

SOLIHULL COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD MEETING – 8 JUNE 2020

MINUTES

Present: Richard Hyde (Chair), David Bell, Katy Blunt, Ben Burton, Jenny Fletcher, Diane Howell, Nigel Page, Patricia Smith (Vice Chair), Louise Tubbs, and Chris Williams

Officers: Fiona Hughes; Surjit Balu; Kevin Bennett; Samantha Gilbert; Mark Pinnell; Mary Moroney; Mark Wills (until end of item 8)

1. CHAIR'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed members to the first Board meeting held via video conferencing.

The Chair confirmed that throughout the Covid-19 crisis he has maintained regular contact with the Chief Executive and more recently had also had telephone conversations with frontline staff and he wished to record his thanks for the work being carried out to support our local community. The Chair also advised that in his discussion with the SMBC Chief Executive it was noted that he was also very proud of the contribution of SCH staff to dealing with the pandemic.

Before starting the business on the agenda the Chair asked each Board member for any statements they wished to make about the current operating environment. There was collective agreement that the Executive Team and staff at SCH have risen to the challenges presented by Covid-19, demonstrating flexibility. It is also impressive to note from the benchmarking data that SCH have managed to achieve higher levels of service in relation to most key indicators during the crisis.

It was noted, for future consideration that a recent formal complaint which had been reviewed by a Board member panel had cost SCH approximately £3k to investigate.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Jenny Fletcher declared an interest in the Private Sector Leasing Scheme referred to in Item 9 on the agenda. In accordance with Standing Orders paragraph 15.3 the interest was noted but it was not felt necessary to exclude the member from that section of the meeting.

There were no other declarations of interest.

SOLIHULL COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD MEETING – 8 JUNE 2020

4. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

There were no matters arising from the previous minutes.

DECISION THE BOARD

(i) APPROVED the minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2020.

5. ACTION LOG

It was agreed that action references 0918-1 and 0919-1 will be removed from the action log as not required at this time.

DECISION

(i) NOTED the action log.

6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

The Chief Executive advised that SCH has been fully embedded with SMBC in the emergency planning arrangements and that a report is currently being drafted for the SMBC Cabinet setting out the scope and complexity of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and this will be available to distribute to Board members next week.

There has been a lot of guidance issued in relation to the pandemic and this is constantly changing. The ministerial letter to all social housing tenants provided a good overview. We have been following closely the guidance for social housing and there has been an announcement that the ban on evictions has been extended for a further two months.

The SCH Recovery Plan was attached at appendix A to the report and it is clear that there are some opportunities arising from the Covid-19 crisis which we will want to build on during the recovery period including the increased use of digital communication. The Recovery Plan is based on the following timelines:

- Short term - up to the end of September 2020
- Medium term - up to end of March 2021
- Long term - 2021/2022

The focus has been on carrying out detailed risk assessments for service areas and for facilities managed by SCH. There are no plans to return staff to working in our offices until they are Covid secure following all the guidance on social distancing, signage for one way systems and hand sanitising stations. Fiona emphasised also that wherever possible and appropriate staff would continue to work from home.

Under section 4 of the report the Chief Executive highlighted an amendment in relation to gas safety compliance with the current position being 52 certificates being out of compliance which equates to 99.3%. The main reason for this is

SOLIHULL COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD MEETING – 8 JUNE 2020

that SCH have more safety inspections due in the summer months and performance has been impacted by the number of tenants shielding or self-isolating. SCH is performing better than the national benchmark but plans are in place to reduce the number of expired certificates.

With regard to the backlog of routine repairs which were stopped at the start of lockdown we are reducing the list by carrying out any jobs that can be done without compromising safety and social distancing such as external and communal repairs.

Staff have been supported by line managers throughout the crisis as well as information on the intranet regarding wellbeing and two staff surveys.

The Chief Executive recorded her thanks to staff for the way they have worked throughout the Covid-19 crisis and that she is proud to lead the organisation. The June edition of the Business Bulletin is due to be issued later this week and the Chief Executive sought permission and this was given to use the front page of the bulletin to highlight to staff the support and praise of the Board for their efforts during the pandemic.

