

Minutes of Meeting

Meeting: Members' Forum Meeting
Date: 17th March 2022
Time: 18:00 – 20:00
Venue: Boardroom

Present

Margaret Buckell	Ann-Marie O'Sullivan
Trevor Brewerton	John Smelt
Gerald Prior	
Bertie Doy	
Edwina Lamond	
Peter Haynes	
Aurora Acone	
Val Kir	
Deb Wills	

Also, in attendance

Kate Waring, Matt Archer & Michelle Pugh-Roberts

1 Apologies for Absence

Kay Sentence, Vic Breach, Neelam Rutti, Trish Langford & Sue Such

2 Approval of January Minutes - Approved

Chairs report by Trevor Brewerton

At last, we are all here together, welcome to our members on the big screen. Welcome to our observers Robert Stark, Kaye Hyde and Angela Harding, it is good to meet you in person.

This has been a long time coming and it is great to be together in the new Soha office. I hope some of you were able to attend the official opening last Wednesday, I was disappointed not to have been able to attend as I was unwell, so thank you to Ann-Marie for standing in for me at the ribbon cutting.

As you all know the AGM is on 26 April in the evening. There is an invite going out in Hometalk to all residents. This year we will be doing the official business and then sitting down to a two-course meal, Michelle will be sending out the meal choices soon. I hope as many of you as possible will be able to attend. We will also be extending the invite to staff and Board members.

Just a reminder of this year's process. At the AGM the two Co-opted members will stand down and then the meeting after the AGM, which will be in May, myself and Ann-Marie will step down as Chair and Vice Chair. Elections for Co-opted members and Chair and Vice Chair will be done at this meeting.

I hope that the social time after the official business will give everyone a chance to catch up and meet old and new friends.

I hope you have all had the chance to read the papers for noting, as requested by Michelle any questions should have come to Michelle before this meeting, as we will not have time to take questions this evening.

I will now pass you over to Kate for her Chief Executive update

Chief Executives update by Kate Wareing

Its lovely to back in the Boardroom with you all today and that we are now not living under so many restrictions!

What's happening Externally?

Nationally, Inflation is currently running at 5.5% The Banks are proposing that will rise to 8% by late spring and potentially 10% by the end of the year. This will be the highest it has been in well over 25 years. For us as an organisation it has an awful lot of impact. It will drive the increase in cost across the whole of the organisation i.e., repairs, wages, fuel cost and interest rates.

We have a finance strategy in place where most of our dept is fixed in long-term meaning that the impact on us as a business is not immediate, but what it really drives is how much it is going to cost us next time we need to turn to the banks for loans.

One of the biggest impacts on us as individuals and as a business is fuel cost increase. The Cap is going up in April. It's likely we will see another increase

in October and that that is not even without factoring in what might happen with reduced supply's from Russia.

This will have an impact on people already living in Soha properties who are already living on tight incomes. Our job as an organisation is to try and proactively identify these people that are in hardship and address it. This will be based on financial help, support with benefits and we also have a hardship fund that can be used.

The other big thing Nationally is, I'm sure you are all well aware of is the crisis in Ukraine. Over 3 million people have now left Ukraine. As of today, about 120 thousand people have signed up the governments call for people with spare rooms or even empty properties to make available to people who are fleeing Ukraine. What we will be doing in relation to that is Firstly, being as clear as possible to our residents about what they need to be thinking about if they are thinking of signing up to this government call. Guidelines soon to be added to the Soha website. As an organisation, there will be requests to help so we are registering our interest with our local authorities.

Peter H raised a question

How will this effect bedroom tax/subsidary if you take a family/refugee in?

Kate W – No plans to change the rules around Housing Benefit and bedroom tax. People get a reduction in housing benefit if they have a spare room, which is the bedroom tax. That will continue whether or not you choose to make that bedroom available under this new scheme, but the bigger question is, what happens to housing benefit entitlement overall? We are trying to seek clarification around this, if someone is in receipt of Housing Benefit would that £350 from the government be considered as an income. It is not clear now, but it is something we are monitoring closely

What's happening locally?

