

Minutes of Meeting

Meeting Name:	Shropshire Towns & Rural Housing Limited			
Meeting Location:	The Shrewsbury Football Club	The Shrewsbury Football Club		
Date and Time:	Monday 27 th February 2023 13.00- 17.00			
Members present:	Chair – Tony Deakin (Independent) TDk Paul Hayward (Co-Optee) PH Julia Buckley (Shropshire Council) JB Yordan Tolev (Tenant) YT	James Wood (Independent) JW Emma Jones (STAR) EJ James Willocks (Shropshire Council) JWI		
Non-Members Present:	Harpreet Rayet (STAR) HRa Tracey Gray (STAR) TG Andy Menzies (STAR) AM Jane Trethewey (Shropshire Council) JT Jo Williams (STAR) JoW (Item 12 only)	Steve Ogram (STAR) SO Ayyaz Ahmed (STAR) AA Mandy Pullen (STAR) MP Lucy Heath (Shropshire Council) LH Steven Tolley (STAR) ST Item 16 onward		

1.	Welcome and Apologies	 TDK welcomed everyone to the STAR Housing Board meeting. He thanked SO for his service at STAR over the years. Apologies were received from: Mark Jones (Shropshire Council) Angela Simpson (STAR) Steve Robinson (Independent) Paul Weston (Co-Optee) Dean Carroll (Shropshire Council) 	
2.	Declaration of Interests	 TDK asked the Board if they have any interests to declare on any items on the agenda. Interests to declare for EJ: Item 6, 8, and 10 	
3.	Minutes from STAR Board Meeting 29 th November 2022.	All members confirmed that the previous minutes had been received and were an accurate reflection of the meeting. A copy of the minutes will be electronically signed and kept for record.	
4.	Matters Arising	The matters arising had been circulated for information. There were no further matters arising.	
5.	MD Report	HRa noted this is a new format for the MD report. He asked if anyone has any queries on the report.	

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	TDk queried the number of outstanding damp and mould cases (121) with no action having been taken. What are
	we doing about this and what are the timescales? Some have been outstanding for some time, are there any kind
	of repeat jobs where we are going back to the same locations?
	TG noted the numbers have gone up since the report and numbers now stand at 210 cases. We have appointed
	two companies who are carrying out independent surveys on the properties.
	JW noted the damp and mould issues is worse due to winter, but as this is 5% of our stock, were previous property
	inspections not picking up sufficient data? Are we acting on this data? TG noted our stock condition data is good,
	but has focused in the past on decent homes compliance and component parts, rather than the fabric of the
	building. We will ensure households with vulnerable residents are prioritised for surveys and remedial work.
	JWil queried if new legislation will be coming out after the case in the press? HRA noted that the Social Housing
	Bill refers to the need for properties to be fit for purpose. There is now a focus on the housing health and safety
	rating system (HHSRS) as well as stock condition data and EPC. We have a five-year stock condition survey rolling,
	however we need to make sure we are getting quality information from this process rather than just looking at the
	amount of properties surveyed. JWil agreed, we need to have better data on our stock in order for us to improve our long-term financial plan.
	PH queried what are we saying to the 120+ residents who have reported the damp and mould issues?
	TG noted that we are calling them back with immediate advice (before the end of March) until we can get the
	surveys of the properties booked in. EJ noted we have also sent out a damp and mould leaflet and general advice
	in the newsletter to all tenants.
	TDk noted we have the baseline of the action we have taken, we just need to be clear on what is happening going
	forward. It is recognising that the stock condition survey now focuses on decency. The previous focus has been on
	components, however now this has changed.
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JW asked as a Board, are we comfortable that with 120+ properties with no action taken? More data is needed- as there may be 120 cases that are fairly minor, but what If one is more significant? We need to know the critical information. TG noted we have 56 jobs with works booked in. HRa noted we knew this was an issue in Nov, and we are now taking steps via an action plan to make sure those numbers are not continuing in the way they have previously. We need to bring an action plan back to Board to show how issues are being resolved. He suggests bringing this back around April once the surveyors are on board. He notes that getting the surveyors has been difficult as they are very much in demand now. JB queries if there is any value in checking neighbouring properties of those who report damp? HRa agrees, this may result in further surveys to be done by the surveyors.	TG provide action plan around Damp and Mould Surveys and actions by April 2023.
JW noted tenant behaviour is a prominent link with damp and mould which makes this a difficult task to resolve. EJ noted the Housing Ombudsman says we cannot put it down to tenant lifestyle when dealing with complaints. SO noted that operatives have been looking for signs of damp and mould when entering a property since November. The operatives can then take photos of the issue to report back. JW asked about the number of disrepair claims received within STAR. TG committed to provide more data at the next meeting. JT is delighted at how seriously the STAR Board is taking this issue, and appreciates this is a work in progress.	TG to provide disrepair claims data for next Board meeting.
JT is delighted at how seriously the STAR Board is taking this issue, and appreciates this is a work in progress. TDk noted the SC medium term plan and the appointment of a transformation partner- HRa noted this is still being discussed internally by Shropshire Council. HRa noted in regards to Parish Rooms, JT and LH have found that Clarion has a shortfall. JT noted they have less grant than they have told us previously, and therefore would like more money for the property. JB noted she	

