

Meeting Shropshire Towns & Rural Housing Limited Board

Date 17 March 2025

Time 13:00-16:30

Location Shrewsbury Town Football Ground



Members Present:	
Tony Deakin (TD)	STAR Board Chair, Independent Board Member
Steve Robinson (SR)	Independent Board Member
Rachel Connolly (RC)	Shropshire Council, Board Member
Lynn Fonseca (LF)	Tenant Board Member
Kathy Jones (KJ)	Independent Board Member
Vince Hunt (VH)	Shropshire Council Supervisory Board
Irina Wood (IW)	Independent Board Member
Rebecca Wilmot	Tenant Board Member
Paul Hayward (PH)	Co-opted STAR Board Member
Non-Members Present:	
Harpreet Rayet (HR)	Managing Director
James Wood (JW)	Operations Director
Ros Jones (RJ)	Corporate Director
Jo Grivell (JG)	Executive Assistant and Office Manager/Minute Taker
Jenny Daisley (JD)	Client Officer (Shropshire Council)
Jane Trethewey (JT)	Assistant Director Homes & Communities (Shropshire Council)
Laura Fisher (LaF)	Housing, Resettlement and Independent Living (Shropshire Council)
Apologies	
Richard Amos (RA)	

Agenda Item	Agenda Item	Who	When
1.	<p>Welcome & Apologies</p> <p>The Chair welcomed all attendees. Apologies were received from Richard Amos. There new Board members were officially welcomed.</p> <p>Prior to commencement of the main agenda, Peter Lomax from Acuity gave an informative presentation on the TSM results. These were done in two waves in May 2024 and Jan 2025. The results that will go to the regulator will be the combined score. The survey is conducted by telephone and there is a fixed quota of participants covering different ages, genders and tenures so it is deemed representative of the entire tenant base. The link to the presentation and results is here. Acuity Presentation on TSM Results for 17th March 2025.pptx</p>		
2.	<p>Declarations of Interest</p> <p>There were no declarations of interested raised.</p>		
3.	<p>Minutes of the previous meeting</p> <p>The minutes were circulated in advance of the meeting. The Board did not review the actions individually but were asked to flag any mistakes.</p> <p>The Board members were asked to approve the minutes as an accurate reflection of the meeting.</p>		
4.	<p>Matters Arising</p> <p>HR raised that there was some confusion with Action #19 which was the Management Agreement KPI's for next year. They were issued but they only went to the Asset Assurance Board. It was approved by the AAB. The report would be circulated to the rest of the Board after the meeting.</p>	RJ	April 2025

5.	<p>Reappointment of Sub-committee Chairs, appointment of Board Vice Chair</p> <p>It was recognized that there are elections coming up in May and should maintain the status quo for now and revisit this afterwards. Kathy Jones and Irina Wood are new appointments to the Board. Kathy will be chairing the DSSI committee and will bring her experience and insight to support STAR’s strategic asset management and development.</p> <p>It was confirmed that everyone had been reappointed at this stage and depending on election results it will need to be revisited.</p>		
6.	<p>Performance Update</p> <p>RJ provided an update up to Period 10 and took the report as read.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance against Management Agreement indicators to end P10 (Jan), the overall performance is good. Processes continue to be automated and data accuracy work is ongoing. Have introduced a year end forecast against targets. • Internal performance portal has been launched. • Monthly pulse –10 out of 13 metrics in top or second quartile at P9 • Further work is ongoing on compliance reporting. The reports are a live feed from the Housing Management system which helps inform SMT of the status of the Big 6 areas. For example, the reports show how many gas or electric safety certificates that are out of date. The focus is on where there are any out of date. It shows where we have conducted fire risk assessments, and they have generated actions. • As a result of the improved reporting there is a lot more information at our fingertips to help the management team understand how things are going in the compliance area. We are trying to make this not person dependent, to reduce the manual error and introducing the triangulation of data. • KJ asked if there are different indicators on Page 1 compared to Page 2, in particular related to the rent lost due to empty properties and arrears written off. HR confirmed one relates to all stock and the other relates to Temporary Accommodation. One of the requests from the Chair was we separated out the TA from the General Needs. • TD said it was good to see the Dashboards and less emphasis on the pages and pages of reports. It is much easier to see the trends from the Dashboard. HR stated that the plan is to let the Board have access to the Dashboard. • RC asked about the conclusion of the report where it said energy efficiency is unlikely to be met. HR said we took the decision we wouldn’t look to improve the energy 		