Under section 8 – Building Safety members were advised that the procurement process for retrofitting sprinklers will go to the Audit and Risk Committee for consideration on 22 June 2020 and then will be reported to Board in July.

With regard to the replacement of spandrel panels following further guidance and inspections it is anticipated that the estimated costs are likely to be significantly higher than initially anticipated and will require SMBC Cabinet Portfolio holder approval once a suitable solution has been identified and costed.

Following approval to reduce the size of the Board from 12 to 10 members we have asked the Council to nominate 3 rather than 4 Board members but as there was no annual Council meeting this year we are awaiting a response. At the Annual General Meeting in September one of our long standing tenant Board members will be stepping down leaving a vacancy that needs to be filled along with a vacancy for an independent member. It is proposed to set up a sub group of the Board to oversee the recruitment process which the chair of the Board will lead with the Committee chairs and Patricia Smith and Louise Tubbs also being on the Task and Finish Group.

Board members raised three questions:

1. Given the fact that residents have been spending a lot more time at home there was an expectation that there would be more reports of ASB during the crisis. Other neighbouring areas are reporting higher levels of ASB is this due to Solihull residents not reporting or behaving in a more considerate manner?

SOLIHULL COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD MEETING – 8 JUNE 2020

We will look at the data on ASB reporting again to ensure that the information is accurate but we are only capturing reports to SCH and it is possible that some incidents are reported directly to the Police.

2. What opportunities have presented as a result of Covid-19 that can be harnessed to enable us to be pro-active rather than re-active?

The opportunities are broadly in three categories:

- Agile working
- Digital communications
- Improved community engagement

All these areas were planned in the Strategic Vision and Delivery Plan but the Covid situation has accelerated and we will build on what has been learnt during the crisis.

3. As SCH looks to restart services how will we identify services that should be stopped permanently?

To-date we have not identified any services which will be stopped permanently but if this were to change it would be discussed with Board and the equality and diversity implications would be fully considered.

DECISION

(i) NOTED the content of the report.

(II) APPROVED the setting up of a task and finish group to be chaired by the Board chair which will oversee the appointment of new Board members and that this will include the chairs of all Board Committees. It is intended that the task and finish group will call on other Board members to be involved in the recruitment process. In particular it will be important to have our tenant Board members and our Customer Engagement team closely involved to ensure we adopt the best approach to the tenant recruitment.

7. REVISED ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION

The amendments relate to reducing the size of the Board from 12 to 10 members which has been discussed previously. There were no questions arising but Jenny Fletcher asked to abstain from the vote.

DECISION

(i) APPROVED the amendments to the Articles of Association.

8. HEALTH & SAFETY REPORT FOR QUARTER 4 2019/20

SOLIHULL COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD MEETING – 8 JUNE 2020

Mark Wills introduced the report and advised that it had been drafted prior to the lockdown due to Covid-19 and that things had changed considerably as a result of the pandemic. There was now a robust risk assessment framework in place and workplace safety inspections to ensure safety of staff and customers. Mark Wills highlighted that the Building Safety Bill and the Fire Safety Bill will both have implications for SCH and an impact report has already been shared with the Executive Management Team.

It was noted that in the current environment health and safety issues are driving most decisions about how we operate.

Board members raised the following questions:

1. In respect of properties with an expired gas safety certificate can we identify those with gas warm air heating systems which would be a higher risk than properties with new condensing boilers?

Mark Pinnell advised that none of our properties have gas warm air heating systems all have either combination or condensing boilers. The recent increase in the number of expired certificates has arisen as a consequence of more safety checks scheduled for summer months and the number of customers either shielding or self-isolating. There is a plan in place to address the number of expired certificates over the next three weeks.

2. The recent government guidance did not state that gas safety inspections should stop and left the landlords to make the risk assessment on whether or not to continue the service. How have SCH made the decision particularly in relation to vulnerable customers who are shielding and may be reluctant to allow gas engineers access?

