

# Homes in Somerset Non-Confidential 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 27 May 2025 at 12.45pm.

## Meeting Information

### Board members

Chris Fisher (Chris F)  
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts (Co-optee) (Federica)  
Cllr Lance Duddridge (Lance)  
Cllr Pauline Ham (Pauline H)  
Jen Vernon (Jen)  
Marie Hide (Marie)  
Oliver Keates (Olly)  
Paul Hackett (Paul H)  
Paul Stephenson, Chair of The Board (Paul S)  
Sarah O'Neill (Board Member Designate/Co-optee) (Sarah)

### In Attendance

Ben Lane, Director of Finance & Performance (Ben)  
Claire Tough, Director of Communities & Customer Service (Claire)  
Louise Pither, Governance Assistant (Louise)  
Naomi Macey, Director of Asset Management, Safety & Development (Naomi)  
Pauline Kelly, Executive Assistant (*minutes*) (Pauline K)  
Peter Hatch, Chief Executive (Peter)

### Guests

Alice Pearce, Governance Manager (Elect) (Alice)  
Chris Hall, Executive Director Community, Place & Economy, Somerset Council (Chris H)  
Craig Green, Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee (STAC) (Craig)  
Pete Lomax, Senior Researcher, Acuity (Presentation only)  
Ros Griffiths, Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee (STAC) (Ros)  
Sujitha Herren, Finance & Performance Manager (Sujitha)  
Wendy Lewis, Housing Specialist, Somerset Council (Wendy)

## Meeting Agenda

### 1. Welcome to Guests and Apologies

Paul S welcomed all to the meeting and introduced Alice Pearce to members who will be joining HiS as our new Governance Manager. Paul S congratulated Cllr Kathy Pearce and Cllr Pauline Ham who have been appointed Mayor of Bridgwater and Mayor of Axbridge (respectively). Apologies were received from Cllr Kathy Pearce.

## 2. Presentation Slot – Corporate Strategy Theme: Customer Driven

Topic: Acuity TSM Report 2024/25

Pete Lomax summarised the results, with the highlights noted below.

- Very good levels of satisfaction with the services provided.
- **Highest ratings** – ‘value for money of the rent’ and ‘being treated fairly and with respect’.
- **Benchmarking** – Very strong performance when compared with other local authorities – all top quartiles.
- **Key drivers / What matters** – well-maintained home, repairs service and communications.
- **Some high levels of dissatisfaction** around complaints handling.
- **Diversity** – relatively normal pattern, satisfaction increases with age.
- **Tenants’ voice** – very clear message about repairs service.

Recommendations were noted around repairs & maintenance, communal areas, handling of complaints and handling of ASBs.

Following the presentation, the following questions were raised.

### 1. Chris F asked if the TSM complaints question could be reworded.

Pete confirmed the questions are prepared by the Regulator and cannot be changed.

Marie echoed the same concerns and asked if there is a way to represent the data in a more accurate way. Pete suggested adding additional commentary to cover the question.

Claire reminded the meeting that this was raised at the Board Away Day and we have had several discussions with the Regulator, however they are not open to change the wording. We need to unpick what we know and prove or disprove it.

Sarah added that at a conference she attended it was clear that the Regulator wants to collect more trends of this data as it is currently worded.

### 2. Chris asked how HiS celebrates excellent results.

Peter confirmed we are good at celebrating internally and will reiterate the great results at the Summer Connect. Externally, we now have a comms plan draft however we do need to sing our praises more.

Jen asked if it is possible to see the external comms plan. Peter will share this with members.

3. **Paul asked Chris H how HiS should celebrate these results.**

Chris H confirmed SC wanted assurance that HiS are delivering well and these slides are one of the best ways of doing this. He would like to share these results with the SC Communities Scrutiny Group.

Paul S thanked Pete for his comprehensive presentation.

**ACTIONS**

**Peter** to share the external comms plans with Board.

**Pauline** to put the Acuity presentation on the board portal.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

Paul H confirmed he is a Board member at MuirCroft Housing Association. Jen noted that she is now a board member of Willowtree Housing Partnership. There were no further declarations from Board members other than those presented within the board pack under this item.

**ACTION**

**Pauline** to update Board members' Declaration of Interests.

4. **Minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2025**

Members agreed that the minutes recorded are a true record of the meeting, subject to an amendment to note that Cllr Pauline Ham was an attendee at the meeting held on 25 March 2025.

**ACTION**

**Pauline** to amend the minutes to include Cllr Pauline Ham on the attendee list.

Resolved

- The Board **NOTED** and **APPROVED** the minutes.

5. **Matters Arising from meeting held on 25 March 2025**

Members noted the matters arising.

Resolved

- The Board **NOTED** the matters arising.

