

# MINUTES

6<sup>th</sup> October 2010

7:00pm Third Floor Board Room, Sutton Gate



## BOARD OF MANAGEMENT SUTTON HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

**Present:** Findlay Macpherson (Chair), Mike Davis (Vice Chair), Samantha Bromige, Michael Baldwin, Lesley O'Connell, Ken Morgan, Ryan Drew and Muhammad Sadiq

**Staff:** Andrew Taylor, Sara Tutton, Brendan Crossan, Joanne Cambra, Cliff Haynes and Diane Richards

**LBS Representative:** Simon Latham

**Also attended as observers:** Enid Bakewell, Terry Haswell (part of meeting), Beverley Brigden (secretary of SLA and vice-chair of SFTRA)

AT in the chair

**1. Appointment of Chair**

LO nominated FM. SB seconded the nomination. FM was re-appointed as Chair.

FM in the chair

**2. Appointment of Vice-Chair**

MB nominated MD. FM seconded the nomination. MD was re-appointed as Vice-Chair

**3. Confirmation and review of committee membership and Board Champions**

AT presented the Board Committees list for approval and asked for a volunteer to join the Audit and Risk Committee as there were currently only three members and therefore a high risk that we would not be quorate at any given meeting. SB volunteered to join this committee.

SB stated that the Equality & Diversity Committee had agreed to broaden their scope to look at Customer Care and Quality Assurance. AT said that they should bring the updated Committee ToR to the Board for approval after their next meeting.

AT said that we would hope that the other open positions on the committees would be filled when our new resident board members

are appointed and it was especially important to have a resident board member involved as Customer Focus Champion alongside FM. AT stated that the Health & Safety Champion role was currently vacant and asked for volunteers.

MS was asked if he would like to take on this role. MS expressed the view that he would like more time to consider this and asked if it could be discussed again at the November Board Meeting. ST said the next H&S meeting was in December so this would be okay in terms of timing. LO said that if MS decides in the negative she would fill the role until a new resident board member is appointed.

#### **4. Apologies**

Sharon Prospere (Maternity Leave)

FM noted that the Board was asking after SP and wished to know when the baby was born so that appropriate congratulations could be sent. DR will action.

#### **5. Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising**

LO said that there had been confusion as to her champion role and that she was Communications champion rather than Governance champion and therefore had not been missed off the review as she stated at the last meeting.

FM stated that he would be meeting with KNK to ensure that KNK recognises the importance of getting it right first time and that the Board would be monitoring this very closely.

**The minutes were agreed as being an accurate record.**

#### **6. 2011/12 Budget**

BC presented the report to the board and highlighted some key points. The HRA business plan identified a reduction of £290,000 in the 2011/12 management fee. This would represent a required efficiency saving of 2.1%. Our efficiency savings target has been set at 3% for 2011/12. This would mean £123,000 of resources to be re-allocated to priority growth areas.

Meetings have already been held with all SHP budget holders and there will be a meeting with HRA budget holders in LBS next week. EMT will further be discussing a programme of efficiency savings at their meeting this week and a further report of the efficiency savings will be brought to the Board in November.

In terms of the HRA, the business plan 2010/40 shows the management fee falling and the subsidy increasing. The subsidy will be in place for one more year. It should also be noted that we do not know the impact of any announcements to come from the government's Comprehensive Spending Review on 20<sup>th</sup> October which may also impact on our management fee and budget process.

MB expressed a strong view that he felt it was unacceptable that the Council was asking us to make budget cuts and to impose an increase in the working balance before the Government announcements are made. BC replied that the Council had agreed that there would be no increase in the working balance in 2011/12 as the increase would come in gradually over the next four years. Also, as the housing subsidy was £400K larger than expected in 2009/10 it had reduced the current working balance which therefore needed to be returned to current levels. MD said that although he understood that there were two different drivers here, he totally agreed with MB's view about the inappropriateness of pressure for SHP to increase the working balance as a safety net as MD felt that the robustness of SHP's governance and financial management meant this was just not necessary. The Board agreed as a whole with the view of MB and MD.

AT said that the Housing Advisory Group would be made aware of the Board's view when these minutes went to their next meeting. However AT noted that ultimately the Council could determine the level of the HRA balance and SHP would have to work within this. He reiterated that in the next two years there would be a limited contribution to the balance as this would be weighted toward the final two years. He reminded the Board that after the upcoming announcements about Decent Homes and the HRA review there would be more clarity about financial risks. The main focus now was not on increasing the working balance but on getting it back to the correct level following the extra £400K subsidy bill. AT also stated that SHP did not view the working balance as a safety net, but as resources not available for service delivery.

SL stated that he had taken on board the views expressed and that the dialogue is still open and he would report the views back. The Council is aware of the pressures and that is why the increases would not take place in the early years of the four year period. SL also thought the Board should be aware of a risk that adjustments would be made to decrease maintenance allowances and therefore further increase the HRA subsidy.

MB stated that this was not Arms Length management. SL said that he could not agree with this view as the Council's Section 151 officer had his legal responsibilities which he could not change.

