



South Essex Homes Limited

Minutes of Board Meeting

Date: 26 July 2022

Start: 3.00pm End: 5.55pm

Via MS Teams

Minutes

Present Roger Eastwood (RE) – Chair of the Board; Meg Davidson (MD) – Vice-Chair of the Board; Michael Oxley (MO); Chris March (CM); Sacha Jevans (SJ); Peter Wexham (PWe), Margaret Borton (MB); Chris Silvey (CS); Carly Volke (CV), Keith Ducker (KD) from Agenda Item 8.

In attendance: Mike Gatrell (MG) – Chief Executive; Mario Ambrose (MA), - Executive Director; Simon Putt (SP) – Company Secretary; Beverley Gallacher (BG) – Director SEPS’ Commercial; Kevin Hazlewood (KH) – Director Operations (Property); Sarah Lander (SL) – Director Operations (Housing); Daniel Lyons (DL) – Director Finance and Corporate Services; Glyn Halksworth (GH) – Director of Housing SBC; Tim Holland (TH) – Head of Housing Support SBC; George Sutherland (GS) – Chair of SEPS’ Board (From Agenda Item 17); Carol Cooper (CC) – Board Support Officer; Brenda Tilley – Scrutiny Forum (BT) - Agenda Item 4; Chris McPhillips – Scrutiny Forum (CMP) - Agenda Item 4; Scott Dorling (SD) – Trowers & Hamlin – Agenda Item 17;

Tenant Observers: Keith Ducker up to Agenda Item 8

PUBLIC MINUTES		
		Action
1.	Welcome and Introductions	
1.1	RE welcomed everyone to the meeting.	

2.	Apologies for Absence	
2.1	Apologies for absence were received from David Joyce.	
3.	Declarations of Interest	
3.1	Chris Silvey and Keith Ducker were required to leave the meeting at Agenda Item 8 and return once completed.	
4.	Scrutiny Forum – Annual Review and Work Programme	
4.1	SL gave an overview of the report and the current areas that the Forum had investigated.	
4.2	BT updated that the next reviews to be undertaken would be in relation to the contact centre followed by the mutual exchange process.	
4.3	BT clarified for RE that the plan is set in conjunction with the tenancy services manager and it had been agreed that the group would focus on the larger areas first but if there were any areas of concern raised by residents then the plan could be altered.	
4.4	MO sought clarity as to how a resident becomes a member of the group and how many members the group currently consists of. BT explained that currently there are 4 members of the group and residents are able to apply and go through the recruitment process to join. CMC updated that the group are currently seeking to increase the membership in order to spread the workload, but members would have to understand the confidentiality side of being a member. SL further updated that when the group was formed in 2013 the members were all interviewed and were provided with an induction and training programme.	
4.5	MB sought clarity as to whether CMC and BT feel that they make a difference and are the Forum's recommendations followed through. BT confirmed that SEH does act on recommendations from the group's reviews and the group feel that they make a difference.	
4.6	MB thanked the forum for their work and suggested that the Board send a letter thanking them. SP to discuss further with RE.	SP
4.7	CM sought clarity as to whether the members felt they received all the information that is required and is the information presented in an easy-to-understand format. BT stated that the full information is provided, and it is very easy to access and understand.	

<p>4.8</p> <p>i)</p>	<p>Recommendation:</p> <p>The Board noted the content of this report and, in particular, the information contained in the Southend Residents' Scrutiny Forum's Annual Report 2022 (Appendix One).</p>	
<p>5.</p> <p>5.1</p>	<p>Public Draft Minutes & Matters Arising from the meeting held 29 March 2022</p> <p>The Minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.</p>	
<p>6.</p> <p>6.1</p> <p>6.2</p>	<p>Chair's Remarks</p> <p>RE updated that he had attended the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA) Strategic Board meeting. The numbers of ALMOs has reduced to 20 but the NFA is still capable of providing a service but if subscriptions start to fall the NFA Board will need to consider its position.</p> <p>RE sought the Board members' views on whether they would prefer to return to in-person meetings. The group agreed that the Board would meet in person for every other Board meeting starting with the Board meeting on 27 October. It was agreed that Committee meetings would continue to be held virtually. The Board agreed to hold the October meeting in person.</p>	
<p>7.</p> <p>7.1</p> <p>7.2</p>	<p>Residents' Voice Your View</p> <p>SP explained the recent query received from a resident at Yantlet which raised several issues at the block. SP confirmed that Officers had worked with the resident to resolve the issues raised.</p> <p>CM noted that with hindsight it looks as though the window replacement could have been handled better and sought reassurance that lessons have been learned from this for not only window replacement projects but other replacement projects too. KH confirmed that lessons have been learned and agreed that retaining the existing configuration of windows is not always the best option and teams have been instructed that prior to window replacement projects being signed off they should be reviewed to see if improvements can be made through the replacement. KH confirmed that this is being applied to all replacement projects across the programme.</p>	

