

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 27 January 2025 at 12.38pm**

Board Members:	Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts Cllr Kathryn Pearce Cllr Pauline Ham Cllr Lance Duddridge Craig Green Marie Hide Oliver Keates Paul Hackett Paul Stephenson (Chair) Sarah O'Neill	Federica Kathy Pauline H Lance Craig Marie Olly Paul H Paul S Sarah
In Attendance:	Alice Pearce, Governance Manager (minutes) Ben Lane, Director of Finance & Performance Claire Tough, Director of Communities & Customer Service Naomi Macey, Director of Asset Management, Safety and Development Pauline Kelly, Executive Assistant (Admin support) Peter Hatch, Chief Executive	Alice Ben Claire Naomi Pauline K Peter
Guests:	Chris Hall, Executive Director Community, Place & Economy, Somerset Council Glen Carlin, H&S Advisor Julian Paine, Director, Governance and Regulation, Savills Lorna Curtis-Davies, STAC member Karen Wilce, STAC member Michael Hooper, STAC member Steve Partridge, Director, Head of Affordable Housing Consultancy, Savills Wendy Lewis, Housing Specialist, Somerset Council	Chris Glen Julian Lorna Karen Michael Steve Wendy
NO.	ITEM	
1.	Welcome Guest	
	Paul S welcomed everyone to the meeting. He thanked the staff for organising, and members for attending the Westfield House and area site visit prior to the meeting.	
	Apologies	
	Apologies were received from Denise Reeves.	
2.	Presentation Slot Strategy Theme: Enriching Partnerships (Supporting our shareholder to deliver)	

	Topic: Somerset Council Options Appraisal – Recommendation Report from Savills
	<p>Julian and Steve outlined their work on the Housing Options Appraisal (OA) and the recommendation they gave to Somerset Council (SC; presentation attached to agenda pack).</p> <p>The slides set out the work Savills did, including a desktop review of the two delivery models and stakeholder engagement. Both models had the ability to be scaled up to 10,000 properties.</p> <p>The stakeholder engagement covered tenants, leaseholders, staff from both teams, Board, community and statutory organisations and others. Almost all feedback supported bringing the services together. Most tenants, leaseholders, staff and Homes in Somerset (HiS) Board wanted to retain their current service and were proud of what they delivered. It was noted that to some degree they had limited experience of the other service.</p> <p>Senior staff reported that they were encouraged by the joint working already happening and looked forward to unifying the service in the future.</p> <p>Both delivery services were performing well, however HiS was stronger, with higher satisfaction rates, the HIS Board provided a strong undiluted focus on social house activities, plus HiS was cheaper than the in-house service. This led to the recommendation that HiS became the delivery model for 10k properties.</p> <p>Julian ran through some points important for the integration, (assuming the recommendation was confirmed by the council);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • welcoming the in-house team into the organisation so they feel part of the future • the need for a county wide perspective • a stronger client function (Savills were working with Chris on this) • language needs to be inclusive • a move away from HiS stock and SC stock • the importance of co-creating future operating arrangements, taking everyone on the journey. <p>It is important that the in-house team do not feel that things were “done to” them and our self-pride doesn’t make people feel they have been “taken over”. Paul S confirmed this had been considered and we were working on developing a new culture for the new business. Marie highlighted the drive to improve needs to remain.</p> <p>As well as teams scaling up, the Board needs to scale up too and be county focused. The Board may want to review composition and ensure that they work with the Council to have the skills needed for the integration period and the longer term.</p>

Julian highlighted aligning the two repairs operating systems would be a big piece of work, and we would need to take staff along the journey. Peter outlined the alignment plans.

Wider benefits for SC were discussed. Having taken on the development function HiS can, in the future, provide new housing across the county. Other areas of benefit that could be considered were the management of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), procurement and Value for Money.

Both current services were passionate about customer engagement, and a combined group could be really powerful. Savills felt strongly that we should start afresh and allow tenants to co-create the new body. The Regulator, during an inspection, will want to know how we hear the customer voice during every conversation. The Board discussed the balance of keeping the good in the current groups, while building something new. We want to retain the trust and empowerment we currently have. Claire set out the steps planned to bring in independent support to work tenants from both delivery models and support them to develop a new body with a single vision. Julian reminded the Board that it needed to ensure its tenant committee meets the needs of the Board.

Paul S reminded everyone that threaded through all these conversations were people. The strength of initial relationships was important; we have been working hard in the last year to build relationships within teams.

At the next Board meeting we will have the decision. Going forward an update will come to each Board meeting and at our Board Innovation Days (BIDs) where we will look at the business plan in more detail. If more time was needed, we would arrange it.

Peter confirmed for Kathy that there was a communication plan drafted for tenants and leaseholders.

Marie raised the changing risks for HiS, and the Board champion roles need to change with it. Ben updated members that the risk framework had been reviewed, and the integration project had its own risk register which was being developed and monitored. There was an update in the confidential Board pack, the Board would hear more about it at the upcoming Spotlight session and the BID. Paul S raised that Board members, particularly those who were risk owners and/or Board Champions, should raise questions at Board or talk to the risk or champion lead.

Federica also commented that the members of the Board may change after amalgamation. There may be changes to the tenant and Councillor members and the total number of members on the Board.

