

South Essex Homes Limited

Minutes of Board Meeting

Date: 10 April 2025

Start: 3.00pm End: 5.55pm Civic Centre

Minutes

Present Chris March (CM) – Chair; Roger Eastwood (RE) – Vice Chair; Chris Silvey (CS); Keith Ducker (KD), Michael Oxley (MO); Anne Jones (AJ); Jane Norman (JN); Margaret Borton (MB), Sir James Duddridge (JD), Rachel Hadley (RH)

In attendance: Mike Gattrell (MG) – Chief Executive, Sarah Lander (SL) – Director Housing Services; Daniel Lyons (DL) – Director Finance and Corporate Services; Beverley Gallacher (BG) – Director Commercial Services, Kevin Hazlewood (KH) – Director Property Services; Carol Cooper (CC) – Board Support Officer Glyn Halksworth (GH) – Director of Regeneration, Housing & Regulatory Services SCC;

Tenant Observer: Majzoub Ali – Public Meeting Only

PUBLIC AGENDA		Action
1.	Welcome and Introductions	
1.1	CM welcomed everyone to the meeting.	
2.	Apologies for Absence	
2.1	Apologies were received from Peter Potter. The Scrutiny Forum were unable to attend.	
3.	Declarations of Interest	
3.1	AJ declared an interest as the Council's portfolio holder for Housing – this is a standing declaration of interest.	
4.	Resident Scrutiny Forum – Review of Contact Centre Services	
4.1	SL confirmed that the Scrutiny Forum were unable to attend and sent their apologies, so SL provided an overview of the report prepared for the Board.	

<p>4.2</p> <p>4.3</p> <p>4.4</p> <p>4.6</p> <p>4.7</p> <p>4.15</p> <p>i)</p>	<p>The recommendations will be discussed with the Executive Management Team (EMT) and any changes to processes will be updated.</p> <p>KD noted that the Forum appeared to have only discussed the service with three residents and KD felt this was not a good representation of tenants overall. SL confirmed that the Forum had attended residents' groups at sheltered schemes and also consulted the Resident Advisory Panel (RAP)</p> <p>CS sought clarity on how individual residents' vulnerabilities are noted and how accessible they are to staff. SL confirmed that vulnerabilities and protected characteristics are available within the Northgate housing IT system. If the contact centre believes there may be safeguarding issues or require clarity about a tenant they are able to contact the duty tenancy officer. SL also confirmed that consent to contact an advocate is also available on Northgate but in those circumstances, it was more likely that a duty officer would be asked to contact the advocate rather than the contact centre staff member.</p> <p>CM noted that the statistics referred to in Appendix B related to 2023/24. SL confirmed that when the Forum had started to carry out the work this is when the information gathering had taken place. The Forum have recognised that there are areas where they need to be upskilled, particularly around understanding data and scoping the review from the outset and training is being arranged to assist with this, however, support will always be available from officers and the relevant director.</p> <p>CM noted that whilst this is a thorough report there does appear to be a need for upskilling to ensure that the Forum's work meets Regulator standard. SL agreed that work would continue with the Forum from the resident engagement team leader and that there are also other forums, focus groups and the complaints panel that scrutinise the services, so there are other avenues for scrutiny.</p> <p>Recommendation:</p> <p>The Board noted the content of this report and, in particular, the Resident Scrutiny Forum's (RSF) report following its review into Contact Centre Services at Appendix One</p>	
<p>5.</p> <p>5.1</p> <p>5.2</p>	<p>Public Draft Minutes & Matters Arising from meeting held 23 January 2025</p> <p>The Minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.</p> <p>GH noted that at 7.2 the word regulation should read reorganisation. This was noted and the Minutes updated.</p>	

