



# Southend Tenants and Residents Federation

**Minutes of the Meeting held via Zoom on  
Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 10am**

Present Via Zoom: Keith Ducker Chair (K.D), Bob Ayriss (B.A),  
Mike Smith (M.S), Geoff Moore (G.M), Majzoub Ali (M.AL),  
Elaine Ridge, (E.R)

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**Firstly, we need all residents who are able to, to distribute leaflets to their neighbours. Especially those in Sheltered parts 1 and 2. We also need these put around general need's homes please.**

1.0	K.D welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that all the residents who asked for the evening meeting have apologised.	
2.0	Apologies from: Barbara Lambert (Having Covid Vaccination), Breda Tilley. Diane Nicholls, Chris McPhillips.	
3.0	<p><b>Minutes of the last meeting.</b></p> <p><b>5.1</b> The Gold Awards. These will be within Insight that is due out now and I hope that residents do send in nominations for these.</p> <p><b>6.0</b> The GOFUNDME that was to be set up is now on hold until we need to set it up. Also, SEH have agreed to fund us for this resident project.</p> <p><b>10.0</b> KD said that there is to be a meeting between SEH, the Board and the Federation regarding the Board Member Information and Recruitment Pack. This is to come to an agreement as to what the Resident Board Members position is on the board. The things that the Federation consider are important for a Resident Board Member to act on are at the end of the minutes for resident's consideration.</p> <p><b>11.0</b> TPAS. This was discussed at this meeting in full as to the benefit to Residents, Federation and also SEH. It was put forward that the Federation apply to SEH for the funding to join this year and there after raise the fee.</p>	KD *
4.0	<p><b>Federation Chairs Report 26<sup>th</sup> January 2020</b></p> <p>Firstly, the board were very happy with the Federation's recommendation of the Resident Board Member for the next 3 years. So, Carly Volke's was appointment to the board for the term January 2021 to January 2024.</p>	
4.1	<p><b>Board Meeting.</b></p> <p>At the Board Meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> January it was agreed that the Federation will be part of the review being done by SEH and SBC. SEH will be inspecting their services against the Consumer Standards, and also how they are doing by way of surveys, Focus Groups and Social Media and comments across the RSH's <b>(Regulator of Social Housing)</b> draft satisfaction measures. As a consequence of the clearly increased focus on real resident involvement, including the Focus</p>	

	<p>Groups representing all areas of the residents being signalled by the White Paper, the Board are to appoint a Resident Involvement Champion, in the same way that we have a Safeguarding Champion and a Health &amp; Safety Scrutineer, whereby a nominated Board member takes a specific interest in those particular areas of activity. Carly Volke was recommended and will be in talks with the Federation and SEH to how this will go forward.</p> <p>Going forward there will be a meeting between SEH, Board, Federation &amp; Scrutiny regarding the duties of the resident board member.</p> <p>4.2 <b>The Cinema Trip.</b> The Cinema Trip has been deferred until after Covid when we will fix a date for this to happen.</p> <p>4.3 <b>Crafting Club.</b> There's been interest in the Crafting Club and Sam Elliott and Paul Davey have instructed all staff that when they call a resident, they should promote the Club and to inquire if this would help them with their isolation and loneliness. At the same time explain it would not cost them a penny for anything they would need to complete their projects. <i>(See 7.0)</i></p> <p>4.4 <b>Decorating Vouchers.</b> The competition for the decorating vouchers has not gone well, as it seems that most residents do not wish to decorate their properties. With this in mind I sent an email to Tenancy, reminding them of the rules regarding SEH paying for decorating and to really look into any request for the decoration scheme.</p> <p>4.5 <b>Face Book &amp; Website.</b> The Facebook page gets many views and has a large following and the website is always busy with visitors. Lots of information on both and if you go to the SEH website you will see that theirs has changed to very much like ours, (4 boxes) so it shows that ours is very good if someone copies it.</p> <p>4.6 <b>Department Reports.</b> I have had reports from all departments that I will attach to the minutes unless you would like them read out, but be warned there are 9 pages. It was agreed to attach them to the end of the minutes. We have a new member of the SEH team who is working in the communications team. Her name is Miranda Edwards and we would like to welcome her to the SEH Family and hope to be working with her in the future.</p>	<p>KD **</p> <p>KD ***</p>
<p>5.0.</p>	<p><b>Scrutiny.</b> A discussion was held to why every time the Federation asks SEH to be involved with something they are doing, SEH come back with "yes that's fine we will invite Scrutiny along as well". It was felt that Scrutiny is involved with too many things at the same time and should be concentrating on the department they are scrutinising one at the time. E.L explained how it works and that they are only involved when asked, so as to be sure it is being done correctly and to be available to check for both parties that it would work without conflicts within SEH. It was agreed that this is a good idea and it will not be brought up again unless for a specific item being discussed at the time.</p>	