6. **Chair's Update**

No questions raised. Olly congratulated Paul S following his appointment as Chair of the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA). Paul S thanked those who attended the recent NFA conference.

Resolved

- The Board **NOTED** the contents of the report.

**7. Chief Executive's Update**

No questions raised. Peter noted that the recent recruitment process for a governance manager has been a success and welcomed Alice as a guest to this meeting.

Resolved

- The Board **NOTED** the contents of the report.

**8. Chair of Audit & Risk Update**

Marie noted members that the pre-board ARC meeting had looked at risk management and reminded members that the next Spotlight session is planned for Thursday 5 June, starting at 3pm. This will be via Teams and an invitation will be circulated to STAC as some committee members have raised their interest in attending. This Spotlight will focus on risk management. The next ARC meeting is planned for 11 June.

**ACTION**

**Pauline** to organise for STAC members to be invited to join the June ARC meeting.

Resolved

- The Board **NOTED** the verbal update.

**9. Chair of Sedgemoor Tenants' Assurance Committee (STAC) Update**

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 29 May. STAC will be welcoming three new members, one of which is Martin Heard who is returning to the committee.

Sarah noted that at present membership is akin to a revolving door but that this is all for good reason. Sarah recommended that the Board review remuneration for STAC members. Jen supported this.

Paul S confirmed that Peter will ask DTP to include remuneration for STAC members when they conduct their review Board, board committees, and ET remuneration. Marie questioned why there was no mention of the future chairing of STAC and Claire advised that this report is coming to July board.

Resolved

- The Board **NOTED** the contents of the report.

**10. Chair of Development Committee Update (verbal)**

Olly noted he found the visits to the two sites in Taunton in April and Penlea House today very beneficial. Paul S mentioned that once Penlea House is completed, a full visit will be organised for Board members. Naomi reported that Seaward Way in Minehead, a net zero scheme, will be finished in July and she will keep members updated regarding a potential visit.

The next committee meeting is scheduled for 10 June.

Resolved

- The Board **NOTED** the verbal update.

**11. Annual TSM Submission 2024/25**

Ben confirmed that Board are receiving the final TSM results for the year before they are consolidated and submitted to SC, with members being asked to approve the submission. The next HiS/SC Partnership Meeting will review the consolidated results and is expected to approve them for submission.

Regarding anti-social behaviour, Jen inquired about support for staff who are dealing with ongoing cases and whether the People team needs more resources to help. Claire confirmed the HiS have Care First in place and colleagues also support each other. She thanked Board members for acknowledging this.

Claire has also reorganised the team, appointing Cyan as the ASB lead. The team are already preparing for an increase in cases over the summer.

Peter mentioned that ET had held discussions in light of the Housing Ombudsman (HO) report. While there is a perception that some responses may be unfair, we must accept the decisions. DTP have been asked to review our complaints policy and process to ensure accuracy, and to provide recommendations for improvements to enhance both customer satisfaction and internal efficiency. Jen asked if there were scope to have tenants in the process to see what they want.

Peter also noted that we have recently made changes to our ASB service and created a dedicated resource to improve outcomes for customers. The impact of this change should be evident in next year's results.

Paul S asked if we have a plan for addressing the issues raised in the earlier Acuity presentation regarding complaints, repairs and ASB? Peter confirmed ET will be picking up the areas raised in the Acuity presentation and will update Board accordingly. Paul S acknowledged the Overall Satisfaction results of 82% which is an outstanding achievement.

Resolved

- The Board **APPROVED** the 2024/25 TSMs which in turn will be sent to Somerset Council, for consolidation with the 'in-house' results, before submission to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) by 30 June 2025.

## 12. Customers First Update (Six Monthly Report)

The Customers First Strategy expires in 2026. Regarding the Customer Influence and Engagement Strategy, the impact assessment will be reviewed by STAC on Thursday 24 June, followed by ET and the Board. There has been significant work around complaints, with forensic analysis being conducted and lessons learned. Marie noted that the report was clear and a pleasure to read, asking Claire to pass on her thanks to Rachel.

Jen asked if the customer insight project plan could be uploaded onto the Board portal for members to review. Claire to arrange.

Paul S asked if these important new strategies are being drafted to ensure they are fit for the future post options appraisal? Claire responded that they were.

The following clarification questions were raised prior to the meeting and the responses is recorded below.

### 1. Can the new Strategy be shared at the October Away Day as part of our forward-thinking agenda?

Claire confirmed the Customer First strategy is not due until 2026. The report refers to the Customer Influence & Engagement Strategy – aiming to complete ready for Board consideration in November.

### 2. Will the Ombudsman Code review be achievable before the July Board?

Claire noted that we are seeking support from DTP and all Housing Ombudsman related documents will be presented to July Board.

### 3. When will the Insight Action Plan conclude as this will provide critical data for our forward thinking.

Claire will upload on the portal.