<p>6.</p> <p>6.1</p> <p>6.2</p> <p>6.3</p> <p>6.4</p> <p>6.5</p>	<p>Chair's Remarks</p> <p>CM noted, following the recent training day, Board members had expressed that it would be beneficial to meet more regularly in person. Although it was too late to reorganise the June meeting, it was agreed that further discussion would be undertaken at the November meeting to decide whether a return to in person meetings for all Board meetings should be undertaken.</p> <p>SCC have recently endorsed a new City Vision; SEH are one of the partner organisations contributing to the development of the Vision and the next Board meeting will see a report outlining SEH' involvement to provide a greater understanding for Board members.</p> <p>SL has prepared the final draft version of Resident Engagement Annual Report which she will be circulating to Board members to ensure that they are aware of the detail. The report will be brought to the Board in June for final endorsement but is being circulated in advance as the Regulator has asked to see a draft version. Board members are asked to review the report and provide any feedback to SL as quickly as possible to ensure where necessary comments are incorporated into the version being sent to the Regulator.</p> <p>Whilst the onsite inspection by the Regulator of Social Housing has been undertaken the report is not expected to be received until late summer and will be presented to the Board at the November meeting.</p> <p>It was noted that this was RE's and MO's last in-person meeting.</p>	<p>SL</p>
<p>7.</p> <p>7.1</p> <p>7.2</p> <p>7.3</p> <p>7.4</p>	<p>Better Queensway – Verbal Update</p> <p>GH provided a verbal update for Better Queensway. SCC continue to engage with potential partners. Work to discharge planning is underway for the roundabout at Southchurch Road. This work is being undertaken by SCC as it would derisk the project for potential partners. Once planning has been discharged this will lead to the Development Control Committee allowing the work to commence.</p> <p>Funding for this area of the development is by government grant through Homes England, the grant needs to be used by 31 March 2026, and it is envisaged that this will be achieved. GH confirmed the Homes England grant is related to highways work and not building of properties.</p> <p>Discussions continue but it is likely to see the project broken down into chunks giving the opportunity to work with different partners for each area. GH is confident that relatively soon there will be a clear understanding of the route to market for the residential elements of the development and at that time further updates will be provided.</p> <p>AJ noted discussion will be undertaken at Cabinet and decisions will be made regarding the approach of partnerships. As time has moved on changes in the market and to the scheme means that it no longer resembles the previous project. SCC are aware of the importance of keeping residents updated with clear and positive messages.</p>	

7.5	GH noted that knowledge and lessons learned from previous years on the project, which first started 10 years ago, means that there have been, and will be, changes in how the project will be managed. GH noted that some changes being considered are refurbishment of tower blocks rather than demolition and rebuilding, but the outcome will provide tenants with modern living conditions turning the estate into a modern development.	
7.6	MB noted that there are not many residents in attendance at the Queensway Matters meeting and it is important to get more residents involved.	
7.7	GH confirmed for RH that there are currently 441 council homes, 4 tower blocks and 2 maisonettes included in the redevelopment but once completed the development will be for 1721 homes providing considerable housing growth.	
7.8	JN sought clarity regarding the timeline for the project. GH noted that this is largely dependent upon the market and could be impacted by current global economic issues, but it is anticipated that from a standing start a project like this would take 4-5 years minimum to complete.	
7.9	AJ noted there would be a large requirement for decants during the project and that requires services and support. Housing needs have changed since the first development of the plan, and it is important to understand the changing population and how this affects housing needs.	
8.	Residents' Voice Your view	
8.1	DL read the submitted Residents' Voice Your View and the subsequent response.	
8.2	The Board discussed ways of ensuring tenants are aware of Residents' Voice Your View and how this can be accessed, in addition to just using the website. There was also discussion regarding ways that tenants can obtain paper copies of the Board papers. It was agreed that officers would investigate further ways to advertise Residents' Voice Your View including having this regularly advertised in Insight magazine, possible posters at schemes and blocks and the use of the contact centre telephone line, where messages can be recorded for those who are waiting. The Board agreed it is important for residents to be aware that there is a way for them to contact the Board.	DL
9.	Governance & Stewardship Report	
9.1	CC provided an overview of the report.	
9.2	JD sought confirmation that the role of Company Secretary, being held by an executive director, was not a governance concern. DL confirmed that the company secretary role was limited in terms of time for DL and that CC would be continuing to support the company secretary function in relation to the Board.	
9.3	The Forward Plan was updated so that the Complaints Update was amended to an Annual Complaints Report.	