7.0	<p><b>Crafting Club.</b></p> <p>KD said that he sent out an email to all the addresses he has, asking for anyone who can distribute leaflets to residents, especially sheltered part 2 on the Crafting Club. But he said he wanted part 1 covered as well, as at most meetings he is told that part 1 sheltered is left out and that should not be the case. EL asked if she could have some as she will put them out.</p> <p>But he has had a very bad response to the request and it does seem as if there is not the interest to try and help out their neighbours by letting them know about activities that will help with the restrictions that Covid-19 is causing right now. KD listed those that had come forward to distribute the leaflets.</p> <p>KD said that the leaflets can be wiped gently over without damaging them with an antibacterial wipe or sprayed. Also, anyone distributing them should take care to avoid contact with Covid.</p> <p>We have had many things donated to us for the Club. We have agreed that we will store any items that resident's make if they have not got the room to do so.</p>	
8.0	<p><b>Residents Associations.</b></p> <p>A discussion on associations setting up where there is already one running. Whether it is officially registered with SEH or not.</p> <p>It was felt that as long as an association registers and it lodges its Constitution with the Federation; it should be recognised as an Official Association within its area as per the Federations constitution Objectives 2.a &amp; Membership 3.b (both attached at bottom of minutes)</p> <p>Nursery Place are about to set their own association and KD will send an email offering the Federations full support.</p>	KD ****
9.0	<p><b>Any other Business.</b></p> <p>9.1 MS said that KD and himself attended the Leaseholders Focus Group on 15<sup>th</sup> Jan but it was not very well supported. Another meeting is to be organised for a couple of months' time to see if it improves. It was maybe due to them not having a meeting since last January and the invite being sent too early and it being forgotten about. Also, it maybe the email invitation would have been lost when sent out too early.</p> <p>9.2 The Covid meeting was held on the 26<sup>th</sup> at 4pm and was very informative and interesting. Plenty of time to ask questions and every question was fully answered. There is another meeting organised for the 5<sup>th</sup> February at 3pm and anyone can join this. Just follow this link and register: <a href="https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/southend-covid-update-and-qa-tickets-136597401505">https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/southend-covid-update-and-qa-tickets-136597401505</a> <b>I hope to see you all there.</b></p> <p>9.3 KD said that he has had requests for the minutes to be sent to residents and have had their email address passed over, but some do not work as they are returned not know. If there are any residents who you know would like a copy of the minutes and are not receiving them, please send me their name and email address and I will make sure they are sent out.</p> <p>KD said that he has had a few questions and suggestions around the minutes also requests for more information. He would ask anyone who has a question regarding what the Federation are doing or are planning to do in the future, to attend the meeting and put the question to the full meeting for them to give the answer, as he</p>	

	is only the Chair and the residents are the Federation and it is up to them to decide what they want us the committee to do on their behalf.	
	The meeting ended at 12 noon.	
	<b>The next Meeting will be on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February at 10am and invites will go out on the 22<sup>nd</sup> so that they do not get lost. If you do not receive an invite by midday then please let me know.</b>	
13.	Distribution List: Julia Pack & Miranda Edwards at communications via emails and the residents requesting the minutes by post via Chloe Hague. All other residents in attendance and non-attendance will receive them via email.	
3.0 *	Requested the TPAS Fee and Stuart has agreed that SEH will pay this year's fees as it will be a benefit to Tenants, Residents and Leaseholders.	
4.1 **	<p><b>The things that the Federation consider are important for a Resident Board Member to act on.</b></p> <p>South Essex Homes have three Resident Board Members who are there to represent firstly the Company and to Express Resident's Views on all matters and are meant to act in the best interests of the company and all residents across the borough. The federation shall elect up to 3 members plus the Chair to sit on the Resident Board Members selection committee when a Resident Board member's position becomes available on the Board of South Essex Homes. The Board selection committee should consist of a Resident Non-Executive Board Member, Councillor and Federation Members as selected by the Federation.</p> <p>The criteria for that said Resident Board Member shall be as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Have an understanding of the way South Essex Homes manage their properties.</li> <li>2) Should put the Company first in all matters, but in doing so keep the interests of the residents in mind at the same time.</li> <li>3) Consideration should be given to what candidates have done in the past for residents, what they can do in the future for residents and their willingness to represent residents at all levels, their ability to work with other Board Members, South Essex Homes and residents from across the borough and not just in their own location.</li> <li>4) Should be accessible to the Federation Chair in regards to Residents interests on the board.</li> <li>5) Attend Board Meetings to represent the Company and Residents interests.</li> <li>6) Attend meetings of resident groups upon request (if possible).</li> </ol>	

