

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.

APPROVED Minutes of the Non-Confidential Board Meeting held in the Sedgemoor Room at Bridgwater House on Tuesday 26 November 2024 at 1pm

Board Members:	Chris Fisher Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts (Co-optee Member) Cllr Kathy Pearce Cllr Lance Duddridge Jen Vernon Marie Hide Oliver Keates Paul Stephenson (Chair)	Chris F Federica Kathy Lance Jen Marie Olly Paul S
In Attendance:	Ben Lane, Director of Finance & Performance Claire Tough, Director of Communities & Customer Service Naomi Macey, Director of Asset Management and Safety Pauline Kelly, Executive Assistant (<i>minutes</i>) Peter Hatch, Chief Executive	Ben Claire Naomi Pauline K Peter
Guests:	Chris Hall, Executive Director Community, Place & Economy, Somerset Council Craig Green, Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee (STAC) Dave Baxter, Strategic Housing Manager, Somerset Council Ian Candlish, Head of Housing Property, Somerset Council Jemma Birley, Service Charge Specialist Julia Paling, Head of People & Communications Ros Griffiths, Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee (STAC) Sujitha Herren, Finance & Performance Manager Wendy Lewis, Housing Specialist, Somerset Council	Chris H Craig Dave Ian Jemma Julia Ros Sujitha Wendy
NO.	ITEM	
1.	Welcome Guest	
	Paul S welcomed all to the meeting.	
	Apologies	
	Apologies received from Cllr Pauline Ham (Board Member), Paul Hackett (Board Member), and Sarah O'Neill (Chair of the STAC).	
2.	Presentation Slot Corporate Strategy Theme: Healthy Homes Topic: Safety & Quality Standard – Understanding Our Homes	
	Naomi and Ian presented the approach and status of stock condition survey data across the combined stock. The Board discussed access levels and emphasised that we need to have clear objectives when collecting data to minimise tenant disturbance i.e. avoiding multiple visits to the same home. Members discussed survey rates and profiling. Whilst a high proportion of surveys are relatively recent, a large volume will be due in the next few years.	

	<p>Due to retention challenges within the in-house team, a possible suggestion could be to align the service and to recruit MD to complete works for Somerset Council as they do for HiS. This would remove the pressure from the in- house team.</p> <p>Savills are currently supporting both teams to develop a joint asset management strategy. The outcome of this work will be available in March (an earlier update may be available if there are significant data gaps or if additional work is required) and Board agreed to this being presented at the April 2025 board away days.</p> <p>A discussion was held on the content of the stock condition survey and consistency between both parties.</p> <p>Board requested for progress updates on our stock data to be recorded on the Monthly Compliance Report.</p> <p>The presentation will be uploaded onto both the Board and STAC portals.</p>
	<p>ACTIONS</p> <p>Pauline to upload the presentation onto the Board and STAC portals.</p> <p>Pauline to add the 'Joint Asset Management Strategy' to April 2025 BAD.</p> <p>Naomi and Ian to review both stock condition survey templates to ensure uniformity and consistency.</p>
3.	<p>Declarations of Interest</p> <p>The Executive Team have an interest in Item 32 (Annual Pay Award and Review of Executive Team Salaries 2024) and will leave the meeting while discussions are held.</p> <p>There were no further declarations from Board members other than those previously recorded on Board Members' Declaration of Interests Forms.</p>
4.	<p>Minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2024</p> <p>Members agreed that the minutes recorded are a true record of the meeting.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED and APPROVED the minutes.
5.	<p>Matters Arising from meeting held on 24 September 2024</p> <p>Members noted the matters arising.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the matters arising.
6.	<p>Draft Minutes of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 24 September 2024</p> <p>Members reviewed the matters arising.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board REVIEWED the minutes.

