


### Homes in Sedgemoor Board Meeting


The primary purpose of the board meeting is to provide oversight and strategic guidance to the business, to address important matters, to assess emerging risks and trends, and make decisions.

#### Minutes of the Non-Confidential Board Meeting held via Teams and in the Sedgemoor Room at Bridgwater House on Tuesday 26 March 2024 at 1pm

<b>Board Members:</b>	Chris Fisher Cllr Pauline Ham Jen Vernon Marie Hide Olly Keates Paul Hackett ( <i>arrived 1.21pm</i> ) Paul Stephenson (Chair)	Chris F Pauline H Jen Marie Olly Paul H Paul S
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Andy Horsman, Compliance & Building Safety Co-ordinator Ben Lane, Director of Finance and Performance Claire Tough, Director of Communities & Customer Service Naomi Macey, Director of Asset Management and Safety Peter Hatch, Chief Executive	Andy ( <i>minutes</i> ) Ben Claire Naomi Peter
<b>Guests in person:</b>	Chris Hall, Executive Director – Community Services, SC Craig Green, STAC member Duncan Harvey, Housing Development Manager ( <i>Presentation</i> ) Sarah Jackson, Director, DTP Consultants Elysia Lanham, Trainee Housing Development Officer ( <i>Presentation</i> ) Julia Paling, Head of People & Communications ( <i>Item 11</i> ) Mark Woodward, Housing Development Partnerships officer ( <i>Presentation</i> ) Rachel Palmer, Customer Focus Manager ( <i>Item 12</i> ) Ros Griffiths, STAC member	Chris H Craig Duncan  Sarah J Elysia  Julia Mark  Rachel Ros
<b>NO.</b>	<b>ITEM</b>	
<b>1.</b>	<b>Presentation Slot (<i>Duncan Harvey &amp; Mark Woodward</i>)</b> <b>Corporate Strategy Theme: Healthy Homes – Developing New Homes.</b> <b>Topic: Development of Garage Sites</b>	
	Duncan, Mark and Elysia attended the meeting, and Mark led with a presentation about the Garage Options Appraisal Project. Jen asked about tenant engagement, consultation and encouraged community involvement. Mark and Duncan responded. Marie raised the issues of parking and emergency vehicle access and again, Mark and Duncan were able to respond to these queries and reassure the Board that resolving these issues were very much part of the planning and consultation process. Olly observed that the presentation was both positive and exciting. Paul S thanked the team for their efforts thus far.	
<b>2.</b>	<b>Welcome Guests</b>	
	Paul welcomed Board members, attendees, and guests to the meeting. A warm welcome to Sarah Jackson from DTP who is observing the meeting as part of the Board Effectiveness Review that is underway.	
	<b>Apologies</b>	
	Apologies received from Cllr Kathy Pearce, Cllr Lance Duddridge and Sarah O'Neill.	

Chair Initials: 

<b>3.</b>	<b>Declarations of Interest</b>
	There were no further declarations other than those previously recorded on Board Members' Declaration of Interests Forms.
<b>4.</b>	<b>Minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2024</b>
	All members agreed that the minutes recorded are a true record.
	<b>RESOLVED</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>NOTED</b> and <b>APPROVED</b> the minutes.</li> </ul>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Matters Arising from the meeting held on 28 January 2024</b>
	Members noted the matters arising.
	<b>RESOLVED</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>NOTED</b> and <b>APPROVED</b> the matters arising.</li> </ul>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Chair's Update</b>
	No questions were raised.
	<p>Olly commented on the recent Artificial Intelligence (AI) workshop held for colleagues and Board members and thanked ET for arranging it. The potential offered by AI is very exciting. Peter explained how we are taking the AI agenda forward with a working group to discover what is out there and look at positive applications. Ben suggested that policies would need to be formulated ie using AI and we will work with Somerset Council (SC) on these. Peter stated that he is cautiously optimistic about the potential use of AI. Paul S and Jen encouraged that we continue to explore AI possibilities and see how we could improve business flow and customer service delivery.</p>
	<b>RESOLVED</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the report.</li> </ul>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Chief Executive's Update</b>
	No questions were raised.
	<b>RESOLVED</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the report.</li> </ul>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Chair of Audit &amp; Risk Update</b>
	<p>Jen gave a verbal update (due to HiS support service sickness) on the Internal Audit 2023/24 and looked ahead to 2024/25. 24/25 Q1 will focus on recruitment and retention, Q2 on legislative changes, Q3 on property compliance and Q4 on contract management. Project Management Framework needs to focus on outcomes for customers.</p> <p>Some areas of ongoing concern for the Audit and Risk Committee were raised; these being pensions, damp, mould &amp; condensation, and contractor management.</p>
	<b>RESOLVED</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the report.</li> </ul>

