may be different to my professional opinion. I think excluding us and our opinions on a personal level, we are doing a disservice to us a resident.

A vote was done by a show of hands. The motion went with the majority being **not to exclude** residents.

Land Banking Policy by Craig Dransfield for decision – Approved

This is a policy renewal which is about to expire. I will highlight the key features of this policy and how it differs from the previous version.

What is Land Banking? It is the acquisition of land or property, where planning permission of social housing grants isn't in place. There is a certain element of risk in Land Banking.
The main gist of this policy is that the Land Bank in total cannot exceed 3.5 Million pounds. The purchases below £500,000 must be approved by the Senior Leadership Team and purchase above £500,000 must have full Board approval

How has this changed from our previous Land Banking Policy?
There are 2 major changes. Previously, purchase above £500,000 needed approval of Senior leadership team and the Chair of the Board. We just felt that it was a little more transparent and open and above board to get Full Board approval for Land Banking Purchases, rather than going to SLT then just the Chair. It spreads the responsibility.
Also, the previous policy included a scoring Matrix. Sites were scored in terms of the risks associated with the purchase i.e., planning, housing need, likelihood of getting grant.
We thought that was such a big subjective and not very transparent in terms of what the risk really is. What we will be doing with the Land Banking report that goes to SLT or Board is replacing the Scoring Matix with a little bit of narrative. The Risks that we will touch on is Location, Property descriptions, Sales Risks, Exit Strategy, Market Trends and Sustainability. We will be more comprehensive with our reporting that go to SLT and Board for approval.

Questions Raised
Kay Sentence – You state Land Banking should not exceed 3.5 million, at what point is that value taken into account, at the point of buying the property's? My other question is regarding the exit strategy – is that looking at options agreements, rather than land banking?

Craig Dransfield and Kate Wareing responded – Options are a kind of

conditional contracts; they are ways of acquiring sites. A conditional contract for is instance could be – we will buy your site if we can get planning permission, here is an amount of money to seal the deal and we will hold that for the next 10 yrs, (hypothetically speaking) This tends to be a route of site acquisition, rather than land banking itself.
With regards to the value of the site, we calculate it based on what we pay for the land we are not getting re valuation of that land over time as we must pay for that. I think it's worth pointing out (Kate) that we are not intending to start speculating in land, we are not treating it as an investment class, its more about buying bits of land that we intend to build on in the future.

Vic Breach – Will this be going to Board? Could I suggest that you change the wording of the Land Banking should not exceed?

Craig Dransfield- Yes, we will change that to Define Purchase Price

A vote was done by a show of hands, the motion went with the majority.
Policy Approved

Homeloss Policy by Jude McCaffrey

This is an annual update to an existing homeloss and emergency move or decant policy. This policy looks to do 2 things. Guides us in how we help people that need to move out of their homes temporarily, normally because of a major incident i.e., fire or a flood. What financial recompenses they would be eligible too and support from Soha and it guides us in how we help or financially support tenants that are losing their home. This is the Homeloss element which changes each year. The Government decide how much money people are entitled to. We update this policy every year to reflect that. It's just been updated to the £7,100. That money is called a homeloss payment. That goes to somebody who is losing their home permanently because we are asking them to move out so we can re develop that block for instance.

Questions raised

Vic Breach – Under 4.2 homeloss payment it states that the claimant must be an assured tenant or a spouse with occupancy rights This doesn’t cater very well for a joint tenancy. My next question would be, who gets the money?

Jude McCaffrey - in this case the same amount of money would go to the joint tenants.
We will make this a little clearer to show that whoever is on that tenancy agreement would be eligible for part of that money.

A vote was done by a show of hands, the motion went with the majority.
Policy Approved

EDI Strategy – By Jude McCaffrey

About a year ago we bought the EDI policy to the Forum. There is also a policy that sits alongside that policy. We have opted to update this as there is some useful things it does for us as, as well as a strategy. It is a more concise document, setting out what our stance is on Equality Diversity and Inclusion. It gathers the key stands, the 9 protected characteristics. It brings clarity on the self-assessment tools we use and a new area of increasing our data collection to 75% or more across all the key protected characteristics i.e., age, ethnicity, sexuality, disability.

A vote was done by a show of hands, the motion went with the majority.
Policy Approved

Organisational Risk Appetite by Kate Wareing

Once a year we review how much risk we think it is appropriate for Soha to take. Often there is an opportunity when you take a risk, however we do not want to take unnecessary risks.

Each year we set out new principles. Where we think it is appropriate for us to take risks and why, and where we think it's not appropriate and why. The way we measure this is on a 1 to 5 scoring system. We are not recommending any changes from last year. What we did last year was, reduce our appetite around people. What that meant was – we needed to try much harder to hang on to our staff. This paper went to Soha's Audit and Risk Committee last night and they would like to see 2 changes.

1. Re word the wording Risk Domain Impact to Innovation
2. Change section Eight from Standards of maintaining properties to home sales

We are asking the Forum if there is any input you would like to provide on this document before it goes to Board at the end of January.

Questions Raised

Val Kir – Why are we loosing so much staff? What is the reason for this please?

Kate Wareing - Our staff survey portrays that people are still very happy to be working for Soha and we are not seeing huge numbers of people leaving across the organisation but what we are finding is that when people do leave, we are finding it much harder to recruit new people. The reason we are finding it harder to recruit people is 2-fold really! I think that quite a lot of people have found the pandemic has really made them rethink how much of their lives they want to give to work and how they can combine that with their other responsibility's. Also, other employers are looking at wages levels to attract new people, so we are finding it harder to recruit particularly to our lower paid positions

Vic Breach – Having looked at the recommendation of the above paper. If you are going to change the wording in item eight, please can this be brought back to Forum as formality?

Kate Wareing – Yes absolutely, this is an important conversation that we need to have in detail.

Chair & Vice Chair Forum Elections by Trevor Brewerton

It is coming to that time of year again, where at the next meeting in March you will need to vote in the new Chair and Vice Chair of the Members Forum. As with last year, Michelle will need to know who wishes to stand for those positions then we will do a vote at the March meeting with a show of hands.

The new Chair and Vice chair will have their elections ratified at the AGM in April by those present and eligible to vote. If you would like to stand, please let Michelle know by Monday 28th February. The Role of the Chair and Vice chair have been issued with you papers for this week's meeting.

Reshaping Consumer Regulations & Workshop Break Out Rooms

Options 1 for discussion
What data would be most useful to you in holding Soha to account for the delivery of its services to residents

Options 2 for discussion
What data would be most useful to you in understanding how satisfied Soha residents are with their neighbourhood as a place to live?

Option 3 for discussion
As an organisation, we have been asked to respond to the government consultation on the measures, which will then be used to monitor and compare the performance of housing associations across the country. We are very keen to understand the Forum's view on the following questions

Please see Appendix 1 for workshop feedback

ENTER DATE

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