Minutes of Meeting

Meeting: Members Forum Meeting
Date 17th November 2025
Time: 6pm – 8:00
Venue: Boardroom

Present

Peter Haynes	Deb Longney
Vic Breach – Vice Chair	Richard Rule
Ann-Marie O'Sullivan – Chair	Bertie Doy
Margaret Buckell	Aurora Acone
Trish Langford	Clive Jepson
Sarah Simmonds	

Also in attendance

Andy Tollett, Nasreen Husain, Jude McCaffrey, Jackie Logan, Craig Dransfield & Michelle Pugh-Roberts

Apologies: Debbie Evans

Observers:

Alan Skins

1. Approval of the Minutes from 15th September

Approved

2.Matter arising

None

3. Chairs report by AMOS

Firstly, Kate has sent her apologies this evening so in her absence, Andy will be covering the chief exec update.
Good evening and welcome to our last Members' Forum meeting of 2025. On that note, I would like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you for all your

time and input to these meetings. It is very much appreciated. Michelle will be distributing the annual incentives over the coming weeks, so please let her know which voucher you would like and if you would like a 2026 diary.

This year we have seen some big changes within the structure of Soha. The main one being “Soha Response” going live. Soha Response is now 6 months into its new role, with a full complement of tradesmen and vans out and about in the Soha area of operation. I’m sure you have all seen them about.

New recruits - We have welcomed 1 new Co-Optee this year - Neelam. Welcome to the Members Forum Group, Neelam.

Two big strategies are being consulted on at the moment, and will be coming to Forum for approval in January. They are:

1. Asset management strategy

2. Communications Strategy

We have Andy here this evening to update us on both the policy and strategy. Next April we will have the Members Forum elections. Please have a think about if you will stand again. If you are unsure of how many years you have been in post, please ask Michelle/Jackie for a copy of the timetable. We will ask you to complete a bio as usual before voting takes place.
I will now pass you over to Andy Tollett for the Chief Executive update

4. Chief executive update by AT

- Local government - reorganisation consultation carried out, to rationalize and organize local government into a singular, unitary authority in this area.

- Gateway site – Council proposes to redevelop the area for flats.

- Rent convergence - this will allow HAs to converge their rents to bring them up to target. 80% of social rents are currently below target.

- Consultation on implementation of the new Leasehold and Freehold reform act 2024 - key points of this are driving up transparency of fees and charges making sure everyone is getting the same level of information

- Competency and conduct standard - making sure that the senior staff within housing associations are suitably qualified, particularly in housing.

- STAIRs provisions (Social tenants access to information)

- Homes England Update – re-organising across 5 regions, new senior leadership team, encouraging portfolio approach to new scheme bidding, prospectus for 2026/36 programme due mid-late autumn, new bid submission software early in new year.

Internal news

- Fire Risk assessment actions - 74 outstanding actions reported to the regulator across all of our blocks. That's down to 27 of which 17 are still not our responsibility.

- Awaab's law – new legal duties and new ways of working - particularly around damp and mould and emergency hazards. Soha has 24 hours from the minute we're notified to deal with that hazard or move the resident to safe property.

- Green electricity tariff – at Soha housing coming.

- Choice Based Lettings app goes live – making the lettings process much smoother and accessible.

- Community Partners networking event. On 26th September we held a networking lunch for community partners. Over 40 partners joined us and shared information about their individual organisations.

5. SP35 - Communications Policy by NH - Approved

Communications Policy now includes methods of proactive communication and also communication response methods and timeframes. Times taken from service standards and includes new guidelines on communications under Awaab's Law. Consultation is currently being carried out and the Communications Strategy, will detail our communications plan going forward.

6. SP60- Asset Management Policy by AT - Approved

The asset management policy is new and has not existed previously. It was separated from the asset management strategy because the policy must focus solely on statutory and regulatory requirements—such as gas safety and EPC compliance—while the strategy sets out what the organisation wants to achieve. The policy is therefore a factual document that can be updated easily if legislation changes, without needing to revise the full strategy.

The strategy itself is currently under consultation. A tenant survey received 670 responses, one of the highest response rates ever. The draft strategy was also discussed at a Board away day, and two resident events have recently taken place, both providing valuable feedback. The intention is for the strategy to be shaped by residents rather than solely by internal views. The team will report back to all those involved, showing how their feedback has been incorporated to complete a full 360-degree feedback loop.

7. SP10 - Homeloss Relocation & Emergency Move Policy JMC – Approved

The Home Loss Relocation and Emergency move policy is reviewed annually. This year the government has not updated home loss payment amounts but the policy has undergone significant changes for three main reasons.

