

### Homes in Somerset (HiS) 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 25 November 2025 at 13.49pm**

<b>Board Members:</b>	Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts Cllr Pauline Ham Marie Hide Oliver Keates Paul Stephenson (Chair) Sarah O'Neill	Federica Pauline H Marie Olly Paul S Sarah
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Alice Pearce, Governance Manager (minutes) 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 (Admin support) Peter Hatch, Chief Executive	Alice Ben Claire Naomi Pauline K Peter
<b>Guests:</b>	Chris Hall, Executive Director Community, Place & Economy, Somerset Council Craig Green (STAC member and Board member designate) Julia Paling, Head of People and Communications Laura Wickens, People Team Business Partner Rik Saunders, Property Services, Investment & Sustainability Manager Sujitha Herren, Finance & Performance Manager Wendy Lewis, Housing Specialist, Somerset Council	Chris  Craig Julia Laura Rik Sujitha Wendy
<b>NO.</b>	<b>ITEM</b>	
1.	<b>Welcome Guest</b>	
	Paul S welcomed all to the meeting.	
	<b>Apologies</b>	
	Apologies were received from Kathy Pearce, Lance Duddridge and Paul Hackett.	
2.	<b>Presentation Slot</b> <b>Strategy Theme:</b> Customer Driven – Inspire Customers & Colleagues <b>Topic:</b> Preparing for the Competence and Conduct Standard 2026	
	Julia presented to the Board on preparing for the Competence and Conduct Standard 2026. The new standard will come into force in October 2026 with a transition period of three years. The presentation set out the levels of qualifications different groups of colleagues would need. The team were investigating what qualifications would be appropriate for each colleague group and if qualifications taken many years ago would still be relevant.	

The People Team had analysed senior colleague training levels. All Executives and the Senior team had a level 5 or above qualification, we are setting out when the qualification was taken. Within the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) there was one person currently undergoing training and one who had a qualification in a different work area. The Leadership Team had a high number of people with a level 2 qualification. Many would go on to level 3 training as we continue to invest in colleagues. We will record all this information in our learning management system and would investigate how we can fill any gaps.

In addition, being awarded GOLD in Investor in People already demonstrates our commitment to learning and development. We have a People Strategy, pay professional membership for colleagues, have implemented IMPACT management training with plans to train a second cohort, and we are investigating a performance management model for the HR system.

Wendy asked if Board members needed to have similar levels qualifications? The Standard does not mention Board members, they do, however already need to evidence their own development plan. Julia and Alice would work together to ensure that the Board Development plan aligns with the Standard. Julia was also considering MD Group. Although they do not directly come under the Standard, we do need to ensure they have the right levels of competency and align to our culture and values.

For the conduct and professionalism element the Regulator will want evidence of performance management, satisfaction levels, customer feedback, and Board and Committee oversight. We will be creating a Competency Matrix, setting out behaviours required, these will feed into role profiles going forward. New colleagues would need to undertake the appropriate level training within 2 years of taking on the role. There are some extensions, such as when someone was on maternity leave. The revision of the colleague Code of Conduct will align into the conduct and professionalism requirements.

In addition, our values were embedded and demonstrated, with recognition linked to our values. Our appraisal and 1-2-1 process will be redesigned to support the new requirements, and we will be looking at how we measure and evidence this.

We have started work on our culture with a questionnaire being sent to colleagues and customers, including STAC, asking them to name three words that would define us. Responses contain words, such as “professional, kind, honest, focused, trustworthy” from colleague and customers. There will be further engagement with colleagues and the People Forum, a culture workshop, policy developed and draft behaviour framework plan.