	<p>performance except what had already been committed. Instead, we spent the time preparing for our bid for Wave 3 and have been successful in getting £9.4 million of external funding which will allow us to upgrade the majority of our stock in the next few years to EPC C. We need to turn that into delivery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PH raised that the lettings targets in the management agreement do not look very challenging. The targets have been increased to top quartile. PH asked if there could be some targets added for the abandonment calls and damp and mould KPIs' too, and what we are measuring against. Action # 22. RJ to confirm this after the meeting. • HR said STAR have agreed to align with the recommendations from Housemark and pulse information. <p>Recommendation: For the STAR Board to note the performance of the organisation in relation to its obligations through the management agreement.</p> <p>Performance and Report were noted.</p>	RJ	16 June 2025
7.	<p>Engaged Customer Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report is responding to the Board request for a customer engagement strategy. The commitment was to produce an annual report on the engagement for customer data. The CSS committee receives more detailed reporting on all the customer engagement activities. • There is the Big Check In planned for July which will give us a better understanding of our customer base. • TD asked about Acuity taking over from Voicescape for the surveys. Did Voicescape do the arrears surveys? HR confirmed they do arrears, but they don't do that for us they just do our transactional surveys and the access to, and quality of the information wasn't good. Acuity's system is more sophisticated and has real time feedback on the services. We had finished the contract. Our arrears have been quite good historically but there has been a lot of change in the team and a new manager. There is a point of reflection of how we make that process more sophisticated in the future and linked to 		

8	<p>Compliance And Property Safety Update JW provided an update and took paper as read.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There has been a review of the compliance function and increased scrutiny since JW has been in post. It is a constant battle to maintain 100% compliance. What we have done is make some strategic changes in how we view our operations delivery, and are using the principles of plan, do and check. • We know we have asset management, planned maintenance and sustainability and compliance and need to make sure it sits in the right area. All the compliance function does is check and monitor and make sure we are compliant. • As of today, we are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 100% gas compliant ○ 96% electrical complaint – STAR as most social landlords do we set ourselves a five-year target, but the legal statutory duty is 10 years, so we are below our internal target but meet the legal target. We will get back to 100% soon. ○ We remain 100% compliant on inspections of fire risk. 85% of our actions are complete. There are no high-risk actions outstanding. We have undertaken an audit, of the triage process of the remaining medium and low risk actions to make sure we are comfortable that we are addressing them in the logical order. ○ There is additional focus on asbestos in the sector. HSE have got their hands on new emerging threats of asbestos. We felt it was appropriate to look at our processes around asbestos on a day-to-day basis, for example when doing repairs there is a risk so we are looking closely at that. We will be changing how we deliver our asbestos programme. ○ We don't have any high rise building and only operate two lifts and we are compliant with those. ○ Legionella is 100% surveyed and there are a few actions that have all been instructed with subcontractors. • In terms of the big six we are in quite a good place but can't be complacent on it. The function now reports direct to the operations director post as it was felt it needed that extra director focus on it. • There is a Damp and Mould working group that meets every fortnight. STAR is much more proactive than a lot of organisations in terms of getting to the root cause of it, once a case is identified. We have quite a significant investment budget. Our surveyor sits in on the working group and advises on an individual property case by case basis and 		

