

## Minutes of Meeting

Meeting: Members' Forum  
 Date: Thursday 11 July 2019  
 Time: 6:15pm – 8:30pm  
 Venue: Board Room, Soha Housing

### Present

Aurora Acone	Patricia Langford
Trevor Brewerton	Richard Mandunya
Jennifer Britton	Gerald Prior
Margaret Buckell	Paul Revell
Vanessa Churchward	Sue Such
Sean Godfrey	Deborah Wills
Peter Haynes	Vic Breach
Edwina Lamond	

### Also in attendance

Kate Wareing, Chief Executive  
 Maureen Adams, Director of Services and Communities  
 David Reynolds, Communications Manager  
 Jackie Logan, Resident Engagement and Communities Manager  
 Andrea Bain, Membership and Community Engagement Coordinator  
 Chelsea Sleep, Resident Engagement Advisor

### Observers

Lucy Weston, Joanne Worth.

### 1 Apologies for Absence

Val Kir, Bertie Doy, David Wilkins, Paul Revell.

### 2 Approval of Minutes

Gerald commented that he and Bertie had been missed from the list of Portfolio Holders recorded in the minutes of the last meeting. Vic commented he had been missed as Design Champion. Chelsea will amend this for the minutes held on record.

### 3 Matters arising

Vanessa asked for an update on the Resident Engagement Incentive Vouchers – Kate explained that the impact on benefits received depend on the individual's income. A payment does count for these purposes and should be notified to the DWP Kate clarified that residents can opt out of receiving vouchers if they wish.

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## **4 Chairs Report**

The Chair thanked all the staff involved in organising and coordinating the Co-regulation Away Day.

The Vice Chair then reported a suggestion discussed at the Effective Meetings Training that took place on 6 June 2019. It was suggested that the person presenting could choose who to take questions from rather than the chair. Vic thought the Chair should be in control and Richard commented that the person presenting might be too engrossed in their presentation to choose who to speak next. The Forum discussed this and decided it could work for internal people but not external, they voted to trial this method for this meeting.

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## **5 Chief Executive update**

### **External updates**

- A new consumer standards regulator may be established with an announcement expected in September. This will not be a significant change for Soha as we check against these standards at Board level and are accountable to residents and members through our membership and co-regulation processes.
- South Oxfordshire District Council experienced a change in political leadership; they are now a Liberal Democrat and Green coalition. They have been reviewing the Local Plan and deciding whether to recall it, as they are not happy with inheriting previous decisions made. The Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) could be at risk if SODC stall plans. This could have an impact upon Soha's development programme, which would be harder to predict. In terms of funding, it would not significantly affect Soha.
- Brexit – Soha have updated their risk register and reviewed their contingency plans.
- Local Community Land Trusts (CLTs) - Soha have been speaking to groups of people who work within small communities to identify sites they would like to see developed and on what terms.

### **Soha's profile updates**

- Soha are the third biggest developer of new homes by turnover in the country. Soha were the 50<sup>th</sup> biggest by number of new homes.
- Val, Bertie and Victoria attended the TPAS conference.
- Carole presented on two panels talking about resident involvement and membership at the CIH conference.

### **Internal updates**

- Office accommodation – Kate explained that because the Gateway project has been on hold for such a long time it has delayed planning, so it is probable that we will be located on the same site with the same building for some time. This means there needs to be improvements to the existing office.

Peter asked what position the Vale of the White Horse's local plan is in. Kate explained she thinks they are currently not planning to recall their own plan but

will double check this.

## **6 Services & Communities**

Maureen and Jackie presented on the Services and Community Strategies. Maureen explained consultations have taken place on the Services and Community strategy; Bethany Eckley, a consultant, is helping to collect all the ideas and consultation to date.

Jackie explained there were some strong themes regarding the Community strategy, these include:

- Training and employment
- Partnerships
- Loneliness and isolation
- Youth engagement
- Intergenerational

Jackie confirmed Soha have a £50k community investment budget this year. Margaret asked if Soha have any plans to assist with the TV licence fees. Maureen commented that whether concessionary licences for sheltered were being reintroduced could be explored.

Maureen explained the strong themes regarding the Services Strategy, these include:

- Getting online and mobile working
- Homelessness – The housing first project with Aspire is now up and running. Soha are monitoring the progress to see whether this project is worthwhile and whether it is something to continue with in the future
- Welfare reform/maximising income – we have six evictions this year which is two less than last year
- Repairs – The service was discussed at the Co-regulation away day
- Resident Safety

Maureen explained the IT team would be visiting Halton Housing Association who use the same system as Soha (QL). They hope to find out what difference the new IT system and mobile working has made to their tenants. Maureen then presented the consultation framework and explained how residents had contributed to the strategy. She confirmed a draft document would be circulated and the final Community Strategy would be issued to the Board AGM released by September. The Services Strategy will be tabled at the September Board meeting after sign off by the Forum,

## **7 Opening up Membership to Soha Staff**

Kate explained a paper would be going to Board next week (18<sup>th</sup> July) for their view on opening membership to staff. The decision rests with members and members will have the final decision at the AGM.