<p>9.4</p> <p>i)</p> <p>ii)</p> <p>iii)</p>	<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>The Board agreed Forward Plan for 2025/26.</p> <p>The Board appointed Daniel Lyons, Director of Corporate & Finance as Company Secretary for South Essex Homes (SEH).</p> <p>The Board noted the appointment of Beverley Gallacher, Director Commercial Services as Company Secretary for South Essex Property Services (SEPS) and South Essex Facilities Management (SEFM).</p>	
<p>10.</p> <p>10.1</p> <p>10.2</p> <p>10.3</p> <p>10.4</p> <p>10.5</p> <p>10.6</p>	<p>Company Assurance Report as at 28 February 2025</p> <p>DL provided an overview of the report.</p> <p>MO sought clarity regarding telephone costs, asking for assurance that, with the disconnection of 60% of lines, the costs would be reduced and the overspend would also reduce. DL confirmed that the overspend for 2024/25 would remain unchanged although 2025/26 would see a significant reduction in spend.</p> <p>RH sought clarity as to whether there was anything further that could be done to mitigate postage costs by using alternative methods of providing material to residents. DL confirmed that the main increase had been caused by the regulatory requirement of the Building Safety Act to provide information to all residents in properties with additional information for those in mid-rise and high-rise blocks relating to fire safety</p> <p>CM suggested that it may be more cost effective for the information to be hand delivered and KH confirmed that this could be investigated, and the Board requested investigation of other methods of distributing the information, such as online, with Insight or the use of Voicescape. KH noted that the interpretation of the Act means there are 3 separate types of information and SEH need to be able to validate for SCC that the information has been provided to tenants.</p> <p>BG confirmed for JN that the digital phone upgrade for Careline customers was underway and would be delivered in time for the digital switchover.</p> <p>RH sought confirmation whether there was a divergence from plan -v- budget in 4.5.10. DL confirmed that the rewiring is part of the Decent Homes programmes, and all properties are compliant except those where there are issues with access. The planned figures were agreed at budget setting and as the year progresses the number of properties changes. KH confirmed that currently the Decent Homes programme is 99.56% compliant, this properties where full surveys have not been carried out due to difficult access, the risk is mitigated by those properties having valid EICR certificates.</p>	<p>KH</p>

<p>10.7</p> <p>10.8</p> <p>10.9</p> <p>i)</p> <p>ii)</p> <p>iii)</p>	<p>RH sought clarity as to whether the lower spend on fire protection against budget (4.5.12) was a risk. KH confirmed that we are awaiting confirmation from the Building Safety Regulator for approval, applications were made in May 2024, and we were informed by the Safety Regulator that there is a 30–40 week delay in having a determination of the work proposed.</p> <p>In terms of the rolling programme to upgrade ventilation systems across all high-rise blocks it was noted as a substantial investment by SCC. Some budget is moved around so the numbers look different the budget for compartmentation works has been carried forward from the previous financial year to allow for 2 roof replacements at 2 sheltered schemes which was funded over 2 years. Any risk is mitigated through fire risk assessments.</p> <p>Recommendations:</p> <p>The Board noted South Essex Homes’ financial performance based on information as of 28th February 2025.</p> <p>The Board noted the performance as set out in the Key Performance Indicator Report as at 28th February 2025.</p> <p>The Board approved the Key Performance Indicator targets as set out for 2025/26 and agreed with Southend on Sea City Council (SCC).</p>	
<p>11.</p> <p>11.1</p> <p>11.2</p> <p>11.3</p> <p>i)</p>	<p>Risk Register Review</p> <p>DL provided an overview of the report.</p> <p>JD noted the appetite of the Audit and Risk Committee to scrutinise the Risk Register and confirmed that the Committee will concentrate on the 3 biggest risks, the biggest of which is the failure of the Repairs & Maintenance contract.</p> <p>Recommendation:</p> <p>The Board noted the contents of the report and approve the Strategic Risk Register (Appendix 1).</p>	
<p>12.</p> <p>12.1</p> <p>12.2</p>	<p>Health & Safety Compliance Report</p> <p>KH provided an overview of the report and updated on actions since the preparation of the report.</p> <p>Whilst CCTV is not a statutory requirement the test certificate had now been received. Discussion with a specialist contractor in relation to the delays in obtaining fire door glazing continue with the contractor offering to produce an alternative solution to ensure certification.</p>	

