Minutes of Meeting

Meeting: Board Meeting
Date: Thursday, 27 March 2025
Time: 6.00pm
Venue: Board Room, Soha's Office

Present:

Naomi Barrand	Dave Lakin	Peter Sloman
Victoria Dingle (via Teams)	Emma Luddington (via Teams)	Hayley Smith (via Teams)
Jenny Ekelund	David Mody	Martyn Thorne
Mark Goldring (Chair)	Peter Nkum	Kate Wareing

Apologies:

Janet Crooks

Also in attendance:

Matt Archer, Director of Housing and Communities
Nasreen Hussain, Director of Finance and Resources
Andy Tollett, Director of Property Services (via Teams)
Craig Dransfield, Head of Development
Dave Edge, Head of Business Transformation
Beau Rickerby, Managing Director of Soha Response
Marisa Elliott, Governance and Regulation Manager / Company Secretary

Announcements

The Chair welcomed Beau Rickerby, Managing Director of Soha Response to the meeting. Beau introduced himself and shared a little bit of his background prior to starting with Soha Response.

Declarations of Interest

There were no new declarations.

59a. Approval of Minutes	Actions
The minutes of the Board meeting held on 27 February 2025 were	

approved.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 27 February 2025 be signed as a true and accurate record.

59b. Audit and Risk Committee Minutes

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee gave an overview of the meeting held on 5 March 2025. He advised that the Committee discussed the deep dive report on a live cyber incident simulation. He confirmed that there were some good outcomes and a follow-up action plan is being created which will feed into the business continuity plan.

The Chair of the Committee noted that actions from the last three internal audits had been signed off as complete and there had been an informative discussion on the system security internal controls area.

Resolved:

That the Board notes the minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee.

59c. Soha Response Board Minutes

The Chair of Soha Response advised that although the Board were meeting monthly at the moment, this will be reviewed in the summer with the intention to drop to bi-monthly or quarterly meetings from September.

He advised that the Committee had received a positive mobilisation report which included feedback from the three trade operatives on the induction process. He confirmed that 300 jobs had been raised to Soha Response with 94% completed and a satisfaction score of 9.4/10 from the survey. He advised that we are looking to increase numbers to six trade operatives as soon as possible.

The Chair of Soha Response advised that the Board had discussed the handover period with MD and noted that 1-2-1 meetings with the MD staff moving across were progressing.

He advised that the Board reviewed the Risk Register and were encouraged to see the completeness of the register including the operational risks. For future reviews, the Board asked for a streamlined register to enable members to concentrate on the more strategic risks.

The Chair of Soha Response advised that we are on schedule for the go live on 1 May.

A member asked if residents had spotted the difference between the Soha Response trade operatives and MD employees. The Director of Property Services advised that there was some awareness but it was on a small scale at the moment. Residents who had interacted with the Soha Response trade operatives had been complimentary on the shift in service they had received.

Resolved:

That the Board notes the minutes of the Soha Response Board meeting.

60. Matters Arising Tracker and Wallboard Ideas

Items 49 & 55 - Update on the MD Repair Backlog
An update is included within the CEX Key Issues report at item 61.

Items 7 - Numbers of Pensioners and Disabled Residents whose Properties are Below EPC C
The Director of Property Services advised that pensioners are disproportionally affected by living in properties below EPC C. He advised that most of them had lived there for 30-40 years.

A member asked if this data had been compared with the residents refusing heating system upgrades. The Director of Property Services advised that it did have a bearing on the number.

Items 8i, 52bi and 52bii
These items are not yet due.

Item 24ii - Re-design the Accruals Process for Responsive Repairs and Voids Contractors
The Director of Property Services advised that following the year end (next week), we will be collating the data held on the system and send to all contractors to seek confirmation about the precise status of each job shown as in progress.

Item 26iii - Progress with FRA Actions especially Fire Doors
An update has been provided within the CEX Key Issues report at item 61.

Items 38i & 38ii – Additional Detail on Soha Response in the Corporate Plan 2025-30
These items are on the agenda for tonight’s meeting.

Item 39bi – Location of Properties for New Development Approvals.
It was agreed to remove this item as location maps are included in the development approvals report.

Wallboard Items

The Chair advised that he didn’t propose to discuss any items but to advise the Governance and Regulation Manager if there are any additional items to add.

Reports

61. Chief Executive Key Issues Update

The Chief Executive provided an update to members on key external trends and internal issues.