	<p>A three-year action plan will set out our plans with progress being reported to Board alongside the People updates. The April 2026 Board Innovation Day will also cover culture.</p> <p>Marie suggested a benefit analysis report to be contained within the updates. "Telling the story", setting out how the qualifications support our service delivery and demonstrate the human impact. We should also see the human impact in our complaints and satisfaction rates.</p> <p>Marie highlighted the risk of wage increases across the industry when people who already have the qualifications become more desirable. Marie asked how we would support those who do not do well with traditional exams. Julia set out the kind of support we would provide. She also spoke about this being something they had raised in the consultations, as well as asking if there could be an assessment to measure experience for colleagues who have experience but not qualifications.</p> <p>Training would be delivered from a mix of in-house, Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), as well as looking at the rest of the market.</p> <p><b>ACTION</b> Julia and Alice to work together to ensure that the Board Development plan aligns with the Competence and Conduct Standard 2026.</p> <p>Julia left the meeting after this presentation item at 13:23</p>
3.	<b>Declarations of Interest</b>
	Declarations listed in the pack were noted.
4.	<b>Minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2025</b>
	Members agreed that the minutes recorded were a true record of the meeting.
	<p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> and <b>APPROVED</b> the minutes.</li> </ul>
5.	<b>Matters Arising from meeting held on the 30 September 2025</b>
	<p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the matters arising.</li> </ul>
6.	<b>Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 30 September 2025 (for review only)</b>
	<p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the minutes.</li> </ul>

7.	<b>Chair's Update</b>
	<p>Inside housing had moved to a digital format, Paul S urged members to have a look. There were interesting articles including one on health and housing collaboration, the review of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM), an update from the Ombudsman on their tiered approach to interventions and Chief Executive's salaries.</p> <p>No questions were raised.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the report.</li> </ul>
8.	<b>Chief Executive's Update</b>
	<p>Marie requested that jargon, such as 'Section 21' be explained in reports.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the report.</li> </ul>
9.	<b>Chair of Audit &amp; Risk Update</b>
	<p>As ARC had not met since the last Board meeting, Marie provided a verbal update, suggesting Champions could raise questions about their related risks. She also said that ARC would make members aware of when the Champion-associated risks would be discussed so they can attend the meetings.</p> <p>Paul S commented there was an impending governance risk, that (assuming the result of the Options Appraisal is that we become a 10k organisation) we do not manage the additional governance framework changes in a timely manner.</p> <p>Ben raised that there was a paper on the Cyber Security risk in the meeting pack. The risk cannot be eliminated in its entirety. It had been reviewed within the new risk register framework, there had been an internal audit, and we had run a Major Incident Plan Scenario Day.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the report.</li> </ul>
10.	<b>Chair of Sedgemoor Tenants' Assurance Committee (STAC) Update</b>
	<p>Claire updated the members that since the report was written Martin Heard had resigned. The three new members would have inductions next week and Paul S would meet them before the spotlight session.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the report.</li> </ul>
11.	<b>Chair of Development Committee Update</b>
	<p>Olly thanked Wendy and Duncan Harvey (Head of Housing Growth and Regeneration) for the draft SC Development Strategy. It will set out the framework for investment. Following Executive Team and Development Committee consideration it will be reviewed at a Partnership meeting and finally Board for approval before SC give their final approval. The strategy</p>