7.	<p>Chair's Update</p> <p>Paul S confirmed the Board Co-optee Member interviews were being carried out over two days due to candidate availability. The quality of applications received has been very high and the panel are interviewing four candidates. A decision will be made after the final interviews on 5 December, with a view for the new member to join at January Board to give a six month handover prior to Jen's departure.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the contents of the report.
8.	<p>Chief Executive's Update</p> <p>At the October Board Away Days, Jonathan Walters had advised that the Regulator's first year review of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) would soon be available. Peter confirmed that the headline report had been circulated this morning and a copy will be uploaded onto both Board and STAC portals. A summary will come back to the January Board meeting.</p> <p>ACTIONS</p> <p>Pauline to upload the TSM report onto the Board and STAC portals.</p> <p>Pauline to add an update to the January Board agenda.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the contents of the report.
9.	<p>Chair of Audit & Risk Update</p> <p>Marie gave an update on her recent attendance to the Audit & Risk Conference, noting that the Regulator is keen for Board members to be fully aware of risks. Marie questioned if currently there is enough evidence in Board packs to show that members are fully aware of risks, risk appetite and mitigations. Marie also felt that reports should have greater detail on risks and risk appetite and authors should ensure that the risk section within report 'Implications' is used for this purpose. Marie has talked the issue through with Paul S and she will update members at the January Board meeting as to what could be considered going forward.</p> <p>Paul S noted that risk sessions held on the morning of Board meetings should be minuted as an evidential link. We also need to link the papers to the Board risk register.</p> <p>Dave suggested that the risk register be moved up the agenda.</p> <p>ACTIONS</p> <p>Marie/Ben to ensure that pre-Board risk meetings are minuted from now on.</p> <p>Peter to look at the running order of agenda items and considering moving the Risk Register up the agenda.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the contents of the report.

10.	Sedgemoor Tenants' Assurance Committee (STAC) Update
	<p>Craig gave an update on the recent scrutiny discussions held at STAC and in which order they will be carried out. Progress on colleague recommendations is reported back to STAC, and 'deep dive' recommendations are reported to STAC by the Scrutiny Panel.</p> <p>Paul S noted that the three scrutiny areas for 2025 will relate to the discussion topic to be introduced by Claire at the December Spotlight session.</p>
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the contents of the report.
11.	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy including the EDI Annual Report
	<p>Julia presented the draft strategy to Board members, which she has been working on over the last 10 months with colleagues and customers with support from the Housing Diversity Network (HDN).</p> <p>Marie asked if the training for future board members was included in the strategy. Julia confirmed this has not been outlined yet, and that the team is working closely with Ben. HDN will be providing the training.</p> <p>Marie expressed concern about wording around the perception of who should be on an interview panel, noting that the main diversity comes from the tenant group, and they might lose out due to lack of experience. The lived experience of tenants is hugely important. Julia will address these concerns offline and confirm the interpretation.</p> <p>Following discussions, the board agreed to approve the proposed EDI statement with minor amendments (customers before leaders). Julia will incorporate this into the policies and update the website accordingly.</p> <p>Board members found the data interpretation at the October Board Away Day was insightful, particularly for geography and communities, and felt Julia Histon (HDN) managed the data analysis effectively.</p> <p>Paul S raised the following questions/observations prior to the meeting and responses are recorded below.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Good to note "Good foundations are in place" as a starting point. The Statement reads well but should it swap the order of "our leaders" and "enable to serve our customers"? The People Team will amend this. 2. Learning and development - can we evidence that Clarity 4D is having a positive impact? Anecdotal currently, but feedback for team meetings, groups such as LT and SLT has been positive. A follow up to review and refresh colleagues on this approach is planned for April 2025. 3. The Strategy itself is longer than expected. Any reason? The format presented to Board includes the actions after each section for ease of reference. They are also included in the annexed action plan so can be removed to reduce the number of pages for the overall strategy.

