Minutes of Meeting

Meeting: Board Meeting
Date: Thursday, 26 May 2022
Time: 6.00pm
Venue: Board Room, Soha Housing

Present:

Naomi Barrand	Dave Lakin	Harjit Sandhu
Tim Bolton	Nicky Mellings	Hayley Smith
Victoria Dingle	David Mody	Kate Wareing
Jennifer Ekelund	Peter Nkum Jnr	Lucy Weston

Apologies:

None

Also in attendance:

Matt Archer, Director of Housing and Communities
Lee Hayward, Director of Property Services
Nasreen Hussain, Director of Finance and Resources
Craig Dransfield, Head of Development
Marisa Elliott, Governance and Regulation Manager & Company Secretary
Sarah Jackson, DTP (joined remotely via Teams)

Declarations of Interest

None

Announcements

The Chair welcomed Gerald Prior and Martyn Thorne to the meeting. She advised that they would shortly be presenting the report of the Resident Scrutiny and Audit Group.

The Chair also welcomed Sarah Jackson from DTP who joined us remotely to observe the Board meeting as part of the external governance review.

88. Resident Scrutiny and Audit Group Review on the Independent Living Service and Soha's Response to the Recommendations	Actions
Gerald Prior and Martyn Thorne, members of the Resident Scrutiny and Audit Group (RSAG), presented the findings and recommendations from the Groups' recent review on the quality and satisfaction of service relating to the various types of accommodation offered as part of the Independent Living Service (ILS). The Group identified a number of key findings including: no specific service standards or KPIs relating to the ILS, although all residents in this type of accommodation pay service charges; no information given to residents on the type and extent of service provided; the OK Each Day service is of value to residents with greater needs but considered expensive for those who don't need as much support and unclear on the service that can be offered and staffing levels within the ILS appears be inadequate and needs to be re-instated to pre-Covid levels. Gerald and Martyn then took the Board through the Groups' recommendations. They felt the main focus should be to consider the aims and objectives of the ILS to meet the needs of current and future residents and have a comprehensive set of service standards for each of the three groups i.e., IL1, IL2 and IL3. The Group were also keen that Soha only charges for the services actually received by residents and be clear about what these relate to. They suggested that the ILS needs to be more visible to residents and details of when visits will be made together with a leaflet detailing the services available and points of contact would be helpful. It was noted that staff levels need to be restored which would enable them to advocate for repairs and other issues for vulnerable residents. The Director of Housing and Communities thanked the Group for their thorough report. He advised that their report had been reviewed by SLT and the Independent Living Manager and all agreed that it was a useful assessment of current processes as well as resident experience. The Director of Housing and Communities confirmed the actions that Soha is taking in relation to the recommendations including the production of a new booklet on the ILS which sets out the service expected for each of the three groups together with the frequency of the service and the opportunities for involvement in a variety of activities. It was noted that this work will also help shape the revised Independent Living service standards due in October 2022. The Director of Housing and Communities explained that the staff working in Independent Living will now be known as Housing Officer – Independent Living to make it clearer who they are. This will also be included in the leaflet for all residents with timings of visits and posted on the notice boards.	

A member suggested that including photos of the Independent Living team would be helpful. This was agreed. A member was pleased to have the full results of the survey of those living in independent living but felt that we should be seeking the views of all residents even those who had not responded to the survey. The Chair commented that she found the report thought provoking and was pleased to see the range of recommendations. She suggested that an update on the progress of the recommendations should be brought to the Board in six months' time. This was agreed and will be added to the Action Tracker.	**MA**
Resolved: **That the Board notes the Resident Scrutiny and Audit Groups' review and Soha's response to the recommendations.**	
89a. Approval of Minutes The minutes of the Board meeting held on 24 March 2022 were approved. **Resolved:** **That the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 24 March 2022 be signed as a true and accurate record.**	
89b. Personnel and Remuneration Committee Minutes The Chair of the Committee drew members' attention to a couple of the key points from the minutes. She advised that since the decision made by the Board to keep the Defined Benefit (DB) pension schemes open for existing members, the numbers of staff in those schemes has dropped below the minimum level agreed (10 members). This means that the DB schemes will close next April and those affected have been advised of their options. The Chair of the Committee advised that the Committee is due to meet in August to specifically discuss the results of the pay benchmarking report and how we can make Membership more meaningful. **Resolved:** **That the Board notes the minutes of the Personnel and Remuneration Committee meeting.**	