**Reports from Department Managers****Supporting Housing Team.**

In line with the national picture, the team are beginning to see an increase of numbers of sheltered residents and also some of the team who are Covid positive. A majority of the sheltered service is being delivered remotely but the team continue to provide an onsite presence where there are emergency or health and safety concerns. Officers continue to support residents daily via support calls. Due to this increase in Covid cases for residents, the team have been reviewing whether it is appropriate to continue to keep communal lounges open. We are working closely with colleagues from Public Health and the Council to continually monitor the situation and are very mindful of the impact on residents' mental health and exacerbating social isolation that the pandemic is having. However, in view of the introduction of the Tier 4 restrictions and the very clear guidance that all households should remain in their own homes the decision was made just before Christmas to close the communal lounges. This fact, coupled with an unfortunate reduction in our staff capacity as a result of a combination of positive Covid tests and shielding by a number of our staff members, meant we effectively had no option. The decision has been taken in full consultation with colleagues in the Public Health Team and the Council's Housing Team. All residents have received letters advising them of the situation and the reasons why this action has been necessary. The situation will be kept under regular review however further to recent announcements by the Prime Minister we do not anticipate that this situation will change while the country remains in lockdown.

**Temporary Accommodation Team.**

As was the case during Lockdown 1, evictions have been suspended unless there is a clear risk to other residents or staff. A proportionality assessment and escalation process are in place which Officers follow. Where every alternative to eviction has been exhausted a professionals' multi-agency meeting will consider any such case and agree the appropriate course of action which by exception, may include eviction. Staff have continued to work with a client group of rough sleepers who are now referred to hostels through the Rough Sleeper Initiative. The team have excelled in supporting this new complex client group and continue to manage issues in order to reduce homelessness. Staff are supporting residents with food parcels and have sourced over 200 toys for families for the Christmas period.

**Support Services Team.**

The Balmoral Food Centre continues to work well to support families within Milton and Victoria Wards who are 'just about managing' (JAM). They provide a drop-in centre for families 3 days a week at the Balmoral Centre. The Hub has remained open and is supporting residents with housing and money advice as well as continued online support. South Essex Community Hub has taken over a new premises to deliver its services from the North Road Chapel which is located within the Balmoral Estate vicinity. It can now provide the counselling service from here where people are unable to access the support online. The Team continue to support digital inclusion by working with older residents who have no ability to access the internet or online services. The Covid pandemic has made it more difficult for these residents to engage and also potentially increases their social isolation. This work involves provision of equipment and individual training to build residents' capacity and improve their ability to maintain communication with family and friends remotely.