Chair Initials: 

<b>9.</b>	<b>STAC Update</b>
	<p>Claire referred to the report, discussing future plans and the continued value of customer led scrutiny. Claire highlighted (in terms of complaint management) how important it is to establish whether the contact is regarding a complaint or an issue with service, at the first point of contact. In response to a question raised prior to the meeting by Paul S, Claire explained that complaints have increased in number from 122 last year to 130 year to date. However a more comprehensive complaint system has been implemented in the last year and we are capturing more complaints. It was recognised that there is a need to recruit more STAC members and advertisements have gone out.</p> <p>Marie asked a question about the Damp, Mould and Condensation and the reference to 'heading into winter'. Naomi acknowledged that we are now coming out of winter and that we had experienced the expected rise in damp, mould and condensation enquiries but that we had maintained high service levels.</p> <p>Jen suggested that STAC should see the 24/25 internal audit programme and future programmes. All agreed.</p>
	<b>ACTION</b>
	<b>Ben</b> to share 2024/25 and 2025/16 audit programmes with STAC (and future programmes thereafter).
	<b>RESOLVED</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the report.</li> </ul>
<b>10.</b>	<b>Budget, Rent and Service Charges</b>
	<p>Ben introduced the 2024/25 budget and the work undertaken with the Senior Leadership Team since the last Board meeting to achieve a balanced budget.</p> <p>Paul S thanked the Senior Leadership Team for their work on the budget. He also stressed it was vital that use of reserves was not ongoing to fund operational/headline expenditure. The Board, Paul S felt, could support balanced initiatives that seek to improve operational effectiveness.</p> <p>Paul H noted that it was good to see a balanced budget but was also concerned that reserves could be used to fund revenue costs.</p> <p>Paul S asked if we were following the same rent model as SC and Claire confirmed that there had been service alignment on rents.</p> <p>Jen raised a concern regarding increased levels of stress-related sickness in the organisation and sought assurance that the measures taken to achieve a balanced budget will not make matters worse.</p> <p>Members discussed the affordability challenges presented by the new rents and service charges. Ben had outlined potential mitigations in his supplementary paper, including a proposed increase of £25K to the hardship fund. This was approved by Board.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting, Paul S had raised a point that the proposed withdrawal of the Mortgage Rescue Initiative allocation from reserves should be approved by Board. All agreed.</p> <p>Paul H noted the proposal for introducing Rent Flex and welcomed the impact assessment that had been undertaken. He asked how far we are behind 'target rents'. Ben confirmed that there are more properties below target than anticipated due to historical decisions. Ben agreed to provide further clarification on target rents.</p>

Chair Initials: 

Jen raised her concerns about affordability for those customers just about managing but not necessarily on benefits. Claire advised that all rents would remain below the local housing allowance cap. Jen requested that Claire share with Board the due diligence undertaken on Rent Flex.

Paul S asked if we have tapped into SC’s experience of using Rent Flex. Claire confirmed that we had as part of the wider alignment work. SC (And formerly Somerset West and Taunton) introduced Rent Flex during the pandemic. Paul S requested an update to Board 6 months after the implementation of Rent Flex.