External Update

1. Grant Funding for Development and Future for Homes England
The Chief Executive advised that the government has announced an additional £2bn top up for the current Affordable Homes Programme as part of the spring statement.

The Head of Development advised that we have received confirmation of £2.4m of Homes England grant funding. This means we can now proceed on the development of thirty one new homes with Thame Community Land Trust and the purchase of homes from Hook Norton Community Land trust for conversion to shared ownership.

The Chief Executive advised that her written update - that Homes England are not currently accepting any bids for funding for schemes that will complete after March 2026 because they do not have any clarity about how much funding they will have available until after the June spending review – was already out of date with the announcement of the interim £2bn.

We are therefore pursuing discussions on the fifty eight homes in the programme which we will need to secure grant to deliver. All Board approvals granted are subject to us being able to access grant, and we continue to explore all options to access grant needed.

2. Local Government Reorganisation
The Chief Executive advised that we have seen a difference in approach from our local authority partners in terms of how they are responding to the current uncertainty about long term local government structures. Some are reluctant to enter in to long term commitments that could pass liabilities on to their successors. Others are less risk averse.

There remain three active proposals for the shape of local government

in our operating area. However this pans out, it will change the focus of our main local authority partner in the future – importantly whether they see housing in Oxford as part of their remit. **3. Introduction of STAIRS (Social Tenants Access to Information Requirements)** The Chief Executive advised that the government is still committed to the introduction of the new STAIRS legislation for private providers of social housing. The legislation will enable residents to request information on any aspect of housing management. It will mean that every social tenant will have a route to access the information they need to hold their landlord to account. It is hoped this will be a positive step to increase trust and transparency in the sector and support residents in holding their landlords to account for providing quality homes and services. We are waiting for a definitive date for when STAIRS will become a requirement alongside relevant guidance. **4. Planning Reform Announcements** The Chief Executive advised that the proposed Planning and Infrastructure Bill provides several new measures, none of which are likely to be detrimental to Soha. **5. Green Paper on Welfare Reform** The Chief Executive advised that the government has issued a green paper proposing significant changes to disability and sickness benefits. The main changes proposed are to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) eligibility and to the Universal Credit (UC) top up payment for those unable to work because of ill health. She noted that both will impact on our residents in receipt of these benefits, with more significant impacts for those who might have looked to claim them in the future. One issue the reforms aim to address is the risk individuals take when they move into work. This change is to be welcomed as it will enable people to take work without fear of losing benefit eligibility if they need to return to claiming benefits. A member enquired about the tenancy sustainment team and their role in assisting residents with the impact of the welfare reform changes. He also asked if we should be communicating to residents on the services and support available. The Director of Housing and Communities suggested that he invites the Tenancy Sustainment Manager to the Board meeting in May to provide an update. This was agreed. **6. Article on the Impact of the Housing Crisis in London** The Chief Executive highlighted an article on the housing crisis in London which could also have been written about Oxfordshire. One key statistic is that a third of London's police officers, ambulance	**MA/VR**

drivers and care workers live in social housing. The article mentioned the risk to London's key services as workers are being forced out of the city as private rents cost in the region of 94% of take-home pay for those in the lowest income brackets. The Chief Executive advised that this is our rationale for seeking a route to our homes for the widest range of people in our communities who need them. She confirmed that it is a point we have made in our recent response to SODC on their proposed changes to their allocations policy.	
<u>Internal Update</u> **1. Soha Response is Live!** The Chief Executive advised that this has already been discussed at item 59c but wanted to add that there is a real buzz in advance of go live. **2. Wave 3 Funding Allocation** The Chief Executive advised that we have been successful in securing over £1.9m of funding from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. This will be match funded by Soha with a budget already allocated. She noted that we will be targeting 175 properties focusing on solar PV and loft insulation top ups. To qualify for the scheme the property must be an EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) D or below and reach an EPC C after the measures have been installed. **3. Update on Fire Actions** The Director of Property Services confirmed that our passive fire contractors CLC are working their way through the outstanding actions from the 2023/24 FRAs alongside checking all the fire doors that were highlighted in previous surveys. In total, there are 186 outstanding actions from the 2023/24 program which are all overdue. It was noted that 120 of these actions relate to Cholsey Meadows for which Soha is the leaseholder. He advised that the freeholder has just provided an up to date FRA and we have requested a program to close out all actions. This leaves 66 actions that Soha are responsible for (down from 73 last month). We will see progress on reducing these increase in pace as more properties are now being surveyed and works instructed. **4. Responsive Repair Work in Progress (WIP) - Update** The Director of Property Services advised WIP numbers have reduced sharply, and as from the date of the report, are down to 1,640 against last month's 2,590. He noted this was a combination of diverting voids work to United Living, MD having cleaned their order book and an improved service overall from MD.	