	<p>4. Are we still calculating Social Value? Yes, this is collated by the Enabling and Housing teams but in a more limited way than before due to resource constraints.</p> <p>5. Is the Action Plan deliverable when considered alongside other demands on the People Team? The action plan sets out the work required by other teams too and will be closely monitored by SLT. The plan is deliverable over the three years and the People Plan action plan is being reviewed to focus on priorities given potential pressures linked to the TUPE of new colleagues and the impact of this.</p>
	<p>ACTIONS</p>
	<p>Julia to amend the documents accordingly.</p>
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <p>The Board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APPROVED the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy and Action Plan • APPROVED the EDI Commitment Statement as recommended in the EDI strategy (subject to the minor amendment highlighted above). • NOTED the contents of the annual update. • APPROVED the proposal for annual progress updates on the EDI Strategy and Annual Update to come to Board, starting in November 2025.
12.	<p>Preliminary Discussion on Rent and Service Charge Increases</p>
	<p>Ben presented an overview of proposed uplifts to rents and service charges. Whilst the Board does not have a decision-making role in this process, their input and views are welcomed by Somerset Council in advance of their decision.</p> <p>Board members held a long discussion on the effect increases would have upon customers and how best to balance the pressures facing the Housing Revenue Account and possible negative impacts to housing programmes if rent increases were not applied. A lengthy discussion was held on affordability, mitigations and the potential implications on our management fee if no rent increase was levied next year.</p> <p>Board members supported the following.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> To increase rents by the maximum 2.7% as recommended by the Executive Team (ET). To pass on the full cost of the Lifeline Service in 2025/26 to customers and in doing so align the charges to those charged in the West, as recommended by ET. <p>Prior to supporting any further recommendations, Board requested the following supplementary information on service charges:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a more equitable approach to the high increases facing some customers in supported housing?

- d. What is the environmental status of those affected buildings (construction type, energy efficiency and past retrofit work).
- e. How many families are likely to be affected?
- f. How do we intend to work and communicate in advance with affected customers?
- g. What are the likely shortfalls if full costs are not recovered?
- h. What future ideas are there for mitigating high energy and heating charges in the future?

Paul S raised the following questions/observations prior to the meeting and responses are recorded below.

1. Service Charges

PS noted that Somerset Council intend to recover all service charges in 2025/26.

2. Lifelines – SC want to align with West and North so how is the service expected to improve in 2025/26?

Officers confirmed that a service level agreement has been developed and is currently with both In-house and HiS for review. The alignment currently is around charges for the service (£3.65) – HiS managed customers were paying significantly less than the former SW&T customers hence the new charge ensures that there is consistency for all service users.

Enhancement to the service however will be provided for all customers and will be on-par to that received by private sector customers and assurance of consistency of support and service delivery.

Services will include:

- 24-hour Lifeline Monitoring
- Installation of new or replacement Lifeline Equipment
- Emergency Response Service
- Keyholding Service
- Provision of regular service usage reports
- Provision of temporary emergency equipment in the event of Lifeline/Scheme equipment failures
- Out of Hours Telephone Service
- Recommend lifeline equipment for changes in legislation/technology to remain compliant and provide value to customers
- Monitor and respond to alerts from specialist telecare equipment installed for independent living

Previously, many areas fell to our Independent Living Team to support which brought them away from the day-to-day support service.

3. Energy – are hardship funds likely to be available?

Officers confirmed yes, we are working with HACT and Somerset Community Foundation who have funds available for hardship.

4. What will the eligibility be for accessing the £14K grant?

Officers confirmed that grants will be up to £500 per household, available to:

- Residents of Somerset.
- Who are over 60 years old.
- Who you believe will struggle to maintain a reasonable standard of living this winter.
- Money may also be given to Somerset residents aged between 50 and 60 years old, but only where a person has a disability or chronic condition that is likely to worsen due to the cold weather.

Agreement states (for the avoidance of doubt), we expect nearly all this money to be given to those aged over 60 years old, but you have discretion to give it to those aged over 50 years old in individual cases.

5. Is this a cost blip to be followed by a reduction?

Officers confirmed that whilst we expect energy bills to fall next year (and recharged in 2026/27) they will likely not return to pre-Ukrainian war levels.

6. Clear explanation to customers whatever is decided is critical: Officers agreed.

7. Extra care – is it deliverable for housing support to be delivered by HiS?

Claire confirmed that the service charge previously paid to the support provider will now be paid to the landlord for delivery of this service. The charge will remain as previously, but the service will be greatly improved as many aspects weren't being covered by the care provider, hence the change in the service commissioned. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) is in place with Adult Services to provide enhanced housing management to sustain the tenancy. This service was previously provided by HiS (pre-2018) but was changed when the Council changed its delivery model to an integrated care & support service. Additional resource will be provided and paid for through service charge.

8. In general, how aligned are HiS with the in-house team? Is there any indication about SC applying a cap?

Officers confirmed that we are not entirely clear at this stage as to SC's approach to service charges for 2025/26, albeit they will pass on costs that they can justifiably levy.