In response to a prior question from Paul S, Ben confirmed that it was not unreasonable for Rent Flex to commence in May this year. Paul H noted that he was happy with the implementation of Rent Flex but was concerned that it may not bring much extra income hence the need to review the target rent position.

All five proposals were approved by the Board.

**ACTION**

**Ben** to define the target rent position of the managed stock, how long SC will require to bring all rents to target and the potential impact on customers.

**Claire** to share due diligence undertaken on Rent Flex and give feedback to Board on the implementation of the Rent Flex system six months from the implementation date.

**RESOLVED**

- Board **APPROVED** the 24/25 Revenue Budget Proposal.
- Board **APPROVED** the 24/25 Capital Programme Proposal.
- Board **APPROVED** the carry forward of unspent Enriching Partnership funds from the previously approved £100k allocation from reserves.
- Board **APPROVED** the carry forward of £26k of unspent LGR Project funding from the previously approved £105k allocation from reserves.
- Board **APPROVED** the allocation of £25k from reserves to increase the level of hardship funding available in 24/25.
- Board **APPROVED** the cancellation of the Mortgage Rescue Initiative from reserves.

**11. People Plan 2024 - 2026**

Julia gave a brief summary of the proposed plan and discussed colleague wellbeing and development. The Investors in People appraisal is due again in November.


Marie questioned whether the HIS People Plan was led by Investors in People (IIP) criteria? Julia explained that the award was very much the by-product and final recognition of what we do. Marie also raised, and it was agreed, that the Plan reference to Board Champions should replace the word ‘use’ with ‘utilise’. All agreed.

Marie questioned if, in our exploration of Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE), we would also look for potential negative impacts? Julia responded that we don’t know enough about this concept yet but would remain open minded.

Paul S observed that the model of the H&S Forum demonstrated a successful model of a colleague forum and encouraged Julia to involve Board champions. Jenny expressed a desire to be involved as Board Champion and recognised colleagues as the mainstay of the business.

Chair Initials: 

	<p>Paul S felt the Plan was a positive read and response following the IIP results. Jen commended the small People Team for pulling this plan together and asked whether mandatory online learning added to colleague stress and there was a discussion re training and staff retention. Jen was keen to see success measured and evidenced.</p> <p>Jen questioned if the proposed new capability and conduct requirements would contribute to stress among colleagues. Peter highlighted that at a recent seminar, speakers had noted that they expect some housing professionals to exit the sector rather than re-take qualifications. This is a risk of the initiative.</p> <p>On the plan overall, Jen asked 'what will change as a result'? Paul S suggested that this is something for the new forum to agree.</p> <p>Following a discussion on colleague surveys, Chris F questioned whether colleagues are always honest? Julia acknowledged this point but hoped our culture of openness and transparency would support honest responses.</p> <p>Paul S and Marie observed the value and appreciation of soft skills as well as formal training.</p> <p>Olly questioned whether or not we faced an increased risk of training colleagues for the new requirements and then them leaving the organisation. Julia felt that this is a risk but we needed to have a strategic approach to this retention challenge. We have had much success with internal moves within the organisation.</p> <p>Board approved the Plan.</p>
	<p><b>ACTION</b></p>
	<p><b>Julia</b> to replace the word <i>use</i> with <i>utilise</i> when referring to Board Champions in the People Plan.</p>
	<p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>APPROVED</b> the contents of the People Plan 2024-2026 which sets out the HR strategy for developing and supporting colleagues.</li> </ul>
<p><b>12.</b></p>	<p><b>Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code - Self Assessment (Statutory from 1 April 2024) &amp; Complaint Policy Review</b></p>
	<p>Rachel gave a brief introduction to the new code and our preparations, observing that HIS are already following best practise. A significant change is that customers now have a 12-month window to make a complaint. Our existing two stage complaint process is proven and works effectively but we will need to make minor adjustments to our policy and processes.</p> <p>Paul S felt that we are already in a strong position and this review maintained this position.</p> <p>Rachel advised, at Peter's questioning, that we now have direct access to the Housing Ombudsman's (HO) portal and will send our statutory self-assessment via this means.</p> <p>Paul S and Marie both felt that we should be better at sharing compliments (both internally, externally and with SC), celebrating good PR and recognition of all that works well. Marie suggested this could be added to our website. Board agreed. Rachel confirmed that we share compliments via the weekly colleague intranet update called Round Robin.</p>
	<p><b>ACTION</b></p>
	<p><b>Rachel</b> to review how we share compliments via our website.</p>
	<p><b>RESOLVED</b></p>