	<p>The Savills report would become public this week, we would email members with a link. The Savills presentation to Board would be placed on the Portal.</p> <p>Paul S thanked Julian and Steve for their ongoing support.</p> <p>Pauline H and Federica joined the meeting at 12:55 during this item.</p> <p>Chris joined the meeting at 13:29 at the end of this item. Julian and Steve left the meeting after this presentation item at 13:30</p>
	The meeting reconvened at 13:40
3.	Declarations of Interest
	Declarations listed in the pack were noted.
4.	Minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2025
	<p>Members agreed that the minutes recorded were a true record of the meeting.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting Sarah enquired how Board members can complete the Colleague Assurance form. A refreshed form had been circulated to colleagues. Hard copies will be circulated to members to complete after the January Board meeting. In addition, Julia explained that the annual refresher e-learning would be relaunched to Board members within the next few weeks. It had been previously paused, for Board members, as it was felt that a more collaborative face-to-face approach at Spotlights was preferable. However, we would make e-learning modules available for members should they wish to complete them.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED and APPROVED the minutes.
5.	Matters Arising from meeting held on the 25 November 2025
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the matters arising.
6.	Chair’s Update
	<p>No questions were raised.</p> <p>A link to an article in the Guardian would be circulated to members and National Federation of ALMOs (NFA), titled “In Somerset, I found glorious proof that England can build great Council houses. So, what is holding us back?”</p> <p>ACTION Peter to share link to the Guardian article mentioned in minute number 6.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the contents of the report.
7.	Chief Executive’s Update

	No questions were raised.
	RESOLVED • The Board NOTED the contents of the report.
7.	Chair of Audit & Risk Update
	Prompted by a question from Sarah prior to the meeting, the Board discussed how they would operate during a cyber incident. Discussions included a printed key contact number list, WhatsApp groups (including one for Chairs), and the use of QR codes to access secure documents. Ben and Alice would add the Board to the core services list within the Major Incident Plan (MIP). The Chairs Group would discuss setting up a WhatsApp group at their next meeting. Ben informed the Board that the updated plan would be presented to the Audit & Risk Committee (ARC) in February.
	Paul S asked, prior to the meeting, if Ben could explain what will be covered by the new risk that covers data. Ben explained that the intention was to present a proposal for the management of this risk to the ARC in February. It would primarily focus on the reliance we place on data and the integrity of that data 'know your customers/know your homes'. Rob Griffiths, Housemark CEO, will come to the next BID. Sarah said she had seen in other organisations that Cyber and Data was high on everyone's risk registers.
	ACTION Ben and Alice to add "The Board" to the list of core service areas within the MIP and develop a plan for how the Board would function during a cyber-attack. Paul S and Chairs Group to discuss the use of a Chairs WhatsApp group at their next meeting.
	RESOLVED • The Board NOTED the contents of the report.
9.	Chair of Sedgemoor Tenants' Assurance Committee (STAC) Update
	Paul S had observed the last STAC meeting and was pleased to see the challenge and probing questions. Claire and the team had taken away a number of tasks to improve the processes and reports.
	RESOLVED • The Board NOTED the contents of the report.
10.	Chair of Development Committee Update
	No questions were raised.
	RESOLVED • The Board NOTED the contents of the report.
11.	Risk Management Framework
	Ben explained that the risk framework now captured all the recommendations from the David Tolman Partnership (DTP) 2024 Board Effectiveness Review. The ARC had reviewed it and was recommending it to the Board for approval.

	<p>Paul S felt that it captures the risk environment and links well to Board responsibilities.</p> <p>Ben assured the Board that the framework was 10k ready. This prompted Marie to enquire if other reviews received recently were also 10k ready. She was reassured that reviews completed since we had received the recommendation were 10k ready. Some policy reviews were being brought forward and being made 10k ready as they were vital for go-live.</p>
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board APPROVED the refreshed Risk Management Framework.
<p>12.</p>	<p>New Customer Influence and Engagement Strategy 2026-2029</p>
	<p>Claire explained that this strategy was important because it sets out customer influence and engagement across the whole business. It will build on TPAS’s co-production project in 2022 and DTP’s Governance Effectiveness report in 2024. It sets out four objectives; Empowerment and Voice, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), Governance and Assurance, and Transparency and Communication.</p> <p>Claire had discussed traditional and non-traditional engagement with Julian from Savills. Currently we were fairly traditional, so there were a number of ways we could broaden our offer. STAC and Sarah had fed in ideas to improve EDI within the strategy. The strategy also looks to strengthened governance. Alongside what is set out in the strategy we will be working with an independent body to co-create, with the customers, the 10k ready customer committee. To ensure we can see the differences we are making the <i>measures of success</i> were set out in the strategy. Additional resources were needed for this strategy which had been built into the up-coming budget. We have considered becoming countywide to deliver wider benefits for all customers. Part of the development of a new customer committee with an independent consultant will look at working in new areas. The offer we agree on needs to be universal and accessible to all tenants. We will also ensure as people become new tenants that we make them aware of the tenant offer.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting, STAC had recommended EDI training for involved customers and a workshop on the EDI strategy and communication channels with a group of Involved Customers (ideally representing diverse groups). Claire updated the Board, that this was already included in the EDI Strategy workstream and the Customer Influence Strategy. In response to Federica’s question about under-represented groups Claire explained that there was a business wide objective to improve the information we hold on our customers so we can identify and work with those groups.</p> <p>Sarah enquired, prior to the meeting, as to the status of commissioning external support for the review and proposals for a new customer</p>

