

**South Essex Homes Limited**

**Minutes of Board Meeting**

**Date: 23 January 2025**

**Start: 3.00pm End: 6.05pm Via MS Teams**

**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), Peter Potter (PP), Sir James Duddridge (JD), Rachel Hadley (RH)

**In attendance:** Mike Gatrell (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) – Company Secretary; Glyn Halksworth (GH) – Director of Regeneration, Housing & Regulatory Services SCC; Tim Holland (TH), Head of Housing Supply, SCC; Stuart Long, Chief Executive – ATF; Chris McPhillips, Brenda Tilley and Diane Nicholls – Scrutiny Forum

**Tenant Observer:** Majzoub Ali – Public Meeting Only

**Inspector Observers:** Alison Napper, Sam Cooke

<b>PUBLIC AGENDA</b>		<b>Action</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Welcome and Introductions</b>	
1.1	CM welcomed everyone to the meeting. Alison Napper and Sam Cooke, Inspectors from the Regulator who were observing the meeting introduced themselves.	
<b>2.</b>	<b>Apologies for Absence</b>	
2.1	There were no apologies for absence	

<p><b>3.</b></p> <p>3.1</p> <p>3.2</p> <p>3.3</p>	<p><b>Declarations of Interest</b></p> <p>AJ declared an interest as portfolio holder for the HRA.</p> <p>SL, CS and GH declared an interest as Trustees on the Southend Community Matters charity.</p> <p>MB declared an interest as a Trustee for Resident Engagement Multi-Cultural Essex</p>	
<p><b>4.</b></p> <p>4.1</p> <p>4.2</p> <p>4.3</p> <p>4.4</p> <p>4.5</p> <p>4.6</p> <p>4.7</p> <p>4.8</p>	<p><b>Resident Engagement Update including ATF</b></p> <p>SL provided an overview of the report and provided an update on comments previously raised by Board members through Diligent.</p> <p>The Residents' Charter had been updated and reviewed as part of the Big Conversation with residents.</p> <p>SL updated on the Big Conversation meeting from 15 January, where 60 tenants had attended to discuss the Residents Charter and commitments. There was a mixed demographic at the meeting with a large proportion of attendees being sheltered residents.</p> <p>SL updated that, to ensure continuous improvement, a Customer Improvement Panel has been established with the initial focus being on repairs. 24 residents have so far registered an interest to be part of the Panel.</p> <p>MB sought clarity as to whether the geographic details of the residents who attended the Big Conversation were known. SL confirmed that those in attendance were from across the stock with a good representation from sheltered schemes but also from leaseholders.</p> <p>CM sought clarity as to why SL thought the event was more successful than previous times. SL confirmed that there was a clear agenda, a lot of time had been spent contacting residents and ensuring people were reminded of the event.</p> <p>Stuart Long (SLo) provided an overview of the presentation of the work undertaken in partnership with SEH by Achieve Thrive Flourish (ATF).</p> <p>KD sought clarity as to whether there are plans to work with residents in the Mendip and Kent Elms area. SLo confirmed that ATF have supported the Mendip garden initiative which is now a constituted group in itself. Working with SEH has identified Queensway as a focus for this year, but ATF are open to suggestions of support for other areas too and are always happy to discuss ideas.</p>	

4.9	JD noted the fantastic work and asked for clarity around the work being undertaken at Queensway following the situation with the regeneration project. SLo confirmed that for the last year the focus has been on building trust with families and residents on the estate, this will forge strong foundations to gather momentum for development of the next piece of work. The Discovery Day was the first step to understanding what residents felt about the development and issues being faced by the community.	
4.10	AJ also noted that she Chairs the Queensway Matters group which meets regularly to keep residents of the Estate updated on the redevelopment of the site with attendees being members of both SCC and SEH housing teams, ward councillors and residents from the Estate.	
4.11	AJ sought clarity regarding whether SLo was aware of any issues that young people faced regarding identification and wondered whether ATF could promote citizen cards. SLo said that ATF could assist with the roll out across schools and would be happy to discuss further with AJ.	
4.12	JN invited SLo to attend a residents' meeting in St Lukes Ward to share ideas and SLo confirmed that ATF were active in Cluny Square and were running the Wellbeing Hive at Garon. ATF also work closely with Temple Sutton School. SLo confirmed for JN that it was sometimes difficult to obtain funding from local businesses but there were other opportunities including volunteering and social value. Both Axis and NatWest had provided staff volunteers to undertake planter repainting at Queensway which had been a big success.	
4.13	MO commented that the report was very impressive particularly being able to quantify the outcomes and congratulated SLo and the ATF team on the work.	
4.14	SLo confirmed for MB that ATF have links with the Balmoral Community Centre through a programme that runs from Milton Primary School.	
4.15	<p><b>Recommendation:</b></p> <p><b>i) The Board noted activities undertaken by SEH and also through partnership with ATF to meet the commitments we have made in our 'Residents' Charter – our Engagement Strategy 2022-27'.</b></p>	
5.	<p><b>Scrutiny Forum Annual Report</b></p> <p>5.1 SL provided an overview of the report. The Forum members introduced themselves to the Board. Brenda Tilley (BT) is the Chair of the Forum and Chris McPhillips (CMP) and Diane Nicholls (DN) make up the rest of the group.</p> <p>5.2 CMP provided the Board with an overview of the works undertaken in 2024 as included in the Annual Report.</p> <p>5.3 CMP updated that the review of the Contact Centre had been put on hold whilst changes within the Contact Centre were bedded-in, but the review has now been restarted. The next area for review will be voids.</p>	