The Director of Property Services advised that our contractual terms allow us to charge MD for additional costs we incur over their contractual rates for work not completed by the end of the contract. Ideally, we are aiming for a WIP of 1,000 jobs to ensure work is planned in for Soha Response.

5. Frances Curtis Court - Sales Update
The Director of Housing and Communities advised that we have now reached a point where the remaining stock at Frances Curtis Court does not push us over the £5m limit we have for unsold stock. We have accounted for twenty seven of the thirty eight shared ownership units (either sold or rented) and of the eleven remaining, six have sales agreed and should be sold by the summer. This leaves five units currently unreserved and these are being marketed by our Sales Team and also by a local estate agent. Our expectation is to have all of these sold by the end of the 2025-2026 financial year. A further update will be provided in six months' time, if we fall behind our revised sales target.

6. Board Away Day – 26 April 2025
The Chief Executive advised that the away day will consist of two sessions. In the morning we will focus on how we will respond to the increasing growth in the numbers of people requiring temporary accommodation. We will include a case study highlighting the pressures on temporary accommodation and our potential role in meeting these.

In the afternoon we have asked Catherine Little of Campbell Tickell to support us to consider how we can balance increasing expectations that Boards have robust assurance often at a very granular level with the Board's role in setting direction and future strategy. We've asked her specifically to help us consider the role of resident voice and experience in both how the Board gains assurance and how we develop our future plans.

Resolved:

That the Board notes the update.

62. New Organisational Development and IT Strategies

a. Organisational Development Strategy
The Director of Housing and Communities introduced the report and advised that the strategy aims to describe who we want to become and how we will achieve this. He advised that we are building on the existing strategy and some of the ambition has been already included in the Corporate Plan 2025-30.

The Director of Housing and Communities invited the Board to break

into smaller groups to consider what are the most significant changes we would want to see over the next three years in these areas. 1. How residents are able to communicate and engage with us 2. Staff growth and development 3. The development of our culture Headlines from the groups are summarised as follows: Question 1 • How do we engage with the silent/hard to reach residents? • Themes of engagement – how should we be asking residents what they want from us? • The MySoha App needs to provide more information • Enable a greater use of self-service • Consider more organic ways of communicating Question 2 • Creating opportunities and actively promoting how staff across the organisation have progressed • Don't become impersonal as we grow in staff numbers • Soha Response has energised staff and the organisation – how can we capture and maintain this going forward? • Build resilience in teams Question 3 • Maintain our existing culture • Work hard to not create two separate organisations – Soha and Soha Response • Continue to discuss and not be afraid to make the big decisions • Continue with a culture of change and feel comfortable doing it • Empowering teams, more delegation and accountability • Maintain our commitment to mutuality and locality ways of working The Director of Housing and Communities advised that next steps are to use the reflections to shape the new Organisational Development Strategy for approval at the May Board meeting. **b. IT Strategy** The Head of Business Transformation presented the report to outline whether the scale and ambition of the proposed changes aligns with Board expectations and whether the sequencing is appropriate. He advised that the biggest change is moving away from having one system – the 'single point of truth' to a 'best in class' model. He commented that we have tried to move as many systems as possible into QL (our current housing management system) but this has been	

limited. In addition, QL does not provide the functionality for us to improve the digital interface with the system for staff and residents (because it operates with closed APIs) and we want to cease trying to integrate any further systems into it.

The Head of Business Transformation advised members of the benefits of adopting this approach including more specialised and superior systems which are easier to use and provide operational efficiency and best practice.

The Chair thanked the Head of Business Transformation for his proposal and then invited comments and questions.

A member asked if any other housing associations had taken the best in class approach. The Head of Business Transformation advised that a number of associations are considering it because of the limitations of the integrated systems on the market and changing expectations about functionality. The Chief Executive advised that Legal & General (a for profit housing association) is developing an in-house system with a great deal of investment and that this might be licenced in the future but is likely to be very expensive.

A member commented that she could see lots of advantages but noted that it will take years to implement. She was also concerned what would happen if our systems are based in the cloud and it went down. The Head of Business Transformation advised that this would be a question we asked as part of the procurement process and we would expect to have a demonstration by the provider on cyber security and security of the system.

A member enquired if we are AI ready and what we want AI tools to deliver for us from a resident and staff perspective. This is an area for further work and exploration.