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	 encourages Shropshire Council to keep going, as she has Bridgnorth residents who are extremely keen to have this property sorted as it is an eyesore currently. EJ queried if the Ukraine refugees rehoming will be tied to Temporary Accommodation? LH noted that this is separate. The proposal is that if the properties are purchased this would come into STAR, so in a way it is related. HRa noted it is a kind of blended approach. 	
	The Board noted the MD Update Report.	
6. Budget 2023/24	 AM noted at the last Board meeting, the Board received a report from the Director of Finance and Resources outlining the 2023/24 Budget Strategy and subsequently agreed to the recommendations made. AM highlighted specifics from the report. Pay Award: At the time of writing, we had been able to deal with the shortfall of the current year. The NJC agreement was considerably higher than expected. We have made a 4% provision for the upcoming year; however AM has picked up today that the national employers have made a first and final offer which equates to 6% for 23/24. This will likely need a supplementary estimate. TDk queried should we not be looking at starting from 6.42% if this is going to be the lowest amount? AM noted at this time we would have to do this from reserves. HRa noted we could take this back and update the paper and look for future approval based upon this use of reserves. HRa noted with the Spruce premises- there are a fair number of empty units within the business park. We are looking to negotiate a new deal to create savings. TG noted in terms of the fleet of vehicles, we have identified future savings on leasing contracts. TDK noted longer term financial plans and stress testing should be ramped up as we enter a new ten-year contract. JW noted that operationally things are quite difficult right now. Is this situation and the additional cost and resources reflected within the budget? TG noted that we are continuing to review the demands on the responsive repairs and voids budgets. HRa noted that we are preparing a plan to demonstrate how we will reform/update services to make sure we are best placed in the future to deliver the objectives in the new management agreement. 	

