

Minutes of Meeting

Meeting: Members' Forum Meeting
Date: 12th May 2022
Time: 18:00 – 20:00
Venue: Boardroom

Present

Margaret Buckell	Ann-Marie O'Sullivan
Val Kir	John Smelt
Gerald Prior	Neelam Rutti
Bertie Doy	Kay Sentance
John Smelt	Sue Such
Peter Haynes	Rob Stark
Aurora Acone	Kaye Hyde
Val Kir	Amanda Drowning
Deb Wills	

Also in attendance

Matt Archer, Jackie Logan, Lee Hayward, Andrea Bain, Nasreen Hussain, Jude McCaffrey & Michelle Pugh-Roberts

1 Apologies for Absence

Vic Breach, Trish Langford

2. Matters Arising

To note and consider any issues from previous meetings, not covered on the agenda – no matters raised

3. Voting for Co-opted members by Ann-Marie

The Members Forum have agreed 5 vacancies for this years Co-opted members. Four members have put themselves forward to stand as Co-Opted members. All Forum members received their biographies in advance of the meeting. PI Full members were asked to raise their hand to vote them in or keep their hand down if abstaining. The voting decision was on the majority.

Standing for election for this one-year role are;

Kaye Hyde, Vic Breach, Robert Stark and Amanda Browning. All Co-opted applicants were voted in unanimously

Ann- Marie welcomed the new Forum members and passed over to Jackie for the next item. Before doing so Ann-Marie stepped down as Vice Chair.

3. Voting for Chair and Vice Chair by Jackie Logan

There have been no members come forward to stand as Vice Chair and one member, Ann-Marie O'Sullivan is standing as Chair of the Members' Forum.

Members voted for Ann-Marie. Jackie Congratulated Ann-Marie as she takes on the role of Chair of the Members Forum.

4. Future chair and vice chair positions by Ann-Marie for Discussion

Ann-Marie asked the Forum to consider once again the subject of allowing co-opted members to hold Vice Chair and Chair positions? If we are going to use the system of elections every three years, then it is quite feasible to expect that the two positions might be hard to fill from elected members only, as has happened in this election. One would have to take into consideration the availability and willingness of elected members to hold those positions, whereas the willingness etc. might be present amongst the Co-optees.

Would the Members here this evening consider looking at this issue and we can make an agenda item in Julys meeting to discuss this and make a decision, so I will have the opportunity of having a vice chair working with me this year?

As you know we will all be standing down next year, so this is an interim proposal, but we could look at making constitutional changes in the future.

The Forum agreed to look at this in July as an Agenda Item

4. Chairs report by Ann-Marie O'Sullivan

Thank you all for Voting me as Chair of the Members' Forum for the next year. I know I have big shoes to fill, and I will be working hard to make sure I am a good Chair.

Welcome to our observers:

Peter Nkum, Angela Harding, Gay Grootz and Edwina Lamond.

Welcome and congratulations to our newly co-opted Members, Kaye, Robert and Amanda, and to Vic for re-standing.

For those of you that have not been on the Members' Forum before, Michelle will be sending you an induction pack, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact myself or Michelle.

This is now our second meeting face to face if we don't count the AGM. It is great that technology gives us the opportunity for those who cannot attend in person to attend via a Teams link. Although they do miss out on the sandwiches. Also, you cannot replace meeting face to face.

This year I would like the Forum to concentrate on our role as written in the constitution and how we will deliver this to ensure that we are seen as a working Forum with the best interests of Soha residents at our core. Being able to highlight the importance of the Members' Forum to Soha staff and other Housing Associations is vital.

Our three main objectives are

- The Forum represents resident and community interests in Soha's business and promotes the benefits of mutual membership.
It helps shareholders make the most of their personal stake and say in the organisation's future.
- The Forum considers Soha's strategy, policy and performance (including resident scrutiny and audit which are independent to the Forum) and recommends action to the Board.
- The Forum supports and monitors the delivery of the Communities Strategy.