90. Matters Arising Item 73 – Matters Arising (Item 47 - Continuous Improvement: Learning from Feedback and Issues) The Director of Housing and Communities advised that he is still reviewing the points on vexatious issues. He noted that we need to be clear about what is unwelcome behaviour vs anti-social behaviour and also what Soha does and doesn't have responsibility for. He also noted that shared owners are not receiving the same offer, and this requires some further thought. The Director of Housing and Communities confirmed that we will be launching a campaign going into the summer to provide assistance for how to deal with these types of issues.	**MA** **MA**
Item 73 – Matters Arising (Item 60 – Budget 2022/23) The Chief Executive advised that she had missed the point on growth in stock numbers and headcount and circulate to the Board following this meeting.	**KW**
Item 78 – Financial Regulations The Director of Finance and Resources advised that she had made some tweaks to the financial limits associated with the levels of breach. She confirmed that she has also provided some additional narrative. She advised that she had considered the inclusion of cyber crime but felt that it was already covered in a separate policy.	
Item 80 – Action Plan on Lettings and Arrears KPIs The Director of Housing and Communities advised that he had been unable to provide the latest performance information on the lettings and arrears KPIs as the figures were inaccurate. He explained that the key performance data is correct but that the phasing and internal data is not. He confirmed that this will be corrected for the next meeting and will be included in the CEX Key Issues report. In the meantime, the Director of Housing and Communities agreed to circulate the correct information following this meeting.	**MA**
Reports	
91. Action Tracker and Wallboard Ideas <u>Action Tracker</u>	

It was agreed to provide an update on how we've handled a domestic violence case including our response and a lessons learned exercise at the Board meeting in July 2022. <u>Wallboard</u> It was noted that items 1 and 3 on furniture poverty and housing disrepair will be discussed at the Board Away Day on 25 June. Item 2 on identifying housing need will be brought to the Board meeting in September 2022. The Chair reminded everyone to add/suggest items for the Wallboard. **92. CEX Key Issues Update** The Chief Executive provided an update to members on key external trends and internal issues. <u>External Operating Environment</u> **1. Covid-19** The Chief Executive advised that we have experienced Covid-19 outbreaks at two of our schemes, but this has been quickly brought under control. We are continuing to run full services and staff sickness has reduced over the last quarter. **2. Inflation, Interest Rates and Cost of Living** The Chief Executive advised that CPI inflation has reached 9% and it's projected to go higher, although average wage increases are well below inflation at 3.8%. She advised that we are working in a totally different operating environment, and this means that we have some significant decisions to make around immediate pressures, i.e. affordability vs investment. The Chief Executive advised that we are beginning conversations now with residents to consider how we respond to the cost of living impacts and what this means in terms of rent increases from April 2023. **3. Queen's Speech Announcements – Housing and Planning Bills** The Chief Executive advised that three bills relevant to housing were announced in the Queen's Speech. These are the social housing regulation bill, the renters reform bill and the housing reform bill which is focused on leaseholder reform but may include an extension of the Right to Buy. **4. NHF Code of Conduct** The Chief Executive advised that the NHF has just published a new Code of Conduct. She noted that we are working through the detail	**JMC/ MA**

and will produce a position statement and an action plan for how we will achieve compliance.

Internal Update

1. Service Update

The Chief Executive advised that performance with our two main contractors (MD and K&T Heating) is improving, although the backlog of MD repairs orders remains high due to a significant number of orders being raised during the winter period. Plans are in place to address this.

The Chief Executive advised that our electrical contractor, NKS, failed to complete the 2021/22 programme due to staff shortages and resident refusals. A recovery plan is in place to address this, but it is anticipated that the works will be complete by the end of May.