	<p>engagement framework. Claire had discussed the proposal with 'in-house' colleagues on 22 January and was now progressing the procurement process looking for expressions of interest.</p> <p>Claire highlighted the section on implications for Board and asked members to consider them.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board APPROVED the 2026–2029 Customer Influence and Engagement Strategy, and the proposed governance and reporting arrangements. • The Board NOTED the revised measures and accountability framework.
13.	<p>Draft Somerset Council Development Strategy</p>
	<p>In 2025 the Development Teams of HiS and Somerset Council came together and agreed a programme to deliver 580 new homes. The strategic priority was to deliver new homes, making best use of the Housing Revenue Fund (HRA). It contains details on net zero delivery which can impact on costs, but we want to deliver high performing efficient homes. Development was already starting to step outside Bridgwater and Taunton, into Somerset. Although this strategy had been a joint piece of work and would be delivered by HiS's Development Team, it was Somerset Council's Development Strategy. Therefore, the Board were recommended to endorse the strategy to the council.</p> <p>Reviewing the strategy at Development Committee was considered critical work and important for members to have sight and contribute to the shaping of the strategy. Once approved a joint workshop to discuss longer term plans, funding, and whether a review of our corporate structure and the merits of a possible development company should be considered in June or July. Oly supported the workshop and had been looking at partnerships and other joint working.</p> <p>Marie asked the team to consider real life considerations, for example, are there public transport options or parking, do family homes support the family. Naomi explained this was always part of the initial appraisal steps.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting Sarah asked for the latest data on the diversity of people who live in Somerset and our tenants. Naomi agreed to provide a briefing note to the March Board.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting Paul S queried if there was sufficient emphasis on regeneration opportunities and associated resource impacts. Naomi agreed that regeneration would play an increasingly critical role in meeting Somerset's long-term housing needs. While this Strategy recognised regeneration as part of our toolkit, we also plan to develop a more detailed</p>

approach to identifying, prioritising and resourcing regeneration opportunities. She explained it would include using the evidence base from the Joint Asset Management Strategy to determine which estates or neighbourhoods require investment, renewal or redesign. It was acknowledged that regeneration activity brought additional resource implications which would be a key to the planning process of any proposals.

Paul S highlighted prior to the meeting, that on page 7, item 6 it states, "provides a three-year housing development and delivery plan". Naomi confirmed that SC had now amended the "master" version to align to the 5-year plan.

In response to a Paul S query, prior to the meeting around sufficient reference to housing for older people, Naomi agreed Somerset had an ageing population with an increasing demand for age-appropriate housing. The development programme seeks opportunities to deliver a range of housing options for older people, including accessible homes, downsizing opportunities, and specialist or supported accommodation where evidence demonstrates need. This approach aligns with the Adult Social Care Strategy and the emerging Joint Asset Management Strategy, recognising that well-designed housing for older people helps reduce pressure on health and care services, supports independence, and improves wellbeing across the county.

Naomi outlined for Paul S prior to the meeting, that the SC review of sites and opportunities (page 16, item 13) was currently being undertaken. We were working up options/proof of concept via the Oaktrees/Milton House Adult Social Care project which it was hoped would open the door for future opportunities.

It was confirmed that legacy projects are being monitored by Development Committee.

In response to a comment from Sarah prior to the meeting, Naomi confirmed that we would look at governance options for Development including the possibility of a development subsidiary, it would be considered as part of the "Building a Better Future" pillar in the new corporate strategy 2026-2031.

ACTION

Naomi to provide a briefing note to the March Board meeting, setting out the latest data on the diversity of people who live in Somerset and our tenants.

RESOLVED

- The Board **ENDORSED** the Somerset Council Housing Development Strategy 2026-2031 for onward review and adoption by Somerset Council.
- The Board **NOTED** that Development Committee have endorsed this Strategy and recommend it to HiS Board review.