Fiona Hughes advised that a risk assessment has been produced including making appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) available and social distancing to allow gas servicing to continue. However, it is accepted that for some customers with underlying health conditions they do not want to take any risks and we would respect their right to defer the service. In general, we will continue to carry out gas servicing with appropriate safety measures in place wherever possible. SCH staff have been making regular contact with shielding customers building up good relationships and will always be sensitive to their needs.

DECISION

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| (i) NOTED | the contents of the report. |
| (ii) NOTED | Appendix 1 – SCH Compliance in relation to Home Standard Duty |
| (iii) NOTED | Appendix 2 – Accident /Incident Reporting Analysis |

SOLIHULL COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD MEETING – 8 JUNE 2020

Mark Wills left the meeting at the end of this item at 7 pm.

9. REVENUE & CAPITAL FINANCIAL MONITORING AND FORECAST 2019/20 MARCH 2020 (QUARTER 4)

Samantha Gilbert introduced the report and highlighted that the cost of rebranding was covered by underspends at year end and therefore the use of reserves was not required. Reference was made to paragraph 6.2 in the report regarding the acquisition of two properties using funds from the right to buy receipts which did not complete by end of March due to the Covid-19 lockdown and we are now awaiting confirmation of the repayment of penalty and interest to the Government. We are however, on track to meet the acquisitions target for quarter 1 2020/1 with two properties due to complete within the next week.

Board members noted that for the last 10 years there have been consistent underspends each year and queried whether this was due to poor budget setting or a deliberate attempt to increase reserves.

Samantha Gilbert advised that for a couple of years there was a deliberate intention to underspend to offset the impact of annual rent reductions of 1% and uncertainty over the impact on rental income of the introduction of Universal Credit. As a consequence of the annual rent reductions we introduced a savings plan and in some areas savings were achieved ahead of schedule resulting in underspends at year end. There is still a need to identify some savings in the current financial year to alleviate cost pressures but overall having underspends of around 2% on the level of expenditure incurred by SCH is not a concern. Further work with SCH managers is being conducted to improve financial forecasting to better inform the budget setting process.

DECISION

- (i) NOTED** the draft revenue and capital outturn for SCH for 2019/20
- (ii) NOTED** the latest draft HRA outturn for 2019/20
- (iii) NOTED** the draft end of year reserves position
- (iv) NOTED** the transfer of this year's surplus of £16k relating to Private Sector Leasing (PSL) into an earmarked reserve for future PSL pressures as approved by the Board on 20 May 2019.

SOLIHULL COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD MEETING – 8 JUNE 2020

10. PERFORMANCE EXCEPTION REPORT QUARTER 4 2019/20

Kevin Bennett introduced the report advising of a marginal improvement at the end of the financial year and confirmed the ongoing focus on improving customer satisfaction levels and delivering service improvements.

DECISION

- (i) **NOTED** the overall performance outturn and the commentary, listed in Appendix A, on those KPI's where targets have not been met

11. CHAIR'S REPORT FROM HOUSING OPERATIONS COMMITTEE HELD ON 1 JUNE 2020

Chris Williams gave a report on the meeting, at which they had received reports on Building Safety which had covered in some detail increased levels of responsibility and accountability SCH had not lost the focus on this area despite the current challenging environment. The last report received by the Committee covered the impact of Covid-19 on services and the Committee had asked officers to work on forecasting of expected future demands on services e.g. whether there will be an increase in demand for housing or increased debts.

DECISION

- (i) **NOTED** the content of the report

12. FORWARD PLAN

DECISION

- (i) **NOTED** the Forward Plan.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

14. REVIEW OF THE MEETING

All Board members confirmed that they were happy with the meeting and felt that having video access assisted the flow of the discussion. Overall it was an efficient and productive meeting.

SOLIHULL COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD MEETING – 8 JUNE 2020

The Chief Executive thanked the Board members for their support and for expressing their appreciation of the efforts of staff.

The meeting ended at 7:30 pm

Signed by chair:

Date:.....