

South Essex Homes Limited

Report of Director – Finance & Corporate Services
to

Shareholder Board

On

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Agenda
Item No.

5

South Essex Homes Business Plan 2023 - 2026

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide to the Shareholder Board with an update on the South Essex Homes Business Plan.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Shareholder Board are recommended to;
- 2.2 **Note** the South Essex Homes Business Plan for 2023 to 2026 and associated Action Plan.

3 Background

- 3.1 The Partnership Agreement between South Essex Homes and Southend on Sea City Council was signed in January 2021. The agreement specifically refers to the expectation for South Essex Homes to submit a Business Plan for approval to the Shareholder Board each year.
- 3.2 The previous Business Plan was agreed by both the South Essex Homes Board and subsequently the Shareholder Board and implemented in 2021. Since then, there have been a number of new challenges that have meant that we have had to look at the way in which we operate. The Business Plan is subject to an annual review each year, this year it was felt that due to the financial challenges the nation faces, new legislation and changing resident expectations it would be timely to undertake a more thorough review than would normally take place at the annual interval.
- 3.3 The South Essex Homes Executive Management Team met in May to outline some initial thoughts about the direction and shape of the Business Plan, and this was used as a basis for an SEH Board Away Day on the 5th July. At this SEH Board Away day the Boards views

were canvassed, and a revised Business Plan (**Appendix 1**) and associated Action Plan (**Appendix 2**) have been developed that encompasses the Board aspirations and ideas. The new revised Business Plan has been set to run for 3 years, with annual reviews, in line with the Partnership Agreement. For completeness South Essex Property Services Business Plan which is part of the overall Group is also summarised (**Appendix 1a**)

3.4 The Business Plan has been developed to encompass 5 themes instead of the original 4 in the previous Business Plan. The theme of 'Innovating Commercially and Socially' has been sub divided to show the difference emphasis of the commercial and social aspects of the plan.

3.5 The overall vision for the organisation has also been changed to give a greater customer focus. The new overall vision for South Essex Homes has been set at 'Provide quality housing services which contribute towards sustainable communities, supporting the health, wellbeing and safety of our residents'.

4 Funding of the Business Plan

4.1 The improvements set out in the Business Plan are needed to ensure that South Essex Homes remains a sustainable and successful organisation. To meet our new regulatory responsibilities, we must have the systems, teams and processes in place to deliver on the required outcomes and expectations of the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill, Building Safety Act and Fire Safety Act.

4.2 South Essex Homes cannot undertake these actions without the need to access funding from the organisation's reserves, although we can fund 'Business as usual' work through our in-year revenue and balance the books, we cannot fund one off expenditure to improve our services and systems without requesting reserves are made available to invest in these improvements (as per the Reserves Policy).

4.3 Therefore, the South Essex Homes Business Plan sets out the proposed expenditure over the next 3 years and shows how this can be funded from reserves, bringing our reserve balances into line with our Reserves Policy and ensuring we can implement the much needed changes to ensure we can meet our obligations and fully evidence the work that we do to the Regulator, to our residents and to the Council.

4.4 Quality and reliability of services

4.5 ICT Functionality – Northgate Development

4.6 In early 2022 a full health check was undertaken to review how we use our current housing management system (Northgate). This identified several areas where we are either not using the current system to the best of its abilities, or where additional modules and functionality would assist us to meet our objectives, assist with satisfying the regulator,

making information more readily available and improve the efficiency of our working practices.

4.7 We have set out the Strategic Priorities that were an outcome of the health check and subsequent discussions with staff. These developments will improve the way in which we work, assist residents to self-serve and ensure that the data we hold can be effectively used to provide the best possible services to our tenants. These improvements will bring processes and tasks that sit outside of our core systems into Northgate so that we can create a seamless experience for staff and residents.

4.8 The improvements that we see as a result of this investment are;

- An overall view of tenant / property information on 360 view, reducing time trawling through different systems and modules to get all the information required on a resident or their property.
- Bringing the complaint handling process into Northgate moving away from spreadsheet recording to enable improved analysis and task management.
- Task Manager processes to ensure all contact with residents is managed and allocated to the correct member of staff, ensuring all contact is logged and no contact is 'lost' through the system.
- ASB module to effectively handle all ASB issues, ensuring appropriate tasks are undertaken, contacts logged and outcomes reported.
- Support Service module to bring existing spreadsheet devised records and contacts into Northgate, making tasks easier to handle and reporting and analysis of all resident data more accessible.
- A repairs finder solution to ensure all responsive repairs calls logged are appropriately allocated at point of call and the correct resources allocated to complete the repair first time.
- A detailed analysis of rent accounts to identify and target our resources to collect rent from those most at risk of falling further into arrears.
- A resident portal to enable residents to self-serve, accessing rent accounts, making payments, reporting repairs and making appointments easily without the need to call our contact centre, giving more accessible services at times suitable for our residents and reducing the contact through our contact centre.

4.9 **Professional Housing Qualifications**

4.10 The new Social Housing (Regulation) Bill will require all housing managers to hold the equivalent of Level 4 (managers) or Level 5 (executive) housing qualifications. To meet this requirement we will need to understand the scope of the requirement in the legislation and commit for any managers and members of the Executive Team not holding a housing qualification to undertake the required development.

4.11 **Customer Services Training**

4.12 An analysis of our complaint themes has revealed that a proportion of complaints are logged due to 'Staff Attitude' or 'Failure to undertake required tasks'. Although we would maybe expect this with a service driven organisation it has highlighted that we have not undertaken any recent core customer services training. To help to improve the customer experience and improve our services we will commit for all of our staff to undertake customer services training.

4.13 **Regulatory Compliance / Service Improvement Resource**

4.14 The introduction of the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill puts a degree of pressure and expectation on us as that we have not seen since the Audit Commission inspections of more than decade ago. The increasing workload and requirements put on our managers and staff mean that bringing into focus what the requirements mean for the activities of our teams is not easily done without dropping service delivery in the interim.

4.15 We are therefore proposing that we put in place a short term (18 month) regulatory compliance resource to fully analyse the requirements of the legislation and ensure our processes are sound, our data collection is good, and our staff are doing what is required of them.

4.16 **Hardship Fund**

4.17 The SEH Board agreed in 2022 in establish a Hardship Fund to support our residents through difficult periods, it is proposed to continue this fund for the foreseeable future allocating an additional £50k in 23/24, £25k in 24/25 and £20k in 25/26.

4.18 **Community Development Initiatives**

4.19 The Board agreed to fund the work of ATF for 23/24 and support the work that they do to build our communities and give young people on our estates a brighter future. It is proposed to continue this good work by further funding ATF.

5 **Equality and Diversity**

5.1 All equality and diversity issues identified from the proposals contained in this report have been considered and are in accordance with the South Essex Homes Equality and Diversity Policy.

6 **Risk**

6.1 The Business Plan forms an integral part of the Company's ability to deliver services in light of current environmental challenges. Failure to adopt a satisfactory Business Plan can lead to the inability to fund

services and a lack of clarity over the future strategic direction of South Essex Homes.

7 Financial Implications

7.1 The Business Plan sets out the financial implications of any elements arising as part of the plan.

8 Resident Consultation

8.1 The Business Plan will make reference to and incorporate elements that establish priorities around Resident engagement and involvement.

9 Background Papers

9.1 Not applicable.

10 Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1 – South Essex Homes Business Plan 2023 – 2026

10.2 Appendix 2 – Business Plan Action Plan