14.	Policies
	<p>The Electrical Safety and Legionella Safety policies were brought to Board as three yearly refreshes. We had worked with SC and Savills on them and they were 10k ready. They meet all current legislation, best practice and have strengthened governance and accountability. Both will become joint policies with the Council. Data management steps (management plans) were set out for both policies).</p> <p>Item 14a. Electrical Safety Policy Sarah raised, prior to the meeting, that the policy needed more detail around our EDI commitments and suggested the wording below, which was accepted and will be included in the final policy. <i>"When planning and delivering electrical inspections, testing, repairs and improvement works, we will:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Make reasonable adjustments to ensure residents are not disadvantaged when accessing electrical safety services.</i> • <i>Communicate clearly and provide information in accessible formats including large print, Easy Read, translated material or alternative formats upon request.</i> • <i>Identify and prioritise residents who are clinically, medically or socially vulnerable, including those dependent on electricity for medical or assistive equipment.</i> • <i>Work flexibly with residents whose circumstances require alternative appointment arrangements, additional time, or the presence of carers or advocates.</i> • <i>Ensure contractors act respectfully, sensitively and professionally when working in residents' homes, recognising cultural, religious and personal needs.</i> • <i>Escalate and respond promptly where electrical works may place vulnerable residents at risk."</i> <p>Item 14b. Legionella Safety Policy Prior to the meeting, Sarah suggested similar improvements to the Legionella Safety Policy as those for the Electrical Safety Policy. Additionally, she suggested <i>"we should note / prioritise customers who were more vulnerable to contracting legionella, such as older, disabled or immunocompromised people, as well as prioritising properties that are higher risk, such as older people's homes."</i> These additions were accepted and would be included in the final policy.</p> <p>ACTION Naomi to update the Legionella and Electrical Safety Policies in line with minute 14, and upload to the website and HIPPO. Pauline to post both Electrical Safety and Legionella Safety policies and management plans on the Board portal.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subject to the changes set out in minute 14, the Board APPROVED the updated Legionella and Electrical Safety Policies and Management Plans.
15.	<p>Review of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Targets 2026/27 (Annual)</p>
	<p>The proposed targets for 2026/27 were set out in the report. Acknowledging the pressure the organisation will face in the transition, they had been set to maintain standards rather than building on the present levels. A few targets were lower than this year’s target but were still higher than current performance. The Board discussed the rationale for keeping most KPIs at the current level, considered the impact of undeliverable targets vs. low indicators masking any drops in performance and agreed keeping the indicators the same would give us a useful indicator of the impact of the integration. We will have some areas where we do dual reporting for a period but would move to a single suite as soon as we can. KPIs had been shared with our ‘in-house’ colleagues, and they were looking to implement the same targets.</p> <p>The Executive Team had discussed the targets at length in their meeting. The data from Savills showed approximately a 6% difference in satisfaction data between ‘in-house’ and HiS. The data was now several months old, the satisfaction rates were considered to be closer now, which makes our work going forward easier. There were some areas where HiS would need to improve performance and others where the ‘in-house’ team would need to improve. By the end of the transformation period we would want performance, across the whole service to be at the same high level.</p> <p>The management agreement KPIs will be agreed at the Partnership Meeting on 9 February 2026. Damp and Mould reporting was the only major change.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting Sarah highlighted that STAC had received proposed targets in the report, however, in the meeting they were advised the Executive Team had recommended subsequent changes. STAC also had noted this year’s KPI decision process had deviated from the format in previous years. They requested to see the full suite of KPIs (as previously) and not just the specific KPIs that ET recommended they monitor. Claire updated the Board and STAC that they had agreed to revisit this at the March STAC meeting where a full overview would be provided with proposed KPIs to monitor.</p> <p>In response to a question from Federica on re-let times, Naomi explained a report had gone to the Partnership Meeting in November requesting funding for an external consultant to support both teams. They would consider and make recommendations on the processes both teams follow to bring together the strengths of each and best practice. We were</p>

	<p>currently getting quotes for and will come back to Board with an update. Marie raised that there had been examples where other organisations “massaged” the data, for example carefully choosing which properties were included as a Void property. Peter felt that we were reporting Voids accurately and our processes could be improved so that we deliver a better service to tenants.</p> <p>Paul H felt it was important to consider what the cause of delays was in properties that needed major repairs. Were we waiting on a repair, a tenant or a new kitchen? Plus, if we were waiting on a new kitchen, we needed to balance the cost for it to be installed quickly against the loss of income. In addition, we need to consider our relet standard.</p> <p>ACTION Ben to attend the March STAC meeting to present the full suite of KPIs for 2026/27.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board APPROVED the proposed suite of KPIs and associated targets for 2026/27. • The Board NOTED the key changes to KPIs compared with 2025/26, including increases and decreases in selected targets, and KPI refinements. • The Board NOTED the proposed dual-reporting arrangements for 2026/27 and the combined reporting approach thereafter.
16a.	<p>Draft Budget Proposals - Revenue 2026/27</p>
	<p>Ben highlighted how unusual the upcoming year was. We are likely to be managing a budget for 4000 homes for 5 months, and 10,000 homes thereafter. We envisage, from September to be running two budgets. There would be a separate transition budget, with allocations from the HRA for the ‘go-live’ funding, HR, finance, Head of Service and MD group mobilisation costs. The Board would receive more details at the February Spotlight session. The draft budget includes some efficiencies from the legal services framework, agency staff activity, reduced contributions to pensions following an external valuation, and delaying recruitment of the Head of Housing. The figures were subject to agreements on the capital programme and management agreement figures.</p> <p>In response to Sarah’s questions prior to the meeting, Ben explained that the reduction in employer pension contributions falls out of the triannual valuation conducted by the actuary. It reviewed HiS’s local government pension scheme (LGPS) fund position to assess whether there were enough assets to meet current and future pension liabilities. It sets the employer’s contribution rates for the next three years to ensure the scheme remains financially sustainable and compliant with funding regulations.</p> <p>In response to Sarah’s question, prior to the meeting, Ben explained that in addition to the Transformation & Integration role we had submitted a bid for</p>

	<p>funding to SC to provide additional resources leading up the to 'go-live' date and beyond.</p> <p>Paul S enquired prior to the meeting, as to why there were increased costs associated with void properties, Ben explained that these were from the cost of utilities and Council Tax for properties while they were void.</p> <p>Ben confirmed that recognising the Grounds Maintenance situation, we were now otherwise in a full cost-recovery situation.</p> <p>Ben requested funding from reserves of approximately £80k (worse case scenario), for 6 months, to cover an interim Head of Development whilst our Head of Development is on sick leave. We had an ambitious programme with complex issues, it was a new team, and there had been some team member turn-over. Resources had been allocated previously for a Transition role that had not been filled, which should cover the majority of the request. Any residual amount would be added to the deficit in the new budget. Agreement was required so that it could be included in the draft budget. The Board approved the request.</p> <p>Paul H raised that in future, any unspent reserves should be returned to reserves, and that new requests for reserves should be submitted separately. Reserves shouldn't be repurposed. Ben agreed to the request.</p> <p>Marie questioned if officers have adequately planned for extra costs arising from managing 10k homes. Paul S enquired if there were any additional costs for a 10k organisation that we haven't considered. Ben explained that the medium-term financial plan would cover a lot of this at the February Spotlight session, and he requested the Board to raise any issues, or missing costs, and monitor performance against the plans. Peter added that we had grossed up costs, some of which, will be borne by the Council. We think we have covered everything, but it was possible we could have missed something, and he also asked members to raise any issues.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board NOTED the current Revenue Budget position for 2026/27, and the next steps outlined in the report. • The Board NOTED subject to final Somerset Council SC approval, the Capital Budget proposal for 26/27. • The Board APPROVED subject to final Somerset Council (SC) approval, the Management Agreement Fee for 2026/27. • The Board APPROVED reserves spend up to £80k to cover an interim Head of Development role.
16b	<p>Service Charge Increases 2026/27 – Customer Impact, Mitigation Options & Grounds Maintenance Update</p>
	<p>It was proposed that a small hardship fund to mitigate financial challenges be implemented for those adversely affected by significant service charge increases. Initially this was considered for those households where the</p>