	<p>we take decisions on the asset to try to attempt to stop the damp reoccurring. We try to triangulate data, such as day to day repairs, and where there are excess costs in the business.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are about forty properties in the damp and mould cycle. The key will be to undertake the work and monitor it next year. • KS asked if tenant data is taken into consideration when assessing damp and mould. JW said the evolution to One Housing will be a big advantage as it will help tell a story about the individual tenancies and the person who lives there. The surveyor goes out and doesn't just triage the problem, he speaks to the tenant and tries to understand how they use their property and if their lifestyle is contributing to it. We cannot cite tenant behaviour as the cause unless there is evidence. The solution is to understand the behaviour and see what we can do to help them. • TD asked for JW's opinion on C365 which many companies use. JW said the challenge is the endless number of technologies that are out there to help us, and you end up with multiple systems that don't talk to each other. C365 is a compliance tool, is quite dated now. One Housing is quite trailblazing. The concern with C365 is it is a technology that is now starting to fall behind. There is no AI capacity at present. The modules that One Housing operate will get us one source of the truth. • TD asked how the Board gets assurance from independent reviews. HR said we will only work with specialist consultants for our compliance work. STAR has got Beevers and Struthers for Fire Risk and ION do the asbestos audits. The results will be reported through the FAR. • PH said it is unclear what the real picture is. The report read as if there is a few problems and members of staff have been removed and changing the lines of management. From the briefing today it sounds like you don't think there is a problem, and you are giving reassurance about the measures we are taking. JW said that it is quickly moving picture. In the compliance team there is some element of the "do" – plan do check – so we have been moving people around, so the "do" people don't report to the people that check. The general picture is that we are not 100% compliant on electric and not 100% on our fire risk assessment actions. There is the need to have some focus. It has been added to the risk register so that everyone is aware of how we deal with it is going to be slightly different, and that we will be using an external auditor to give that assurance. <p>Recommendation: For the STAR Board to note the performance around compliance. Performance and the report were noted.</p>		
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9.	<p>Sub-committee Update-FAR SR & RJ provided the following update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were a number of items that were brought there for approval, the Procurement Strategy and Procurement Process and Governance Orders and Financial Rules. Those items were reviewed, and we are generally happy with the work done on that. • There is further work to do on Health and Safety Policy and it is going through a further review. • Have taken recommendations from FAR and updated policies accordingly. • On the Financial Rules we have said that we will get some external validation done on it. • KJ highlighted that there is nothing on the customer influence register about procurement processes. RJ said that there are plans to get them involved in the procurement. • KJ highlighted that in the Governance Orders and Financial Rules there is no explicit reference to the HRA. The other point was on the reserves in the budget and whether as a Board we are happy with the reserves being at the £400K mark. RJ said the rules are about how we manage STAR's finances. There are the financial planning principles that sit alongside that which sets out how we manage the HRA and what is set down in statute and ringfences the HRA and that we must not subsidise the general fund in any way. We do have golden rules for the reserves which is a percentage of turnover. HR added that when MCHLG visited they asked why we have reserves when they need more supply. The level of external investment is reducing so the reserves are dwindling down but at some point, they might be needed so it is striking the right balance. <p>Recommendation: For the STAR Board to approve the policies as recommended through the FAR Committee subject to external validation of the Financial Rules. H&S will be brought again separately for approval. This was approved.</p>		
10.	<p>Subcommittee Update – Development, Sustainability and Strategic Investment</p> <p>HR gave the following update:</p> <p>The DSSI covered where we are with the Development and Regeneration schemes and Asset Management and Sustainability work.</p> <p>The only item for approval was regarding the Parish Rooms in Bridgnorth which is a Temporary Accommodation scheme and was recommended for approval.</p>		

	<p>Recommendation: For the STAR Board to approve the request to enter into a JCT intermediate contract for a sum of £893,082 and approve the total scheme cost of £1,299,820. This was approved.</p>		
11.	<p>Sub Committee Update – Customer Services PH gave the following update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The committee met on 26 February and went through all the reports in detail. • There was bit of a deep dive on damp and mould, call handling and call abandonment, and also major adaptations. We will do more work to get under the covers of those three areas. • In addition, the TSM results were reviewed as per the presentation from Acuity. We are really pleased with the results and picked up on the 85 residents that are happy to get engaged with STAR’s work. • The strategy delivery programme work was reviewed, and the number of projects has been refined from over 100 to around 60. <p>There were no questions asked.</p> <p>Recommendation: For the STAR Board to note the contents of the report. Contents noted.</p>		
12.	<p>Sub Committee Update – (H&R) VH gave the following update:</p> <p>The papers reports were taken as read, and there were no decisions to be made. Thanks go to Siobhan Johnson who provided robust questions and scrutiny on the topics. There were no questions asked.</p> <p>Recommendation: For the STAR Board to note the contents of the report. Contents noted.</p>		