Regarding the Communities Strategy. There will be a Co-regulation working event on Saturday 11th June. This will be at Benson Parish Hall. The event will start at 1.30pm, with a buffet lunch and will swiftly be followed by workshops led by Matt Archer. Staff and hopefully some Board members will also be present. Some of you might remember that at the Board AGM in Sept 2021, Members were asked to vote on the extension of the strategy date, so that there would be an opportunity to Co Design this strategy to be more in tune with the current climate, the previous one was written before the pandemic. Matt will be telling us more in his agenda item this evening.

So please save the date, Michelle will be sending you confirmation of details soon.

5. Business Plan update 2022/23 presentation by Margaret Buckell

Margaret presented the Business plan for 2022/23. She highlighted the key areas over the next 10 years on the budget for the current financial year, which was rolled forward on a set off assumptions, inflation and interest rates.

A number of tables and graphs were displayed detailing, turnover, Developments, Surplus, Loans, and Cash Flow

Margaret explained in detail the term of stress testing. It's a series of situations that could go wrong and have an effect on the Business Plan i.e., the pandemic over the last two years. In these situations, there are an assortment of scenarios put in place to test the business plan to breaking point. When Soha knows what is relevant to them, then mitigation plans can be put in place. Once this has all been done it will go to Board for approval. Following Board approval, it will be submitted to the regulators and lenders.

Questions

Interest rates may rise, has that been taken into consideration?

Yes, this has been taken into account. At present 80% of our loans are fixed leaving the variable element only 20%. Our 80% fixed rate loans are for 30/40-year fixes, however the 20% will have a higher interest rate

6. EDI Policy 2022 by Jude McCaffrey for Decision

This is an update on the previous Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

The Two main updates are:

1. Clarity on the self-assessment tools that Soha uses to guide the EDI Strategy and working group.

We have benchmarked where we are by looking at other external bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Housing, Housing Quality Network and Housing Diversity Networks. All the above have best practice strategy's that we can learn from and use

2. A commitment to increase data collection to 75% across key protected characteristics.

What we previously found is that we do not hold enough diversity data. There are gaps in Disability, Ethnicity, LGBT and religion.

This year we will be running a programme to increase that data to 75% across the key protected characteristics.

Questions

Is there any reason why Soha do not hold that data? Are people ticking the prefer not to say box?

Yes that does come into the 75% but historically I do not think we have been asking the right questions or we have made do with what we already had i.e., gender and DOB but we haven't been asking people about their ethnicity and sexuality. We need to be actively asking these questions going forward. We have a new feature on the Soha app where you can update your own stats.

In the 9 characteristics you talk about, unseen disability is not mentioned?

We have given a lot of thought to this and recently rolled out a training programme across Soha on neurodiversity, raising awareness amongst staff.

Ann-Marie asked if this programme could be rolled out to all Forum members – Jude approved.

The Forum **approved** the EDI paper as a new policy.

7. Joint Venture Development by Nasreen Hussain info & decision

We are looking at forming commercial Joint Venture (JV) development company Cottsway and Hyde. Nasreen wanted to highlight that this does not impact on Soha's independence as an organisation. The purpose of this JV is so that we can share risk, have more control as to what type of homes we build, to increase housing within the area and reduce our dependence on section 106.

Nasreen asked the Forum for their thoughts for this JV and any concerns so that they could look to re address those concerns with Cottsway and Hyde

Questions

My concern is that Soha might get too big and the residents become just a number

I want to reassure you all that there is no change to our legal structure. We will still grow at the same pace. It might be slightly different where some of those properties may not be section 106 homes.

Are we becoming more of a real estate agent?

No, the focus will be to supply more houses, meeting housing needs not making money as a primary objective. We are entering a JV with other housing associations with the same aims and ethics.

Will there be more social houses built opposed to affordable?

The answer to that is yes

Kay queried point H in the paper as not clear, Nasreen agreed to re-write that element.

The Forum **Approved** this Decision

8. Repairs and Maintenance Policy by Lee Hayward for Approval

This updated policy sets out how we maintain our homes. It covers services, responsive maintenance, Aids and adaptation service. This policy was last updated in 2019. Following a

recent asset management audit it highlighted that we did not specify the frequency of our stock condition surveys.

This updated policy confirms that we will carry out a 5-year rolling programme of stock condition surveys to ensure we are investing in the right areas. We will be looking to complete 1200 surveys per year starting this year so we have accurate information on our homes and where we need to invest.