Chair Initials: 

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>APPROVED</b> the self-assessment and proposed changes to the Complaints &amp; Feedback Policy in line with the revised Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.</li> </ul>
<b>13.</b>	<b>Compliance Policy Review</b>
	<p>Naomi introduced the updated policies for Fire Safety, Asbestos Safety and Gas &amp; Heating, all of which will now cover a 3-year period rather than be reviewed annually. Policies now refer to Somerset Council (SC) rather than Sedgemoor District Council (SDC) and incorporate any new relevant legislative changes.</p> <p>Marie asked how we manage customers' needs relating to fire safety in order to ensure they comply with their responsibilities? Naomi explained our approach and highlighted our close working with the Fire and Rescue Service. Marie commented that we need to ensure that every opportunity is taken to raise awareness of responsibilities with those deemed to have diminished responsibilities.</p> <p>Paul S noted that as Board Champion for this area, he was involved in the Health &amp; Safety Forum and had been party to the consultation that has taken place on these policies prior to today. He also noted that there was typo in section 9 of the Fire Safety policy (Fair/Fire). Naomi to amend.</p> <p>Paul S requested sight of the Fire Safety Management Plan.</p> <p><b>ACTION</b></p> <p><b>Naomi</b> to correct typo in Fire Safety Policy.</p> <p><b>Naomi</b> to make the Fire Safety Management Plan available on the Board portal.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>APPROVED</b> the updated policies subject to the amendment highlighted above.</li> </ul>
<b>14.</b>	<b>Sealing of Contract – Rand Associates</b>
	<p>Ben explained that Rand Associates had been selected by a tender process and they will be undertaking retrofit assessments. Board approved.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>APPROVED</b> the request to seal a contract for the provision of consultancy services which will support the works to retrofit homes.</li> </ul>
<b>15.</b>	<b>Governance Framework Review: Councillor Board Member Nominations (Position Statement)</b>
	<p>Board unanimously ratified the continued membership of the three existing Councillors with the caveat that they continue with the blessing and approval of Somerset Council.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>NOTED</b> the position statement.</li> </ul>
<b>16.</b>	<b>Review of RSH Consumer Standards including Social Housing White Paper (Six Monthly Review)</b>
	<p>Board noted the contents of the report and acknowledged the work that had previously been completed and what is also now underway. An update on the Mock Inspection will come back to May Board.</p> <p>Jen noted that some actions were 95% complete but not quite over the line. Was this all alignment work? Claire confirmed that it was related to tenancy agreement work.</p> <p>Paul S questioned the value for money survey results and noted that there are areas in which SC may not be able to progress at the current time. These could impact on the overall position of the mock inspection. Chris H noted that it was important to flag up any risks early with SC.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p>


Chair Initials: 