	will be aligned with the Joint Asset Management Strategy and the Sustainability Strategy.
	<p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the report.</li> </ul>
12.	<p><b>Board Member &amp; Committee Appointments</b></p> <p>Craig remained within the meeting, not taking part in discussions or voting. Alice outlined the thorough recruitment and interview processes and the recommendations. Four applicants had applied for the tenant Board member role and Craig was recommended to the Chair for the role, while two other applicants were proposed to be considered for the STAC roles. The STAC recruitment process identified a further proposed candidate.</p> <p>It was confirmed that Craig had agreed to be on the Development Committee and take the Customer and Complaints Champion role.</p> <p>We were working on filling the Digital and IT champion role in January.</p>
	<p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>APPROVED</b> the appointment of Craig Green as a Tenant Board Member and Director of Homes in Somerset with effect from 25 November 2025 until the Annual General Meeting in September 2026.</li> <li>The Board <b>APPROVED</b> the appointment of Craig Green to the Development Committee with effect from the 25 November 2025 until the Annual General Meeting in September 2026.</li> <li>The Board <b>APPROVED</b> the allocation of Craig Green to the Board Champion role of Customer and Complaints as shown in <b>Appendix A</b>.</li> <li>The Board <b>APPROVED</b> the following tenant appointments to the Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee (STAC) with effect from the 25 November 2025 until the Annual General Meeting in September 2026. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>John Hardy</li> <li>Nima Tehranchi</li> <li>Michael Hooper</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Paul welcomed Craig to the Board.</p>
13.	<p><b>Governance Framework, List of Appendices and Proposed Review Timetable</b></p> <p>Alice set out the plans for reviewing the Governance Framework. The timeframe would take into account review dates, any sector changes, and the documents that would need updates due to the outcome of the Options Appraisal exercise. She outlined the documents that would be combined and the gaps. Once the principles had been approved a timetable of review would be prepared with two or three documents coming to each meeting for approval. We intend to have a suite of effective documents that works for the organisation.</p>

	<p>Alice clarified for Marie that when streamlining documents, we would not be aligning the quoracy of Committees as this was not deemed appropriate. Marie also reminded members that the Board composition, whilst having 2 at present, allowed for up to 3 customers with one being eligible under the 'ordinary board member' category. Marie asked Alice to ensure that this point was clear in relevant framework documents.</p> <p>Paul S noted that some governance documents were beyond their review date, but this would be resolved now that Alice was onboard. Alice thanked Sarah for her offer of her EDI expertise.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board <b>APPROVED</b> the proposed Governance framework restructure.</li> <li>• During the framework review the Board <b>APPROVED</b> the Governance Manager to update <i>other</i> framework documents to reflect the changes approved.</li> <li>• The Board <b>APPROVED</b> that non-material changes to the Governance Framework documents can be approved by the Executive Team.</li> </ul>
14.	<p><b>Health &amp; Safety Policy and Framework (Annual)</b></p>
	<p>Peter explained that there had been small changes to the framework. In addition, there had been some changes in the external H&amp;S environment, the government were changing some approaches. Glen Carlin (External Health and Safety Advisor) keeps us updated with a regular in-depth corporate briefing. The framework would be reviewed again after the outcome of the Options Appraisal was known.</p> <p>In response to Federica's enquiry, members were informed that there was annual refresher e-learning training for colleagues and Board Members. Board members do need to complete the Colleague Assurance Form as well as staff.</p> <p>In general, when policies were reviewed, we consider how the policy affects Board members.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board <b>APPROVED</b> the Health &amp; Safety Policy and Framework for 2026.</li> </ul>
15.	<p><b>Preliminary Discussion on Rent and Service Charge Increases</b></p>
	<p>Ben outlined how we were complying with the rent setting and service charge policy on SC's behalf. The proposals were in line with the governments ten-year rent settlement of CPI (this year 38%) plus 1%. (4.8% in total).</p> <p>Prior to the meeting Sarah requested a comparison of HiS average rents to other providers in Somerset; both social housing (including the in-house team) and private rental providers, to establish that HIS is at or below average</p>

rents for the area. Ben reported that the latest Local Authority Data Return (LADR) for 2024/25 shows Somerset Council rents as follows:

- General Needs - Average Rent - £101.16 per week compared to £115.43 for all other register providers in Somerset.
- Supported Housing - Average Rent - £91.32 per week compared to £111.50 for all other register providers in Somerset.
- The office for national statistics shows that private rents had risen to an average of £966 (£222.92 per week) in October 2025, an annual increase of 3.4% from £934 (£215.54 per week) in October 2024. This was lower than the rise in the Southwest (5.9%) over the year.

Ben highlighted that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was under pressure. Our funding to deliver our services comes directly from the HRA. Rent increases and service charge recovery fund the HRA and any non-recovery of service charges will have to be funded elsewhere.