This new policy has been aligned with our environmental strategy to make sure we are in line with new government regulations.

Questions

What will this survey look like for tenants?

We are looking to target our pre 2000 properties, this survey will be carried out with our normal inspections and they will take approx. 45 mins max to make sure we have a decent home standard and what energy is presenting our residents homes.

With your older properties, you mentioned about bringing them up to date, would the pre 2000 properties, would Soha be looking at selling them off to tenants?

We have got the right to buy in place for our long-term residents. Our main aim currently though is to upgrade all our properties in line with government regulations by 2030/2050.

The Forum **Approved** the updated Repairs and Maintenance Policy

9. Health and Safety report 21/22 by Lee Hayward for noting

Lee advised the Forum that this report is for noting only but he would like to bring it to the forum every 6 months. This report sets out how we comply with various health and safety legislations.

This includes:

- Fire safety
- Water Hygiene
- Asbestos
- Gas safety
- Electrical
- Lifts

The whole idea behind this paper is to show you how we are performing and meeting our legislative requirements.

9. Independent Living Service Report by Residents Scrutiny and Audit Group for noting

Report sent out with Forum papers for noting

9. Community Strategy by Matt Archer

In preparation for our Co-Reg away in June I would like you to start thinking about the Three key principles to develop our refreshed Community Strategy. This is a broad framework with our communities.

1. **Local** - We want to work at the most local level possible – not assuming that what is right for residents in Henley will be right for those in Swindon. The recently formed localities teams will help us develop a clearer picture of the unique situation, strengths, aspirations and needs for each area we have homes.
2. **Trusting Residents** - We fundamentally believe that the best people to bring about change in any community are the people who live there. Our residents know their communities best and are most invested in them and so it is crucial that our approach to developing communities is set by residents, focussing on the priorities they have for their community.
3. **Catalysing change** - We know that every individual, neighbourhood and community has great potential, as we want to leverage all the support we can muster towards fulfilling it. We want to be asset-based – focussing on what people can do, rather than focussing simply on their needs or barriers.

Matt asked the forum to have a discussion amongst themselves based on the below 3 questions

1. What would be the best way to have these conversations?
2. Who are we not reaching out to? Who are we not connecting with?
3. Are the above questions the correct questions to be asking?

Some of the feedback was captured in this brief discussion as a starting point for the Co-Reg Away day

1. Phone, Social Media, Door Knocking, Social Events, Community Spokespeople, Drop in Centre, Coffee Mornings, Going Back to Basics
2. Workers, Mums, Disabled

3. Smaller groups to emerge to discuss to build report. Giving people examples of what could be great and what has happened in other areas is a way of abstracting good concrete information from others.

10. Planned Maintenance & Repairs Portfolio Positions by Ann- Marie for decision

Ann-Marie reported to the Forum that she would like to put herself forward as discussed with Trevor previously. I have also been informed by Robert Stark that he would like to take the other vacancy. I hope you are all happy with this and please could I have a show of hands for approval?

The Forum **Approved** Ann-Marie & Rob Stark as the Planned Maintenance & Repairs Portfolio Holders

11. Portfolio Holders Update by Deb Wills

Deb reported the Forum how previously customer service calls were taken longer than usual to be answered and resolved due to more complex calls. Following this a pool of Soha staff stepped in to provide additional help. Since then, 2 more full time CS agents have been recruited and CS is now back on target achieving KPI's

The new phone system that has been put in place is a highly intelligent phone system, which not only takes calls but prioritises them to the correct person and flags up problems, along with taking card payments anonymously. Customer services was awarded another accreditation in April.

12. Sundry Income Recovery Policy By Nasreen Hussain for decision

Soha's Sundry Income Recovery Policy sets out Soha's approach to collecting sundry income and current and former tenant recharges and was last reviewed in January 2019.

No significant changes are required with two additions made:

- An inclusion has been made to highlight that finance staff will work closely with housing management, the rental income team, and colleagues across Soha to coordinate our approach.
- Clarification has also been added regarding the need to obtain tenants agreement to support recharges and limit the amount of time spent and level of write offs incurred.

During the review, the Finance Team consulted with Repairs as well as the Rental Income Teams to ensure changes were consistent with understanding across the business.

The Forum **Approved** the updated Policy

Any other Business

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