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**Minutes of Meeting**

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Meeting: Board Meeting  
Date: Thursday, 26 November 2020  
Time: 6.00pm  
Venue: Via videoconferencing on MS Teams

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**Present:**

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Tim Bolton	Dave Lakin	Harjit Sandhu
Victor Breach	Nicky Mellings	Hayley Smith
Lucy Weston	David Mody	Kate Wareing
Jennifer Ekelund	Nasreen Razaq Al-Hamdani	

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**Apologies:**

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Victoria Dingle, Board Member  
Marisa Elliott, Governance Lead and EA to the Chief Executive  
Margaret Buckell, Members' Forum

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**Also in attendance:**

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Lee Hayward, Director of Property Services  
Nasreen Hussain, Director of Finance and Resources  
Jude McCaffrey, Interim Director of Housing and Communities  
Craig Dransfield, Head of Development  
Katie Legg, Head of HR  
Samara Arnold, PA to Director  
Bertie Doy, Members' Forum

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**Declarations of Interest**

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The Chair welcomed Bertie Doy to the meeting.

Victor Breach, Nasreen Razaq Al-Hamdani, Hayley Smith and Bertie Doy declared an interest in item 42, the Rent Increase 2021/22 and Affordability paper as they are all Soha residents.

<b>38a. Approval of Minutes</b>	<b>Actions</b>
<p>The minutes of the Board meeting held on 22 October 2020 were approved.</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>That the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 22 October 2020 be signed as a true and accurate record.</b></p> <hr/>	
<p><b>38b. Personnel and Remuneration Committee</b></p> <p>The minutes of the Personnel and Remuneration Committee meeting held on 5 November 2020 were noted.</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>That the Board notes the minutes of the Personnel and Remuneration Committee meeting.</b></p> <hr/>	
<p><b>39. Matters Arising</b></p> <p>Item 19 – Staff Engagement Survey 2020</p> <p>The Head of HR confirmed the results of the survey had been shared with Members’ Forum. The Forum were suitably impressed, they liked the presentation format and also wanted to express their thanks to Soha staff.</p> <p>Item 23 – CEX Key Issues Update</p> <p>The Interim Director of Housing and Communities confirmed a copy of the external evaluation of learning report had been forwarded to Board members.</p> <p>The Chief Executive confirmed that up to 4 Board members, one per working group, were invited to attend the Co-regulation Away Day on 3 December from 6pm-7pm. She asked members to respond to Sam Mace’s email if they were interested.</p> <p>Item 24 – Review of Key Performance Information for Q2 2020/21</p> <p>The Director of Finance and Resources confirmed they were working on the dashboard to make it more user friendly and will present the new format in January. She also confirmed she had updated the table at the back of the Approach to Risk Management to include a reference to stress testing.</p>	

<p>The Director of Finance and Resources advised that the date for moving to the data centre was running a couple of weeks behind. She advised more testing was required to ensure the stability of the phone system and to check the internet capacity and data centre were up to speed before the move and with the Infrastructure Manager on leave for 2 weeks, it was felt best not to rush the go live date. The additional testing would also give Board assurance that the system had been thoroughly tested.</p>	
<p>Item 31 – Lettings and Tenancy Policies</p>	
<p>The Interim Director of Housing and Communities confirmed he was happy to bring a few case studies to the Allocations training in February. He confirmed he already had one case study ready, but will work on a few more between now and February.</p>	<b>JMC</b>
<p><b>Confidential minutes</b></p>	
<p>Item 27 – Development Update</p>	
<p>The Head of Development confirmed he will bring regular updates to the Board on Townsend Road in Shrivenham. At present he was waiting on planning drawings from the contractor and once he had received these and approved them, they would be submitted for planning approval.</p>	<b>CD</b>
<p>The Head of Development also confirmed that future reports will be revised to include additional commentary on the saleability of any shared ownership units.</p>	<b>CD</b>
<p><b>Personnel and Remuneration Committee</b></p>	
<p>Members noted that the EDI Steering Group had re-convened and the Board Learning and Development Plan was being presented later in the agenda. Members were enjoying the weekly Friday webinars and found them very interesting. The Chief Executive mentioned that Customer Services were running the session tomorrow which members might find beneficial to watch as they would see how Soha provide that service and what issues they face. She confirmed all the sessions were recorded and available to view on Teams at a later date.</p>	
<b>Reports</b>	
<p><b>40. Action Tracker and Wallboard Ideas</b></p>	
<p><u>Action Tracker</u></p>	
<p>Item 126 – Monitoring the progress of the implementation of the new IT</p>	

system

The Director of Finance and Resources confirmed the implementation of first touch and planned maintenance were on track. She advised the data centre move was covered earlier.