**Tenancy Services Team.**

Since the first lockdown restrictions relaxed earlier in the year the re-housing team has been working hard to advertise and let all of the Council's void properties. They successfully managed to catch up with the backlog of void properties within a month of reactivating this function to resume normal service but have been left with a high number of 'hard to let' Part 2 sheltered bed-sit accommodation. These sheltered bedsits have been advertised as usual on the Council's choice based letting system 'On the Move' (often multiple times) but have received no bids from applicants. The main reason for this, we believe, is that these properties are age-restricted, and this demographic of clients are choosing not to bid during the Covid pandemic. We have liaised with the Council's Housing Solutions Team and as they process their back log of applications, they will prioritise Housing Applications where the applicant is above the age of 60 years and would qualify for these kinds of properties. In addition, SHE's Support Services Officers are directly contacting eligible applicants to raise their awareness of these properties and see if they need any assistance to bid. During the early stages of the pandemic, where re-letting voids was limited, officers in the re-housing team had worked on carrying out welfare calls for those identified as being potentially vulnerable. One of the team has even continued to do a weekly food shop for one of our residents who live in a Part 1 scheme. Generally, the void contractor, Morgan Sindall (MS) is completing works to voids within agreed timescales. The team are striving to continue to provide services to our residents, albeit in a different way. During the initial stages of the pandemic, the Tenancy Services Officers adapted how they communicate and engage with the residents, using letters, phone, email, and Zoom calls to investigate and resolve matters. To a large degree they have been able to continue with these practices, which is particularly valuable in the light of the significant increases of infections locally and Southend moving to Tier 4. The main challenges are conducting visits in peoples' homes and face to face appointments such as sign ups. During the pandemic Mutual Exchanges applications and routine property inspections were not carried out, due to the associated risks and the Government Guidelines at that time. Now we have ensured that risk assessments are in place and reviewed at intervals as and when the guidelines changed, these activities having been going ahead in line with these risk assessments. The team have seen a sharp rise in the number of ASB cases being reported at the beginning of the pandemic, with many cases relating to others not adhering to the Government Guidelines. Tenancy Services and Essex Police worked in partnership to ensure that a consistent message was given to residents to offer reassurance and guidance. Throughout 2020 the team continue to see a rise in the number of reported ASB cases. This is a primary focus for the team with additional temporary resource allocated by the Council, being used to ensure that all outstanding ASB cases are dealt with appropriately and in a timely way. The team have encountered significant difficulties in gaining access to carry out the annual gas service during the pandemic and this resulted in unacceptably high numbers of properties without a valid CP12 certificate during summer/autumn 2020. Part of the reason for this was difficulty in securing court dates to apply for warrants as well as a reticence from some residents to allow access due to concerns around the Covid infection or their self-isolating. The team has taken great strides to address this situation and through excellent communication with tenants as well as using the court process when needed, the position at 18th December stands at only 2 outstanding gas services with which we are following our usual difficult access process. Of course, this position can fluctuate as new services become due, but officers are monitoring progress daily. There have been some frustrations with the magistrates' court not confirming new listings for warrants very quickly. We are communicating with them

regularly via email and have engaged the assistance of the Council's Legal Team via the court user group to prevent any issues from building up. The team are also working with colleagues across the organisation to refine and improve the process to gain access in to 'difficult access properties' for purposes such as fire door servicing.

### **Community Safety.**

The Board will recall that officers contacted all of our residents that are over 70 living in general needs accommodation and other residents under this age group that we considered may be 'vulnerable', to check on their welfare and offer assistance should they not have any support network in place. Officers are now focusing attention on following up these calls particularly those where no contact was made despite earlier efforts including visits to their homes. Officers have made good inroads with these, with a relatively small number still to be visited. Any referrals from these visits are passed to the South Essex Community Hub charity or managed by our officers where individuals can and have been linked to a volunteer or the befriending service. There has been some media attention in respect of local authorities appointing Covid Marshalls to respond to non-compliance of government guidance. SBC has seconded officers from within the organisation to carry out marshalling activities based within the Regulatory Services Team. Their role is primarily focussing on non-compliance by businesses and high footfall areas such as Southend High Street. Due to an increase in residents declining mental health and an increase in Safeguarding referrals, an MS Teams meeting was held with front line managers and mental health services to obtain a greater understanding of where to gain advice and assistance for front line officers.

### **Property Services Team.**

Since the 3rd August MS have returned to a 'normal' service with all engineers back to work full time. Initially as tenants started to report non-emergency repairs a backlog occurred but additional resources were brought in to assist from other neighbouring contracts to assist. The number of repairs currently in the system are at normal levels. A weekly progress meeting is held with MS where scrutiny is undertaken of jobs which are nearing the target date. Performance by the contractor remains within contractual targets. There has been a slight increase in the average time to complete all repairs. This has been caused by some residents self-isolating. The team are also developing a 'route map' of actions and priorities with MS describing a collective plan to underpin an excellent responsive repairs service, support vulnerable residents and, maximise outcomes for our customers as well as SEH and MS. The new contact centre has settled in extremely well with the new team working well with the technical and non-technical staff both within South Essex Homes and with staff from MS's contact centre. The integration between the repairs ICT systems is nearing completion and it is hoped it will go live shortly with the contact centre staff using it initially. Once it has been fully tested in the live environment the proposal is that it will be rolled out across the organisation, with all staff raising their repair orders direct which will free up staff at the contact centre.