## **ACTION**

**Pauline** to upload the Insight Project Plan onto the port.

Resolved

- The Board **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## 13. Stock Condition Survey Programme Update

Naomi presented an update on the combined HiS/SC stock condition project. (This update was a request by board at the April board away day at which members expressed concern at the pace of the project and asked ET to consider increasing resources).

The report indicated that increasing the number of surveyors would not materially expedite reaching the 40% target due to a time lag associated with

training and administration. While costs would rise along with additional administrative needs, the anticipated benefits may not be realised. Charlotte is leading the operation, and Naomi is confident that improvements will be evident in time for the July Board meeting. In the meantime, Naomi will update members on any interim issues should they arise

Board discussed risk to the project and Naomi stated that access is the primary risk. Fortnightly meetings are being held to help stay on track - if we fall behind, additional resources may be needed. Paul S thanked Naomi for the comprehensive, well-written report and noted it is logical for Board members to monitor and asked Naomi to keep members updated.

Paul H asked if a contingency plan is in place to address any absences that may disrupt the programme. Naomi confirmed we have accounted for potential absences within the project however, any significant absences would require further resource consideration, and we have a plan for this

Resolved

The Board members:

- **NOTED** the update on our Stock Condition Survey Programme.
- **AGREED** with that the current programme will deliver sufficient progress.

#### 14. **Compliance Performance: HiS Summary Report – April 2025**

Members noted the report. Jen asked about the two asbestos related incidents detailed in the report. Naomi agreed to provide this to Jen after the meeting. Paul S also reminded members that he routinely reviews such incidents at the bi-monthly Health & Safety Forum

#### **Joint HiS/SC Compliance Summary Report – March 2025**

Naomi noted that Savills will lead on the programme to align data to ensure consistent information across service areas, identify key areas, review policies and procedures, and integrate them. This process will take the remainder of the financial year.

Marie questioned if the reference to sickness within the joint compliance report indicated a problem regarding allocation of work to officers? Naomi explained that the sickness was within the damp, mould and condensation service at SC and that we are jointly reviewing workloads within our alignment work. Paul S noted that team capacity was discussed at Partnership Meetings.

Paul S welcomed the alignment work and commended officers on the five improving indicators.

#### **ACTION**

**Naomi** to share asbestos incident details to Jen.

Resolved



- Board **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## 15. Fraud Review (including Whistleblowing/Bribery Act Reporting) (Annual)

Paul S noted that it was great to see the scope of work achieved in the last year. A spotlight session on risk is scheduled for June. Ben also confirmed that a major incident simulation test is planned to take place in the summer as per usual.

The following clarification questions were raised prior to the meeting and the responses are recorded below.

### 1. Are the SC possible matches of 378 considered high nationally?

Ben was uncertain but will make some enquiries to see if this information is available. We get given access to our own specific data set to work through.

### 2. How often do board members complete cybersecurity training?

The Board took the decision to move away from E Learning and instead utilise spotlight sessions for identified pieces of training. A slot was utilised at the December 2024 spotlight to deliver a cyber security training/ awareness session.

### 3. Has there been an independent cyber assessment carried out?

Ben confirmed we have a Cyber Security audit within our 25/26 audit plan (Q1) which will be conducted by our internal auditors SWAP. If, through this process, we identify that a completely independent external assessment is necessary we will commission the work. Our internal audit will identify what, if any, independent cyber assessments have been carried out on SC on whom we are reliant for our networks.

### **ACTION**

**Ben** will make some enquiries to investigate if the SC possible matches of 378 are considered high nationally.

Resolved

- The Board **NOTED** the contents of this report.

## 16. Board and Committee Member Attendance Report – 2024/25

Discussions were held concerning the monitoring of meeting attendance, the format in which meetings are held, and procedures for recording information for reporting purposes. In response to a question from Sarah O regarding adopting hybrid board meetings to aid attendance, Paul S expressed his preference that board meetings remain in person. It was noted that hybrid arrangements appear to be working effectively for ARC, STAC, and DevCo. There will be an opportunity to deliberate on future governance arrangements during the October Board Away Days.

Resolved



- The Board **NOTED** the attendance for the 2024/25 financial year.

## 17. Board Member Tenure and Term Update (Annual)

The report confirmed that Jen's tenure as a Board member ends prior to the July Board meeting and Paul S has asked her to attend the meeting as a guest. Jen raised her champion roles and Paul noted that he has an interim plan in place.

Ben advised members that SC has now had their full AGM meeting and appointed Lance, Kathy and Pauline to continue as the SC councillor representatives on the HiS Board.