7.3	<p>MB sought clarity in relation to the claim that the block had not been cleaned for 12 months and wanted to know whether issues could only be reported by the residents' association. RE confirmed that any resident is able to raise an issue via the contact centre or via their tenancy services officer. BG gave reassurance that cleaning is carried out regularly and team leaders are able to monitor the work of the caretakers via the Housemark app which provides before and after photos of the areas. No complaints had been raised by other residents in relation to the cleanliness of the block. Upon visiting the block however, the Team Leader did agree that cleanliness in some areas had slipped below B standard and additional measures have been put in place to ensure that the block reaches the required standard and the Team Leader will continue to monitor the cleanliness.</p>	
7.4	<p>MB sought clarity as to what 'B standard' meant. BG updated that standards had been set following consultation with residents and a photobook is available on the website which shows each standard and the standard we adhere to is B standard. This allows the resident to compare the cleanliness of their block with what the standard shows in the photobook. BG agreed to share the photobook with the Board.</p>	BG
7.5	<p>MB sought clarity as to whether caretakers inspect the whole of the building. BG confirmed that the caretakers would walk to the top floor of the block and work their way down inspecting each floor and those floors that required cleaning would be cleaned. Team Leaders monitor this via the Housemark app.</p>	
7.6	<p>MO requested that in future Voice Your View reports it is noted where the response has come from, ie response from EMT. SP agreed to do this for future Voice Your View reports.</p>	
7.7	<p>MO sought clarity in reference to the water rate question as to whether tenants know that they can apply to the water company and do they need our assistance. DL updated that for part 2 sheltered schemes we proactively advise tenants of their rights, but this is not done generally across the whole of the stock.</p>	
7.8	<p>CS sought clarity as to whether the cost of SEH supplying a window cleaner for the block would result in an increase in service charge. KH updated that unfortunately service charges will have to be increased to accommodate the cost, but KH will discuss further with colleagues as to how we can support residents.</p>	
7.9	<p>The Board noted the Residents' Voice your View and the Board's comments.</p>	
8.	Governance & Stewardship	
8.1	CS and KD left the meeting.	

8.2	SP gave an overview of the report.	
8.3	RE felt that having an away day meeting to further discuss resident engagement re the management of the subject. It was agreed that the October Board meeting would be held in person and that a mini away day would be held prior to this. CC will make arrangements with Board members.	CC
8.4	MO noted that there is reference in the report to Board member recruitment selection panel and requested that SP circulate the process to the Board.	SP
8.5	Recommendations:	
i)	The Board noted the re-appointment of Meg Davidson and Peter Wexham and the appointment of Margaret Borton as the Council nominees for a period of one year in accordance with the Articles of Association.	
ii)	The Board agreed the re-appointment of Chris Silvey to the Board for a further period of three years to run until 2nd October 2025 in accordance with the Articles of Association.	
iii)	The Board agreed the recommendation of the Board Member Selection Panel to appoint Keith Ducker to the Board of South Essex Homes for a term of office of 3 years to run until 26th July 2025 in accordance with the Articles of Association.	
iv)	The Board noted and discussed the position regarding resident engagement with the Board.	
v)	The Board agreed the Audit and Risk Committee's Annual Report 2021/2022 including the Annual Governance Statement 2021/2022 and Action plan for 2022/2023 as recommended by the Audit and Risk Committee (contained in Appendices 1, 2 and 3).	
9.	Business Plan 2021-2026 Update	
9.1	DL gave a brief overview of the report.	
9.2	Recommendation:	
i)	The Board noted the Business Plan Update.	
10.	Company Assurance Report as at 30 June 2022	
10.1	DL gave an overview of the report.	