13.	<p>Council Update</p> <p>JT gave the following update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a time of significant change at the Council. • There was a 3-day leadership event held with the service directors to discuss the direction of travel and the Council going forwards. They are working hard to formalise the plans. • The other big change is the election coming up and the current Housing portfolio holder is standing down so there will be a change. • Once the election is over it will be important to establish those connections. • There are two Service Directors who have responsibility for Housing: Paula Mawson and Laura Tyler. Paula Mawson has the broader brief around housing needs and services and Laura Tyler oversees the commissioning and contracting for Shropshire. It would be good to start to invite them to meetings and build the relationships. • The cost saving measures are still in place and the story will run and run. • The Chair put on record the Board's thanks to Jane Trethewey, for all the support she has given to STAR Housing. It was also put on record the support from Lesley Picton and Dean Carroll. STAR has been very fortunate with the support they have had from the Council from Mark Jones, Vince Hunt, Julia Buckley and Rachel Connelly. • STAR Board will have those early discussions with the portfolio holder and the two new Service Directors. • Jenny Daisley remains the point of contact on a day-to-day basis. • SR asked where the responsibility lies as the Shareholder to STAR. JT stated it is partially Jenny Daisley's role and also Laura Tyler as she has the commissioning role. SR asked is that a conflict if she is commissioning us as an organization? Who do we talk to if we want to grow the business and services we provide. JT said it could still be Laura or Billy Webster who is the Service Director for Strategy and is looking at the commercialism side of things and all the companies that deliver for the Council. • SR asked if we need to do more in terms of induction of the new leads, who won't know much about what we do. HR said it is important we start that engagement, but the timing needs to be right. There is a role there for the Council firstly to do that work and then at the right time meet with us to have those discussions. They have only recently been appointed and are responsible for areas that maybe new for them, so we need to give them some time to absorb some of their new responsibilities before we get into the detail with them, for example the proposal for restructuring housing within the Council. 		
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14.	<p>Managing Director Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TD flagged whether there was enough time before the election for the Council to look at the Housing Services Review, whether the time needed to be extended. HR said he was asked by the Chief Executive to produce a proposal with Jane in January, unfortunately because of other changes there has not been any further feedback on the proposal We will await formal feedback from the council on the proposal. • TD asked why there was not a Finance person in the Council structure. It was confirmed that James Walton is the Section 151 Officer and is part of the top structure. • TD asked about the local plan and the timescales. HR advised that it has been pulled and the early feedback is that it is 12-24 months before they are in a position to submit a new plan. JT said that the thinking is to start again as there is no point trying to refresh the previous draft where we would need to start a new plan straightaway. VH pointed out that the Council are not allowed to use the local policies so would need to use the national policy framework relating to land development which is much different in its approach. The current plan was 1,000 home short. The Council is going to have lots of planning applications. There is going to be a lot more development. <p>Recommendations: The Board was asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the contents of the Managing Director Update report. • Note the proposal for the review of housing services for Shropshire Council (appendix A) • Note the restructure of the council (appendix B) • Note the STAR Housing Interim Structure • approve the recommendations for new Board members. This was unanimously approved. <p>Contents noted.</p>		
15.	<p>STAR Maintenance Services Update</p> <p>JW gave the following update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board should recognise there has been a high level of transformation in the repairs service which is reflected in the TSM scores but most importantly on a day-to-day basis 		

	<p>the repairs service is much more fit for purpose. The whole service is geared around getting that repair resolution done at the earliest opportunity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voids has improved from 88 days to 48 days. We will look to improve that even further. • KJ asked about the insourcing of work and whether STAR has the skills and capacity and whether it will be a challenge. The change in getting our current workforce to be multi trade, multi skilled is a benefit. The balance is quite good now. The ambition is there. The TSMs tell us everything we need to know about our business and the complaints go up when you outsource to a third party, as you lose control of the interactions. What we want to do is make it a better tenant experience and is it value for money. • HR said that the business case for insourcing has become more challenging with the NI increase, so we are being cautious. The focus is on are we as productive as we can be with our existing workforce. Any insourcing needs to demonstrate value for money. • HR raised the work that is being done on service charging and the grounds maintenance team. We are subsidising through the management fee about £0.5 million in relation to the service charges. We can't sustain that so there is a big piece of work being done to identify what we should be maintaining and what we shouldn't and use that as a basis to look at a more cost-effective service. • TD asked who had won the new stores procurement. A new contract has been signed with Jewson, with new conditions, material control and stock control and a number of changes in working practices and additional controls. The main things are we are reducing the stock, and supervisors have to sign off special items and we have introduced some mandatory data fields to help the Finance Team track and identify where our spend is. <p>Recommendations: The Board was asked to note the progress made in delivering on the Repairs Improvement Plan. Contents noted.</p>		
16.	<p>Development Delivery Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report covers the lack of a coordinated and cost-effective process to acquire properties from CDL. It is not in line with the management agreement and not in line with the spirit of partnership. It is a strange process where we do all the due diligence, the Board approve it, and JT also approves it. It then goes to another Council Team to check all our work, which then goes to legal services, and they won't take any instruction except from that Council team. That has resulted in 12-months later the properties remain empty and its wasted loads of money. 		