Firstly, the policy has been revised to reflect the increasing number of emergency moves required, often due to issues such as damp, mould, or failures identified under housing health and safety regulations. Historically, only a small number of emergency moves were needed each month, usually linked to problems like plumbing or electrical failures requiring short-term decanting.
The updated policy now sets out more clearly the organisation's responsibilities and residents' rights when an emergency housing situation arises, including short-term safety moves and longer medium-term emergency moves where a household may need to be placed elsewhere for weeks or months in a suitable alternative home.

Secondly, the policy provides a clearer and more comprehensive procedure for dealing with permanent home loss. This reflects learning from past projects where outdated independent living schemes were closed and replaced. The updated approach aims to give residents better clarity on what to expect from the organisation, including treatment, communication, and financial compensation entitlements.

Finally, the policy introduces clearer guidance on handling pets during emergency moves. While the organisation may sometimes have a statutory duty to fund temporary rehoming, it will not take responsibility for arranging kennels, catteries, or similar facilities. The responsibility for temporarily rehoming pets will remain with residents, and this clarification is intended to prevent future misunderstandings or complaints.

8. SS06 – Development Strategy by CD – Approved.

Thanks were given to Richard and Kay for their significant involvement in the consultation, along with staff and the Board. The development strategy is an important document, as it guides where and how new homes will be built, and determines the types of homes and customers they are intended for.

The plan sets out an ambition to build 800 new homes over the period of the strategy, averaging around 200 per year. A cap will be placed on shared ownership development because there is a sales risk associated with shared ownership which is income forgone. A cap of 30% is also proposed for land-led development. This approach offers greater control but also carries higher risk, particularly due to market fluctuations.

Despite the increased risk, we will continue with land-led development because it provides control over property type, layout, specification and build quality, helping the organisation deliver a better product. Other development priorities include increasing the number of accessible and adaptable homes, and delivering more larger homes in response to identified needs from both the lettings and sales teams.

The commitment to zero-carbon capable homes continues from the previous strategy. These are homes that can be constructed to achieve zero operational carbon emissions. Building to this standard now reduces the need for extensive retrofitting later and aligns with long-term environmental targets.
The organisation is also beginning to rethink its older, ageing housing stock; existing schemes that are in need of attention. Work is underway to consider future options such as refurbishment, replacement or alternative approaches to regeneration.

Finally, engagement has taken place with Community Land Trusts—small, community-led housing groups typically formed by local residents—exploring opportunities for partnership as part of the wider development approach.

A further key priority in the development strategy is to maximise the delivery of homes for social rent. The forum noted the distinction between affordable rent, set at around 80% of market rent and often still relatively high, and social rent, which is calculated through a more complex formula but is typically around half the cost. Increasing social rent properties remains a priority.

9. SP48 – Tree Management Policy – Approved

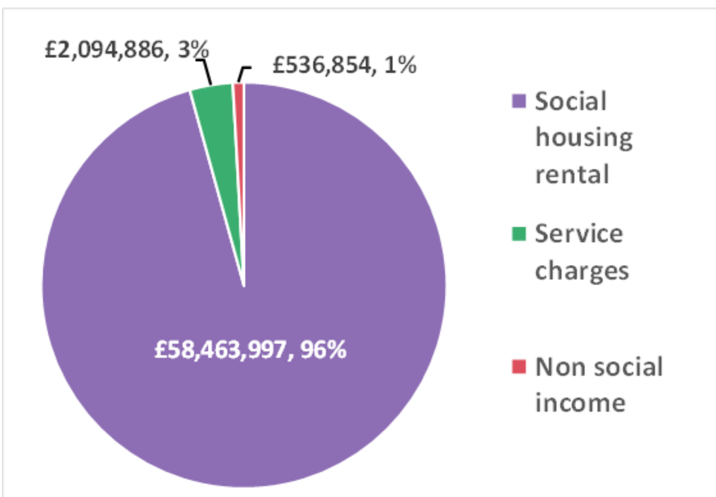
There was a question about the previous tenancy policy, which stated that residents could not have trees over two metres tall in their gardens. This requirement was removed from the updated tree management policy, and the speaker asked whether the original two-metre rule in older tenancy agreements was still valid. It was explained that although some older tenancy agreements do include the two-metre tree height limit, the organisation cannot enforce it. It would be unfair to apply a rule that was never consistently enforced and that contradicts the current tree policy. Therefore, even if that clause remains in an older tenancy agreement, it will not be acted upon.

Regarding responsibility for trees in tenants' gardens, it was confirmed that residents are responsible for maintaining trees located within their own boundaries. The organisation is not responsible unless the tree is on communal land.