### **Capital Programme Update.**

Following the earlier report and the continuation of lockdowns and local restrictions the team finally commenced a full programme on 28th September 2020 and have continued to deliver projects in these uncertain times and through collaboration with our contractors and working in a new way to protect all stakeholders against Covid-19. Despite these circumstances the team have still managed to deliver a

number of projects which continue to improve the properties under their control. The team also have a number of projects that have been Tendered and awaiting award and are now in process of preparing Tender Documents for Frameworks that are coming to an end and looking at potential projects to be included in next year's programme. Asbestos works and surveys have reverted to normal volumes with no material backlog or access issues. Electrical inspections are being undertaken and volumes are now returning close to normal rates with the backlog of works being addressed with the aim to be back on track this calendar year. This follows a reduced number of inspections undertaken between March to July due to a combination of tenant access and contractor availability. Legionella testing and protocols continue as planned with no present or anticipated problems. In recognition of the statement issued by Government on Saturday 19th December, Morgan Sindall Property Services has reviewed its current approach, and for contracts that fall substantively into the new 'tier 4 restrictions' they will move to an essential/emergency works only. This means that they will only provide;

- An essential service of emergency repairs and priority voids
- Undertake Building Safety/Compliance activities (such as Gas Servicing) and deem them essential
- Where planned works have commenced, MS will make safe and secure until we can resume work safely MS have assured us that they will continue to ensure their workforce are fully equipped with PPE and operate in a safe manner, adhering to current guidance to increase the confidence of both operatives and residents.

**Careline SOS.**

Calls had started to increase again following the 2nd lockdown and the team continue to maintain the target of responding to 97.5% of calls within 60 seconds. The initial impact of the third lockdown is not entirely known as yet but already there has been a reduction in the number of calls coming through and sales have continued to decrease as residents/customers stay at home. The team have not been able to undertake any significant marketing of the service in the last six months but continue to bring on board new dispersed customers, although they are experiencing a number of losses due to death, respite and care home admission of some of our customers, however, have not lost any customers to other providers in the last 6 months. The service is currently only able to operate from an office environment and currently does not have the ability to work remotely therefore not affording us the option to have staff working from home. There have been a number of staff self-isolating in the 2nd lockdown and now staff are absent due being contacted by Test and Trace. Further with the new Government guidance around shielding we have a small number of staff no longer able to work within the office so there are duties that have been identified to enable them to work from home. The team are working extremely hard to ensure that the service continues to provide a response to the most vulnerable of customers. The Assistant Director - Commercial is currently reviewing the Careline Service system provider and has engaged with a number of market leaders in recent months to understand the offers available to us as we move forward into "a new normal". The current contract arrangements cease in 2021 and we are actively looking at framework agreements to ensure that procurement is efficiently carried out. The Telecare Services Authority accreditation which we have had in place for the last 6 years is due for renewal in 2021 and the team are working hard to provide auditors with all the information they require for this audit which is due to take place in March next year. As this is a full audit there is much work to be completed to coordinate all the documentation for this is an evidenced based assessment.

### **Estates Services Team.**

The service continues to work on a business-as-usual method, although risk assessments have been carried out and arrangements have been made for staff to take our vehicles home so that they do not have to travel to one place which had brought all staff together at the beginning and end of each day. Face masks are mandatory when cleaning in communal areas and, in some instances, PPE is used. The team continue to see a much larger issue with bulk refuse and have been in dialogue with Veolia the Councils waste provider to ascertain if buying in some services from them would be a better value service for our tenants. This conversation is continuing as bulk clearance costs are 25% higher than in previous years. In addition, the strategy around company vehicles is being reviewed as leases on our current fleet mature late in 2021, this gives us the opportunity to look at more sustainable and environmentally friendly ways to move around the borough and to look specifically at much smaller electric vehicles and using energy from solar panels.