You will have heard over the last 3 and half years talk about the difference between social rent and affordable rents and why we charge affordable rents on our new builds. However now we can report the success on our joint work to lobby for Social Rents in local planning policy So you will be seeing more social housing on our new development. Both South

Oxfordshire and Cherwell District council have now changed their planning policies.

We have also had success on our work to lobby for a “Housing First” approach to addressing homelessness. What Housing First aims to do is, secure a home as soon as possible. Housing first will provide support to be able to maintain the tenancy and provide support needs if required throughout their tenancies.

We have been working alongside other housing associations across the county to make at least 50 tenancies a year available direct to people who are experiencing homelessness.

What's happening at Soha?

As you know we have had some major issues with our contractor's staff during the winter period, particularly with heating. Apologies if this has affected any of you personally. We also had a large backlog of repairs that accumulated with our Contractor MD, these have now been brought right down. We are in the middle customer services accreditation. This is happening in early April which we will report back to you what the outcome is.

Storm Eunice caused an awful lot of problems for a lot of our residents. We had 57 emergency call outs that day, all of those were responded to within 4 hours. Unfortunately, we had one block of flats that lost its roof and one of our extra care schemes that was without power for a duration of time. Since then, we have been doing a lot of thinking how we can prevent this from happening again with backup systems in place.

There will be 3 areas that we will be focusing on this year, first our satisfaction repairs, then our re-let time, these have not yet recovered from Covid and last the data we hold for our residents, making sure all data is accurate and current.

Power outage at Petypher House by Matt Archer

Matt gave an overview of what happened at Petypher House during storm Eunice, how we responded to that and what lessons we have learnt.

There was a power outage from about 11 clock Friday morning. We held an emergency meeting on site at about 15:30 with staff and contractors. The decision was made that there would be an Order of St Johns provider onsite until power was restored. The power was out till Saturday evening the following day. We are sad to say that one resident had a fall during the night but because she was unable to call, she was not discovered till the following morning. She was then taken straight to hospital as a precaution.

Soha staff were back on-site late morning on Saturday, by which time the local community rallied round to provide additional support for residents. Staff remained on site on Saturday until all power and systems were restored from 8am Sunday providing additional support throughout the day, including hot meals.

What this has highlighted is the limitations of battery powered back-ups. As a result, we have been looking at how we can extend the battery life and also what other back-ups we need. Petypher's water system is powered by electricity, so this was also down. We will be looking at the designs of each scheme and the particulars of how each site is designed and how we need to be mindful and how we cross reference that with the individual needs of each resident. We will also be making sure we have evacuation chairs in all buildings. We have now increased our stock of charged torches. Following this incident, we will be doing a thorough internal review of our systems and procedures.

Margaret B raised a question

Did you who should be in their homes?

Matt – We had an accurate record of our residents but their whereabouts was the issue, so it was a case of knocking on all doors

Ann-Marie raised a question

How did people cope without electricity and water?

Kate – there was enough water in the building, the second night we had blankets and sleeping bags delivered as it was starting to get cold. Residents that were more mobile were offered to stay on local the local travel lodge however most wanted to stay in their homes. We made the decision if the power was not up by the following day, we would need to move people out, thankfully it did not come to that.

Deb W raised a question

If there was a fire in one of your extra care schemes, how do you know who

all your residents inside the scheme are?

Kate – We do have a box outside the scheme with a list of people's names and address who live at the scheme that can be accessed.

We are now asking our builders for a much more precise plan in newer developments so we can cater for such events.