Item 39 – The Chief Executive advised that there were no changes since the last Board meeting.

#### Wallboard

The Chief Executive advised that there is nothing further to report on the Wallboard items since the last Board meeting.

#### **Resolved:**

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**That the Board notes the update.**

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#### **41. CEX Key Issues Update**

The Chief Executive took members through the report as follows:

1 - Covid 19 – The Chief Executive advised that a full report was attached as Appendix A, but to summarise, staff were doing a great job. Repairs were being caught up, we were making good progress on relets and development numbers were going well. Complaints were rising due to tenants being frustrated with delays to their repairs as a consequence of lockdown, but these were being progressed. Call volumes still remained high, but with the additional staff, this is helping to deal with the queries.

2 – Economic impact of Covid-19 – The Chief Executive advised that our expectations are of a difficult forthcoming year. She highlighted the Oxfordshire Community Foundation report and stressed the concerning trends there on three key sets of metrics: income, child poverty and food insecurity.

3 – Brexit – The Chief Executive advised that data from Oxford showed the very high numbers of people from EU nations who are having to go through the complicated process to remain in the UK. She confirmed we are working to identify and support any residents to whom this applies.

4 - Publication of the Social Housing White Paper – The Chief Executive confirmed the general direction was positive as it emphasised the increased input and involvement for residents. However, the tone was very negative towards HAs, mainly flowing from the Grenfell enquiry. She advised there were seven standards every

<p>resident should expect from their landlord and these would be looked at during the Co-Reg meeting next week.</p> <p>She confirmed we will track all the work we need to do on the changes being brought in next year, with the Regulator publishing the paper in due course. The Chief Executive confirmed the emphasis on enabling home ownership was more significant than we expected it to be as it also included S106 build properties. However, she felt that although it was highly unlikely that our tenants would take this option up, the changes would cause a lot of bureaucracy and the impact could be on our valuations. She advised we were liaising with Savills on the effects of this change. The Head of Development confirmed the consultation on the paper closes on 17 December.</p> <p>5 – NHF Code of Governance – The Chief Executive confirmed the only area of the code which we may want to choose not to comply with was the maximum term of Board service which had reduced from nine to six years. A report will be brought to the next Board meeting to discuss.</p> <p>Internal update:</p> <p>1 – Covid 19 update – discussed previously.</p> <p>2 – Joint work with Oxfordshire Community Land Trust (OCLT) - The Interim Director of Housing and Communities confirmed we were looking at how best we can support OCLT and secure funding. The Head of Development confirmed we were looking at supporting other CLTs who might find the risk too big on their own.</p> <p>3 – Placeshapers lobbying meeting with Clive Betts MP – The Chief Executive advised she had had to withdraw from the meeting but had been updated afterwards. The meeting had been very useful as it had focussed on long term zoning proposals. She confirmed we were doing lots of work with Placeshapers at present.</p> <p>4 – Membership – The Chief Executive confirmed we had 752 current members.</p> <p>5 – Upcoming events – The Chief Executive confirmed the virtual NHF event aimed at Board members would be held on 26 and 27 January 2021.</p> <p>6 – Communications Update – members noted Appendix B.</p> <p>The Chief Executive confirmed since writing the paper she had a couple more items to update members on:</p>	<p><b>ME</b></p>
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Spending Review – Firstly the temporary increase in UC of £20 p/w was likely to be withdrawn from March, but this had not yet been confirmed. Secondly, LHA levels would be frozen in cash terms from next year which will be bad news for renters in the private sector who pay rent above LHA levels.

New Builds – She confirmed pre announced funding for new builds had been reconfirmed in the spending review.

Didcot First are making funding of £20,000 available via Soha to help individuals start their life off in a different direction, which could be purchasing a computer, training for a new career etc. Research had been carried out in Canada through the New Leaf Project which gave cash payments for people in crisis and found it made a huge difference to getting people back on track. Funding of £10,000 was also being made to help people get online, which could include access to devices, broadband packages, access to Word, Excel etc. We will piggyback this for school leavers and people stuck at home during the pandemic.