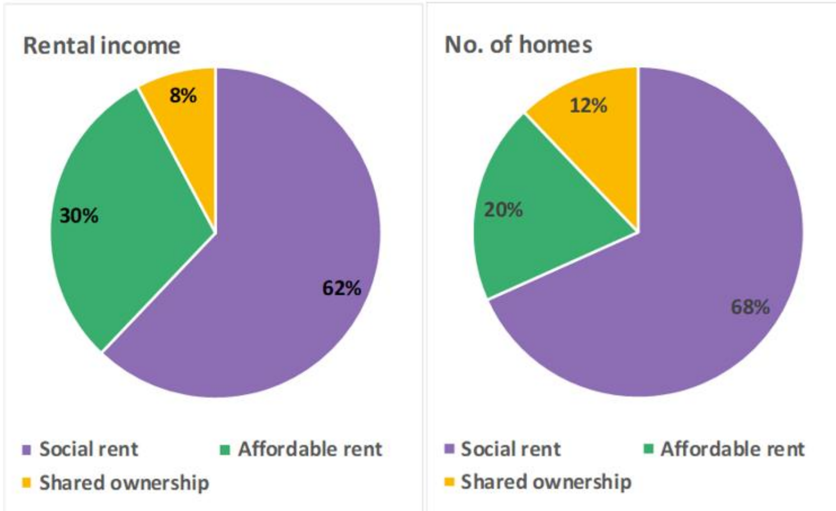
10 .Rent Change presentation by NH for discussion

NH shared a presentation with the forum in preparation for the rent change in 2026.

How much of our income is from rents?