10.2	SJ sought clarity as to the reasons behind the decline in the Careline numbers and wanted to know how difficult we felt it may be to attract new customers.	
10.3	BG updated that following the restructure and the implementation of the new operating model, allowing working from any location, the focus had been on the recruitment and training of new staff members meaning that marketing had not been undertaken. The remaining new staff will be joining the team in August and work will be undertaken to look at options that are available from other careline services and what other devices are available in order to plan a marketing strategy. A new sales officer has been recruited in order to carry out sales specifically related to Careline in order to actively increase sales.	
10.4	SJ noted the pressure on the repairs budget and requested further information as to how we felt this may impact the programme of works. DL updated that the main reason for the pressure is the budget of £6m allocated by SCC, when the original bid was £6.5m, coupled with this is the uplift in rates for Morgan Sindall which increases to circa £7m. Discussions with colleagues at SCC are ongoing and SCC have made the point that they expect an overspend on the repairs budget. Due to a number of other budgetary pressures at SCC the repairs budget is part of a wider discussion at SCC. Any alterations to the programme will most likely effect planned external decorations.	
10.5	KH noted that £3.5m per year is directly associated with building safety compliance. Some external decs would be postponed. In relation to responsive repairs, the process has been altered so that any jobs over a certain cost need to be signed off by KH ensuring that spends provide the right outcome. KH noted that there will be difficult choices if the economy continues this way. KH confirmed that Compliance and H&S works are essential, and these will continue.	
10.6	MD sought clarity as to whether sheltered housing residents automatically received the Careline service. BG confirmed that residents in part 2 sheltered schemes have a dedicated system, and all have a direct link to Careline, however, residents decide if they require a daily call.	
10.7	MB sought clarity as to the timeline of when a decision may be made as to whether Careline is viable. BG updated that the team are actively monitoring the situation and reiterated that Careline is a service that SCC have delegated to SEH to provide to tenants and subsidised with private customers which is who are diminishing. BG confirmed that this is a discussion item for both EMT and the Strategic Partnership Board.	

10.8	MB sought clarity as to how the utility bills overspend might impact other budgets. DL updated that the overspend will impact the cost base and as we move forward service charges will be adjusted to recover the over payment but there is a need to educate tenants on the increased costs and there will be a programme of education around gas and electricity use and the levy on communal area charges.	
10.9	MB sought clarity as to how SEH is assisting residents with their rent payment in the current cost of living crisis. DL confirmed that SEH has set up a hardship fund following agreement by the Board to use reserves. All teams across the organisation support tenants in relation to their financial situation.	
10.10	DL clarified for MB that the discussion with SCC in relation to void properties on the Queensway estate is ongoing. The SCC Executive Team have acknowledged that for SEH to have to pay the unintended Council Tax cost for the project is unfair but no decision as to funding from SCC has yet been made.	
10.11	MO noted that BG had provided useful additional information to background around Careline but wondered whether this was an item that should be further Board discussion around alternative scenarios. RE agreed that once discussions have been progressed with SCC then the item would be returned to the Board to enable the Board to make a decision on the range of options available.	
10.12	Recommendations:	
i)	The Board noted the update provided on financial information as at June 2022.	
ii)	The Board noted the Key Performance Indicators position as at June 2022.	
iii)	The Board Agreed to fund, from reserves, the post of Service Improvement Co-ordinator for a period of between 3 and 6 months as detailed in section 5 and Appendix 5.	
11.	Health & Safety Compliance Report (incorporating Fire Safety update)	
11.1	KH gave an overview of the report.	
11.2	MD sought clarity as to how many tower blocks in the City have aircraft warning lights. KH confirmed there are 10 sites with warning lights.	

11.3	<p>MD sought clarity in relation to complaints received about lifts at Cecil Court during the major work being undertaken with the sprinkler system and what lifts had been used by contractors. KH updated that whether contractors used lifts during a project is agreed at the start of the project and is based primarily on whether the building structure doesn't lend itself to a hoist being used, if required the lift maintenance contractor would be put on notice so they were aware that the lift is being used by a contractor. Generally, however there do not appear to be any issues with breakdown.</p>	
11.4	<p>BG confirmed for MB that 433 of the 466 doors have undergone a visual inspection, requiring a photo to be taken to indicate that the door was intact and had not been altered. The visual inspection does not replace the full maintenance inspection and as such until this is completed the door will remain non-compliant. KH confirmed that each tower block is on a rolling programme.</p>	
11.5	<p>KH confirmed for MB that the lift contractor is being held to a strict regime and a specialist contractor is retained to provide support from a technical perspective.</p>	
11.6	<p>KH confirmed for MB that the lift at Blackdown will be used by the contractor and the lift contractor is aware of the situation and the SEH supervising officer also closely monitors the situation. KH noted that there have been some issues with vandalism and that the lifts in the block are ageing which brings issues with repairs.</p>	
11.7	<p>CM sought clarity as to whether funding is available for ensuring that properties reach EPC standards. KH confirmed that there is a drive to improve energy efficiency and all properties should be rated minimum EPC C. Discussions are ongoing as part of the SCC/SEH sustainability & environmental subgroup which reports to the Strategic Partnership Board in relation to EPC and funding. Funding could be available from the decarbonisation fund, but any funds provided need to be match funded, but he assured CM that SCC and SEH are working closely in relation to this.</p>	
11.8	<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>i) The Board noted the metrics as the Corporate Compliance Position Statement and the statements in sections 4 to 10 of this report</p> <p>ii) The Board noted the actions being taken to regularise positions where required</p>	
12.	<p>Empty Properties Report</p>	
12.1	<p>KH gave an overview of the report.</p>	