The Chief Executive advised the Board away day tomorrow would be making use of two different types of technology – Zoom and Miro (a big white board in electronic form). She confirmed the link had been sent round by Sam Mace and asked members to test the links before 9am tomorrow. She advised that members may need to log in a couple of times to get it to work.

Members noted that Oxfordshire would be in Tier 2 after the country came out of national lockdown on 2 December. The Chief Executive advised Soha would reopen the office as of next Wednesday, but only with a core team to enable the opening of reception. She felt having reception open was valuable for residents that relied on it.

A member asked about the risks associated with the Community Land Trust. The Interim Director of Housing and Communities confirmed that we were using Capsticks to draft the leases for a small number of opportunities to limit the risk.

**Resolved:**

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**That the Board notes the update.**

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**42. Rent Increase 2021/22 and Affordability**

The Chief Executive presented the report which followed on from the detailed review last year and she confirm the logic still stood. Members were advised that we were allowed to apply an increase of CPI plus 1% = 1.5% for Social and affordable rents and RPI plus 0.5% = 1.6% for Shared ownership which would generate a total increase in rent of £617,939. The report was recommending we apply the full increase

and then target help on individual households that are struggling.

**Confidential items were discussed** and further information is contained within the Confidential Minutes.

All members approved the recommendations, and noted that consultation will now happen with the Members' Forum prior to a final decision on rent increases being made at the January Board meeting.

**Resolved:**

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**That the Board:**

- **Decide in principle to increase Social and Affordable rents by 1.5%, and Shared Ownership rents by 1.6%; and**
  - **Make appropriate allowances in the budget setting process to enable us to offer effective support and, where required, financial assistance to mitigate the impacts of this on those subject to the benefit cap (42 households) or otherwise struggling to afford their rent.**
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**43. New Complaints Handling Code**

The Chief Executive presented the report to provide an update to Board on the new complaints handling code.

She confirmed the details of the new code and our self-assessment which were attached to the paper. Members were also advised that the White Paper had introduced more items to the complaints process and we would need to check what impacts these had on our compliance.

The Chief Executive felt we currently had a good system in place, but there were areas for improvement including how we make it easier and clearer for people to understand how the Complaints process works.

**Resolved:**

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**That the Board discussed and noted the Complaints compliance checklist and action plan.**

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**44. Development Update**

The Head of Development presented the report to update the Board on progress since the last meeting.

He explained the scheme at Pyrton Lane, Watlington. **Confidential items were discussed** and further information is contained within the Confidential Minutes.

The Head of Development advised SODC were currently letting 2 bed

units to families who were waiting for houses as they have a different policy to us. He confirmed we could let units through Rightmove, but the risk might be we would not cover those in housing need, although he felt we needed to make sure we were meeting the needs of a larger tranche of people as well.

A member queried S106 costs and whether they left us open to risk. The Head of Development confirmed S106 agreements stipulated the scheme had to comprise affordable housing units and that historically S106 agreement could contain rather expensive financial contributions for such matters as education. However all financial contributions for off-site planning gain are now included within the Community Infrastructure Levy from which Soha is exempt when it builds affordable housing. There is a small residual risk that financial contributions could be sought for on-site planning gain for such matters as public art etc but there was more than sufficient contingency within the Board financial appraisal to cover this.

A member queried the risks associated with the balance of costs between acquisition and works. The Head of Development confirmed we do full due diligence checks before we exchange contracts and get advice from a valuer on the land cost. He also advised we get advice from a QS on appropriate build costs and we follow up with a full re-book valuation for the land and a Value for Money Statement from a QS. The Head of Development gave assurance that there was enough in the pot if Beechcroft were to go bust and we also have adequate insurance cover.

The Chief Executive advised that the first of the Board training sessions, starting in December, would be on Development and would give Board members a valuable insight into Development processes and procedures.

It was agreed that the Head of Development would review the Development report to expand on the information already contained within it, such as more localised information, connectivity and sustainability.

**Confidential items were discussed** and further information is contained within the Confidential Minutes.

Members approved Pyrton Lane, subject to grant being received.