The Chief Executive advised that the Intelligent Energy software is live, and the accuracy of the data is being checked and verified. This will enable us to identify our least energy efficient properties and put together our Social Housing Decarbonisation Grant Fund bid.

The Chief Executive advised that work on stock condition surveys commences in July, and we hope to complete 1,200 surveys this year. The information will be collected in-house using an iPad-based solution.

The Chief Executive advised that we have been re-accredited with the Customer Services Excellence award for a further twelve months. We will also be seeking ISO14001 accreditation for our environmental management standards and the initial audit is taking place this month.

2. Localities Update

The Chief Executive advised that the localities team working commenced in April and early signs are positive with improved cross team working.

3. Induction and Culture Review

The Chief Executive advised that we have run a series of workshops with staff who have recently joined Soha to hear about their induction experience and how a hybrid working pattern affects the settling in period. We are also using the cultural principles recently agreed to form the basis of a revised competency framework.

4. Soha's 25th Birthday

The Chief Executive advised that Soha turns 25 this year and we are holding an event for staff on 17 June and a number of other celebrations in July.

5. Communications Update
An update was provided as shown in Appendix A of the report.

6. Regulatory Judgements and HOS Update
An update was provided as shown in Appendix B of the report.

The Chair then invited questions.

A member asked if we were keeping residents informed about the issues with the repairs service. The Director of Property Services advised that we are advising residents when there are issues including via the website and Facebook. He advised that he would discuss this and assurance on the service in more detail at the Board Away Day.

A member asked how the success of the localities working will be measured. The Director of Housing and Communities advised that we are in the process of developing a dashboard based on localities with a number of key areas being monitored. He also provided a verbal case study to members.

A member enquired about the Homes for Ukraine project. The Director of Housing and Communities advised that Soha is still keen to support the project and we are waiting for further updates on how we are able to do this.

That the Board notes the update.

93. Group Business Plan 2022/23

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

A confidential item was discussed. The Group Business Plan for 2022/23 was approved. Further information is contained within the Confidential Minutes.

Resolved:

That the Board approves the Group Business Plan 2022/23.

94. Global Accounts 2021

The Director of Finance and Resources presented the report which provides analysis from the Global Accounts and Soha's comparative performance.

She advised that the latest data available is for the year ending 31 March 2021 and shows that Soha's social housing unit cost is £3,172 per property. This places us at fourth lowest in our peer group. Our social housing operating margin is very good at 43.2% and gives us the capacity to contain rental costs or increase cost or investment.

The Director of Finance and Resources confirmed that although Soha has very good performance and provides strong value for money, this data is over a year out of date and the operating environment has changed considerably within this time. However, it does show that we have choices about we how invest in our homes and services.

Resolved:

That the Board notes the analysis from the Global Accounts and Soha's comparable results.

95. Partnerships and Mergers Annual Review

The Chief Executive presented the report and asked the Board to consider Soha's corporate structure and whether it is appropriate to meet Soha's vision, aims and objectives.

She advised that the Board must consider annually whether continuing with the current structure is appropriate, including whether we should proactively seek partnerships or to merge. She confirmed that the Business Plan is being brought to the Board alongside this report and demonstrates that Soha is a financially strong association. Given our strength, and ability to deliver our Corporate Plan objectives it is the view of the Chief Executive that our current structure remains appropriate.

The Chief Executive then moved onto partnerships. She explained that while we are financially strong, our size does limit our ability to take on some opportunities, particularly those with significant sales risk or where we need to compete on the open market for land. We could consider a partnership with a Homes England development partner to gain grant at higher rates and this is part of the current motivation behind the potential joint venture with Hyde and Cottsway.

The Chief Executive proposed that we continue to seek opportunities to work closely with partners and/or create joint ventures. However, no proactive approach to seeking a formal change (merger) is proposed for Soha.

The Chair then invited questions from members.

A member asked if we had consulted Members about whether our corporate structure is appropriate. It was noted that we discuss partnerships and mergers annually with the Members' Forum.