5.4	The Board noted the importance of the work undertaken by the Forum and thanked them for their input.	
5.5	<b>Recommendation:</b>	
i)	<b>The Board noted the content of this report and in particular, the information contained in Southend Resident Scrutiny Forum's Annual Report December 2024 (Appendix One).</b>	
6.	<b>Public Draft Minutes and Matters Arising from meeting held 24 October 2024</b>	
6.1	The Minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.	
7.	<b>Chair's Remarks</b>	
7.1	CM noted that the Executive Management Team (EMT) and Officers had reviewed all the comments made by Board members in Diligent and that these would be addressed as part of the overview of the individual report.	
7.2	CM noted that via Diligent JD had requested an update on Local Government reorganisation and how this may affect SEH going forward. CM noted that having discussed the issue with MG and GH it is currently too early to provide a useful update, but an update will be provided at the next Board meeting. JD requested that the update include views on who we may potentially partner with and possible implications for SEH.	
7.3	CM reminded the Board that the NFA conference invitation had been circulated and encouraged them to attend if they wished. The conference is taking place in Birmingham on 14 May 2025. CM stressed the importance of Board members attending these types of events to ensure that they are up to date with the issues affecting social housing.	
8.	<b>Residents' Voice Your view</b>	
8.1	There were no Residents' Voice Your View received.	
9.	<b>Governance &amp; Stewardship Report</b>	
9.1	CC provided an overview of the report. There were no questions from the Board and the recommendations were agreed.	
9.2	<b>Recommendations:</b>	
i)	<b>The Board noted the update on recruitment and agreed the appointments of Christopher Turland and Christopher Harris to the Board with effect from 25 July 2025 as Non-Executive Directors for a term of 3 years in accordance with the Articles of Association.</b>	
ii)	<b>The Board agreed the appointment of Christopher Turland to the Audit &amp; Risk Committee and Christopher Harris to the Personnel &amp; Remuneration Committee with effect from 25 July 2025.</b>	
iii)	<b>The Board noted the annual analysis of Board Member attendance.</b>	

<b>10.</b>	<b>Health &amp; Safety Compliance Report</b>	
10.1	KH provided an overview of the report and appendices.	
10.2	KH updated the Board as follows on the compliance position since the report was circulated:	
10.3	Gas servicing – the 5 properties identified in the report as being potentially non-compliant – 2 properties have now been completed, and 3 properties have appointments booked. Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) stood at 100% compliance. All automatic air vents were compliant and the insurance inspection for the scissor lift had been received.	
10.4	KH updated on comments in Diligent – the extra funding will allow SEH to carry out 2 years of electrical testing in one year to bring properties to full compliance rather than being in a reactive state. SCC had agreed the funding, and it was agreed this was a positive development.	
10.5	MO had raised a question in Diligent regarding a private fire hydrant, as this had not been tested due to a car being in the way. MO sought clarity as to what would happen in the event of the fire brigade being in attendance. KH confirmed that Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) have powers to move vehicles and direct traffic so this scenario would not present a problem.	
10.6	SL updated on comments made in Diligent regarding bedbugs. Bedbugs are more prevalent in sheltered schemes due to shared facilities such as laundry rooms and carers visiting various properties. Of 22 sheltered schemes, there are currently 3 where bedbugs are present, and these are being proactively treated by our specialist contractor. There has been an increase in bedbug infestations, the reasons for which are not clear. It was agreed that SL would discuss further with JD outside of the meeting, particularly in relation to whether the bedbugs can move through air vents.	<b>SL</b>
10.7	KH confirmed that targets for dampness, mould and condensation (DMC) inspections are aligned with current proposals to be introduced as part of Awaab's Law, with inspections being undertaken within 7 days of notification by a tenant of a DMC issue.	
10.8	MB sought clarity regarding a particular property in Townfields where the tenants were experiencing DMC in the property. KH agreed to discuss further with MB outside of the meeting.	<b>KH</b>
10.9	AJ requested that the report be shared with the Housing and Planning Working Group as the information regarding Building Safety cases would be useful for that group. KH to share with AJ.	<b>KH</b>
10.10	KH confirmed for JN that 1 of the 3 lifts in the refurbishment programme is at Cluny House.	