ACTION

ET to supply requested information within two weeks (by Tuesday 10 December).

RESOLVED

The Board:

- i. **NOTED** the government's decision to extend the existing rent settlement for another year which allows rents to increase by a maximum of the September 24 Consumer Price Index (CPI) 1.7% + 1%, ie 2.7% for 2025/26
- j. **APPROVED** the Executive Teams (ET) recommendation to increase rents by the maximum 2.7%
- k. **APPROVED** ETs recommendation to pass on the full cost of the 'Lifeline Service' in 2025/26 to customers and in doing so align the charges to those charged by the in-house team in the West.

	<p>Prior to supporting any further recommendations, Board requested the following supplementary information on service charges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> l. Is there a more equitable approach to the high increases facing some customers in supported housing? m. What is the environmental status of those affected buildings (construction type, energy efficiency and past retrofit work). n. How many families are likely to be affected? o. How do we intend to work and communicate in advance with affected customers? p. What are the likely shortfalls if full costs are not recovered? q. What future ideas are there for mitigating high energy and heating charges in the future? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DISCUSSED and NOTED the mitigations and funding in place to support the most vulnerable customers who will be impacted by the increases most acutely.
13.	<p>Proposed Dates for Board Member Attended Meetings in 2025/26</p>
	<p>Dates were approved and calendar planners will be circulated. As referenced in the Board Member Appraisal Feedback Report, the Forward Plan is being reviewed to consider meeting frequency, venue and style of formal Board meetings.</p>
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board APPROVED the proposed dates and times for the various meetings.
14.	<p>Annual Health & Safety Policy and Framework 2025</p>
	<p>Slight changes noted to names and role profiles. Alan Turner will be retiring in the early part of 2025, and we are tendering for a new external Health & Safety Advisor.</p>
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board APPROVED the Anti-Theft, Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy.
15.	<p>Debtor Balances and Write Offs (Six Monthly Report)</p>
	<p>Sujitha confirmed the write off information being £11k of commercial debt and £28k of tenant recharge debt.</p> <p>Paul S raised the following questions/observations prior to the meeting and responses are recorded below.</p> <p>1. Outstanding organisation debts?</p> <p>Ben confirmed the outstanding debts that relate to organisations has always been small and are shown in a single table. The other debts such as recharge debts and rent/service charge debts are made up of many individual customer debts. Ben offered to analyse the debts by bandings of amounts owed if Board thought this would be helpful.</p>

	<p>2. Domestic Drain Services outstanding debt? Ben confirmed that the Finance Team are still pursuing the drain services debt to recover the outstanding monies from 2022. If we are unable to prove the validity of the debt, we will regrettably have to write it off. The team are enhancing processes around raising commercial debts to ensure that we have clear acceptance from contractors before a sales invoice is raised.</p> <p>Board approved to write off the unrecoverable debt.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <p>The Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NOTED the debtor balances as at end of September 2024. • APPROVED the write off of £39k (£11k commercial debt/£28k tenant recharge debt) worth of unrecoverable debt relating to four debtor balances.
16.	<p>Customers First Update (Six Monthly Review)</p>
	<p>Paul S raised the following questions/observations prior to the meeting and responses are recorded below.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Specific trends from customers attending Reception? Claire confirmed that our more vulnerable customers continue to attend reception more frequently. We have always tried to ensure customers can access our services by their preferred channel of communication and reception is predominantly used by our more vulnerable customers who might struggle with reading and writing or digital contact. 2. Logging of communication dissatisfaction? Claire confirmed that this is where customers feel we have not responded quickly to their request or have failed to respond at all. From the feedback gained from complaints and surveys, the main areas of concern are delays with call-backs from colleagues, and lack of updates from colleagues/contractors. We are reviewing our service standards to ensure our two working days target is still relevant and achievable with the resource we have. We are also seeking to manage this through our CRM system and one to one meetings with colleagues. There is also an element of managing expectation within the existing resource to respond quickly and Claire will be discussing this during her Spotlight session on 5 December. 3. Link to EDI action plan? Claire confirmed that Rachel is working with Julia on this. 4. Increase in vulnerability/complex needs? Claire confirmed that we have a new Vulnerable Persons & Reasonable Adjustments Policy (part of the Housing Ombudsman action plan) which is now in place.
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board NOTED the contents of the report.