Prior to the meeting Paul S asked if SC were assuming £1 per week of convergence and if so, what will the impact be if the government decide on a different settlement? Ben set out that £1 per week from 1st April 2026 will bring in c£350k and £2 per week will bring in an additional c£350k (c£700k in total).

Ben confirmed for Paul S (asked prior to the meeting) that because the HRA was under pressure, even with the £1 assumption, the following scenarios and sensitivities were built into the HRA business planning:

#### Sensitivity Testing

- General inflation rates increase by 1% against the baseline assumptions from 2027/28 for three years. This sensitivity test shows the effect of a rise in general inflation, which impacts on both rents and costs.
- Building costs rates increase by 1% against the baseline assumptions from 2027/28 for three years. This sensitivity test illustrates the impact of costs increasing at a faster rate than rents over the medium term.
- Interest rates for new borrowing increase by 1% against the baseline assumptions from 2026/27 for three years. This sensitivity test demonstrates the effect of a medium-term increase in borrowing costs.

#### Scenarios to Model:

- Including an average decarbonisation investment of £0.020m per dwelling by 2050 from 2030/31 onwards, with 50% external funding. No new build.
- Including an average decarbonisation investment of £0.020m per dwelling by 2050 from 2030/31 onwards, with no funding. No new build.
- Extending the new build programme by 5 years to deliver 50 new homes per annum at an average of £250k per property. No decarbonisation.
- Combining scenario A and C, above.

Ben outlined that the Executive Team would come back to Board in January with support proposals such as hardship funds and/or capping for 132 people who would have a large increase in service charges (£20+).

He also explained we would introduce grounds maintenance charges for the former Sedgemoor patch. Previously, they had not been charged due to credibility of the information we held. The report outlines the key issues and mitigations.

Prior to the meeting Paul S enquired why we had not passed on full costs for TV aerials, lifts and legionella in the service charges previously. Ben explained that with a dedicated Service Charge role, we were better placed to identify and analyse costs incurred that were 'service chargeable'. To be chargeable we had to be confident we had the supporting evidence to justify the charges. When compiling 26/27 service charge proposals we used the last completed financial year (24/25) as a basis for the proposed service charge, adjusting for known and material ups and downs (for example, new properties coming online (Penlea) that weren't included in the year of review). Likewise, when compiling 25/26 service charges we would have been relying on 23/24 actuals as the starting position for the calculations. Between 23/24 and 24/25 costs for these three areas had increased significantly.

Ben went on to explain, in answer to Paul S' question, that further analysis on the 132 properties would be completed before the Christmas break, and reported back to Board in January along with any recommendations such as hardship funds and/or capping.

The Board discussed how we were trying to be as equitable as possible so there would be one service delivery for all. We have worked closely with customers and will continue to do so to manage grounds maintenance professionally.

**RESOLVED**

- The Board **NOTED** the government's new 10-year rent settlement that will see rents increase by CPI plus 1% starting on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026. For 2026/27 this permits Somerset Council to increase rents by 4.8% (September 25 Consumer Price Index (CPI) 3.8% + 1%).
- The Board **APPROVED** the Executive Team's (ET's) recommendation to increase rents by the maximum 4.8%. This figure will be our recommendation to SC.
- The Board **NOTED** the proposed Service Charges for 2026/27.
- The Board **NOTED** the proposal to introduce Grounds Maintenance Service Charges from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026 for those customers who have not previously been charged for this service.
- The Board **NOTED** the ET's intention to provide an update to the January Board on the customer impact of service charges for the 132



