

## Minutes of Meeting

Meeting: Members' Forum Meeting  
Date: 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023  
Time: 6pm – 8:00pm  
Venue: Boardroom

### Present

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| Ann-Marie O'Sullivan - Chair |  |
| Vic Breach – Vice Chair      |  |
| Gerald Prior                 |  |
| Val Kir                      |  |
| Margaret Buckell             |  |
| Kay Sentance                 |  |
| Amanda Browning              |  |
| Bertie Doy                   |  |
| Sue Such                     |  |

### Also in attendance

Matt Archer, Jude McCaffrey, Lee Hayward, Jackie Logan, Michelle Pugh-Roberts and Marisa Elliott

### Apologies

Deb Wills, Aurora Acone, John Smelt and Trish Langford

### 1.Approval of Minutes January 12<sup>th</sup>

Approved

### 2.Matters Arising

No matters arising.

### 3.Chairs Report by Ann-Marie O'Sullivan

Again, we have a heavy agenda, so can I ask you to put all the questions through the chair or the vice chair. This makes for easier communication and allows everyone to speak.

We have the AGM coming up on 25 April. Invites will soon be sent out to all members, so we hope to see you all there.

Everyone should have had an email or letter by now, asking you to vote for those that are standing in the elections. It is very easy and quick to do this online. It's a secure page, allowing you to access the page once only, to place your votes. The deadline to place a vote ends at 5pm on Monday 28th March. So, if you have not placed a vote yet, please do either online or by returning your voting ballot paper via post.

We have 3 vacancies for Portfolio holders as we have 2 members that are stepping down. The positions available are

- Responsive and Planned Maintenance
- Information Technology

The other portfolio holder for responsive and planned is me.

There are currently two positions available for the IT Portfolio Holder Role.

Support and any training will be given if required. On occasions you may be asked to be part of an interview panel. Again, all training will be provided.

**ACTION** – Volunteers for Portfolio Holder vacancy

When I did your appraisals with you last year, there were a lot of people who said they would be interested in training. An email went out recently about TPAS training and possibly training with Fiona Joins. If there is anything that you are interested in at all.

**ACTION** – Forum members to contact Jackie or Michelle re training.

We recently sent an email out asking the Forum if they thought any changes needed to be made to the constitution. We had a few suggestions which will be covered as a separate agenda item this evening.

#### **4.Chief Executive update by Lee Hayward**

##### **External news**

The government continue to focus on disrepair in social housing with adverts, urging social housing residents to report complaints to their housing providers concerning, damp, mould and condensation issues. All residents will receive a letter and leaflet soon asking them to contact us with any concerns they may have regarding damp and mould issues, so we help remedy as soon as possible.

Inflation and interest rates are starting to stabilise, however, costs to Soha are increasing i.e. supply and contractor cost continue you to rise, restricting things that we would normally do. Interest rates are currently at 4.1% and 10.1% inflation.

Energy costs cap will fall to £3,280 in April; however, government has not committed to further support. There will be an energy price guarantee which is in place looking to reduce energy costs to Approximately £3,000.

## **Internal news**

We have launched MySoha App to great success. It was launched on the 20<sup>th</sup> February and is now available to download to your phones. This will replace the old app. The old app will close down at the end of March.

MD, our main contractor are still struggling to clear the backlog of repair orders. We are currently working with a new contractor (United Living) to help clear the repair backlog for MD.

MD have recently employed employ 4 additional operatives and committed to increasing by a further 6 over the next coming weeks as an agreed action plan.

Our current grounds maintenance contract with ID Verde is due to expire after a 3-year period and we have decided not to renew it. Our new grounds maintenance contract goes live on 30th March, re appointing our former contractor, John O'Connor.

Rent and service charge letters have been sent out. Some residents will have seen a sharp increase, particularly due to communal heating costs increasing and contractor cost.

Our new Scheme Francis Curtis Court has opened in Wallingford, comprising of 38 properties for sale and 37 rentals. 20 rentals have already been allocated and 2 sold and further 7 reserved for sale.

## **5. Localities feeding Members Forum and restructure for update**

Matt updated the Forum on changes that have been put in place since the last Forum. Following on from Members events, Co -Reg away days and interviews, it has become clear that we need to make our services more localised. To do this we need re structure other areas to make more recourse for Neighbourhood Community Officers and Localities Leads The main objective of this restructure is to enable greater recourse at a locality level and enabling teams to work with their communities, which is key to understanding our communities at a local level.



## 6. 2023-25 Delivery: Priorities, Targets and budget to deliver by Nasreen Hussain for info

### Corporate plan 2023 – 2025

Nasreen showed a series of slides showing the areas that they will be focusing on over the next 2 years, as part of the Corporate Plan.