### **South Essex Property Services.**

The repairs contact centre has continued to flourish and key performance indications are on track. The team have completed their initial training programme and are working very efficiently. Further system changes will be brought in at the beginning of 2021 and that should improve the time taken on each individual call. The team are also introducing options to extend customers choices on how they communicate with us, so they can also contact on Facebook to carry out non urgent repairs which our teams will pick up and progress. The catering service still remains on hold whilst the café and hospitality service at the Civic Centre remain closed. The team have been asked to provide options on what an offer might look like in mid-2021 which we are currently working towards. The team continue to deliver to the Council enhanced cleaning services at the Civic Centre, Tickfield Centre and Libraries and Museums throughout the town. In addition, the team are also working on opportunities to expand the services provided by the fire door servicing team as the Fire Safety Act progresses. Currently it is proposed to increase both communal and flat door servicing from the annual servicing programme in place, and they are looking at resources to ensure that they are ready to hit the ground running should that become law. It has remained difficult to increase business development during 2020 but we still have a number of opportunities that we will continue to explore both with the Council, Porters Place LLP, Southend United Football Club and other housing providers.

### **Specialist Income Management Team.**

The team continue to serve Notice to Seek Possession (NSP) which now requires a 6 months' notice period for the majority of cases before court proceedings can be issued. Exceptions include arrears of more than 6 months and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) grounds. Since the 6 months' notice period was brought in (September 2020) 96 NSPs have been served and all of these are still within the 6 months period where we cannot issue possession proceedings. Changes to possession proceedings Possession claims for rent arrears that were issued prior to 23rd March 2020 need "re-activating" with the Court. Where possible the team have arranged consent orders, where an agreement is reached outside of court proceedings and a draft order is submitted to the court. These avoid the need for a court hearing to take place as all parties agree to the outcome. For all cases the team are now required to try and establish if and how the tenant has been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic and they have therefore introduced some new letters to meet this requirement. The aim in all cases to ensure that all

avenues have been exhausted prior to issuing or reactivating possession proceedings. The clear message the team are delivering to tenants is that we want to support them to sustain their tenancies and this message seems to be increasing engagement. The team continue to use all channels available to them to engage with tenants including phone, letter, text message; email and video conferencing (i.e., Zoom). The team are also looking to increase our use of WhatsApp and we have used this as a way for tenants to send documents to us. The team continue to work closely with other agencies including Citizens Advice Southend (CAS) to support tenants. Referrals to CAS have been particularly useful when looking at consent orders for tenants. The team continue working closely with other teams including Tenancy Services and Support Services, and there has been a lot of success referring cases to the Support Services Team including numerous successful applications for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) which have reduced or cleared arrears. Evictions Prior to the most recent lockdown, we had issued our first eviction warrants since March 2020. These evictions were put on hold due to the lockdown and will now not be enforced until the end of January 2021 at the earliest. Evictions are suspended over the Christmas period which runs until 11th January 2020 and the Bailiffs are required to give 14 days' notice of any eviction dates. Evictions will only take place in January if we are in Tier 1 or 2. Evictions cannot take place in Tier 3. We continue to try and engage with tenants that have evictions pending. Changes to payments received from the DWP. In September we saw a change in the frequency payments are sent to us from the DWP. Where an Alternative Payment Arrangement (APA) is in place whereby the Housing Element of Universal Credit (HE) is paid directly to us, we now receive these payments at the same time the tenant receives their Universal Credit (UC) payment (i.e., we are now receiving these payments daily) rather than 4-weekly. Third Party Deductions for payment of rent arrears are still paid 4-weekly. This means that these payments are not delayed and is beneficial to the arrears position overall as well as on individual rent accounts.

**General Organisational update.**

Rent collection. Throughout the crisis the Income Management Team and Tenancy Team have worked closely with the Support Services Team to maintain rent collection. An analysis of the impact of COVID 19 on the arrears is as follows:

- Current arrears as at the end of March 2020 (2019/2020)
- Arrears as at 6 December 2020 (end of November) (2020/2021)
- Overall increase in arrears since Covid 19 £709,832 £749,428 £39,596 11.1.5

The above figures do not reflect the increase in rent this year, and to make a more meaningful comparison we should look at the arrears as a percentage of the collectable debit which shows the following position:

- Arrears as a percentage of collectable debit as at the end of March 2020 (2019/2020) was 2.17%
- Arrears as a percentage of collectable debit as at the end of November 2020 (2020/2021) was 2.30%

This shows an increase of just 0.13% in arrears so far this year. Since we have entered "lockdown" due to COVID 19 we, as expected, have seen an impact on arrears, interestingly however we have seen considerable fluctuations in the arrears throughout the last 8 months ranging from £782k to £715k, however since the DWP have now bought the APA UC payments in line with the payments made to the claimants, the arrears position over the last 2-3 months has become far more stable with arrears at the end of November being £749 k. It is also interesting to note that overall, the number of tenants in arrears since the beginning of COVID has reduced from 1728 in March 2020 to 1573 in November 2020. In addition, the number of tenants more than 7 weeks in arrears has only increased marginally

from 278 cases in March 2020 to 287 in November 2020. The teams are continuing to work hard and adapting to new ways of working to ensure that we are both supporting tenants and maximising the Council's rental income stream throughout this pandemic. We believe that the key to our success has been; Using all methods of communication available.