	customers facing increases greater than £20 per week, alongside potential mitigations for consideration.
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16.	<p><b>Policies &amp; Procedures</b></p> <p>Rik joined the meeting at 13:55 during the Preliminary Discussion on Rent and Service Charge Increases.</p> <p>Repairs &amp; Maintenance Policy (including Damp, Mould and Condensation).</p> <p>This joint policy will ensure that all tenants in Somerset Council properties will receive the same service, while reflecting the needs of recent regulatory changes. Our timeframes for repairs have been aligned with the requirements of Awaab’s Law. The policy has made changes to “same day” repairs, increasing the timeframe. To help mitigate this we will work with residents to offer appointments that meet their preference and availability. There has been extensive consultation with residents and a communication plan to share these changes was underway.</p> <p>Repairs and maintenance is a vital service for our customers and important for satisfaction; it is right that we have worked on it jointly with the ‘in-house’ team and to move to the Awaab’s law timescales. Our repairs booking system, VerseOne, enables tenants to book appointments at times that suit them. SC will be implementing VerseOne but it will take time. Alongside VerseOne, our Localz software sends a text with a link so they can see the en-route location of the operative.</p> <p>Naomi confirmed for Paul S (question asked prior to the meeting) that if HiS Board approved the policy, it would be discussed at the Partnership Meeting on 8 December and then follow SC’s internal governance processes for approval. However, if approved here, HiS would implement the policy from 25th November.</p> <p>It was requested that an impact report comes back to Board in 12 months. Prior to this Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) would give an indication of how the changes were impacting tenants.</p> <p>Rik left the meeting at 14.16, after the Repairs and Maintenance Policy.</p> <p><b>ACTION</b> Rik to bring an Awaab’s Law update to the Dec 2026 Spotlight Session.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board <b>NOTED</b> the statutory drivers, operational changes, and new monitoring arrangements.</li> <li>• The Board <b>APPROVED</b> the Repairs and Maintenance Policy 2025 – 2028.</li> </ul> <p>The Corporate and Personal Device Policy and Acceptable Use of AI Policy were brought and considered together.</p> <p>Both policies were aligned with SC’s policies and will be applicable to members and colleagues.</p>
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	<p>The use of AI policy sets out that people must check all outputs and be careful what information was fed into the system. The policy makes it clear Work Co-pilot is the only AI technology permitted, as it was within our network. As this was such a fast-moving technology the policy will be reviewed in one year.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>APPROVED</b> the Corporate and Personal Device Policy (Version 1.0, November 2025).</li> <li>The Board <b>APPROVED</b> the Acceptable Use of AI Policy (Version 1.0, November 2025).</li> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the associated implications across operational, legal, governance, and equality considerations.</li> </ul>
17.	<p><b>Proposed Dates for Board Member Attended Meetings 2026</b></p>
	<p>Alice presented the proposed meeting dates. Sarah highlighted she was not able to attend the STAC meeting proposed for 7 May 2026. Pauline K would check calendars to ensure availability/admin support and liaise directly with Sarah and Claire.</p> <p>Marie reminded members that the Audit and Risk Committee meetings were held in-person and only hybrid for auditors and exceptions.</p> <p><b>ACTION</b> Pauline K to agree with Claire and Sarah the May STAC meeting date.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>APPROVED</b> the proposed dates and times for the various meetings.</li> </ul>
18.	<p><b>Award of Tender – Fire Safety</b></p>
	<p>Naomi highlighted this was a routine exercise as the current contract comes to an end. Jo Hutchins, the procurement officer had been involved, and we are complying with the 2023 Procurement Act. The preferred supplier was well placed to deliver, and the appropriate due diligence, references and account checks had been performed.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>APPROVED</b> the award of a two-year contract (with an option to extend to five years) to Severnside Security Limited for fire safety services.</li> <li>The Board <b>APPROVED</b> sealing the contract, estimated at £500k over two years, to enhance legal protection and risk mitigation.</li> </ul>
19.	<p><b>Debtor Balances and Write-offs (Six Monthly Report)</b></p>
	<p>The report bought debtor balances, write offs for noting and a request for a rechargeable debt to be written off as it was over £5k. A lot of the performance</p>