12.3	<p>Work to sprinkler systems will be completed by the end of April. Gas testing for communal and domestic dwellings was now 100%, although 1 property has fallen out of compliance due to the fact it is due for demolition, however work is underway for Cadent to remove the gas supply from the property thereby mitigating the risk. A platform lift at Nestuda House is not LOLER compliant and KH's team is engaging with residents and insurance to have the lift decommissioned but the lift will remain in situ for any future use.</p>	
12.4	<p>GH & KH confirmed for JN that the property due to be demolished is an ex-caretaker bungalow and the whole site is due for redevelopment by SCC. Cadent are the statutory body responsible for gas at the property and once the gas supply has been removed any risk will be removed.</p>	
12.5	<p>RH sought clarity regarding figures at 10.3 – DMC where performance is concerning prior to Awaab's Law coming into effect. KH confirmed that Internal Audit have been commissioned to complete an audit (which will be completed this week) and have been specifically asked to look at SEH' preparedness for Awaab's Law and to look at approaches to ensure preparedness. Once completed the audit report will be presented to the A&R Committee.</p>	
12.6	<p>The Inspection Performance Team have been tasked with completing 80% of jobs outstanding by the end of April. The R&M contractor has been informed that unless all outstanding actions are completed by the end of the week then KH will appoint an additional contractor and recharge the current R&M contractor. All work to ensure preparedness is being monitored and supported by the DMC Working Group and DMC Oversight Group.</p>	
12.7	<p>KH had liaised with MHCLG regarding guidance for landlords prior to the introduction of Awaab's Law and had been informed that guidance will be issued by October.</p>	
12.8	<p>MO sought clarity of any risk associated with the glazing in fire doors being delayed. KH confirmed that the timber in place will mitigate the risk of the spread of flame down the passage. In order to be BM Trada compliant, it may be necessary to install an anti-arson box. KH noted that recent fire safety regulations had been watered down, and the SEH standard of testing was far superior to the regulations.</p>	
12.9	<p>MB wanted to know whether consideration had been given to whether the sprinkler system installation was a cost effective solution given some of the problems. KH confirmed there are 3 systems which are operating and functioning, but some defects currently require repair. The issues are monitored by the Building & Fire Safety Sub-Group and the sprinklers are tested regularly and recently following a small fire were found to be effective at extinguishing the fire.</p>	
12.10	<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>	

ii)	The Board noted the actions being taken to regularise positions where required.	
iii)	The Board noted the situation reported in paragraph 7.3.	
iv)	The Board noted the information in paragraph 10.	
13.	Committees' Forward Plans & Terms of Reference	
13.2	DL updated that a meeting had taken place prior to the Board meeting to review the Committees' Terms of Reference the outcome of which is that officers would bring a report to the June Board meeting providing proposals on updated governance structures and proposals.	DL
13.3	Recommendation:	
i)	The Board noted the review being undertaken of the Terms of Reference for the Audit & Risk Committee, the Personnel & Remuneration Committee and Group Commercial Committee	
ii)	The Board agreed the Forward Plan for the Audit & Risk Committee	
ii)	The Board agreed the Forward Plan for the Personnel and Remuneration Committee	
Date of next meeting 24 June 2025 at 3.00pm via MS Teams		

Chris March
Chair of Board

Date 24.6.25