- A more supportive approach increasing engagement
- Staying up to date with changing legislation so that we are ready to issue possession proceedings when warranted
- Making use of APA and PTD payments form UC and TPD
- Working closely with other teams and agencies.

We understand that other organisations including Housing Associations and Local Authorities have seen their arrears as a percentage of collectable debit increase from 3.5% to 5%, whereas our arrears have remained as a percentage of collectable debit at 2.3% at the end of November 2020. It was also interesting to note from a very recent meeting of the Housing Quality Network (HQN) Rent Income Excellence Network meeting ,attended by 32 other Accredited organisations from all around the country , that a majority of them were seeing their arrears going up or flat lining, with very few seeing reductions in arrears. It is very difficult to predict the full impact of COVID 19 particularly with the recent move to Tier 4, with no immediate signs of improvement for a number of months; however, we will continue to closely monitor the situation and provide regular updates to both the Board and SBC. Making home working work/ICT Update. The rollout of new laptops and the move to the Windows 10 operating system is continuing, and it is hoped that this will be completed by the end of the first quarter of 2021/22. There are still issues with the F5 functionality, with connections dropping out, however as part of the overall infrastructure overhaul, the Council will be moving to a replacement in the new year. Perhaps the biggest issue has been the supply of mobile phones, which have traditionally provided by the Council. We understand that this is due to a national shortage and is impacting on the Council as well. Where staff only require basic functionality, we have managed to procure a number of phones to ensure that the service can be delivered, and importantly maintain contact with residents. The positive relationship that is being built with our ICT Business Partner and other Managers across ICT continues to improve, with regular Service review meetings being introduced, improved service desk reporting with formal escalation procedure in place to ensure that issues raised by staff that affect day to day operations are dealt with effectively. The establishment of Digital Champions across the organisation, and Product Service Groups relating to specific systems that we utilise for example Northgate. There is still a long way to go, however a solid foundation has been built, and once the basic infrastructure and hardware has been updated further improvements will be delivered.

### **Communications.**

South Essex Homes has been actively communicating with tenants, leaseholders and the wider Southend community since the start of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020. 11.3.2 Since our first statement regarding the issue on Monday 16th March, we have posted 20 online news stories on the subject of COVID-19 and made them all easily accessible via a dedicated page linked from the homepage of our website. The spring, summer and autumn issues of our quarterly residents' magazine Insight have each featured article about our company's response to coronavirus and highlighted the help available in Southend and nationally to anyone who may need it. Throughout this time, we have been posting key messages on our Facebook and Twitter pages and retweeting key sources, sharing advice and details of the NHS and government guidelines relevant to our area. Additionally, we have upped our internal communications with staff so they feel

equipped to identify vulnerable residents and signpost them to available services or indeed so they know how to access help they may need personally. Importantly the organisation has embraced the use of MS Teams and wherever possible all our meetings are arranged using Teams which has a number of benefits and is fully supported by the Council. Policies and Procedures SEH is aware that during unprecedented times such as the current Covid pandemic, we have to adapt how we do things. Changes in the law covered in the Coronavirus Act 2020 has meant that some of our usual procedures for example, how we escalate an arrears case or breach of tenancy to eviction, have had to adjust. This particularly affects many of our 'customer facing' policies and procedures. It is particularly important that our policies and procedures are accurate as should we face a legal challenge, the court will always look to identify whether we have followed our prescribed procedures. Managers have in some cases developed new procedures to reflect current practice as well as working through other policies and procedures to ensure that they still remain valid. In addition to this, we have added the following caveat to all of our key policies and procedures, where the pandemic has amended how we deliver our services. We monitor local and national guidance and legislation to ensure that the health and safety of our customers, staff and partners are paramount. Our Policy and Procedures are regularly updated however there may be occasion where external factors (e.g., COVID-19) impact upon our compliance. When such instances occur, it is important that we are responsive to these factors. This may mean that we need to amend our compliance with Policy and Procedures as we adapt our service delivery to be consistent with Government Guidance. We will always seek to do this in a way that does not disadvantage our customers and we will take every measure to ensure any disruption or alterations to service is kept to a minimum.