	<p>indicators were hitting target and manageable commercial debt had been reduced.</p> <p>In response to Marie’s request, tenant arrears would in future be compared to last year’s figure.</p> <p><b>ACTION</b> Ben to share tenant arrears figure be compared to last year.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board <b>APPROVED</b> the write off of £5k worth of unrecoverable debt relating to one debtor account.</li> <li>• The Board <b>NOTED</b> the debtor balances as at end of September 2025.</li> </ul>
	<p>The meeting adjourned from 14:25 to 14:45.</p>
<p>20.</p>	<p><b>People Plan (Six Monthly Review)</b></p>
	<p>Julia Paling and Laura Wickens joined the meeting at 14:45 before item 20.</p> <p>Our 9 Investors in People (IIP) indicator scores were all good and have improved since the last assessment. Paul S felt it was very positive such progress has been made. Julia responded to Marie’s question that the scores were out of 7. A score of 7 would be ratings of “strongly agreed” and would equate to a Platinum award.</p> <p>The Board would consider ‘culture’ at the Board Innovation Day (BID) in April, and we would be revisiting psychologically/trauma informed work environments (PIE) post Options Appraisal.</p> <p>When the Development Team joined HiS from SC in April this year we learnt lessons about the wellness of colleagues, system and IT challenges, access to purchasing and TUPE. Many of these were addressed at open question sessions.</p> <p>In response to Paul S’s question, prior to the meeting, about what might a “wellbeing plan” look like, Julia responded the plan would set out our commitment to the wellbeing of all colleagues. It will include support on mental and psychological wellbeing, (EAP and mental health first aiders), financial wellbeing, such as advice on budgeting, pensions and link to our reward strategy, pay and benefits. It would include the work of the People Forum, EDI group, team building, Connect sessions, promote volunteering and supporting the wider community, and link to the new Behaviour Framework, the EDI strategy and our values.</p> <p>Paul S asked Julia what was the thing that “kept her awake”. There was no one thing that concerned her, but a combination of things like vacancies and sickness happening together and impacting on teams. This could then impact IIP scores. Marie enquired what one thing could we do that would make a big difference. Julia felt there was no obvious “one thing” but ensuring</p>

	<p>communication was strong was very important. People need to be listened to and heard. When morale is low you often hear “I have already said this”.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of this report.</li> </ul>
21	<p><b>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Report and Strategy Update</b></p> <p>It was considered that work in the report was good but there was always more you can do. Sarah will represent the Board on the EDI group and support them in their work. It would be important for our work on culture.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting Paul S asked how frequently do the EDI Group meet and how many members does it have? Laura updated the Board that EDI Champions were aiming to meet 4-6 weekly, quarterly once we have settled into a pattern and agenda. Membership was currently 7 colleagues (including Julia as Chair) - representing Finance/IT, Income, Compliance, HR &amp; Comms and Customer Service Team, and was open to more colleagues joining and had been looking for volunteers from other departments. Sarah O raised a number of observations in advance of the meeting and would meet with the team to discuss how these can be incorporated into the next update.</p> <p>Sarah O'Neill, as Board Champion, is invited to upcoming meetings.</p> <p>Laura and Julia left 14:49 after item 21.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the annual update.</li> </ul>
22.	<p><b>Customers First &amp; Complaint Management Update (Six Monthly Report)</b></p> <p>In response to Paul S’s question, prior to the meeting, Claire informed the Board that there had been a sector-wide increase in ASB cases compared to last year (2023/24- 42.5 to 53.5 in 2024/25). Like others, we had improved our approach, as per the Housing Ombudsman Service updated Code, and seen an increase in overall numbers logged. We also note issues relating to the understanding of “what is a complaint” i.e. ASB report vs ASB service failure (i.e. failed to follow the policy). Increasing volumes was challenging; we were tapping into the council team to support the investigation work.</p> <p>We worked with Federica as the Councillor Responsible for Complaints. We were seeing an increasing number of complaints going to the Ombudsman. Due to the Ombudsman’s capacity some complaints had been with them for some time, one was from December 2022. In some cases, the Ombudsman was directing us to perform another stage-2 review of the complaint following the new processes. When revisiting the complaint, we tend to provide a stronger response setting out what has been done and why.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the report.</li> </ul>