	<p>increase was greater than £20 per week, but after further work, the new proposal was expanded to those where the increase was greater than £15 per week. We would use processes developed previously to issue the hardship fund.</p> <p>Although we were moving towards introducing Grounds Maintenance service charges, we need better information to be able to do so. We would also look to align the process with the 'in-house' team in 27/28.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board NOTED the updated analysis on significant service charge increases in 2026/27. • The Board NOTED the historic hardship fund uptake analysis set out in this report. • The Board APPROVED the establishment of a targeted hardship fund of up to £17k, funded from reserves and administered by Homes in Somerset (HiS). • The Board NOTED the decision made with SC to defer the introduction of grounds maintenance charges until 2027/28.
17.	Governance Framework
	<p>Alice outlined the three documents for approval and the reasons for the changes. The Governance Framework was an overarching document that set out how HiS manages governance. It then sign-posts people to the appropriate document or policy for more details.</p> <p>Item 17a. Governance Framework</p> <p>In response to Sarah’s question, prior to the meeting, around qualifications for the alternate Company Secretary role, Alice explained that a Company Secretary does not need to be a qualified Company Secretary but must have the skills and time to fulfil the role. Peter and Alice were looking at short and long-term training requirements, which would be shared with Board members once confirmed.</p> <p>In response to a question prior to the meeting from Sarah, Alice would update the framework to state draft Board minutes would be uploaded onto the portal within 14 working days subject to Chair and CEO availability.</p> <p>Sarah also noted prior to the meeting, that STAC members were not all Board members, for example in the section on the Code of Conduct. Alice would update the framework. On the Code of Conduct, Claire responded that it was included in the proposal for consultancy support for the new committee.</p> <p>Item 17b. Board Membership and Recruitment</p> <p>In response to Sarah’s comment, prior to the meeting, Alice agreed to update the document so that the skills matrix work reflects Board and Committees, including STAC. Currently we perform this for STAC but not for the other</p>

	<p>Committees, when the skills matrix documents were next refreshed, she would extend it to the committees.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting, Sarah suggested, and it was agreed, to expanding the EDI section to the following: <i>"We are committed to equality, diversity and inclusion in the recruitment and appointment of Board Members. As a social housing provider, we recognise that effective governance is strengthened by a Board that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve and brings a broad range of skills, perspectives and lived experience. Our board recruitment processes are fair, transparent and based on merit, using objective, skills-based criteria aligned to the organisation's governance needs. We take reasonable steps to remove barriers to participation, promote equality of opportunity and encourage applications from under-represented groups. We will regularly review the effectiveness of our recruitment arrangements to ensure they support inclusive decision-making, strong governance and our responsibility to deliver safe, high-quality homes and services for current and future residents."</i></p> <p>There were no comments on Item 17c Board Member and Committee Member Responsibilities.</p> <p>ACTION Alice to update the Governance Framework and Board Membership and Recruitment policy with the changes set out in minute 17. To then publish them on HIPPO and the Board portal, along with the reviewed Board Member Duties and Responsibilities.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject to the changes set out in minute 17, the Board APPROVED the reviewed Governance Framework document (not all the appendices as these will be reviewed in the coming months). • If the Board later approves updates to appendices that conflict with the overarching Governance Framework document, then the Board APPROVED the Governance Manager to update the Framework document to reflect the appendices changes. • The Board APPROVED the Governance Manager be appointed the Alternative Company Secretary. • Subject to the changes set out in minute 17, the Board APPROVED the reviewed Board Membership and Recruitment policy. • The Board APPROVED the reviewed Board Member Duties and Responsibilities.
18.	Building Safety Act Assurance – Westfield House
	The Board had toured Westfield House and the surrounding area in the morning before the Board meeting.

