

Minutes of Virtual South East Scotland Regional Meeting
24 May 2021, Via Zoom

Present:

Alan Frank, Chair
Bill Campbell, Vice Chair
Isabella Vint, Secretary
Lillias Reid
Cath McArthur
Terry Kirby
Penelope Ciancanelli
Irina Lazarenko

In attendance:

Carolynne Watson, TP team

Apologies:

Alan Dunton, Chair (Acting)
Debra McCreath, Committee member.

1. Welcome

Alan Frank, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were noted.

2. Co-options to the Committee

Alan noted that following the AGM, the committee asked Carolynne Watson, Scottish Government, to invite the following to re-join the committee on a co-opted basis:

- Cathie McArthur (East Lothian) to the committee, to cover the office bearer post of Treasurer; and
- Debra McCreath (Scottish Borders) to cover a committee role in relation to Communications and the website.

Cathie and Debra both confirmed their willingness to serve as co-optees via email prior to today's meeting. Lillias Reid proposed both co-options and Bill Campbell seconded, and both Cathie and Debra were duly co-opted to the committee. Alan welcomed both.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting- 29 March 2021

Terry Kirby proposed the minutes of 29 March 2021 and Lillias Reid seconded.

Irina Lazarenko asked for some amendments and corrections to the minutes to note that:

- Irina does not attend by phone, as indicated in the minute, but instead prefers to join on Zoom without video. Carolynne Watson agreed to update the minutes to reflect this;
- Regarding the 'In attendance' section of the minute, Irina asked for clarification of whether Annabel Hoatson attended the previous meeting. The committee noted that

they did not recollect Annabel being in attendance at the meeting of 29 March, however Carolynne agreed to check this, and update the minutes if necessary.

4. Matters arising from 29 March 2021

There were no matters arising which are not covered on the agenda for today's meeting.

5. Rents Focus Group Update

Terry gave an update on the recent work of the Rents Focus Group. At the last meeting, on 6 May, Kirsty Wells of HouseMark attended to discuss HouseMark's affordability calculator tool which is used by a range of social landlords in rent setting to determine rent affordability for tenants. Terry noted that the tool can be used to calculate rent alone or to factor in other whole housing cost considerations such as energy use and Council Tax. Terry noted that most RSLs use the tool.

Terry noted that there is no clear definition of 'affordable' in the context of rent or other housing costs in Scotland in terms of the percentage of a household's income being spent on rent and other housing costs. Affordability is referenced in Housing to 2040 and the focus group feels this represents positive progress towards a clearer definition. At the moment, the Scottish Social Housing Charter requires landlords to take affordability considerations into account in rent setting and there is a requirement for landlords to consult with their tenants in relation to rent setting.

Penelope Ciancanelli noted that for many tenants, variability in income from month to month can have a significant impact on the affordability of rent. For many the pandemic has made incomes more unstable than before, with furlough, fluctuations in shift patterns and the impact of zero hours contracts.

Bill noted that the costs of energy are already high and increases in costs are often very significant, which has an impact on overall affordability. Carolynne noted that this is something the Regional Network committees and the focus group are very aware of and the issue was raised with Kevin Stewart MSP when Mr Stewart was Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning, who noted the importance of ensuring whole housing costs are affordable. Mr Stewart cited the example of a tenant who was offered a move to a new-build property with higher rent who planned to turn the offer down, only to discover that his energy bills would be so much lower in the new property that his whole housing costs reduced overall. The focus group are mindful of these considerations and are keen to include the 'lived experiences' of tenants in their work.

6. Chairs & Secretaries Update

Carolynne noted that for the new members, it will probably be helpful to have some background information on the meeting schedule and working groups the Networks are involved with and she stated that now the AGMs are almost complete, the TP Team intends to work with the new members to provide this background, most likely with a meeting for new members and updating the paperwork in the induction pack to reflect the most recent developments. Irina noted that training would be helpful for some existing members also and Carolynne stated that a training/networking event for all members is in the pipeline for later in the year, most likely to be at the beginning of the autumn to allow

for summer holidays. In the meantime, the TP team will shortly be issuing questionnaires to all network members, which will cover skills, experience and any training gaps and requirements.

Carolynne gave an update on Chairs & Secretaries, including outcomes from the HRA sub-group meeting with representatives from the Accounts Commission and subsequent actions, planning for the AGMs which are now complete and the Regional Networks Communications sub-group. The Comms group is listed on today's agenda, for an update from Debra. In Debra's absence, Carolynne updated on progress with the group, noting that Annabel and Jemma of the TP Team have updated the Communications Plan for the Network. Carolynne noted that there is a backlog of paperwork to be added to the South East Scotland section of the Regional Networks website and Jemma will shortly add these to the site. Carolynne also updated the committee on the Basecamp tool and the committee agreed they would be interested in a trial of Basecamp, which Carolynne agreed to arrange.

7. AOCB

Having covered the item on the Communications group, Alan moved to cover Any Other Competent Business.

Irina noted that the election of office bearers which proceeded after the AGM should be minuted and Carolynne agreed to prepare a minute to be circulated around the committee members.

Irina also noted that she would like some further information on the role of the Chair and of the Secretary and Carolynne noted that in general, the Secretary will lead on the administration of the committee and of meetings, including the preparation of paperwork etc and the Chair will provide direction and leadership to the committee as well as leading meetings etc. Carolynne noted that any questions or concerns committee members may want to raise can also be directed to any members of the TP Team, and the team can provide any necessary further clarification on the role of office bearers.

Bill noted that Fife representatives are meeting virtually this week to receive presentations on Housing to 2040 and to prepared their response to the publication.

Carolynne noted that at the last few meetings of the SHR Liaison group, there have been no attendees from South East Scotland and that the SHR leads for the group have raised this with Carolynne. Carolynne asked for clarification from existing members on whether they would like to continue to be involved, and Alan Frank agreed to continue. As Debra and Alan Dunton are absent, Carolynne agreed to contact both separately. There is one vacant space following David Rintoul's resignation from the committee and Bill agreed to take this place. Carolynne will contact Bill separately with further background information on the group and background paperwork.

Carolynne also noted that a session on Freedom of Information in RSLs and local authorities will be delivered by staff from the Scottish Information Commissioner on 22 June. Jemma has issued an Eventbrite link for the meeting for anyone who wishes to book. Irina asked Carolynne to add her name to the attendance list and Carolynne agreed to let Jemma know.

AP: Carolynne to provide information on the SHR Liaison group to Bill, to contact Debra

and Alan D and to pass Irina's booking to Jemma Stewart.

8. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Monday 19 July.

The meeting cycle to the end of the year is as follows:

- 19 July;
- 13 September;
- 8 November.

Alan closed the meeting, thanking everyone for their attendance.