A member noted that IT is an enabler for change and this links directly to the corporate objectives. He asked members to consider innovation and how much we want to invest or the number of systems we want to provide. The Head of Business Transformation advised that it's also about capacity and capability.

A member commented that we need to agree a scoring system and the ranking of priority. The Head of Business Transformation confirmed that when the strategy comes back to the Board it will include a priority order, who it benefits and how. It was noted that we will use external expertise to assist with procurement decisions and a Board member suggested we should also get external expertise as we finalise our strategic approach.

The Chair summarised the discussion and advised that the Board

endorsed the overall proposal but asked to see the priority criteria and assurance from external experts as part of the process. **Resolved:** **That the Board discussed and approved the basis for the new Organisational Development and IT Strategies.** **63. Corporate Plan 2025-30 – Objectives for Years 1 and 2** The Chief Executive presented the report which sets out the objectives to be delivered in years 1 and 2 of the Corporate Plan. She asked the Board to note that the content of the action plan will develop as more work is done, for example, at the Board Away Day when we discuss how we respond to homelessness locally. She therefore asked that the action plan is viewed as a live document. The Chair then invited questions and comments. A member enquired what objectives would stretch staff the most. The Chief Executive advised that the biggest impact on organisational time will be when we consider the various aspects of the Asset Management Strategy.	
A member asked if the format of the action plan could be revised to see where the links are and to make it easier to digest. This was agreed and will be amended for the six month review by the Board in October.	**KW**
A member noted there were many actions assigned to the Head of Localities. It was confirmed that these would be shared among the Localities team and also that some staff will be transferring into the team to provide additional support on the community development work. **Resolved:** **That the Board reviewed and approves the action plan covering Years 1 and 2 of the Corporate Plan. The Board also noted that progress will be reported to the Board twice a year in October and May.** **64. New Development Approvals** The Head of Development presented the report to ask the Board to approve the site at Blackthorn Road in Ambrosden. He advised that it's a S106 scheme with Mulberry Homes providing eighteen homes for affordable rent and one for shared ownership. Approval was granted.	

The Head of Development advised that he was in the process of arranging a meeting for Dave Lakin, Emma Luddington and Martyn Thorne to discuss how to improve Board papers seeking development approvals. This will be taking place in April. We will work on a process for full Board engagement in the new Development strategy in May.

Resolved:

That the Board approves the development site at Blackthorn Road in Ambrosden.

65. Soha Response Repair Target Times

The Director of Property Services presented the report to ask the Board to approve a change to the existing repair target times for Soha's repair service. The rationale for this is to decrease the number of jobs that need to be rescheduled and therefore improve satisfaction with our repairs service.

He advised that we currently have four levels of repair target times ranging from 4 hours for an emergency to 28 days for a routine repair. The proposal is to remove the 4 hour priority and replace it with a 24 hour priority with the intention that all 24 hour repairs are attended within the same day if possible. The change has been agreed by the Members' Forum and the Soha Response Board.

He advised that a meeting had taken place with the Customer Services team to establish the genuine emergency repairs as the data gathered shows that more repairs have been appointed as an emergency than the average number in the sector. Since the meeting, the number of emergency repairs has declined. This remains an area for focus.

Resolved:

That the Board discussed and agrees the removal of the 4 hour priority and replacement with a 24 hour priority as detailed in the report.

66. Progress Against the Consumer Standards

The Director of Housing and Communities presented the report to inform the Board on progress against the Consumer Standards.

He advised that SLT have been reviewing compliance against the four standards to enable us to demonstrate where we meet them, the evidence that supports this, being transparent about the gaps and how we propose to close these.

The Director of Housing and Communities advised the spreadsheet shows work to date but it is a live document and is intended to give the

Board assurance on progress. He noted that we will be seeking external assurance through commissioning a validation of our assurance in September. A member asked what type of external validation was being considered, either a desktop review or testing the services directly. The Director of Housing and Communities agreed to consider this further. **Resolved:** **That the Board discussed and notes the progress to date.** **67. Financial Regulations** The Director of Finance and Resources presented the updated Financial Regulations for approval. She advised that they have been re-organised and strengthened and now include all subsidiaries. She confirmed there were no substantive changes to Board delegation levels. The Director of Finance and Resources advised that training will take place soon to embed the Financial Regulations and Value for Money Statement of Approach. **Resolved:** **That the Board approves the revised Financial Regulations.** **68. Annual Review of Health and Safety Learning** The Director of Property Services presented the report to provide an update on health and safety learning for the year including key findings, improvements made, and actions taken to ensure the welfare of our residents and employees. He took members through some of the key actions from 2024/25 including building compliance, personnel, accident and incident monitoring, H&S Committee and Fire Safety Committee. He then provided a brief summary of the actions we are looking to complete during 2025/26. The Chair then invited comments and questions. A member noted the rise in aggressive behaviour from residents towards staff and asked what the tipping point would be when we need to take a different approach. The Director of Property Services advised that we have introduced a number of measures including establishing a Personal Safety Working Group to continually learn from our	 **MA**