Portfolio Holders update

Gerald Prior – Estates and communities

I am pleased to say we have managed to continue our portfolio holder operation including regular quarterly meetings with the estates teams, development, and neighbourhood team. They have been keeping us updated on progress reports and contractors' performance figures. Development continues to perform well and have been able to provide new properties well in line with their new targets. The re developments and St Lawrence and the Acreage they tell us its looking very well received and the extra care scheme in Wallingford is progressing. One particular development I am interested in is the re development of Phillimore House. This is due to be Soha's first carbon neutral project. The neighbourhoods team continue to do well even though they face many restrictions. Although the overall numbers of ASB cases have risen many of which has resulted from an increase in mental health issues, they have done extremely well. At our last meeting, no anti-social behaviour or evictions have been reported. We continue to be fully involved in the CAT programme, which carries out improvements across all our estates, two main ones being Russel Jackson Close and Westcroft in Berinsfield. These are Two areas that have no off-street parking positions for tenants, so we are pleased to say we have been able to get this put in place for them.

Another problem we have pushed to have rectified is the overheating of the dining area of Petypher house. I am pleased to say they have a new air con system so hopefully that will be successful. The Estates team & Grounds Maintenance team continue to have labour problems, but they now have a new manager in place and are showing some improvements. Estates inform us that they are currently seeking compensation for their performance and a number of mis cuts that could amount to around 30 thousand pounds. Just ask, the cleaning contractors continue to perform well and continue with the sanitising programmes within the extra care schemes etc. We

continue to administer the forums estate improvement budget and we are pleased to say that the number of applications in the past year has seen quite a substantial increase on previous figures, and we have been able to delegate the entire budget of this year. The majority of the application we have seen however still come from extra care and sheltered schemes, but we would welcome applications for the wider estates. As always these can be for smaller estate improvements or community projects providing, they are mainly for Soha tenants. We did manage to start our estate business last year before we went into lock down again and what this showed us was its always good to get out there and meet people face to face. We will be looking at re starting our visits as soon as possible. Now that restriction have been lifted and more relaxed, we are looking for a re-launch of the Green Champions, so if anyone is interested, please let contact the estates team know.

Trevor Brewerton - Planned and Responsive

I'd like to give you a short update. I had a meeting with Chad about a fortnight ago. They had fallen behind, but they are gradually catching up. The only thing that I would like to touch on is they seem to have a lot of complaints, but I understand they have had employment issues and time off due to Covid, but I am pleased to say they are making head way with this now.

Margaret Buckell – Finance

This is partly retrospective; the creation of Finance and Resources Portfolio was relatively new. An early event was John Smelt and Margaret Buckell representing the portfolio holders in taking part in the interview process to appoint the Head of Finance, the posting of Mat Ridley. This took place on 7th February 2020.

Later in February Margaret was able to attend an F & R meeting. Items discussed have over the last 2 years been implemented, for instance budgeting for carpets and higher IT expenses. Within a couple of weeks, life as we knew it ground to a halt and face to face meetings ceased due to the impact of Covid. A planned meeting for John and Margaret to speak to the Head of Finance in mid-March could therefore take place. Coming forward to the present, with the chance to communicate more freely, I have

pleasure of giving a short overview of progress. End of year 2021 indicated an operating surplus ahead of budget. Operating expenditure was lower than expected, primarily due to the knock-on effect of Covid effecting number of planned maintenance jobs issues with contractors having difficulty with supplies and labour. The revolving credit facility with Santander has been renewed to take advantage of positive rates. Improvements have been made in payment facilities to accept more direct payments. Finance, with HR, have introduced the new Payroll system. It is hoped to be possible to meet with more of the Finance team this year and produce more regular reports to the Members' Forum.

John Smelt – Finance

I have a review of what has happened in the last 12 months, IT wise. The office 365 employment has been completed with exchange online for handling emails and SharePoint. DocuSign has been built into SharePoint so people can sign electronically. The new CS phone system is now in place and working very well. TV screens with Soha information/updates have been put on to schemes i.e., Towse court and the Wi-Fi has been improved. MD repairs contract has been renewed. Hybrid meetings are now in full swing.