12.2	CM sought clarity as to the target turnaround figures for voids properties. KH confirmed the overall target for voids is 17 days but that is key to key. There is a 10-day turnaround set as a contractual target for Morgan Sindall. KH noted that within the report Morgan Sindall was not hitting target when the report was written but it is believed that by the end of July they will be within target.	
12.3	MB sought clarity as to when the Balmoral Project action plan will be shared with the Board. KH confirmed that the action plan will be available at the October Board meeting.	
12.4	MD sought clarity as to the empty properties as part of the Queensway Project and are these considered long term, or will they be let? KH confirmed that there is a combination of both where some are relet, some used for temporary accommodation and some long-term void. In relation to the long-term void properties this is being discussed in detail with SCC colleagues.	
12.5	GH updated that SCC are aware of the challenges related to the Better Queensway project and have started to analyse numbers in a different way. However, to understand the financial implications and work through with the regeneration partner as to workarounds being developed, it is still prudent to put a hold on the properties. Therefore, providing a timescale as to how long these will be empty is hard to do but he assured MD that work is being undertaken in earnest presently.	
12.6	MD sought clarity as to the progress on redeveloping the 12 ex-SHO units. KH confirmed that a commission has been awarded to a consultant to undertake a feasibility study to look at how to bring the accommodation back into use and how to best to take this forward.	
12.7	It was agreed that an update would be provided for the October Board meeting.	SL
12.8	Recommendations:	
i)	The Board noted the contents of this report	
ii)	The Board agreed to receiving a follow-on report at a subsequent Board meeting	
13.	Resident Engagement Strategy Report	
13.1	It was agreed that Page 5 of the Strategy be amended at 6.1b to read 'including opportunities to influence and be involved in the governance of SEH and for meaningful engagement with Board'. SL to update.	SL

13.2	CS noted that section 6 in particular was very comprehensive, but he sought clarity as to how the Board are going to receive feedback and information on how the Strategy is working, how it will be monitored.	
13.3	SL updated that this Strategy, along with Community Safety Strategy, will feed into the annual report to the Board but the Scrutiny Forum will be updating the EMT quarterly on key actions and the Forum could be asked to update the Board too.	
13.4	KD sought clarity as to whether a Board Resident Champion had been appointed as he felt this was important in order to be proactive with resident engagement. RE agreed with this point and noted that residents like the resident Board members to attend their meetings. It was noted that Cllr Board members are also in regular contact with residents and RE suggested that since this was discussed the situation has progressed.	
13.5	MB sought clarity as to whether Board members had visited any local estates. It was acknowledged that this had been difficult during covid, but Board members had previously attended estate walkabouts as part of the induction programme.	
13.6	RE reminded the Board that it should not get too involved in the operational side of the business but noted that constructive challenge was required.	
13.7	Recommendation:	
i)	The Board endorsed the SEH Residents' Charter – our Engagement Strategy 2022-27.	
14.	Community Safety Strategy Annual Review	
14.1	SL gave an overview of the report.	
14.2	MB wanted to understand how SEH engage with vulnerable residents when they are often difficult to engage. SL updated that there are a lot of residents with complex needs and in order to engage as much as possible SEH work with a lot of partnership agencies, including SCC's adult social care team and this has provided many positive outcomes.	
14.3	Recommendations:	
i)	The Board noted the contents of the report.	
ii)	The Board endorsed the Community Safety Strategy 2022-25.	

15.	Draft Unaudited Accounts 2021/22	
15.1	DL gave an overview of the report.	
15.2	DL confirmed that Audited accounts will be available at the October for sign off.	
15.3	Recommendation:	
i)	The Board noted the draft unaudited Accounts 2021/22	
16.	Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting held on 16 June 2022	
16.1	MO gave feedback on the Audit & Risk Committee Minutes in David Joyce's absence. Discussion had centred around a number of financial, performance and risk management issues and given the timing of the meeting the Committee had received a number of reports summarising the position for 2021/22 including reports from the Counter Fraud Investigation Team, Internal Audit's Annual Report and the Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report.	
16.2	The Board noted the minutes for the Audit & Risk Committee.	
17.	Date of Next meeting 27 October 2022 at 3.00pm in-person	