<p><b>10.11</b></p> <p><b>i)</b></p> <p><b>ii)</b></p> <p><b>iii)</b></p> <p><b>iii)</b></p>	<p><b>Recommendations:</b></p> <p><b>The Board noted the metrics as the Corporate Compliance Statement and the statements in sections 4 and 10 of this report.</b></p> <p><b>The Board noted the actions being taken to regularise positions where required.</b></p> <p><b>The Board noted the situation reported in paragraph 7.3.</b></p> <p><b>The Board noted the information in paragraph 10.</b></p>	
<p><b>11.</b></p> <p>11.1</p> <p>11.2</p> <p>11.3</p> <p>11.4</p> <p>11.5</p> <p>11.6</p> <p>11.7</p>	<p><b>Company Assurance Report</b></p> <p>DL provided an overview of the report.</p> <p>DL responded to a question in Diligent as to whether the contractor would be recharged for the compensation being paid out from complaints for service failures. DL confirmed that the team are working hard with the contractor to ensure the service improvement plan is progressed in order to get the best service for tenants</p> <p>DL responded to a comment in Diligent regarding postage costs confirming that this week the Finance Team had received a breakdown of postage costs from SCC. This will require further analysis although work is underway to look at alternative arrangements for processing rent arrears letters which should reduce postage costs.</p> <p>CM sought clarity regarding the rise in premises costs. DL confirmed that, historically, grounds maintenance had been undertaken by SCC through an SLA. However, SCC had proposed a substantial increase to the SLA. This resulted in the GM contract being awarded to SEPS and whilst the costs have increased the contract with SEPS is still financially advantageous when compared with what the increased cost of the SCC SLA, would otherwise have been.</p> <p>CM sought reassurance that we are doing all we can to recover costs for common area improvements from leaseholders. DL confirmed there is a very rigorous S20 process in place, so he is comfortable that we are.</p> <p>DL clarified for CM that all but one of the ex-SHO properties are now let.</p> <p>CM sought clarity as to the number of properties at the Queensway Estate, available to let and the reason for this. DL confirmed that Board members will remember that as part of the proposed regeneration project for the estate, it was agreed that properties would be held back, resulting in a lot of empty properties on the estate. The decision was made to bring these properties back into use for temporary accommodation to alleviate the burden on SCC's need to use bed and breakfast accommodation. Those properties are now becoming ready to let. However, there is often a time lag in identifying suitable tenants which can prolong the process. The Team is working with SCC to ensure the properties are let as soon as possible although many properties are either bedsits or 1–2-bedroom properties that are not always suitable for families on the waiting list.</p>	

<p>11.8</p> <p>11.9</p> <p>11.10</p> <p>11.11</p> <p>i)</p> <p>ii)</p>	<p>CM sought clarity in relation to sickness absence, in particular whether there are any teams/areas where there is an issue. DL confirmed that sickness is across the whole business but is prevalent in frontline/manual workers. There is a rigorous support programme in place to support staff back to work as soon as possible.</p> <p>BG confirmed that there have been issues within Estate Services with sickness around musculoskeletal issues which are not work related but take time to resolve. There has also been a high level of sickness within the Careline/Sheltered Housing Team comprising of mostly short-term illness. Managers closely monitor all sickness and ensure staff are supported and policies are complied with.</p> <p>RH confirmed that the Personnel &amp; Remuneration Committee are provided with a detailed report for sickness which is an area of focus for the Committee.</p> <p><b>Recommendations:</b></p> <p><b>The Board reviewed and considered South Essex Homes' financial performance based on information as of 31 December 2024.</b></p> <p><b>The Board noted the performance as set out in the Key Performance Indicator Report as at 31 December 2024.</b></p>	
<p>12.</p> <p>12.1</p> <p>12.2</p> <p>12.3</p> <p>12.4</p>	<p><b>Budget 2025/26 (including Performance Target setting)</b></p> <p>DL provided an overview of the report.</p> <p>DL highlighted KP4 and KP5 noting that a target had yet to be set. This is due to the uncertainty around the migration of Housing Benefit (HB) to Universal Credit (UC) which is expected to affect around 1000 of our tenants. It is anticipated that sheltered housing tenants will be exempt. The issues will occur as HB is paid in advance and UC is paid 5 weeks in arrears so this may well have a big impact on rent arrears targets. If all 1000 tenants migrate to UC it is likely to increase rent arrears from 2.7% to 4%. The Board will be kept up to date with progress of discussion with SCC regarding setting a target for these KPIs.</p> <p>MB sought clarity as to whether SEH were informing residents regarding the change, as some residents may never have been in rent arrears. MB was concerned that letters being automatically generated may cause residents concern if they are told their tenancy is at risk. DL confirmed that a communication campaign will begin soon, informing tenants of the migration and the support that can be offered to help them through the process.</p> <p>SL noted that there is a transitional protection payment (TPP) that tenants can claim but they would need to wait until they receive notification that they are transferring across. Once they get the letter the TPP will kick in. It was noted that DWP are mindful of the impact this may have on tenants.</p>	