23.	<b>RSH Consumer Standards Review (Six Monthly)</b>
	<p>Claire discussed how the impact of damp and mould was wider than the compliance team and resulted in a much greater engagement with contractors. Poverty was often the underlying issue, and teams were getting involved with new people who had not been on our radar previously. We have been identifying damp and mould caused by individual issues rather than location-based causes.</p> <p>Marie highlighted the need to consider all implications of new heating systems on the bill payer. The impact in winter, as well as bill levels in summer need to be communicated; rural properties with little shielding and individual medical needs all impact on bills. Unexpected bills are detrimental to families.</p> <p>Indices of multiple deprivation had been published recently. In the future we would combine this with medical and property data to provide us with hot spots for need. Claire and Naomi had and would continue to work with their equivalents in SC to support assurance and accountability.</p>
	<p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the report.</li> </ul>
24.	<b>Compliance Performance</b>
	<p>a. HIS Summary Report – October 2025.</p> <p>Paul S reminded members that Briefing Note 8 had been added to the board pack as “No access” was becoming an issue for compliance. It has been a problem across the sector.</p> <p>Marie asked how we can evidence that the report of no access was not caused by the contractors. MD Group had van tracking, so we can check they have visited the address for a suitable amount of time, and we had seen the same issue across all contractors in all locational areas. We had been working with contractors to improve communications and scheduling. Patch teams also contact tenants. Tenants will inform us if they were in and we were told otherwise. In addition, “No access” injunctions had changed making it harder to gain access.</p> <p>Marie highlighted we need to carefully plan visits to minimise the number of visits reducing the need for tenants to take multiple days off work. The paper outlines how we were working to reduce the number of visits made.</p>
	<p>b. Joint HiS/SC Compliance Summary Report – September 2025</p> <p>There were no additional comments.</p>
	<p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the contents of the annual update.</li> </ul>

25.	<b>Stock Condition Survey Programme</b>
	<p>Stock condition surveys were back on track, with an accumulative total across all SC-owned stock of just under 74% at the end October, 78% complete by the end of November and 100% (albeit there will be some no access) predicted by March 2026. It was considered to be an acceptable position for the Regulator. Savills were now engaged to work on the Asset Management Strategy and will use the data to inform the programme. They were on track for the strategy to be ready at the end of March and to be presented at the BID in April 2026.</p> <p>Paul S asked the extent to which the new stock condition data was informing the 26/27 capital programme? Naomi confirmed that all data obtained to date was being extrapolated to inform next year's budget.</p> <p>In response to Pauline H's question Naomi said there had been higher than expected damp and mould reports since the introduction of Awaab's law on the 27 October. We had received 100 reports, double that of last year, however they were presenting with small amounts of damp and mould, with only 2 or 3 severe cases. Most cases were only a patch and could be fixed with steps such as upgraded fans and cleaning. Teams were stretched; all surveyors were working on damp and mould putting other areas on hold. The Executive Team think that it will settle back to normal numbers with time. Claire's team were supporting.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the update on progress of our Stock Condition Survey Project.</li> </ul>
26.	<b>Board Member Appraisal Feedback Report</b>
	<p>Paul S thanked everyone for their time, he had a master sheet of objectives and training which Alice would use to create a training plan. We had completed phase 1 of DTP's mentoring (Olly and Marie) and were hoping to start in January with Sarah and Craig.</p> <p>Members were asked to complete the 360-degree feedback for Paul S which would be used by Alice and Marie to perform Paul S's appraisal.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the update.</li> </ul>
27.	<b>Sustainability By Design Update</b>
	<p>Naomi explained that the external environment was ever changing. We were using a range of initiatives to help manage these changes.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the update on Sustainability by Design.</li> </ul>
28.	<b>Management Accounts – October 2025</b>
	There were no comments on the management accounts.