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JT noted given the changes from the Social Housing Regulator, as the landlord, the Local Authority need to be clear	
as to what is happening to the stock and the services to the tenants. There is a need for more direct engagement	
with this in the future, including with the HRA. In the future the Council may need to take a stronger lead from a	
strategic view.	
TDk noted on Bid 2- getting regular visits from health visitors may be difficult. AA noted this is not via the NHS, rather through adult social care.	
The Board agreed the following recommendations:	
i) The Management Fee for 2023/24 will increase in line with the rent cap adjusted for	
the effects of the pension review and with no request for additional funding in respect	
of clauses 3.2 to 3.6 of schedule 5 to the Management Agreement.	
ii) In accordance with the results of the 2022/23 triennial review undertaken by the	
Pension Fund Actuary the employer's contribution rate will rise to 19.2% for 2023/24.	
iii)	
a) No pay award decision is made in April 2023 in respect of the 2023/24 year at this	
time but we will continue to monitor developments at the NJC negotiations.	
b) If a national settlement for 2023/24 is agreed a further report will be brought to the	
Board to seek re-alignment with the NJC pay spine and backdate any amendment in	
accordance with the terms of the national agreement.	
c) An amount of £222,000 which equates to a 4% pay increase is held in the budget to	
fund or contribute to the cost of the final settlement.	
d) An amount of £111,000, which equates to a 2% pay increase, is identified in the	
budget as a further contribution towards the potential cost of the pay award to be	
funded by reserves in 2023/24.	
iv) The level of general reserve for the Company is maintained at 5% of turnover	
(equivalent to £540,000 for 2023/24).	
(Equivalent to 1340,000 101 2023/24).	

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		 v) Charges for services directly provided by the Company listed in Appendix 2 are approved. vi) The two Area Panels are each allocated discretionary budgets of £20,000 for Community Grant applications in 2023/24. Any underspend against these budgets at 31st March 2024 is returned to general balances. The pre-Service Development Budget for 2022/23 shown in Appendix 3 is approved. viii) Service Development Proposals recommended by the Senior Management Team (reference numbers 1 to 8 on Appendix 5) are approved for inclusion in the 2023/24 budget and beyond. ix) The 3-year budget forecast shown on Appendix 6 is noted. xi) The draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 2023/24 for Shropshire Council attached as Appendix 7 is noted. xii) The Proposed HRA Capital Budget for 2023/24 attached as Appendix 8 is noted. 	
7.	Terms of Reference Customer Sub Committee	TDk had suggested that operational matters should be delegated to a customer sub-committee, which would then allow the main Board to focus directly on strategic matters.AA presented the proposed terms of reference for the new customer committee. Board noted that there will be far more focus on the quality of housing management services in the future, so it is essential that we pick up the items around detailed scrutiny. In terms of membership, we need to have some discussions as to membership on review of all sub-committees. We need to strengthen the number of co-optees across the whole governance structure. The Board were happy to agree TOR today, and have further discussions on membership. We also need to recruit further tenant Board members.PH noted a lot of these issues are critical, so we need to find a mechanism to bring them back to Board. LH agreed, 	

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		The Board agreed to the Terms of Reference for the Customer Services Committee,	
		(Appendix 1) subject to a review of the overarching membership.	
8.	Forward Plan Marketing and Comms	AA noted the Forward Plan: Marketing and Communications supports the vision for growth and protecting and enhancing the brand and reputation for excellence for STAR Housing.	
	Comms	This plan delivers an increased opportunity to engage with customers, staff, stakeholders, members and Board.	
		PH queried do we have the budget and resources? AA noted we are utilising Stockport Homes as a strategic partner for communications currently. This plan sets out the framework of the next 12 months. There is a	
		baseline budgeted for publicity such as the production of newsletters however this year we will see the 10-year celebrations marking the extension of the Management Agreement for a further 10 years. There may well be additional costs associated with this event or course of events. A separate growth bid would be considered for this.	
		HRa noted we do some great work and it is good to advertise ourselves. He would like the Board to become involved in these events. TDk added that it is about an attitude, we are very good at doing the job, but we need to be good at publicising what we do. EJ noted the award season is approaching and she is hoping to put us forward for various awards in the sector.	EJ to look into awards STAR can apply for.
		The Board noted and approved the proposed Forward Plan Marketing and Communication (Appendix 1 – Main Tracker) for the year that will cover:	
		a) Events such as a staff conference and 10-year celebration of the next management agreement	
		 b) Awareness programmes such as condensation and mould booklets. Stockport Homes to assist with monthly planned promotions. 	
		c) Community events such as the promotion of garden events	
		d) Timetable for various newsletters such as tenant and stakeholder newsletters	
		e) Promotion of new developments that are to be handed over in 2023f) Housing Award entries	