A member enquired at what point does the number of staff have to increase by to take it past the 'sweet spot'. How do we maintain our culture by growth? It was agreed that this required further thought and should be added to the Wallboard. **Resolved:** **That the Board:** **1. Agrees to continue with Soha's current corporate structure as the most appropriate to achieve its vision, aims and objectives; and** **2. Asks the Executive to proactively explore opportunities offered by the stock consolidation agendas of other associations and is open to alternative partnership delivery mechanisms (including joint ventures) that may enable Soha to better achieve its objectives.** **96. Joint Venture Update** The Head of Development presented the report to update the Board on the setting up of a joint venture development company. The Head of Development advised that we are still in the early discussion stages and there are a number of issues that need to be resolved. The most important one being the grant issue with Homes England. He explained that we are seeking clarification from them on whether we are able to receive grant via Hyde's strategic partnership and also be able to access grant direct from Homes England in our own right. This is a fundamental issue for Soha and may well put the brakes on our plan to set up the joint venture. As soon as we have the advice, we will know how to proceed. **Resolved:** **That the Board:** **1. Notes the feedback from the Members' Forum and the Joint Venture Working Group (JVWG); and** **2. Agrees that detailed oversight is carried out by the JVWG and is reported back to the Board.** **97. Development Update** The Head of Development presented the report to ask the Board to approve a S106 site with Bellway Homes. The scheme at Kingsgrove in Wantage comprises 45 affordable units and generates a positive NPV. A member enquired why there were no shared ownership units in this	**KW**

appraisal. The Head of Development advised that shared ownership units were not part of this phase but there are a number within the entire development.

The Head of Development asked the Board to approve a S106 site with Deanfield Homes. The scheme at Charlotte Close in Hermitage comprises six affordable units of which four are for social rent and two for shared ownership. It generates a positive NPV.

Resolved:

That the Board approves the sites at Kingsgrove in Wantage and Charlotte Close in Hermitage.

98. Budget Increase Request

The Director of Property Services presented the report to ask the Board to approve an increase in the budget for installation of carbon monoxide detectors.

He explained that the Board had previously agreed a budget of £300k this year for the installation works which had been planned to take place over a two-year period. However, the Government now requires this work to be completed by the 1st October this year.

The Director of Property Services advised that the contract has been tendered at a total cost of £810k to Pilon. Pilon have confirmed they are able to commence the installation works in June and complete the full programme by the end of September, within the statutory deadline.

The Director of Property Services asked the Board to approve the full budget of £810k being brought forward to this year.

There were no questions raised.

Resolved:

That the Board approves the increase in the budget for installation of carbon monoxide detectors from £300k to £810k in 2022/23.

99. Performance Reports 2021/22

The report was presented by members of the Senior Leadership Team to update the Board on financial and operational performance for the year ending 31 March 2022.

<u>Performance and Key Trends Report</u>

The Director of Finance and Resources presented this report and

noted some of the key highlights. She advised we had an operating surplus of £18.2m, which is £0.1m over budget. The main drivers were reduced responsive and planned maintenance expenditure due to contractor availability of resources and labour, but this is beginning to stabilise. Operational expenditure was £26.1m, which is £0.6m under budget. The Director of Finance and Resources advised that rent arrears ended the year at 5.9% against a target of 5.5%. It was noted that the arrears figure has steadily reduced since the re-opening of the courts and the ability of the team to re-engage with residents. The average re-let time was 52.3 days against a target of 45 days. With the introduction of localities working across a number of teams including lettings and repairs, it is hoped this figure will improve. The Director of Property Services advised that three of the four main repair KPIs missed target in 2021/22. The average time to complete a repair ended the year at 11.1 days against a target of 9 days, although this is still top quartile with Housemark. He advised that repair appointments made and kept was at 93.1% compared with a target of 98% and emergency repairs completed on time ended at 97.9% against a target of 99%. The first time fix target ended at 85.7% compared with a target of 85%. He noted that the drop in performance was largely due to MD being under resourced from April to December 2021. We continue to work closely with our contractors and staff to improve the KPIs alongside resident satisfaction results. The Head of Development advised that we delivered 174 new units with a pipeline of 463 contracted units. It was noted that the value of unsold shared ownership units was £3.1m, under the trigger point of £5m. <u>STAR Survey</u> The STAR survey results for the end of the year were noted and no questions were raised. <u>GDPR Performance</u> This report provided an overview of the GDPR work carried out over the year. The two areas covered in more depth were breach management and Data Protection Impact Assessments. It was noted that the number of data breaches has decreased by 27% compared with the previous year. This is mainly due to increased staff awareness via mandatory GDPR training.	