Recruitment of Portfolio holders and Co-opted members

Positions available for Portfolio holders in Customer Services department and IT. If you are interested in any of these positions, please let Michelle know. I recently sent out an email asking for up to 5 Co-Opted members when it comes to time of voting at the AGM. This is due to the Forum only having 15 full members rather than the preferred 18. I think that this will be a good opportunity for anyone considering standing for a full member in next year's elections. If any of you are interested, please contact Michelle.

Localities working by Matt Archer

Locality based working: What is it?

By adopting a localities-based approach, is first recognizing within the geographical area that we serve that there are a diverse set of needs and priorities for each area. At present the way our model works is to treat all of

our homes as a whole. What we are trying to achieve now is to understand the different areas to be able to help residents in those areas and fulfill their potential both individually and collectively. Teams will be working a lot more closely together covering a specific area, building good relationships and being more visible. From the beginning of April our Rental income team, technical officers and the Independent Living team will also be organized on a locality basis. There will be 6 members of staff looking after each locality.

Another important thing we are trying to change will be to devolve decision making as locally as possible i.e., a lot of the budgets centrally held have now been devolved to the local teams rather than signed off from managers etc.

Matt asked the Forum a series of questions as part of the workshop

- What do you love about your area?
- If you had a magic wand and you could change one thing, what would it be?
- What would it look like for Soha to hand over more power to localities

A discussion was held among the Forum and below are some of the outcomes

- Community: Looking after each other, checking all ok.
- Bus service: lost service 3 years ago causing isolation and difficulties for Doctor/Hospital appointments.
- Residents/Elderly mobility issues: - Those that can do, help those that cannot.
- Better communication, regular meetings, door knocks, calls just social contact.
- The bus service may be a private owner/contractor.
- More community events & more parking on estates
- Soha to be more visible
- More cohesion
- To have one point of contact at soha
- Community's coming together
- I love where I live, I am a happy customer

Budget 2022/23 & proposed KPI'S by Kate Wareing

The presentation included an overview of Soha's budget process timeline:

Budget Headlines	Budget 2021/22 £'000s	Budget 2022/23 £'000s	Variance to 21/22 Budget	
			£'000s	%
Total Operating Income	44,849	48,449	3,601	8%
Planned maintenance costs	(9,562)	(11,351)	(1,789)	19%
Responsive Repairs costs	(4,884)	(5,643)	(759)	16%
Staff and other pay costs	(5,749)	(7,008)	(1,259)	22%
Communities focused budgets	(495)	(489)	6	-1%
Other areas of expenditure	(5,209)	(5,457)	(247)	5%
Net interest costs	(11,874)	(12,057)	(182)	2%
Total Operating Expenditure	(37,773)	(42,004)	(4,231)	11%
Operating surplus after interest	7,076	6,445	(631)	-9%

Budget headlines for financials were presented as follows:

- The majority of expenditure is on Repairs & Maintenance and Planned maintenance. These are projected to increase by 17%, reflecting the increase in carbon zero spend and inflationary pressures.
- Staffing costs are also projected to increase by 22%, which is reflected in yearly pay reviews as the job market has changed, as well as additional staff resources and inflationary uplifts.
- The Communities focused budget is £489k for 2022/23 and £495k last year. Historically this budget was less than £100k and included Resident involvement spend and it should be emphasized that positive community activities that have been achieved, even during the pandemic period.
- Other areas of expenditure include Housing management costs, and all other running costs such as finance, IT, office services etc.
- Interest costs are increasing as we develop more units and carry more debt. Interest costs over the last 5 years are as follows:

	Budget 2017/18 £'000s	Budget 2018/19 £'000s	Budget 2019/20 £'000s	Budget 2020/21 £'000s	Budget 2021/22 £'000s	Budget 2022/23 £'000s
Net interest cost budget	9,800	9,921	10,948	9,966	11,874	12,057
Number of properties	6,428	6,645	6,786	6,939	7,123	7,342

Any other Business

Deb attended a training session called “Playing with Words” a couple of weeks ago and just wanted to mention how good it was but unfortunately there was only 2 attendees.

Signed.....
Date05/04/2022.....
Chair of Members’ Forum