- HR asked that the Board empower the Executive Team to say it's not working and there is no sensible movement, so STAR can down tools and have a discussion with the top of the Council organization with an evidence base.
- TD said he was concerned about the timing and the capacity issues with the council and the election looming. JT and JD have been doing a lot of work in the background and it has been this way for years.
- JT said there doesn't appear to be one simple reason for the delay, there are lots of different aspects of the process, so it is not solely down to Legal or in fact the Council. CDL colleagues recognize there are areas where they can tighten things up too.
- JT also feels the timing is not good at this time because the Legal teams are fully engaged with setting up the elections and they do not have a lot of spare time. There is a meeting planned with colleagues and they are open to a different way of structuring and different delegation.
- JT agreed with the duplication of work when the Council double check the work done by the Development Team.
- SR stated he would prefer to wait and have the conversation with the Leadership of the Council after that election. He said there is a post of commissioning, and they are looking at services outside of the council and to the public. They should also be looking at how legal services are commissioned and is it value for money and are they delivering what the customer wants, and, in this case, it is us. Whatever political party is in place should be open to hear arguments for a more cost effective and value for money service.
- VH said that there was a robust conversation on this at the Housing Supervisory Board. It does need to be resolved; it does cost a lot of money and there are people living in B&B when there are houses out there that they could be living in.
- TD said he believes it should be done with the new leadership after the election. Present the case and then look at options.
- HR said there is a legitimate point that with the existing structure and process STAR Housing cannot offer good value for money.

Recommendation:

The Board supports the approach to work with Council officers and discuss the issues with the process with the new leadership at the right time. To complete only existing development commitments and pause new development opportunities until the process and the constitution is changed allowing the STAR Housing Board to complete its contractual commitments to deliver the development programme.

Temporary Accommodation Update

- HR stated STAR has looked at its base position and the cost of the service and delivery of the service. We have outlined how the TA programme will potentially grow in the future, with 152 units managed within the HRA and we have put forward the cost recovery position.
- In the background it has been discussed what TA looks like in the future; talks about the council doing IHM and support and STAR doing IHM and using the existing model, and also the Council doing IHM, support and asset management.
- It is very difficult for STAR to do the asset management without the control on the tenancy and the reason is that we can't get access and can't take responsibility, and it creates blurred lines.
- The report outlines a methodology for recovering costs.
- We need to conduct an IHM review to get the agreed position.
- If we can't get to an agreed position, we need a legitimate conversation with the Council that we don't think we can deliver the service and ask them to take it forward.
- The request to Board is for STAR to be allowed to have those discussions with the Council.
- The base position is that STAR wants to support the Council, and we have some good expertise to make sure the Temporary Accommodation continues to be a success.
- HR advised we have been at this for over a year and we are not any further forward. We need to put a line in the sand and say who is the best placed to move this forward.
- KJ suggested including in the conversation what the Local Authority is doing around homelessness, and if long term homeless is affected the temporary accommodation model will change. HR said there is a piece of work going on with the RPs around tenancy ready - making sure the tenants in temporary accommodation are tenancy ready. There was an acceptance that most of the temporary accommodation was within the HRA. Most of the other providers are moving away from TA.

Recommendations:

- **Support the proposed review of Intensive Housing Management support and the TA programme in partnership with the council.**
- **If the review does not progress with a firm recommendation by 1st October 2025 or consensus on a new process is not developed. STAR Housing should request that the TA programme is managed directly by the council with STAR Housing acting as a contractor on behalf of the local authority.**

This was approved.

18	<p>AOB</p> <p>LF queried a statement on the Customer Scrutiny Panel Terms of Reference – paragraph reads: - The group will elect a chairperson or a vice chairperson from the members of the scrutiny panel. To ensure transparency, these individuals cannot also be members of the STAR board or the Customer Service Committee. It was confirmed that it needs to be reworded as they can be a Board Member, or a member of the other committee but they can't be the Chair of the Scrutiny committee because the job of the Scrutiny Committee is to scrutinise the Board. Action 26: The TOR needs to be revised to make the guideline clearer and reissued to the Board and Panel for approval.</p> <p>Date of Next Board Meeting – Monday 16 June 2025 at STAR Offices, TBC whether Mt McKinley or Ptarmigan, 1.00 pm – 5.00 pm</p>	JM/EJ	16 June 2025
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Chair of the Board:

Date:

Managing Director:



Date: 9 April 2025