	<p>At the Board meeting presentation slot in December 2025 the Board agreed a number of actions to further strengthen compliance, oversight, transparency, and resident safety. The main actions were a bi-annual external validation of compliance and building safety, introduction of a permission to work scheme and 6 monthly updates to Board. This report updated members of this work and other developments.</p> <p>Naomi had had discussed with Marie, the Board Champion how to enhance her involvement in the work being undertaken at Westfield House. Their first meeting would be in February.</p> <p>The Board discussed the possibility of visiting other properties and hosting Board meetings in other locations. It was agreed that from September we would likely hold alternate Board meetings at the Depot, Taunton. This would enable stock visits in that area.</p> <p>ACTION Naomi to provide 6 monthly updates on Compliance and Building Safety at Westfield House to the May and November 2026 Board meeting. Peter to put together a list for approval, of other visits and Board meeting locations.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board APPROVED the actions from the Spotlight session designed to further strengthen Building Safety, Compliance, and governance for Westfield House.
19.	<p>Bell Contract Direct Award – WH:SHF Sustainability Wave 3</p>
	<p>HiS had secured Wave 3 WH:SHF funding for retrofit of homes, with 72 homes required by March 2026. Failure to deliver these risks approximately £700k in grant funding. Our primary contractor had insufficient capacity. The report asks for approval of a direct award, up to £2 million, to complete these specific works by the deadline. During this period, we would proceed with the full procurement process for the remaining delivery.</p> <p>Marie questioned staff confidence in Bell Group and their customer engagement. Naomi assured her that we had worked with Bell Group previously and they had the capacity. As a goodwill gesture Bell Group had started to progress works at their own risk and had bought in customer liaison staff already. We had performed all the appropriate checks and feel confident in their ability to deliver.</p> <p>In response to Paul H’s questions Naomi confirmed that a direct award will be legally compliant as we have already conducted a competitive mini tender and can therefore demonstrate best value.</p> <p>ACTION Ben and Naomi to seal the new contract with Bell Group to deliver the immediate Wave 3 WH:SHF retrofit properties.</p>

	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board APPROVED a direct award to Bell Group for delivery of immediate Wave 3 WH:SHF retrofit priorities, to a maximum value of £2m. The Board APPROVED that the new contract with Bell Group is sealed to enhance protection and extend the time under which delivery issues may be challenged.
	<p>The meeting paused for a break at 15.22. Lance left the meeting at 15:25 <i>To allow Glen to speak to it, item 28 was addressed next in the agenda.</i> The meeting reconvened at 15:40</p>
28.	<p>Health & Safety Performance (Six Monthly Review)</p> <p>Glen had been working with Naomi and the team over the last 6 months reviewing compliance, the impact of legislation changes, bringing best practice and supporting the team. He felt the team was very proactive and had no concerns to bring to Board. He had been engaging with contractors and the information he had been receiving was all positive.</p> <p>Paul S added that he attended the Health & Safety Forum (HSF), which was really helpful. The level of external assurance we received from Glen was really valuable. Tenants’ safety was paramount to HiS, as a 10k landlord the discussions at the H&S Forum (and then Board) would widen, and we would not take H&S for granted. There were challenges, such as access issues, but we will continue working at it.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the contents of the report. <p>Glen left the meeting at 15:54.</p>
20.	<p>Corporate Risk Register – December 2025</p> <p>Paul S highlighted that the risk register had been scheduled first, within the reports for information, to ensure there was time to give it due consideration.</p> <p>Paul S enquired, prior to the meeting, if there were any specific considerations for the Board around the Cyber risk. Ben replied the Board needs to ask themselves if they were receiving an appropriate level of assurance regarding how this risk was being managed. It was agreed that David Littlewood, Chief Information Security Officer, SC, would attend the June Spotlight session to discuss the service they provide on Cyber security. Sarah also raised the increased issue of our third-party providers and wanted to hear how SC was controlling that risk, plus the behavioural issues of people using technology. She also requested the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) toolkit for Board members be considered by Ben and Alice. It was agreed that the Board members also need cyber training.</p> <p>In response to a question Paul S raised prior to the meeting, Ben responded, that when looking to mitigate a risk there was a balance between risk mitigation and resources allocated. With the spend on the SLA with SC (who</p>

	<p>provide the security in the background) and the colleague resource we dedicate to work with SC and raise awareness around the organisation he believed the balance we had was right. The Board agreed that we required an Interim Board Champion for Cyber Security, and Sarah was appointed to this role.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting, Paul S raised, given the Cyber Annual Self-Assessment was scored at 0% what were the next steps? Ben explained that we would be working with our SC colleagues to self-assess ourselves against the NCSC Cyber Essentials best practice with the aim of obtaining 'Cyber Essentials' status. We plan to be complete by 31st March with feedback to the ARC in June 2026.</p> <p>Paul S, prior to the meeting, enquired if there were any concerns with the SWAP Audit still being at 90% since Dec 2024. Ben updated the Board that the outstanding action was being carefully monitored by the ARC. It relates to a recommendation to put in place a Succession Statement for colleagues (Board and ET had been completed). Priorities had meant that this was delayed until February ET.</p> <p>Paul questioned, prior to the meeting, what progress had been made with the new Board portal. Alice updated the Board that we intend to introduce a new Board and Committee meeting management software in Q2.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting Paul S asked what proposals were there for the Data protection/FOI report. Ben responded that the intention was to produce an annual report, much like we do for Value For Money and Fraud. The report will need to cover all Data protection/FOI activity in the preceding year, framed in the context of controls and mitigations in place. Board capacity permitting, the report would go to the May Board.</p> <p>ACTION Ben and Alice to consider the use of the NCSC Board member toolkit. Ben to provide appropriate Cyber training for the Board including a June Spotlight Session.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board NOTED this summary report. • The Board APPROVED Sarah be appointed as interim Board Champion for IDCT which includes Cyber Security.
21.	<p>Board Member Effectiveness Review (DTP) (18-Month Review)</p>
	<p>Our last external review was in 2024. We plan to perform an inhouse effectiveness review soon and will then perform an external review as a 10k landlord.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board NOTED the progress made against the Board Effectiveness Review Action Plan during the last six months and the plans for future effectiveness reviews.