As discussed at the April Board Away Day, Jen reiterated that members need to consider extending Paul's appointment as Chair beyond his six-year term, with the possibility of a rolling one-year timeframe (up to a maximum of three years). Jen advised members they would need to decide when to replace Paul as Chair by the end of his first 12-month extension, to give plenty of time to explore recruitment options to ensure a smooth transition. Peter noted that a report on this would come to a future board meeting.

Paul S informed members that, with Jen's tenure concluding, he had some suggestions for updating the Board champions to introduce new perspectives to the championed areas. These plans will come to September board.

The following clarification questions were raised prior to the meeting and the responses are recorded below.

### 1. There is confusion about the election of Chair in terms of at the September Board or AGM in the report.

Ben confirmed the Chair (and all roles and Committee memberships for that matter) are determined as the first item on the agenda of the September Board meeting that immediately follows the September AGM.

### 2. Has external advice been sought regarding extending board members beyond 6 years? (DTP advice to another organisation was that board members only be extended one year at a time and not for a full three-year term, beyond their first two terms)

No external advice sought yet. As per Jen's recommendation any proposal put forward for the Board to consider would be for a one-year extension in the first instance with the possibility of a second one-year extension thereafter.

Resolved:

- The Board **NOTED** the annual position statement and **AGREED** that the following action needs to be taken to.
  - a) maintain a full complement of Board Members in accordance with the Articles of Association.

- b) ensure required Co-optee arrangements are in place from September 2025.

## 18. NHF Code of Governance – Self Assessment

Certain areas show potential for further improvement. ET to inform the Board of areas where development is possible. Customer feedback (hearing the customer voice) will be included on the October Board Away Day agenda.

Resolved

- The Board **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## 19. RSH Consumer Standards Action Plan (Six Monthly Update)

No questions were raised but Paul S noted that key themes in this report were raised at the recent NFA conference.

Resolved

- The Board **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## 20. Statutory and Other Registers – Six Month Update

Members agreed with Ben's suggestion to remove fraud entries from this report. Fraud entries will be updated on the annual report.

Resolved

- The Board **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## 21. Management Accounts – 2024/25 Year End

Paul S noted the very positive headline figures, including MD (with an underspend and increase in performance). Spend has increased on consultancy work due to the alignment projects.

The following clarification questions were raised prior to the meeting and the responses are recorded below.

### 1. Within the context on an excellent set of headline figures, is there a specific reason why the Consultancy costs have exceeded budget?

Ben confirmed any decisions around consultancy spend have always been taken in the context of the overall final position. Spend on alignment and partnership work have been incurred, eg mock inspection, rent assurance, stock options, due diligence around the transfer of the development team etc.

### 2. The usual one now, are there any concerns about the carry forward items in the Capital Programme?

Naomi confirmed we have been working on the delivery plan for the Capital projects we carried forward and are confident that we can deliver the entire programme in 2025/26.

Resolved

- The Board:

**NOTED** the **£280k surplus** recorded against the balanced 24/25 revenue budget for 24/25.

**NOTED** the **£302k underspend** recorded against the £527k Managed Use of Reserves 24/25 allocation and, further to the 25/26 budget setting report taken to the March Board, that **£302k** will be carried over into 25/26.

**NOTED** the **£898k underspend** against the £8.8m 24/25 Capital Programme and the requirement to carry forward **£515k** of this underspend to 25/26 to complete works commenced in 24/25 (including SHDF Wave 2 to ensure grant claim) and **NOTED** that **£383k** will be released back to the Housing Revenue Account.

## 22. Key Performance Indicators

Members acknowledged the detailed report. Paul S noted that ET had been asked (by Board) to review the decline in TSM Overall Satisfaction, and he expressed the Board's gratitude for their thorough update. The TSM Overall Satisfaction has now risen back to 84%.

The following clarification question was raised prior to the meeting and the response is recorded below.

### 1. Excellent overall performance. In the Pulse report, are there any surprises or areas for concern?

Ben confirmed there were no surprises. The data presented in pulse is just for the month of March in isolation. Staff Turnover and Staff Sickness in the month was high when compared to the sector quartiles. Each month the ET receives a detailed 'people' report which amongst many things captures this data and any underlying issues or trends. No trends have been identified, and ET are content with the actions being taken to manage sickness. We expect sickness levels to improve as the impact of a couple of long-term sicknesses, which ended in May, impact our KPI.

Resolved

- The Board **NOTED** the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

## 23. Debtor Balances and Write-Offs (Six Monthly Report)

No questions were raised.

Resolved

- The Board **NOTED** the debtor balances as at end of March 2025.

## 24. Sustainability By Design Update

Members noted the collaborative efforts with SC on addressing fuel poverty.

Resolved

- The Board **NOTED** the update on Sustainability By Design.

## Confirmed as a true record of the meeting

Signed: 

**Name (Chair):** Paul Stephenson

**Date:** 28 July 2025