Rental income % and number of homes by tenure

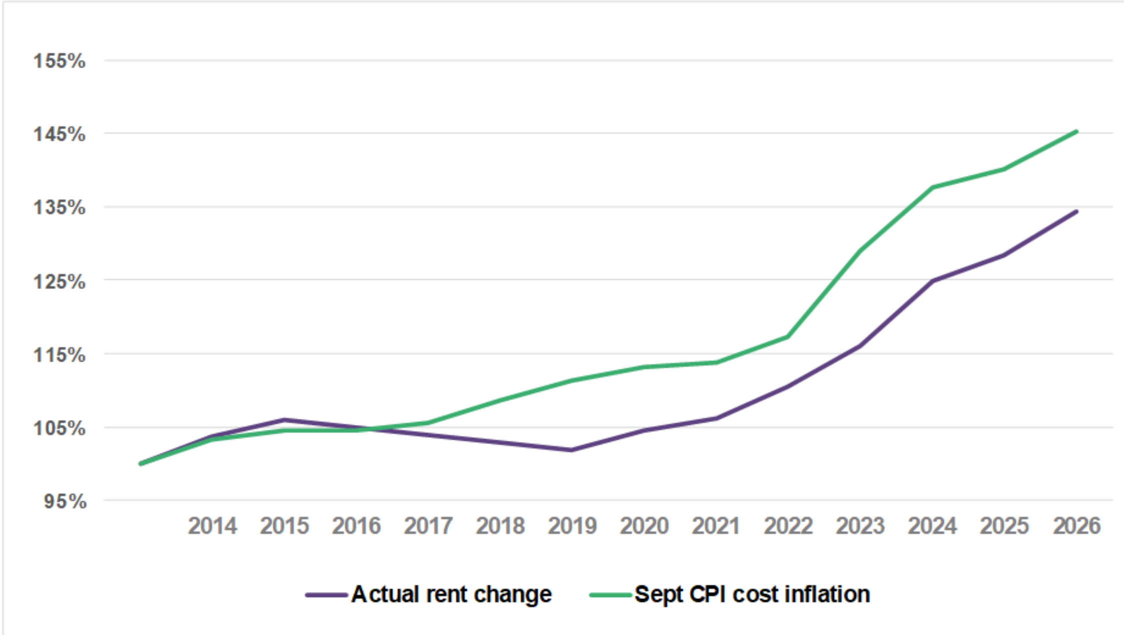


2. How rents are set and increase

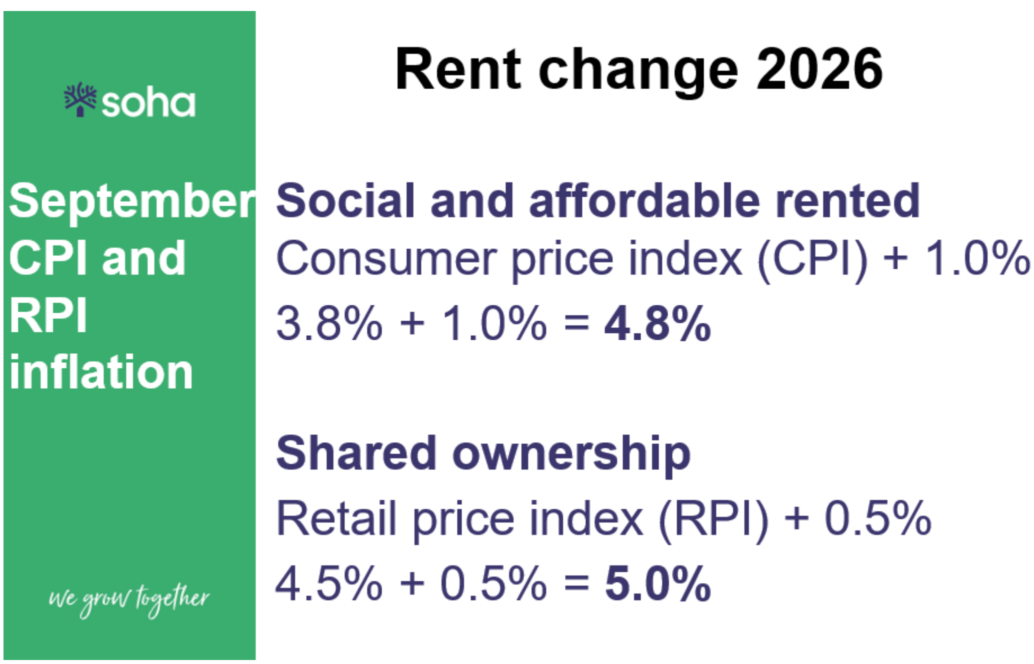
Tenure	Social rents	Affordable rents	New model shared ownership rents*	Shared ownership rents
Rents are set in line with:	Rent restructring formula	80% of market rent	2.5% of unsold equity	
Rents increase in line with:	Regulator of Social Housing Rent Standard		The individual property leases	
Rent increase is based on:	Previous September Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1%			Previous September Retail Price Index plus 0.5%
September 2025 inflation:	CPI = 3.8%			RPI = 4.5%
1st April 2026 rent increase:	Rent increase = 4.8%			Rent increase = 5.0%

* currently only 4 homes waiting to be sold

3. Rent change and inflation



4. Rent change 2026



soha

Average rent increase

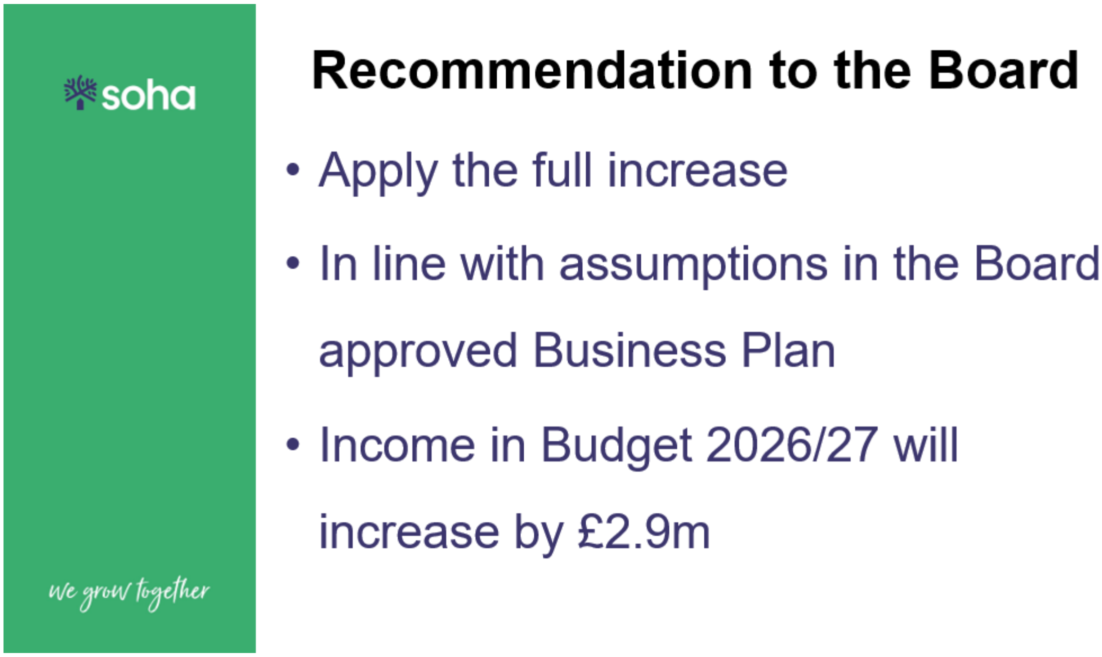
we grow together

Average rent increase

Tenure	No. of homes	Current average monthly rent	New average monthly rent from 1st April 2026	% increase	Average monthly increase of:
Social	5,177	£591.96	£620.38	4.8%	£28.42
Affordable	1,598	£958.41	£1,004.42	4.8%	£46.01
Shared ownership	829	£440.91	£462.95	5.0%	£22.04