1. To create more homes – aiming to build 800 new socially and environmentally sustainable homes via planning gain, over the next 4 years. Also looking at new ways to provide affordable and secure homes for everyone
2. Support residents – ensuring our residents know how to get support and aim for zero evictions into homelessness. Through investment in our tenancy sustainment team, we will identify and support at – risk residents by delivering or supporting others to deliver services that help residents to
  - Build their financial resilience
  - Access employment and training opportunities
  - Overcome mental health challenges
3. Look after our residents' homes – to achieve a higher level of customer satisfaction - Deliver repair, void, planned cyclical maintenance services that achieve at least 90% resident satisfaction.
4. Improve service technology – improve online service offer resulting in residents choosing to make 75% of all transactions online.
5. Become more environmentally sustainable – Maximise the use of available grant, funding work towards achieving the Net Zero Carbon by 2050.
6. Involved residents build communities – increase the number, range and take up of meaningful opportunities for members, residents and staff to get

- involved, making decisions about soha's future, collaborating in the design and delivery of services, and holding soha to account.
7. Advocate change – in partnership with residents and communities, we all advocate and speak up for the recourses and legislation necessary for us to provide a high quality, affordable and sustainable homes needed for the future.
  8. Enable staff to offer the best service – increase staff membership up to 75% by providing clarity on the benefits of membership and embedding sign up processes into management structure.

**Members agreed these were the right priorities that soha will be focusing on over the next two year.**

### **KPI's 2023 – 2024**

Nasreen shared with members the KPI that soha will be using from the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2023. She asked members to for their input and feedback. **Members were happy with the levels the KPI's are set at. They concluded that the KPI's are challenging but achievable, which are better to ensure good staff motivation.**

### **Budget 2023 – 2024**

The Board approved the budget at the February meeting.

Budget this year has been more challenging due to various factors i.e rent cap and in addition to that cost increases in almost every area. However, we are still a strong health and financially viable organisation. Nasreen shared an overview of the income and expenditure for the financial year starting for April 2023

### **7. No recourses to public funds project by Jude McCaffrey for info**

Migrant homelessness - This project is aimed at helping people that have been working in the UK and had the rights to work in the UK but have lost their jobs or allowed their time in the UK to Laps therefore they are unable to claim benefits. Because they are then unable to claim benefits. It is these people that can then become at risk of being homeless or rough sleeping. We have been working with Oxfordshire home movement and Asylum Welcome, offering 12 bed spaces at a peppercorn rate for migrant homeless people. This has been a very successful project, they have been working closely with the charities to assist with claiming benefits, getting back into work and housing.

### **8.SP33 Tenancy sustainment policy by Jude McCaffrey for decision**

Jude explained they have done a review on the current tenancy sustainment policy. The fund was originally put in place to help people who were struggling

with welfare reforms, benefit caps and how we could help tenants with their rent accounts. We have done a 3-year review and found there is a way we can help people that are caught in the poverty trap, people coming off benefits, people that have experienced traumatic experiences. Jude wanted to talk to the Forum around tenants. He asked the Forum their thoughts about, people with very high rent areas that they haven't got a realistic means to bring them down, how would they feel about match funding payments. An example of this would be, Tenant agrees to pay £50 per month for 12 months and at the end of the 12 months Soha will match those funds.

**ACTION** - The Forum decided that they would like to explore this more and re discuss it at the May Forum meeting.

#### **9. Damp and condensation policy by Lee Hayward for noting**

This policy was approved by the Board in January. It is about putting a highly effective policy in place adopting the good practice and the recommendations set out in the Housing Ombudsman's 'Spotlight on Damp and Mould' report – October 2021. One of the recommendations was to introduce our own Damp and Mould policy, setting out how we communicate best with our residents and how to keep on top of properties that are affected by damp and mould. We are being more proactive to tackle this issue. We have introduced 105 sensors into people's homes called switching devices, they not only regulate heating, but they detect the relative humidity in the property to identify properties that are at risk. We are also carrying out ventilation surveys.

#### **10. Resident and Community Shareholding Membership for info by Marisa Elliott for info**

This policy came to Forum in January. PH noticed there was a minor error with the procedure which has since be update and approved by the Forum following amendments. This policy then went to Board and January and was approved.

VB asked if its possible for an ex-tenant of Soha to remain as a shareholding member.

ME agreed that if the Forum members were happy to propose this then it could then be taken to the Board to consider.

**ACTION** – Members' Forum to communicate to ME if they would like to propose ex tenants remaining as shareholding members.

#### **11. Associate Membership update for discussion by Vic Breach**

Following a working group of 3 involved residents, a draft document was drawn up and sent out to all members prior to the meeting outlining the possible category for Associate Membership, if it was agreed to be put in place. The Forum agreed it needs to be explored further, specifically looking at how many associate members can we have and what rights/decision making power they have as an Associate Member. It was also agreed that it would be good to talk to

other housing associations that have this in place already, to look at the pros and cons and what it can bring to Soha as an organisation. **ACTION-** research and bring back to May Forum meeting for further discussion.

## **12. Service Standards update by Jude McCaffrey for update**

As an outcome from the recent Service Standard workshops, we have been reviewing our services standards to make sure we are clear and consistent across all areas. An area that was highlighted was - what happens if we fail to do what we said we would do?" what can residents do to challenge Soha?

**ACTION-** An update will be sent out to all involved with the workshops and this will be coming to the next Members Forum meeting for approval in May.