12.5	AJ noted that she had discussed the issue with MG along with the Chief Executive of SCC and the Leader and confirmed that the Council's Household Support Fund could be accessed, and AJ will be discussing further with SCC's benefits team.	
12.6	<b>Recommendations:</b>	
i)	<b>The Board approved the proposed budget for 2025/26.</b>	
ii)	<b>The Board agreed the proposed Key Performance Indicator Targets for further discussion with Southend on Sea City Council (SCC).</b>	
13.	<b>Review of Financial Regulations and Scheme of Delegation</b>	
13.2	DL noted that the Audit and Risk Committee approved the document and recommended to Board for approval. There were no questions from the Board.	
13.3	<b>Recommendation:</b>	
i)	<b>The Board approved the updated Financial Regulations and Scheme of Delegation.</b>	
14.	<b>Business Plan Action Plan Update Report</b>	
14.1	DL provided an overview of the report.	
14.2	DL clarified for MO that the appraisal form noted in the report was the appraisal form used by managers for staff appraisals.	
14.3	DL confirmed for RH that KH has self-assessed against the Housemark spotlight report and produced an action plan that will be available at the next Board meeting.	
14.4	CM sought clarity as to the centralisation of the complaints handling function. DL confirmed that all complaints are now dealt with centrally. The centralisation of the function has been successful, with the turnaround times for answering complaints in time improving, it has also provided consistency in responses. It also provides the tenant with a single point of contact and provides a better service overall. In addition to the central complaints function, MeLearning training for all staff in complaints handling and dispute resolution is being progressed which it is anticipated will improve the complaints TSM.	
14.5	<b>Recommendation:</b>	
i)	<b>The Board noted the progress made in meeting the actions from the South Essex Homes' Business Plan for 2023 to 2026.</b>	

<b>15.</b>	<b>Consumer Standards Improvement Plan</b>	
15.1	SL provided an overview of the report.	
15.2	SCC is the registered provider who will be inspected. SCC will need to provide the Regulator with assurance that it is meeting the Consumer Standards. However, SEH has been delegated areas of the housing function and so it is very much a joint approach to ensure that Consumer Standards are being met. The external scrutiny assessment undertaken by Savills in 2024 had formed the basis of the Consumer Standard Improvement Plan. The Consumer Standards Improvement Board was established last year and is chaired by GH with colleagues from both SEH and SCC forming the Board. The Board reviews any actions completed and any that require flagging.	
15.3	There were no questions from the Board.	
<b>15.4</b>	<b>Recommendation:</b>	
<b>i)</b>	<b>The Board noted the content of this report and progress in delivering actions set out in the Consumer Standards Improvement Plan</b>	
<b>16.</b>	<b>Minutes from Audit &amp; Risk Committee meeting 12 December 2024</b>	
16.1	RE provided an overview of the Minutes – noting:	
16.2	Point 9.4 – monitoring of sickness will be undertaken by the Personnel & Remuneration Committee rather than A&R.	
16.3	Point 11 – benchmarking with Housemark had been undertaken and whilst further analysis is underway performance was good.	
16.4	The Committee felt that TSMs should be taken directly to Board rather than to A&R.	
<b>16.5</b>	<b>The Board noted the Minutes from the Audit &amp; Risk Committee meeting 12 December 2024.</b>	
	<b>Date of next meeting 10 April 2025 in-person Civic Centre</b>	



Signed .....  
Chris March, Chair

Date 10 April 2025