22.	<p>Corporate Strategy</p>
	<p>Item 22a, There were no comments on the 2023-2026 (Six Monthly Review)</p>
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the report.
	<p>Item 22b, Corporate Strategy 2026-2031 Draft Headlines The report contained the key messages we looking to deliver in the Corporate Strategy, Board would see more detail at the BID in April, with a final version at the May Board meeting and launch in July. This report amalgamates the work at the last BID session and other working groups. It reduces the 5 pillars to 3 and we were looking to change "mission statement" to "purpose". We would need a section for governance, probably within the transformation pillar. It looks to get the basic functions right and then we will be able to consider how else we could support SC.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting Sarah asked if colleagues could elaborate on "people & culture", and where does Sustainability sit? Peter responded that people and culture would be a major area of work in the transformation and integration and we would start this work at the April BID. Sustainability was within business as usual with both programmes and funding confirmed for the medium term. It was a key area of the current strategy and received due focus. Primary attention would be on transformation and integration of the two organisations.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED and DISCUSSED the draft headlines.
23.	<p>Information, Digital, Communications & Technology (IDCT) Strategy 2025-2028 (Six Monthly Review)</p>
	<p>Ben highlighted for members that post decision, we need to consider which systems need to be in place at go-live and which can be completed at a later date.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting, Paul S asked, bearing in mind the transitional work, would items labelled "not yet commenced" likely to be started? Some of the actions were now underway and fall into the wider transition work, for example the Board Portal, migration to SharePoint and refresh of ICT policies. Others we may need to revisit in the context of the core transition project to make sure they don't distract from that priority. Paul S also asked, prior to the meeting, if any of the delays represent a risk which ARC/Board need to be aware of. Ben responded that any areas of slippage, e.g. verifications portal, would not create a significant risk should they be delayed.</p> <p>Sarah requested, prior to the meeting, to understand the rationale behind the decision to not complete the NSCS Cyber Assessment Framework. With Cybersecurity our number one risk and social housing providers succumbing to more attacks, and these attacks increasing she would not</p>

	<p>support this decision. Ben informed Sarah that SC hold all of the necessary CAF accreditations and had advised that it was un-necessary for HiS to pursue accreditation (SC provide all of our Cyber Security protections). Additional accreditations and recent audits undertaken in the Cyber Briefing had been uploaded to the portal. SC’s Cyber Security lead would facilitate a session with members at an upcoming spotlight session.</p> <p>In response to a question raised by Sarah, prior to the meeting, Ben explained that a facilitator was an AI tool that guides meetings online by keeping participants aligned, engaged, and on track. It listens, synthesises key points, and nudges the group forward with prompts and balanced input.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the progress on the IDCT Strategy and Action Plan during the last six months.
24.	<p>Sustainability By Design Update</p>
	<p>Paul S raised that it would be useful for members to understand how the government’s “Warm homes:Social Housing Fund” programme works for us. Naomi responded that she was working with the ‘in-house’ team and consortium partners and would provide a full update in the next report. If there was anything significant, she would update the Board before then.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting Sarah received the following clarifications to her questions:</p> <p>Naomi explained the implications of trialling carbon neutral retrofitting at portfolio level. The proposal represents a strategic shift designed to test whole-building and whole-block solutions that may deliver greater carbon, financial and operational efficiencies. However, this does have implications for our previous emphasis on achieving carbon neutrality at an individual property level. If the trial demonstrates that portfolio-level interventions deliver stronger outcomes - particularly in blocks, estates, and buildings with shared infrastructure - there may be instances where individual homes do not independently meet a carbon-neutral standard, even though the overall scheme does. This does not mean we are stepping back from strong individual-home performance; rather, we are testing whether a portfolio-level approach can go further in reducing emissions, improving resident outcomes, and delivering better value for money. Any shift in approach will be brought back to Board for decision, with full consideration of the risks, benefits, and the impact on our long-term commitment to decarbonisation.</p> <p>Naomi elaborated on how customers were co-designing the strategy. Resident experience was positioned at the heart of Sustainability by Design, and customer insight was being embedded in multiple parts of the programme. Co-design currently happens through:</p>

- 1) Direct engagement during retrofit projects, where residents receive assessments, tailored energy-use advice and opportunities to shape how works were planned around their needs.
- 2) Feedback gathered through the Energy Advice Service, which informs how we refine communication, tailor advice and structure support pathways.
- 3) Consultation at pilot sites, such as Dunwear House, where resident concerns (e.g. mobility scooter charging and communal space use) directly shaped the design of the net-zero pilot.
- 4) Ongoing communication via the annual sustainability campaign calendar, which was being designed to enable two-way dialogue, not just broadcast messaging.

As we move into Wave 3 and expand the scale of retrofit, we intend to formalise co-design even further working with resident groups such as STAC, and increasing structured opportunities for customers to shape priorities, communication approaches and satisfaction metrics.

Naomi explained the strategy for customer communication and education regarding sustainability. The report confirms that we were developing a year-long Campaign Calendar with the Communications team to strengthen resident awareness around sustainability, retrofit and energy use. Our communication and education strategy was built around:

- Multi-channel messaging (social media, web, targeted letters, onsite visits, workshops).
- Timed campaigns aligned to seasonal needs (e.g. winter warmth, summer solar optimisation).
- Behaviour-change tools, including advice on tariffs, the Solar Export Guarantee, and energy-efficient appliance use.
- Project-specific briefings for homes undergoing retrofit, supported by the Energy Advice Service.
- Clear, practical materials that make sustainability simple and accessible.