**Resolved:**

**That the Board:**

- **Approves the development at Pyrton Lane: acquiring the land, entering into a build contract and entering into all**

**CD**

**subsidiary appointments and contracts necessary to deliver this scheme; and**

- **Notes the remainder of the report.**

#### **45. Progress on Communities Strategy Work**

The Interim Director of Housing and Communities presented the report giving a progress update on the 3 year objectives in the Communities Strategy and the work completed with Collaborate.

He advised that due to Covid they had had to change the ways they worked with Collaborate, but were still able to produce valuable outcomes. Following meeting with community members they had looked at four different areas: inclusion, bonding, bridging, and advocacy and the actions that came out of the meeting will promote these areas.

The Interim Director of Housing and Communities confirmed that due to Covid we had been unable to carry out our conventional canvassing methods for getting residents involved, such as door knocks, but confirmed we currently had 700 members signed up against our objective of 1,000. He confirmed we would be promoting membership to our new Bromford tenants and also with our welfare calls being carried out by staff.

Members noted the continued work in Henley with young people and tackling isolation which was particular relevant during the pandemic and lockdown. The Interim Director of Housing and Communities advised that both enhancing local offers and how we tackle isolation were mentioned in the White paper and we would continue working with the local community to tackle these issues.

He highlighted the case studies in the Collaborate presentation and members felt it was a really interesting report and made sense when read with the second report. The Interim Director of Housing and Communities advised they would be looking at the structure next year and how the skills gaps could be filled by either volunteers or as an enabling role. Members felt this could make a real difference and thought the Food Co-op in America was a great idea. Members asked for an update to be brought to a future meeting

Members felt we could tap into contacts Board members might have to gain expertise in this area.

Members agreed it was a very useful report and thanked the Interim Director of Housing and Communities for the great work.

**JMC**

<p><b>Resolved:</b>  <b>That the Board discussed the report and direct any questions to the Interim Director of Housing &amp; Communities.</b></p> <p><b>46. Extension to Power of Attorney</b></p> <p>The Chair presented the report and asked the Board to approve the extension to the Power of Attorney as per the recommendation. This was approved.</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b>  <b>That the Board approve the resolution to grant a further Power of Attorney to Capsticks LLP until 30 June 2021.</b></p> <p><b>47. Board Learning and Development Plan</b></p> <p>This report was for information only and no issues were raised.</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b>  <b>That the Board notes the revised Board L&amp;D Plan.</b></p> <p><b>48. Board Succession and Recruitment Plan</b></p> <p>Members felt this was a good plan which was constantly evolving with regular conversations being held and was a valuable toolkit.</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b>  <b>That the Board notes the latest Board Succession and Recruitment Plan.</b></p> <p><b>49. Information Management Strategy</b></p> <p>The Chief Executive agreed the Strategy had been misnamed and acknowledged there was a lot of work to be done in this area. She confirmed this would be taken on by the new Head of Business Transformation once they are appointed.</p> <p>Members asked whether it would be beneficial for our internal auditors to review and the Director of Finance and Resources will look into this. Members also asked for the Quality and Disposal of Data to be included in the Strategy.</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b>  <b>That the Board notes the introduction of this strategy and the actions contained within its action plan.</b></p> <p><b>50. Project Management Strategy</b></p>	<p><b>NH</b></p>
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Members felt a section on cultural change needed adding to the Strategy and the Chief Executive agreed to progress this.

KW

**Resolved:**

**That the Board notes the introduction of this strategy and the actions contained within its action plan.**

**51. Members' Forum Minutes – 15 October and 12 November 2020**

Bertie Doy confirmed the Forum meeting went well, although they were missing the social aspect of it, but members were getting to grips with the technology which was an exciting learning curve for them. He thanked the Chair for being invited to the Board and would be happy to attend again.

**Resolved:**

**That the Board notes the report.**

**52. Any Other Business**

No items were raised.

The Chief Executive thanked both the Director of Property Services and the Head of HR for attending the meeting.

**53. Date of Next Meeting**

- a) The date of the **Board Away Day** will be **Friday, 27 November 2020**, commencing at **9.00am** via **Zoom**.
- b) The date of the next **Board** meeting will be **Thursday, 28 January 2021** at **6.00pm** via **MS Teams**

The meeting ended at 7.50pm.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_