No. of beds	Shared ownership (5.0%)			Social (4.8%)			Affordable (4.8%)			Current average market rent*
	Current average monthly rent	New average monthly rent	Average rent increase per month	Current average monthly rent	New average monthly rent	Average rent increase per month	Current average monthly rent	New average monthly rent	Average rent increase per month	
0				£407.28	£426.83	£19.55				£800.00
1	£319.42	£335.39	£15.97	£501.69	£525.78	£24.08	£775.79	£813.03	£37.24	£1,050.00
2	£425.11	£446.37	£21.26	£582.13	£610.07	£27.94	£939.93	£985.05	£45.12	£1,250.00
3	£511.81	£537.40	£25.59	£656.77	£688.29	£31.52	£1,114.39	£1,167.88	£53.49	£1,500.00
4				£745.94	£781.74	£35.80	£1,296.47	£1,358.70	£62.23	£1,700.00
6				£847.17	£887.83	£40.66				n/a
Average	**£440.91**	**£462.95**	**£22.04**	**£591.96**	**£620.38**	**£28.42**	**£958.41**	**£1,004.42**	**£46.01**	

* where available



The discussion concluded with an explanation of the organisation's careful financial approach. Stress testing is carried out regularly, and the approved business plan and budget will be brought back to the forum for information in the future. Some members may wish to be involved in the budget-setting process.
A question was raised about who decides what is affordable? It was clarified that when homes are built, the rent levels are determined by the local authority or its appointed agent. Many of the homes acquired through developers are set at affordable rent, whereas homes built directly by the organisation are usually set at social rent. Over time, government changes have reduced grant rates and shifted subsidies into rent levels, resulting in higher affordable rents.

A request was made for a copy of the presentation to be circulated. The group was also offered a separate session to explain how social rents are calculated.

11. SP47 Environnemental Management Policy AT

A question was raised about waste management
AT explained that this part of the policy relates to the organisation's use of "Wascals," a type of smart skip. Unlike conventional skips, which incur a standard collection fee, Wascals cost slightly more but allow around 90% of waste to be recycled. Each skip provides detailed certification showing how much material was recycled or sent to landfill, and the system signals when a skip is full. The skips are enclosed, preventing unauthorised use and help avoid issues such as fly-tipping. This approach supports the organisation's environmental policy. The Forum considered the additional cost worthwhile given our commitment to sustainability and net-zero objectives, and the journey towards net-zero carbon.

12. Scrutiny review by VB

The shared ownership scrutiny report had been taken to the Board, where it was very well received. Board members agreed it was the right piece of scrutiny to undertake and recognised the value of the resident scrutiny group. A full scrutiny meeting will take place on December 8th, where the group will agree the next area of scrutiny to take forward.

13. Members Forum Elections 2026 by JL

An update was provided on the Members' Forum elections due to take place in April 2026. The process will now be managed in-house. Administration will mainly be carried out by JL team, with support from the Comms team. As this is the first year without Civica, there will be a significant amount of manual administration early in the new year.
Each member will receive a letter explaining how to submit their vote & bio with options to email, telephone or request reimbursement for postage if needed. All members with email addresses will also receive the election information electronically. Candidates will be asked to submit a short biography and a photograph, as in previous elections. All members have the option of standing for a 9-year term. Election letters are due to be sent in January, along with the deadline for the expression of interest.

14. Soha residents/staff incentives

JL raised the question of whether staff members who are also Soha residents should receive incentives when they take part in resident workshops outside of working hours. JL noted that some working-age residents who are also employees represent an under-engaged group whose experience and perspective are valuable.
There was also discussion about whether there could be tax or HMRC implications. Some members felt it would be wise to confirm whether there is a threshold above which incentives could become a taxable concern for staff who are also residents, to ensure compliance and avoid future problems. It was agreed that the principle of incentivising staff-residents for out-of-hours resident involvement is fair, but clarification from finance about any upper limit would help ensure everything remains within HMRC rules.

Next Members Forum meeting – January 15th