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9.	Voids Update	TG noted the void performance for the last two years has failed to meet KPIs. In September 2022 a report was commissioned by Board for HQN to review the voids and lettings process at STAR, as we had seen a deterioration in performance and an increase in re-let time and void rent loss. She notes this was quite a stark report. There are some quick wins with this but significant changes are likely to take 6 months and we will see a future dip in KPI's due to us letting properties that had been void for a significant period.
		We have already taken steps to appoint a voids manager to review the HQN report and implement the outcomes.
		A review of the letting's standard has also been completed, around which we completed a resident consultation exercise and on the back of the new standard, we have appointed two new subcontractors to help with the backlog. This will incur additional costs, but can be met by pre-approved growth bids.
		The DLO will keep on top of new voids coming on line. There may also be a requirement to utilise additional modules within the Open Housing system, which may incur costs. There are no operational or performance dashboards that show the end to end process currently, and this is something that needs to be improved.
		PH appreciates the action plan that has been put in place. Addressing the concern around management data, how quickly can we get the accurate performance data? TG noted what is being presented to Board is an accurate reflection.
		JW noted that fundamentally it is uncomfortable reading. With the action plan, the Board should recognise that STAR have worked very quickly on this. What we have to take out of this is that the information that is coming to Board needs to be clearer and more informative. We are getting too many facts and figures without any reassurance that anything is being done to correct the issues. We need a more defined plan going forward to reassure the Board.
		TG noted the compliance reporting work in progress and agreed that we need to be bringing to the Board a dashboard that clearly identifies the areas of concern for the Board so they can focus their attention on the high-risk areas for the business.
		TDK noted the timing of asking for this review was important as this was during Covid. The time it has taken for this review to be finalised has been affected by this. He welcomed the report's recommendations as it is a modernisation that is needed. He is confident that we can address the issues and challenges identified in the HQN report.

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		 HRa noted in regards to the Board pack, there is a lot going on at the moment which has influenced the amount of papers. He recognises the problem of noting what is important if you have 400 pages to get through. JB noted that this is a bigger agenda as we have asked for many items to come back, currently these items have come to fruition hence being brought back to this Board. The Board noted the Improvement plan for voids and lettings. 	HRa to give consideration to how the board agenda and minutes can be more strategic moving forward.
10.	Baseline Survey (TSMs)	 AA noted The Regulator of Social Housing has created a new system for assessing how well social housing landlords in England are doing at providing good quality homes and services. There will be 22 TSM elements, 12 to be collected through tenant perception surveys and 10 to be collected through management information. This must be repeated every 12 months and comes into play during the next financial year. In light of this, STAR commissioned Acuity to carry out a resident satisfaction survey for 2022. Around 2000 residents (50%) were included in a postal survey, which took place between October and November 2022. The results from the survey are generally positive and compare well with other social landlords. A good percentage of residents are satisfied with the overall services provided by STAR Housing (81%). The 3 areas that received the most comments were repairs, communication and customer service. 39% of residents are unhappy with how complaints are handled. The top 4 comments related to: 	
		Day-to-day repairs – Timescales to complete repairs	
		 Repairs service generally: better work from the contractors and higher quality of work Better communications from STAR, to listen to them more carefully and show some more empathy 	
		PH queried with the complaint handling- what are we looking at to remedy this? EJ noted these questions were not targeted to just those who had submitted complaints. From the tenant's perspective, they could have raised an	