AT said in closing that the matter had been discussed with Councillor Jayne McCoy who was now aware of SHP's perspective on the matter.

**The Board agreed the recommendation:**

**(i) The Board agree the budget setting process for 2011/12**

## 7. Resident Involvement

JC presented the report and explained that although we did have some feedback it had not allowed us to move forward as much as hoped and therefore the recommendations reflected this. The recommendation is that SHP, in consultation with SFTRA Executive Committee, will develop an approach to involvement and offer further opportunity for residents to express their views on the recommended approach.

SB said that the paper was good but that she was concerned about the time given for a response as some of the groups may not have had a chance to meet during the period given. KM agreed that the level of response was disappointing. AT said that he felt that enough time was given and that resident associations were informed that "late" responses were acceptable. JC agreed and said that the level of response received was not unusual. **JC** said that we do need to review why we are getting a poor level of response and see what we can do to improve this. AT also commented that the dialogue remains open and further opportunities for feedback will be given. He thought that perhaps the original letter had been too vague for some groups at this early stage and that a second more specific proposal would generate more response. AT mentioned that the new chair of SFTRA (Frank Berry) was proposing to draw together the chairs of all the RAs for meetings in the future so we would hopefully be able to get a more collective response from this group.

LO commented that we need to focus on how to persuade people that it is worthwhile to get involved. She said that there were two factors she felt needed to be addressed. The first is better communication and feedback to assure residents that SHP has taken notice of their views and that they have been acted upon. She noted that at times, residents can say one thing and staff can hear something completely different due to simple miscommunication. LO said her second area of concern as raised in Jean Crossby's letter was moving back to no dedicated involvement teams. LO felt that we need to build on what is currently good and not keep changing for change sake.

JC suggested that the next Board report would come with qualitative as well as quantitative data with a specific aim of identifying the RI areas in which we are getting value for money – i.e. are we putting our money into the areas where we are getting the best return.

LO said that SHP puts a lot of effort into RI but we need to better communicate this to all residents as sometimes they do not see this.

SL mentioned the large increase in the status survey results for the question "Are you satisfied with the opportunities for participation in management and decision-making?" This had moved to 59.9% from 43.3%. SL said we should focus on what had led to this positive increase. SL also said that he agreed with section 4.3 on the report on how residents should scrutinise SHP and that he was in talks with AT regarding this.

MD congratulated JC on the status survey increase mentioned in the report. MB expressed his exasperation and his concern on the lack

of response. He suggested that we need to go right back to basics and start by ensuring that residents have some training in key issues (such as finance and the HRA) to allow them to understand the full scope of the issues facing SHP. There can be no meaningful dialogue if we do not understand each other's position and the constraints we are faced with. MB had some experience in "bringing people along with us on our journey" and offered to share this with JC. MB stated that it was a shame that TH was no longer on the Board as he often brought the resident perspective to the meetings and was a breath of fresh air.

JC reminded the Board that we had come a significant way already but that the key focus now was to consider how resources can be used to be more imaginative and to capture communities from a local perspective. AT said that this was a challenge for us but that we would keep going and keep offering chances for engagement. MB mentioned that Clockhouse felt they had no neighbourhood manager now but JC confirmed this was not the case.

FM said that there were two separate parts to this report. The first was scrutiny of SHP which he felt was quite straightforward. The second was RI which was the challenge of how we could use resources to make our community a better place. FM said that we do want to improve so we need to know the real issues but that we also need to work together to find the solutions and invited BB to input to this point as a SLA representative

BB commented that leaseholders felt that they were not being listened to in the areas of repairs, major works and caretaking and that SHP sometimes said one thing and did another. BB gave an example from the recent SIG meeting when cleaning in Shanklin was raised and the response was "Oh you brought that up a few months ago." BB explained that residents do want to work with SHP but want to feel we are talking the same language. There was also a feeling that effort was ramped up before the inspection and has declined again after it.

BB felt that strong support should be offered for individual RAs as they are the people who actually live on the estates and know the issues best. Although efforts like the mystery shoppers are good, it is important to put resources into building up relationships between residents and SHP officers and Neighbourhood Managers. It is a shame that currently Shanklin residents did not know what was happening for instance with their neighbourhood manager.

FM said it was clear we all needed to reflect further on resident involvement and that sometimes simplicity is the best. Some of it did seem to boil down to communication as he did not feel that we had decreased our efforts after the inspection. BB said that might be the case but that what you see internally is quite different to what we see on the estates. KM asked if we had lost focus after inspection. AT responded that our performance indicators and the recent status survey did not show this.

JC commented that we currently struggle with formal engagement and that we need to understand that one size fits all is not fit for

purpose. We are trying to develop communities from a younger age upwards but that this takes time and planning and we need the resource in the right place. We need to understand the expectations of the different groups and ask difficult questions like what we will offer to a small RA who may not be representing the whole estate. FM suggested that RI be treated as a key item on the agenda for the Board away weekend in January. All parties need to work on how we can become better aligned and to seek the common ground. KM asked if we needed to divert more money into RI. JC said that it was more about how we spend what we already have and to listen to residents to ensure we are spending it in the right places and on the right projects.