There were no questions were raised.

Complaints Performance

The report provided a summary of all formal and informal complaints for the year 31 March 2022. It was noted that we have seen a slight increase in the number of formal complaints at 45 compared with 39 in 2020/21. No complaints have been escalated to Stage 2, although we are waiting for the outcome of an investigation by the Housing Ombudsman raised in early 2021. We have seen a decrease in dissatisfied (informal) complaints from 549 to 485 cases. We continue to try and resolve issues at an earlier stage before they become formal complaints.

There was also a self-assessment checklist on the revised Complaints Handling Code published by the Housing Ombudsman. The compliance checklist will be reviewed by SLT to ensure we fully comply by 1 October 2022.

No questions were raised.

ATFS Economic Review

This report was noted, and no questions were raised.

Resolved:

That the Board discussed and notes the performance report.

100. Progress Against Corporate Plan and Strategy Action Plans – 6 Month Update

The Chief Executive presented the second review of performance against the actions in the Corporate Plan 2021-25.

The Chief Executive advised that the action plan covers the first two years of the Corporate Plan and identified 152 actions for completion by 31 March 2023. The results show that 32% of actions have been completed, 51% of actions are on track, 5% of actions are trending off track, 1% are off target and 12% of actions are not yet due.

She advised that areas where we are trending off track relate to stock condition data as there has been a delay in some of the modules going live in QL but is anticipated to go live in December 2022; the First Touch mobile technology has been discontinued by Aareon and we are considering alternative mobile solutions; and membership both in terms of promotion of the benefits and an increase in staff membership to 75%. We will recommence our efforts to drive numbers up.

The Chief Executive advised the target of 15% of new homes delivered through S106 in 2021/22 has not been achieved. This is due to planning issues at our scheme in Shrivenham, although we are hopeful that it will still proceed.

Resolved:

That the Board discussed and notes the update.

101. Health and Safety Update – 6 Month Update

The Director of Property Services presented the report to update members on health and safety issues since the last report in November 2021.

He advised that all actions identified in both the 2020 and 2021 Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) have been completed. However, there are two outstanding actions from the 2019/20 FRA survey relating to leasehold properties which are expected to be completed by the end of May.

The Director of Property Services confirmed that this year's FRA programme will consist of all general needs communal areas alongside sheltered and extra care schemes.

He advised we are 100% compliant with gas servicing, lift servicing, water hygiene testing and fire safety equipment servicing. As previously mentioned at item 92, NKS has failed to complete all electrical safety testing for 2021/22 due to staff shortages and resident refusals. There is a plan in place to carry out all remaining inspections by the end of May. It was noted that whilst these are outside our own target reinspection standard of 5 years they are well within statutory requirements to inspect once every 10 years.

A member asked if we needed to use external consultants to assist us with any building safety issues. The Director of Property Services felt this was not necessary as we had recently used EDP to support us with H&S issues and also, we don't own any high-rise buildings.

Resolved:

That the Board discussed and notes the update.

102. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

The Director of Housing and Communities presented the updated policy.

No questions were raised.

Resolved:

That the Board approves the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

103. Any Other Business

Board members noted that the recent training on Neurodiversity Awareness was good and encouraged those who had not attended to do so.

104. Date of Next Meeting

The date for the Board Away Day is **Saturday 25 June 2022,** commencing at 9.00am at Fison Barn, The Earth Trust, Little Wittenham, Oxfordshire OX14 4QZ.

The date of the next Board meeting will be **Thursday, 21 July 2022** at 6.00pm via MS Teams or at Soha's office (location to be confirmed nearer the time).

The meeting ended at 8.40pm.

Signed:__________________________

Date: ________________