The intention is to drive understanding, informed choices, and long-term behaviour change, while building trust and maintaining transparency.

Naomi proposed the following training for STAC, be delivered alongside the new Campaign Calendar to ensure alignment with our organisational messaging:

- Understanding EPCs and SAP ratings
- What retrofit measures do and why they matter
- How funding (e.g. SHDF, ECO4) shapes priorities
- How residents can influence sustainability decisions
- Post-retrofit behaviours and maintaining a healthy home

We would bring a proposal to STAC setting out the format, delivery method, and timeline.

Naomi explained that our current prioritisation for properties for decarbonisation was based on a combination of:

- Stock condition and energy performance data (e.g. EPC ratings, SAP scores).
- Programme readiness and technical feasibility.
- Funding eligibility (SHDF, ECO4, WH:SHF).
- Property type and construction characteristics, especially where buildings lend themselves to grouped or portfolio-level solutions.

The report showed strong recognition of diversity needs, disability, mobility, language, and complex vulnerabilities, but does not confirm whether these factors actively change prioritisation rather than simply being considered in delivery. To strengthen alignment with our Healthy Homes ambitions and enhance our prioritisation methodology we would build the below additional considerations into our planning and implement wherever it is possible to do so:

- Fuel poverty risk
- Health vulnerability indicators
- Occupancy pressure
- Household-specific risk factors (e.g. damp/mould history, ventilation issues)

This would ensure that our investment strategy directs decarbonisation first towards those with the greatest need, not just the greatest technical opportunity.

Naomi explained how we could monitor homes post-retrofit. The report outlines extensive resident support and technical oversight during retrofit but does not detail a structured post-retrofit monitoring process. To ensure there are no unintended consequences - particularly increased damp, mould or condensation - we were considering strengthening our monitoring approach through:

- Post-completion ventilation assessments (mechanical and behavioural).
- Follow-up humidity/temperature checks, especially in the first winter after installation.
- Use of sensors where appropriate, particularly in higher-risk households.
- Integration with the Energy Advice Service, ensuring residents receive guidance on system use (e.g. heating patterns, ventilation regimes).
- Targeted follow-up visits for homes where issues were present pre-retrofit, or where residents have health vulnerabilities.

This would align retrofit with our broader organisational priority to reduce damp and mould, support winter wellbeing, and maintain a safe, healthy home environment.

ACTION

Naomi would include in the next Sustainability By Design update what the governments' "The Warm homes: Social Housing Fund" programme means for HiS.

Naomi to bring a proposal to STAC for training to better understand sustainability, retrofit and our long-term strategy.

	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the update on Sustainability by Design report.
25.	<p>Enriching Partnerships Report (Annual)</p>
	<p>Our intended partnership survey coincided with the Options Appraisal consultation. To avoid duplication, we used the Savills results to inform our work. Five responses were received by community organisations, which we will follow up with separately. There will be further consultation so we can get a richer picture of our smaller partners. The Board felt we should promote our work in the community more.</p>
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the update.
26.	<p>Key Performance Indicators</p>
	<p>Paul S briefed the Board on a conversation with another ALMO where the council was moving towards unitary status.</p> <p>The Board noted the ASB improvements.</p> <p>Due to the average relet times being longer than we would like, Claire responded to Paul S’s questions (prior to the meeting) on plans to make improvements. We were recruiting a new voids surveyor following the resignation of the previous postholder. The end-to-end process was being reviewed to ensure works were completed within timeframe, and through the allocations action plan work, we have dedicated two housing officers to provide a focus on letting homes quickly.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting Sarah shared that STAC had challenged the format of the KPI report (which is the same as for board) and requested it be reviewed for better interpretation and to remove unnecessary information. She also suggested that we use the opportunity to refresh the look of the report overall and maintain consistency between any dashboard presented to Board and STAC. Ben responded that he would review the presentation after January Board.</p>
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the KPIs as at the end of December 2025
27.	<p>Compliance Performance</p>
	<p>No comments were raised for on the HiS Summary Report – December 2025</p>
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the contents of the report.
	<p>No comments were raised for the Joint HiS/SC Compliance Summary Report – November 2025</p>
	<p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the contents of the report.
28.	<p>Health & Safety Performance (Six Monthly Review)</p>

	<i>Item 28 was considered earlier – between item 19 and 20.</i>
29.	Stock Condition Survey Programme Update (Monthly)
	<p>The visits being performed now were those where previously there had been access problems. We were working together and were still on target for the end of the financial year. We had met with Savills to work on the Asset Management Strategy, and this would come to April Board.</p> <p>After discussion, the Board agreed, that unless there was a specific reason not to, future reports would contain one set of figures, rather than separate data for the 'in-house' team and HiS.</p> <p>ACTION All – unless there was a specific reason not to, in future all stock condition reports would come to Board containing one set of figures rather than separate data for the "in-house" team and HiS.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the update on progress of our Stock Condition Survey Project and the actions being undertaken to address no access.
30.	Management Accounts – December 2025
	<p>No questions were raised.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board NOTED the management accounts for the first nine months of 25/26 (Apr - Dec 25).
31.	AOB (to be notified in advance)
	There was no other business notified.

The non-confidential meeting finished at 16:18

Confirmed as a true record of the meeting

Signed: 

Name (Chair): Paul Stephenson

Date: 31 March 2026