LO said that she agreed with the way forward but asked if SLA would be involved in this as well as SFTRA.

BB mentioned the budget survey which would be sent to residents and her concern that they would not be given enough time to respond. BC said that this would be sent by the end of the month.

AT commented on the difficulty on the window of time in that if we send it too early it will be meaningless as we are still awaiting the government information. BB suggested that **we could have communicated earlier in the year with the RAs to give them time to set their meeting dates at the right points for key communications.**

AT said this was a fair point and that we should do this. BC mentioned that there was an invite about to go out to discuss the content of the survey with a 5/6 week window to respond. FM suggested we send out a pre-warning that this was coming. **BC** agreed to do this.

**The Board agreed the recommendation:**

**(i) That SHP, in consultation with the SFTRA Executive Committee, develops its approach to involvement in line with best practice and views already received and provides further opportunity for residents to express their views**

**8. Voids Service Review**

Cliff Haynes presented his report and explained that a steering group had been set up for the review and he detailed the high level of resident consultation including surveys to new tenants, to tenants applying but who did not move in and mystery shopping.

Along with benchmarking and comparisons, the feedback was used to formulate recommendations and an action plan as detailed in the report appendix. CH commented that although it had put in the report that the review outcome would be cost neutral, he did want to note that SHP had tripled the volume of recharges and would like to continue to build on this success.

MD expressed his view that actions 6 & 7 were particularly important as cleanliness was one of the most important issues to new tenants. CH agreed that cleanliness and safety of gas and electrics were the key resident priorities. LO queried whether the cleaning contract is due for renewal. ST said this was part of the KNK contract and it was

vital to move properties from a “builders clean” to a “domestic living” clean. FM expresses the Board’s view that this was fundamental and that we cannot get a tenant to feel responsible for maintaining a property if we do not set the right tone from the outset.

MB queried the point in 3.2 about whether we should be enforcing more through the courts and not just shrugging our shoulders and saying it will be too hard to take to court. ST responded that we always take cases of major damage to court but it is not always value for money to take cases involving simply years of neglect and therefore shabby properties.

MB also recommended that we think about running training courses for tenants on decorating to encourage them to keep properties in good order.

KM asked how the current spend compares to last year’s spend and against other ALMOs. ST said that we will always be high against the benchmark until the Decent Homes money comes through and basic condition of stock improves. KM also asked how we know which vouchers tenants require. ST explained that the Re-housing officers deal with this.

EB asked if we charge outgoing tenants for problems found (such as poor decoration or smoking odour) and CH replied that we do not do this in the area of decoration.

**The Board agreed the recommendations:**

- (i) That the board note the outcome of the review and approve the recommendations and action plan**
- (ii) That the Board receive a progress report in 6 months**

**9. Code of Governance Overall Review**

AT presented the report and highlighted the key changes made to the Code of Governance. He emphasized that the review found that SHP’s Code of Governance is in full compliance with the National Housing Federation’s Excellence in Governance standard.

MB asked said that we should continue to ensure that we exceed the standard set for housing associations in governance as when the Board was set up. AT assured him that this had not changed.

MD said that it was reassuring that we did comply with the NHF.

FM expressed the Board’s view that we should continue to set the right tone and set the bar quite high when it comes to governance standards.

**The Board agreed the recommendations:**

- (i) That the Board agree the recommended Amendments to the Code of Governance**

DR will send out the revised Code of Governance to all board members.

## 10. Any Other Business

### Fire Safety

LO raised the issue of fire safety which she had been asked to bring to the Board from the SIG meeting. Residents in low rise buildings had been asking for instructions on what to do in case of a fire. This was brought up as an example of residents asking for one thing and staff hearing another as the SHP response was slow in coming and did not initially hit the correct mark. ST said that this had now been resolved as SHP was sending a letter issuing all residents in low rise blocks with fire safety guides. LO thanked ST. FM said that we do need to get better at managing situations where residents have issues such as these as it is human nature to focus on the failures rather than the achievements. We need to get smarter at how we communicate. LO said we do need to ensure that we understand that residents are not just complaining but raising very valid issues and that they often really know what they are talking about.

**MD requested a written update to the Board on Fire Safety. ST said she would prepare this for December Board**

ST mentioned that the Fire Safety Officer had been in yesterday and that he felt quite comfortable with SHP as an organisation. LO said that we need our residents to feel comfortable with this and to know this.

### Status Survey Results

AT said that we are still awaiting the full STATUS survey results but that on the whole the early indicators look good. There have been one or two dips, such as in leaseholders' satisfaction which may be a result of a robust approach to collecting income.

### Staff Conference

AT said that the staff conference was a successful event and that the staff satisfaction survey results would be shared with the Board in November. He expressed disappointment that more board members were not able to attend as it is the ideal opportunity for Board members to engage with staff. AT also thanked MD for his attendance and participation in award presentations and his speech of thanks to SHP staff.

The Meeting ended at 21:50

**Date of the next meeting:** 3rd November 2010 at 7pm

**Venue:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Sutton Gate

Chair	
Date	