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the report.</li> </ul>
<b>17.</b>	<b>Sustainability By Design Update</b>
	Noted by the Board.
	<b>RESOLVED</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>NOTED</b> the update on the Sustainability By Design</li> </ul>
<b>18.</b>	<b>Review of Safeguarding Effectiveness (Annual)</b>
	<p>Paul S asked if any trends had been identified e.g. post-lockdown? Claire replied that where some services were retrenched, we are proactive and working more collaboratively. We strive to get better at referring households that come to our attention.</p> <p>Paul S and Marie queried the term 'unreasonable behaviour' in our policy and Claire explained what it means and how we manage it.</p> <p>Jen asked about Safeguarding training for Board Members and whether it was mandatory. Paul S explained it was mandatory and all members should get details of how to access the training.</p> <p>Peter reiterated the importance of Safeguarding Training, especially as members may visit customers (albeit mostly accompanied by colleagues).</p>
	<b>ACTION</b>
	<b>Peter</b> to liaise with the People Team and share the list all mandatory training required of Board members.
	<b>RESOLVED</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the report.</li> </ul>
<b>19.</b>	<b>Compliance Report Summary – February 2024</b>
	Board noted the report.
	<p>Jen asked about non-access to properties policies and procedures. Naomi explained about gas injunctions and tenancy action that could be taken. Jen asked what our legal position was if an incident occurred due to no access. Naomi responded that we would always need to demonstrate that we had followed our policies and processes to make every attempt to access.</p> <p>Jen queried why old fire risk assessment for Windmill Crescent had not picked up the items identified in the most recent assessment? Naomi noted that risk assessments and competency have continually developed in recent years and that it is not always an exact science.</p> <p>Jen requested the number of colleagues sick rather than just a percentage in the report.</p>
	<b>ACTION</b>
	<b>Naomi</b> to ensure that future sickness statistics include the number not just a percentage.
	<b>RESOLVED</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the report.</li> </ul>

Chair Initials: 

<b>20.</b>	<b>Management Accounts – February 2024</b>
	<p>Paul S noted that with 3 days to go until financial year end, were we expecting anything of significance? Ben confirmed no, but shared that a former supplier had enlisted a new solicitor to pursue their claim for payments relating to the waking night watch from 2022/23. Somerset Council Legal team are dealing with this, and our position remains unchanged.</p> <p>Marie noted the reduction in cyclical works spend and asked if we were at risk of storing up future problems. Naomi responded that this wasn't the case but rather the works had been completed under a different budget. Board thanked all budget holders for their work to bring all figures up to date.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>NOTED</b> the Management Accounts to month eleven of 23/24 (April to February).</li> </ul>
<b>21.</b>	<b>Corporate Risk Register – February 2024</b>
	<p>Paul S noted that the Board would be looking at corporate risks at the April board away days. A discussion followed on risk appetite and members requested that this be added to the April session.</p> <p>Ben reminded Board members that within the corporate risk register he has now assigned key risk to each Board champion and that champions should confirm with the ET lead if the risks allocated were correct.</p> <p><b>ACTION</b></p> <p><b>Ben</b> to include risk appetite in his session at the April away days.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>NOTED</b> this summary report following a full review of the refreshed risk register at the Audit and Risk Committee in February.</li> </ul>
<b>22.</b>	<b>Key Performance Indicators – February 2024</b>
	<p>Paul S commented that rent performance is outstanding and that we should capture, report, and celebrate our success.</p> <p>Marie and Paul H questioned the four repairs Tenant Satisfaction Measures and the apparent peaks and troughs during the year? Naomi responded that there was no obvious correlation with causal factors other than reaffirming the impact that repairs have on overall satisfaction.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board <b>NOTED</b> the key performance indicator results for the first eleven months (Apr 2023–Feb 2024)</li> </ul>

Chair Initials: 



<b>23.</b>	<b>AOB</b>
	<p>Jen reminded ET to avoid confusion by using abbreviations and unclear phrases. Noted by Peter.</p> <p>Jen also questioned if the Information Items should be called something different to the Information Pack. Peter to discuss with Paul S.</p> <p>Jen updated Board on her attendance with Claire and Marie at Chris Moseley’s celebration of life.</p> <p>Olly asked about the welfare of the person injured at Walter Barnett House. Claire and Naomi responded to say that we are still actively in contact with this person and communicating regularly. Extra support has previously been offered.</p>

**Confirmed as a true record of the meeting**

Signed: 

**Name (Chair):** Paul Stephenson

**Date:** 28 May 2024

Chair Initials: 