## **13. Constitution Changes and Co- Reg Training for update by Ann-Marie O'Sullivan for discussion**

Michelle recently sent out an email to all the Forum asking if they thought any changes needed to be made to the Constitution.

We had responses for the below areas within the Constitution.

### **Members:**

- 2.7 The Forum may elect up to two co-optees if they feel that there is a skills or experience gap they need to fill following the Members' Forum elections. Forum members may decide that there is no need for a co-optee. Forum co-optees are elected for a one-year term and must stand down at the AGM. They will not be re-appointed until the first ordinary meeting after the AGM. Co-opted members have equal voting rights to full members.

**Q How do we know what skills are needed? Is there documentation? How do we know what skills the members have? Who maps those skills to ensure we have what we need?**

This would be covered as part of individual appraisals done by the chair of Forum. Co-Opted and Members of the Forum can request any training or support needed to full fill their position. Individual skill sets are also shown on biography's when standing for election. Amanda kindly offered to help put a working document together with a little more infrastructure for when the new Forum members have been elected.

**Q. How many co-opted members are we going to have?**

The Forum decided based on 18 Full members then 2 Co-Optee's would be acceptable, however in the event of Forum members stepping down they would like to keep the co-optee's to a maximum of 6.

## **Work:**

- 3.6 The Forum will produce and publish a one-page, infographic-style annual update of its work, informed by a group appraisal session.

**Q What impact do we want to have and what do we want to happen?**

Forum members voted to keep 3.6 in the constitution.

## **Portfolios**

- 4.1 To keep the Forum informed about and focused on key aspects of Soha's business, it can appoint up to two full Forum members or other residents with special interest or expertise per portfolio as portfolio holders. The Forum will agree the number and scope of portfolios taking into account the need to prioritise the growth and development of shareholding membership.

**Q. Full and Co-opted. Not just full?**

Forum members voted to have 1 full member and one other person. Does not have to be a Forum member, Co-Optee or hold membership. This person would need to be a resident of Soha.

- 4.3 Portfolio holders may be required to take part in panels to consider formal customer complaints. This panel is Soha's 'designated person' and will comprise of three portfolio holders chosen by the Chair of the Forum.

**Response – No longer applies as new procedure.**

Forum members agreed to have this paragraph removed from the constitution.

## **Standards:**

- 6.2 The Forum must also demonstrate and promote Soha's values of *putting people first, achieving more together, looking for opportunities and having high standards.*

**Q These are different from the values listed on the website, see link below.**

[Who we are - Soha Housing](#)

Forum agreed this will be updated to reflect new values.

**14. Updated Code of Conduct for observers and Co-Opted members by Ann-Marie O'Sullivan for Approval**



## **15. Portfolio Holders Update by Gerald Prior, Vic Breach and Margaret Buckell**

Gerald – Estates and Communities

We continue to hold regular meetings.

Development have built 340 new properties against the 200 target.

For years 2023/24 they predict 346 properties and 24/25 237 properties for the following years there could be slightly less due to predicted higher cost. We have been informed they are more interested in providing homes for social rent with working with the Community Land Trusts and the Zero Carbon developments. Neighbourhoods continue to cope well however ASB cases are still fairly high. Locality leads appear to still be finding their feet within their areas. We continue to be involved in the CAT programme. The Estate has appointed a new contractor to replace IDverde. The Cleaning contractors continue to perform well, and the contract has been extended for another 12 months. The tree survey on communal land is under way so should start to see work in that area soon. We continue to administer the Forums Estates improvement budget. This year shows more applications than previous & the budget has all been allocated.

Margaret Buckell – Finance

We had communication from Matt Ridley prior to his departure that the work on budget, insurance and securitisation was well underway. The IDA was a great success. The budget has been approved by the Board. The rent increases and services charge letters have now gone out. The finance team have received 39 service charge calls since then around charges. Which is a small amount considering.

The finance team have been working with Barclays to raise new finance loans, which has been agreed.

Vic, Peter and I are part of a working group. Our next set of meetings will be based on service charges.

Vic – Rental income

What's going well? The early intervention of lower rent arears and tackling static arears, managing cases to avoid eviction where possible and agree realistic repayment plans. We now have a system called Rent Sense where priority cases are done on a rolling four monthly basis, meaning that cases are actioned appropriately and regularly, flagging up priority cases.

Areas for concern are rent arears that have been brought forward to existing arears, due to the pandemic.

Migrations continues – the movement of working age benefit claimants onto the universal credit schemes. As of the end of 28<sup>th</sup> February, there were 2,483 claimants and we expect that to rise to 3,500 this following year.

A new income assistant has been recruited for the rental income team to focus on welfare reform, particularly those effected by bedroom tax and benefit caps. Arears cases was previously peaking at 6.45% but has now come down to 5.4%.

We have established a tenancy support service as a stand-alone team, with an additional TSO and a new tenancy support manager, this aligns the service with the 5 localities.

Vic stated that he would like to bring end of year figures back to the Forum in May.

**Date of next meeting – Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May**

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