	<p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> management accounts for the first seven months of 25/26 (Apr - Oct 25).</li> </ul>
29.	<p><b>Key Performance Indicators – October 2025</b></p>
	<p>Paul S noted overall satisfaction at 85.7% and compared it to recent London inspections with C1 gradings, where one had a satisfaction rate of 62%. All of our TSMs, except two were in the top quartile.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting Paul S asked what were the issues behind the average re-let times being 83 days? Ben clarified this number relates to the number of standard re-let properties rather than re-let days. In respect to General Needs and Supported Housing the performance had been impacted by contractor delays in some cases and the gathering of all compliance certification. Difficulties in finding suitable tenants for some Supported Housing voids (e.g. accessibility issues) had also contributed to delays. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) continue to monitor performance in this area very carefully to identify actions needed to relet voids within target timeframes. Claire added we had been working more closely with Adult Social Care colleagues to allocate Extra Care Homes more quickly, this will result in lower re-let times going forward. Long standing Extra Care void properties were now being let resulting in the average void days for those properties now hitting our performance. Naomi added it was recognised that the voids service was not where it needed to be and it was a key improvement area for ET. A joint report to SC/HiS Partnership Meeting in October considered a number of actions that could help improve performance.</p> <p>Analysis of our processes at HiS had revealed that delays occur because of issues with the co-ordination and sequencing of works throughout the void period. We also identified that efficiencies could be made around key elements such as clearances, asbestos surveys/removals and the stock condition survey. Work was underway to review standard operating procedures (SOPs) and streamline these works accordingly. It was further noted that HiS had a backlog of void properties that MD did not have the capacity to resolve within the current cost model . The Partnership Meeting was asked to consider a proposal for an additional interim resource to support MD to resolve the current backlog. In order to ensure that the joint service meets all regulatory compliance and was fit for the future, Partnership Meeting was requested to consider the procurement of a consultant to review and assist with the alignment of this important service. Although the Partnership Meeting was supportive of both requests, it does not have a decision-making remit. The requests were therefore following SC’s internal governance process. In the meantime, work was continuing to streamline the service and ET are continuing to closely monitor.</p>
	<p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the KPIs as at the end of October 2025.</li> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the Somerset Council Housing Performance for Quarter 2.</li> </ul>

30.	<b>Risk Register</b>
	<p>Paul S asked, prior to the meeting, with Cyber Security being identified as number 1 risk, what plans and mitigations do we have in place with SC? Ben reported that the output of a recent internal audit on Cyber Security would be taken to the December ARC. Alongside this, the findings of a Major Incident Plan test, focused on a Cyber Security incident, would be presented to the December ARC. The Executive Team had also received a presentation from the Cyber Security lead at Somerset Council (Dave Littlewood). Part of the presentation focused on what HiS can do for SC to help mitigate the Cyber Security risk. We are working through the resulting action plan.</p> <p>The results of a recent phishing test confirm the need for colleagues to remain vigilant. We are rolling out bite size Cyber Security awareness articles through our internal communication newsletter 'Round Robin'.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting Sarah asked if we can receive a comparison of our Risk Register to the recently published Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) Sector Risk Review (to ensure we are in line)? Ben updated the Board that a comparison review was scheduled to be presented to the December ARC to ensure we don't have any blind spots. The ARC papers are uploaded to the Board portal enabling all Board members to review this comparison should they wish to do so.</p>
	<p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> this summary report.</li> </ul>
31.	<b>Statutory Registers Update (Six Monthly Report)</b>
	There were no comments on the statutory registers.
	<p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the report.</li> </ul>
32.	<b>AOB (to be notified in advance)</b>
	There was no other business notified.

The non-confidential meeting finished at 15:26.

Confirmed as a true record of the meeting

Signed: 

Name (Chair): Paul Stephenson

Date: 27 January 2026