experiences, installing additional cameras in reception and consideration of trialling the use of body worn cameras for staff. A member asked how we were being consistent when dealing with unreasonable behaviour. It was noted that we remind staff of the procedure for how to manage these situations which provides some examples of unacceptable behaviour, what staff should do and escalation routes. We also set expectations with residents. A member commented that it had been a struggle to recruit H&S staff and asked if we needed to adopt a different approach. The Director of Property Services advised that we have reviewed our structure and hopes this will make recruitment easier. A member enquired what issues are coming up that we should be aware of. The Director of Property Services advised that we are preparing for the introduction of Awaabs Law, more regulation in relation to shared blocks and Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans. A member enquired if there was a higher post work inspection regime for any H&S related jobs. The Director of Property Services advised that this currently applied to damp, mould and condensation issues, and would consider further whether and how this could be expanded.	**AT**
Resolved: **That the Board discussed and notes the report.**	
69. SP18 Aids and Adaptations Policy The Director of Property Services presented the policy for approval. He advised that we already have an Aids and Adaptations Policy but it has been re-written as we have seen an increase in what we are being asked to deliver in terms of property adaptations. We want to set realistic expectations, ensure a focus on good communication and ensure there is clarity for when we decline requests particularly when suitable alternative accommodation has been offered and declined, or where properties are under occupied. A member asked what an 'exceptional case' would be as referred to in point 5.19 in the policy and how this would be decided. She felt that we needed to state explicitly how we balance the needs of households versus the effective use of resources or achieving best value for money. The Chief Executive commented that these decisions would be made by Directors Group given the difficulty of defining categorical rules in the abstract. It was noted that a procedure for staff will be developed to accompany the policy which provides some real life examples.	

A member suggested that we change ‘best value’ for ‘community impact’ as it removes the financial terms. This was agreed. **Resolved:** **That the Board approves SP18 Aids and Adaptations Policy subject to changes to the wording and the creation of appropriate procedures for staff.** **70. SP52 Reasonable Adjustments for Residents Policy** The Director of Housing and Communities presented the new policy for approval. He advised that the policy aims to provide clarity on when we are and are not able to make reasonable adjustments and to be clear on removing unnecessary barriers whilst not providing special access to our services. A member asked if the policy could include wording for residents with neurodivergent or cognitive differences alongside those with other disabilities. This was agreed. A member asked if the policy covers all protected characteristics in the Equality Act or just disabilities. It was confirmed that it was currently focused on residents with disabilities. It was agreed that this would be made explicit and considered further for a future revision. **Resolved:** **That the Board approves SP52 Reasonable Adjustments for Residents Policy subject to changes to the wording and clarity on who the policy covers.** **71. SP01 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy** This item was for consent with no questions raised. **Resolved:** **That the Board approves SP01 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.** **72. SP30 Health and Safety Policy** The Director of Property Services presented the policy for approval. A member queried the wording in respect of individual health and safety. This point was clarified and no further questions were raised. **Resolved:**	

That the Board approves SP30 Health and Safety Policy.

73. SP02 Board Member Recruitment and Selection Policy

This item was for consent with no questions raised.

Resolved:

That the Board approves SP02 Board Member Recruitment and Selection Policy.

74. Value for Money Statement of Approach

This item was for consent with no questions raised.

Resolved:

That the Board approves the Value for Money Statement of Approach.

75. Any Other Business

None.

76. Date of Next Meeting

a) The date for the Board Away Day is **Saturday, 26 April** commencing at **9.00am** at **Homeless Oxfordshire, O'Hanlon House, Luther Street, Oxford OX1 1UL**.

b) The date of the next Board meeting is **Thursday, 22 May** at **6.00pm** in the **Board Room** at Soha’s office.

The meeting ended at 8.25pm.

Signed:__________________________

Date: ___________

CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

There were no confidential minutes.

Signed:___________________________

Date: _________________