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		issue that was not treated as a complaint so there may be differences in the figures between formal complaints and the responses from the survey.	
		JWil noted the comparison with other landlords is a very good piece of work to show where we are. It gives confidence to show where STAR is going forward.	
		The Board noted the contents of the report and appendices.	
11.	Q3 Budget Monitoring	The 2022/23 budget was approved by the Board on 22 February 2022. AM noted the report shows performance against that budget with the outturn position showing a projected underspend for the year of £39.5k – representing 0.44% of the management fee.	
		In summary, underspends due to vacant posts in Neighbourhoods, Management General and Repairs & Maintenance are being offset by increased costs of materials and contractors in Repairs.	
		As part of the budget approved by the Board on 22 February 2022, there were a total of 22 Service Development/Growth Bids.	
		AM noted the Housing Revenue Account projected outturn as at 31 December 2022 shows an adverse variance of £ 112k which represents 0.59% of the budgeted income. We are in monthly discussions with the Council around the HRA and voids.	
		The cost of living programme is progressing well. The home insulation work has started and is likely to be finished with reports by the first of March.	
		AM noted we have a pretty good handle on things at the moment, we do have 100K from the original growth bid for voids. There is a considerable amount of additional work to be done. TDk queried if we are capitalising the major works costs around voids? AM noted yes, where we can.	
		PH queried if financial write offs could be delegated to a sub-committee? AM suggested FAR. HRa noted perhaps we could come back with a framework as to what can be delegated to where (SMT, FAR, Board depending on amounts).	RB/AM develop write off delegation framework
		The Board noted the contents of the report and approved the debt to be written off.	

12.	Q3 Performance	JoW joined the meeting to discuss the Q2 performance results and reported on those targets that have not been met. This included a presentation which is attached to the minutes.TDk queried the Covid situation within staff at STAR? TG noted particularly with the operatives we have had a spike in numbers which has impacted on service delivery. HRa noted we need to review our Covid policy to update ours to align with the Council's policy / other similar organisations. JB noted the other aspect is the vulnerability of our tenants and we have to respect it could be a legitimate reason for the tenants to put items on hold.TG noted in terms of routine repairs targets, we have done well to stay close to the tolerance for these. We are heavily reliant on our DLO and do not have sub-contractors to rely on. We are potentially looking at getting contractors for the peaks and troughs in workload. HRa noted with the targets we have set ourselves, we are ambitious. There is a cost associated with adding contractors. We need to make sure our business plan shows clearly our process for implementing this with clear costs. TDk noted it is important to show where we stand in relation to other organisations.	HRa to arrange a review of STAR Housing Covid policy
		 LH queried where are we up to with getting benchmarking data? JoW noted this has come through on one of the appendices and has been updated. She notes benchmarking is set by the MD. HRa noted we could take this back, looking at comparative sized organisations which have between 3-6K units and at the RP sector as well. PH noted he is struggling to reconcile this performance information with the TSMs. He would like to know which one of these will be a part of the TSMs. JoW noted she can do this, so that any TSMs are flagged if they are out of target. LH noted this would be very useful for the AAB as well. JoW noted on the new documents going forward this will happen, the TSM aren't up and running as of yet (April '23). JT asked for more thought to be given to assessing the impact of not hitting the targets? TG noted the idea of a compliance dashboard to assist with this. JB noted that having this report and the TSMs together as one item would be helpful. HRa noted the operations report and the TSMs would be good to be done together. 	HRa update benchmarking data restrictions.
		The Board noted the presentation.	

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13.	Operational Update Report	TG noted what used to be the Service Report has now been updated to become the Operational Update Report. Following the appointment of the new MD and Interim Operations director, a wholesale review of all resident facing services is being carried out.	
		The report is aimed at bringing more oversight for Board on the key areas of potential risk as well as providing assurance that mitigations are been sought or are in place.	
		TG noted various audits will be carried out over the coming months that will be presented back to the Board Fire Safety and Electrical are the first two audits being carried out. We are just about to receive the first draft report of the electrical audit. When we have this we will share with the Board.	
		In regard to reactive repairs, this is an area of focus and an action plan will be forthcoming	
		TG noted that we have some really positive work going on in the business, including high levels of satisfaction and good rent collection performance. TG stated that we need to give the teams the tools to do their jobs well, and get the right people in the right roles.	
		TDk noted we need to make more of the fact we have a ten-year management agreement and we need to be talking to the staff about investment and systems to help them going forward. He is conscious of the fact that Board visibility with staff had not been great during the covid period. He stated that he would be addressing the housing management teams at the Staff Briefing on Thursday.	
		TG noted the pushback around the idea that this money is available now and hasn't been available before to help ease the resourcing pressures. HRa noted the business currently has a number of single points of failure (for example, if our Senior IT officer were to go off, IT would struggle). EJ noted in the past, staffing has been done around "not spending money for the sake of it". This is where some of the frustration has occurred, that it could have been useful years ago rather than only now. She notes it is hard to plan to grow the business when you don't	
		know if there is going to be a business, now we know we have the 10-year agreement, we can move forward with the funding.	
		The Board noted the contents of the report.	