Kate explained there are two potential risks to allowing staff to become members:

- 1) Staff members' decisions may be driven as an employee rather than as a

member and what is best for Soha.

2) Staff views could overwhelm residents' views.

In order to manage this Soha would allow no more than 15% of members to be staff, and also ensure that votes cast by staff carried no more than 15% weight in any Member vote.

The opportunities are:

- 1) To help Soha achieve its vision of residents and staff shaping a stable future  
Soha has a long history of staff working with residents, Kate explained she would like staff to have the same sense of ownership as residents.
- 2) A number of staff are residents and they would like the opportunity to become members.

Peter asked if staff would be able to join the Forum. Kate confirmed they would not as the Forum is purely for residents. Staff can use the Staff Consultative Committee to voice opinions. This is an internal group for staff to meet with the Chief Executive and head of HR.

Deb commented that staff could argue they should be able to join the Forum if they are residents as well. Kate confirmed that staff who are also residents are treated as staff for these purposes.

Aurora asked if the 15% was of existing members or all tenants. Kate confirmed it was of the 15% of members and not all Soha residents.

Gerald commented staff cannot vote in Members' Forum elections, he asked if they would be able to vote for board. Kate explained staff would have the same rights as members except voting in the Members' Forum elections and being able to join the Forum.

Kate explained that any staff member who has completed their probationary period would be eligible to apply. Similarly, residents can only apply if they are fully assured residents, not on a starter tenancy.

Richard asked what impact on staff retention could be expected. Kate hopes that it will be another reason for staff to want to stay with Soha.

### **The Forum agreed the proposal to open up membership**

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## **8 How the Forum represents Residents**

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The new membership leaflet for residents was tabled. David explained the leaflet was designed for residents considering becoming a member. David asked the Forum whether the benefits of becoming a member have been captured.

Gerald noted that the Forum members are already involved so are embedded in the organisation, but it may be different for those that are not as involved.

Aurora commented that the text in the leaflet referring to the opportunity to 'own a share of a £38 million a year business' is misleading. Kate explained members do own a share but because Soha is a charity, there is no financial gain.

Vic asked why the phrase 'merging with another Housing Association' has been used. David explained that, historically, this was a popular reason for membership.

Peter suggested being more proactive in promoting the benefits of what Soha has done to persuade people to become members.

Sue said we do not need to scare people, she suggested using 'bitesize chunks' and to explain to others assuming the other person does not know the issue.

David then asked the Forum for their views on membership prize draws. He commented Soha held a prize draw and it attracted 50 new members, the Forum agreed that membership draws are a good idea.

Vic asked if a month's free rent in a draw connects with the complications of incentives and benefits. Kate explained it does not if it is in a prize draw, it is treated differently, and it comes under 'ad hoc payments'. Vic suggested offering £100 vouchers instead of a month's rent, which could be costly.

Peter commented that this might not be as effective. He suggested offering those using direct debit to pay their rent, a discounted rent. The Forum agreed to defer this discussion to another time.

The Chair and Vice Chair then asked the Forum for their views on how the Forum can communicate with other residents. Vic suggested the Forum would benefit from regular feedback about the community strategy items.

Vanessa asked if there are many younger members with families. Andrea said she would bring an update of the profile of Soha's members to the next Forum meeting. The Forum agreed they would like the Resident Engagement team to feed back to the Forum regularly.

Jackie and Andrea encouraged the Forum to attend Resident Engagement events. There are events coming up in Berinsfield, Thame and the Soha Summer Fair in Benson. They confirmed the community are welcome but Soha residents are a priority. Andrea will give Chelsea a list of events to circulate to the Forum.

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### **Any other business**

Kate explained Soha are updating Shared Ownership leases in order to equalise the rent increase clauses. Some leases have a higher rent increase than others so these will be brought into line.

Trevor and Vanessa will be attending the Board meeting next week. They asked if anyone else would like to attend the next meeting and if so, to let them know. Trevor and Vanessa will report their views on the Board meeting back to the Forum.

Maureen explained that the management report had not been available in time to prepare the Balanced Scorecard and presented some key performance statistics. One red indicator is re-letting voids; this is currently at 25 days. Maureen explained there have been 132 lets this quarter compared to 82 a year ago. The team are meeting the increased demand and continuing to improve the lettings service.

The statistics from the star survey show that satisfaction with repairs and maintenance has increased to 81% from 74% in the last quarter, and satisfaction with overall service has increased from 87% to 92% this quarter.

The Forum warmly welcomed this.

The quarterly Scorecard would be tabled at the next Forum meeting.

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**Date of the next meeting**

**Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2019**

**Signed..... Date.....**  
**Chair of Members' Forum**