17.	Timeline for Options Appraisal Exercise
	<p>Progress on the Options Appraisal project is now a standard agenda item at the Quarterly Performance meetings with Somerset Council. Peter suggested a Board Champion role and it was agreed that Paul would be involved as chair of the Board and Jen be appointed Board Champion until July. Board members will revisit the champion role once the new co-optee is on board.</p>
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <p>The Board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NOTED the revised timetable. • NOMINATED Jen Vernon as the Champion Board Member to the Options Appraisal project team.
18.	Sustainability By Design Update
	<p>The following question/observation was raised prior to the meeting and the response is recorded below.</p> <p>Paul S noted it was good to know we will receive grant funding for retrofitting and asked if the team knew the number of customers likely to be impacted adversely. Naomi confirmed the team are still developing our customer insight and approach to fuel poverty so do not have a clear picture at this stage. We do not currently hold full details of household income but will be targeting residents for the grant support who are older or otherwise vulnerable and in a home which is below SAP 69.</p>
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board NOTED the contents of the report.
19.	Compliance Report
	<p>Dave Baxter queried the status of the template Wayleave Agreement. Naomi will discuss this with him after the meeting.</p>
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board NOTED the contents of the report.
20.	RSH Consumer Standards (Six Monthly Review)
	<p>Paul S asked about progress on the overall Service Alignment work needed. Naomi confirmed the Tenancy Agreement work was suspended to due resource challenges across all council departments and at the request of the service director.</p> <p>There has also been limited progress due to availability of resource from both sides to aligning policy. Teams have met and agreed a plan to take this forward and we are making inroads into aligning policy using Co-pilot. As policies are being reviewed, we are sharing and aligning where we can. Work is being monitored through our Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards work (including the HQN action plan).</p> <p>Barnsley Council and Berneslai Homes (ALMO) have received a C1 grade from the Regulator. They shared how they did this via a webinar. It is understood that some of the larger London Boroughs are due to be inspected soon.</p>
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board NOTED the contents of the report.

21.	Board Member Appraisal Feedback Report
	Paul S thanked members for their participation in the annual exercise.
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the update.
22.	Management Accounts – October 2024
	<p>Paul S raised the following questions/observations prior to the meeting and the responses are recorded below. He noted the positive revenue prediction and the Board Champion observations regarding Capital Programme at the start of the report.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Why are block works delayed and what works does this topic include? Naomi confirmed there is no current concern regarding the block works. We are forecasting to achieve £1,630k before end of the financial year of which we have already spent to date £683k. The balance of £947k will cover the final works on Brooklands expected to be completed before end of December 2024. Roof works planned for Connaught, Windsor and Halswell are on track to start early in Q4 2024/25. Demonstrating Value For Money from the DELTRON lift contract? Naomi advised that we recognise that Deltron costs are higher than anticipated and we will be looking to retender in the new financial year. Somerset Council are currently out of contract and opportunities to jointly procure are being explored. SLA cost variance – further explanation required on the three identified areas? Naomi agreed to circulate a fuller analysis, however the headlines are legal costs for the advice/support regarding the on-going disputed 'waking watch invoices and the required (and unbudgeted) legal advice to support the move to the upgraded accounting system have created budget pressures. Service charge costs in respect of Bridgwater House are predicted to be higher to cover energy increases, repairs and maintenance. Year on year analysis will be performed. Any underlying issues regarding increase fly tipping costs will need to be investigated.
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the management accounts for the first seven months of 2024/25 (Apr-Oct 2024).
23.	Key Performance Indicators – October 2024
	Board commended the team on an exceptional performance, particularly Overall Satisfaction which was at 86% YTD. Current arrears and void rent loss are also strong. Members asked Claire to congratulate the team. Ollly to formally congratulate colleagues at the Christmas Colleague Connect on their fantastic performance.
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) at the end of the first seven months of 2024/25.

24.	Statutory and Other Registers – Six Month Update
	No questions or queries were raised.
	RESOLVED
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the contents of the report.

Confirmed as a true record of the meeting

Signed: 

Name (Chair): Paul Stephenson

Date: 28 January 2025