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14.	Finance, Audit & Risk Subcommittee (19.01.23)	EJ gave an update on the recent FAR Subcommittee meeting. There was discussion around Fairfields which has triggered a series of audits. The fire risk actions were also discussed. Solo Protect was discussed as it is a standard item. Since this meeting, she has spoken to CO- when it comes to reporting, they are overall figures of everyone who has a device. The requirements are for ten logins on the device (weekly). She noted that in her own case, as she only goes out once every three weeks- this is considered in the red, which is inaccurate. The minimum this can be reduced to is 5- meaning she must turn on her device every day to test it to keep it in the green. There needs to be a difference in reporting to show this is dependent on service area (DLO vs Office Based). The Risk Management register was also discussed. The draft audit reports for Housing Management and Corporate Governance were also received.	
		TDk suggested that we needed to have more of the finance items (debt write offs etc) reported at this committee rather than at Board? EJ noted the membership of this committee needed to be looked at . TDk agreed and noted we needed to undertake a skills audit and where necessary address skills gaps via the	HRa/TDk to propose new arrangements for
		appointment of further co-optees to committees.	future board make up
		HRa suggested we review the TOR for FAR to bring back to the next meeting. The Board noted the contents of the minutes.	HRa/ MJ review TOR for FAR.
15.	Development Subcommittee (13.02.23)	JW gave an update on the recent Development Subcommittee meeting. Members were very pleased to receive the new Development Board report format, as this resulted in a more strategic session. There was a lot of encouragement to see we have a new MD who understands development.	
		The development programme is not without its challenges at the minute but they are being dealt with in the way they should be.	
		HRa noted we are looking at expanding the TOR for the group This will focus on the strategic picture as well as the finances.	
		JT followed up and noted the Local Authority is changing it's position. As STAR has developed property, what hasn't happened with the Council previously is the review of what they have needed to meet their needs. The Council will in future be taking a much more active role in development. When it comes to the HRA, it is Council homes being	

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bought with Council money, and the Council will be looking at the commissioning process. HRa agreed, that we needed to review who does what with regard to development. We have renamed this group the Development, Sustainability and Strategic Investment Sub Committee. LH noted the real pressures are around specialist provisions.
JB queried about the Harpers issue.
JW noted that Harpers has three of our development schemes- we have some difficult contractual issues at the moment. It is noted that most of these are due to the contractor trying to fill a gap in their funding shortfalls. The Employers Agent has given us advice to follow. There needs to be some sensible levels of negotiation. HRa noted they have issued a contractual letter so unfortunately, we need to deal with this with legal advice instead of having a direct conversation with them. It is an awkward difficult situation for all parties due to the way they have gone about the process. We need to draw a line in the sand for the current issues before we can have conversations on further projects. JW noted work is still going forward on site, progress is still good. It is at an exec level that the relationship is more difficult. JB queried is there anything around paying them more if they can finish earlier? HRa noted that part of the issues is around delays on site. JW noted we may need to review this for year-end accounts.
The Board noted the contents of the minutes.

ITEMS EXEMPT FROM PUBLIC DISCUSSION

Date of next meeting: 15 th May 2023 – Shrewsbury Football Club	
The meeting closed at 17.47PM	