#### **Staff Wellbeing.**

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that a large part of the workforce of South Essex Homes has been working from home since March 2020. This change in working pattern has brought into focus the importance of staff wellbeing, it is apparent that in certain situations staff are finding this arrangement difficult with particular problems around isolation and managing teams remotely: The Communications Management Group (CMG) have been working to address some of these issues and find solutions that enable our workforce to remain as healthy and motivated as possible in the circumstances. The CMG group felt that there was not adequate support available to them through this difficult time and as a result a workshop on resilience was organised and attended by all CMG Managers, this was a success and is the first part of a series of initiatives aimed at providing this group with both the support they need and additional skills that will equip them for the future success of both themselves and the organisation. Isolation among our workforce is considered to be a priority for the group to address and so towards the end of 2020 a series of initiatives were started to target this, a music club and a book club have both been started along with an afternoon coffee and chat session where staff can drop in and get to chat to colleagues they may not have seen in a while. The CMG group will continue to explore avenues to address staff wellbeing and the group are currently engaged in developing both a buddying system and mentoring system. This area is still very much a work in progress and it is hoped over the coming months we will develop and initiate various schemes aimed at tackling these problems.

**Recovery Planning.**

**New Operating Model.**

The pandemic has certainly changed how we as a business operate, with a significant proportion of our service being delivered remotely and staff in many cases, working from their homes. Although these changes happened quickly and were almost ‘forced upon us’ as we needed to respond quickly to safeguard staff and residents, we have found that in many cases, there are real benefits and staff are able to work more efficiently without any detriment to our residents. This does give us the opportunity to consider a refreshed operating model, particularly in terms of our office-based staff, and explore a more flexible approach. We want to ensure that we maximise on practices that have worked well, ensure residents have a positive and customer focused experience of our service while factoring in a safe work-life balance for staff. A small project group of staff is to be set up and meet in January where we will consider these factors – staff and resident feedback, how we can work efficiently and aspirationally and how to address any barriers. All recommendations arising from this group will come back to EMT and the Board. This will help the Forum capture views from all these parties when it is planning which service areas it will review and also formalises how it will feed back on its recommendations and track progress against agreed actions. The Forum is currently drafting its work plan for 2021/2022 and is considering reviewing a number of areas including specific parts of the Tenancy Service such as; effectiveness, clarity and tone of correspondence (both emails and letters sent out to residents), the difficult access process and the changes in working brought about by the Covid pandemic (for example, the revised sign-up procedure). This will be particularly important as the guidance and legislation from the Social Housing White Paper becomes available Settling into the new routine. The SEH business plan constructed following the Board away day will need adjustment to reflect our new knowledge. It is our understanding that SBC is planning a review of their 2050 Ambition to accommodate their learning from this crisis and the SEH business plan is absolutely tied to the 2050 Ambition. Given these two factors our business plan will require in depth review to accommodate;

- the potential to release office space
- the requirement to upgrade technology and technological services
- the need to develop and introduce a new fundamentally changed operating model
- itemise a much-improved contribution to environmental damage reduction through home working
- improved or changed terms and conditions to increase flexibility within work patterns
- a deeper and more engaged relationship with tenants
- the impact of the revised 2050 Ambition
- significant continuous improvement plans/targets set to address the likely new financial attrition. The crisis is not over and the impact will be felt for years to come. SEH will continue to respond accordingly and to learn the lessons offered up by the crisis as it unfolds.

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2. Objectives. Section a. To encourage and assist in the wellbeing of all tenants and resident’s associations and partnerships of the Southend on Sea area.  
3. Membership. Section b. Southend Tenants and Residents Federation in conjunction with South Essex Homes will support any claim from tenants who wish to initiate any Tenant or Residents Association, Action Group or Street/Block Voice within their area

<p>where one is not already in place. All such Tenant or Resident Associations, Action Groups or Street/Block voices shall be registered with the Federation, so as to be recognised and come under their umbrella for guidance and support. All AGM's shall be presided over by an officer from the Southend Tenants and Residents Federation.</p>	
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<p>KD has sent an email offering the Federations support in setting up Nursery Place Residents Association.</p>	
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