

Meeting Shropshire Towns & Rural Housing Limited Board Meeting

Date 18 September 2023

Time 14:00-17:00

Location Shrewsbury Town Football Club



Members Present:

Tony Deakin (TDk)	Chair, Independent
Julia Buckley (JB)	Shropshire Council
Jane Trethewey (JT)	Shropshire Council
Emma Jones (EJ)	STAR
Paul Hayward (PH)	Co-opted
Steve Robinson (SR)	Independent
Vince Hunt (VH)	Shropshire Council Supervisory Board
James Woods (JW)	Board Member

Non-Members Present:

Harpreet Rayet (HRa)	Managing Director
Tom Forty (TF)	Operations Director
Rosanna Davenport (RD)	Governance Manager, STAR
Charlotte Burrows (CB)	STAR EA
Lucy Heath (LH)	Clienting and Commissioning Manager (Housing)
Arjan Benning (AB)	Two-week work placement, accounting and finance
Debbie Gauntlett (KG)	Minute Taker

Apologies

Ros Bridges (RB)	Corporate Director
Mark Jones	Vice Chair, Shropshire Council
Paul Weston (PW)	Co-Opted
Yordan Tolev	Tenant Board Member
Eleanor Ravers (ER)	Tenant Board Member

Minute No.			
1.	Welcome & Apologies	The Chair welcomed attendees, and introductions were made. Apologies were accepted.	
2.	Declarations of Interest	No new declarations of interest.	
3.	Minutes of the previous meeting	The minutes from the previous meeting dated 10 July 2023 were reviewed . The minutes were approved . Agreed Action: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acronyms and names of attendees are to be checked and amended. 	
4.	Matters Arising	HR updated on the following matters arising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical Actions from Board Meetings. HR/RD had completed a review of matters arising from previous meetings. A comprehensive list was compiled to be presented to the Board for information of actions undertaken or outstanding during the last 12 months. • Office Move. Due to take place on 2 October 2022. HR said he looked forward to welcoming the STAR Board to the new offices at the next Board meeting. • Shaw I.T. Consulting Review. Presentation as part of today's agenda. The review took place in September (initially scheduled for November). • Board Strategy. A virtual briefing session/presentation to be organised for all Board members to include a briefing and next step. • Risk Register. Risk Register to be a standing item agenda on future agendas. Agreed Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of actions to be circulated to the Board. • The Next Board meeting to be held at the new STAR Housing office. • Board Strategy presentation to be arranged. • Risk Register to be on future agendas as a standing item. Risk Report and Register to be circulated after the meeting. 	RD / HR All HR RD / HR

5.	Shropshire Council Update	<p>Presentation: Jane Trethaway</p> <p>A report had been circulated in advance and taken as read. The purpose of the report was to update the STAR Housing Board members on Shropshire Council priorities involving or affecting STAR Housing. The Board members were asked to note the contents of the Assistant Director Homes and Communities' update.</p> <p>JT talked through the Council finances and substantial savings programme described as a major focus for this financial year and next, after which it is anticipated that the pressures would ease.</p> <p>Key areas for consideration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Financial position • Regulator of Social Housing Pilot • Governance Review • TA Figures Review <p>The Chair cited the recent Section 114 notice served on Birmingham City Council. He referred to the figures within the report presented and queried the impact of the notice on Shropshire County Council. JT assured the Board that Shropshire County Council has a savings programme that covers all the Council's activities. It was noted that other councils across the UK are considering section notices. JT talked about unpredictable times (cost of living crisis, inflation rates, war in Ukraine), however, whilst unable to anticipate the future, the plan at the moment was for the Council to remain on track.</p> <p>PH enquired about further investment being available to tackle homelessness. JT responded that STAR Housing already supports temp accommodation within the HRA, which would be preferred moving forward. How to we divert people coming to the Council for housing options whilst reducing the number of people in temporary accommodation, and hotels. Early intervention is key.</p> <p>Self-Referral to Social Housing Regulator. JT thanked TF and the team for responding and submitting the data to the SHR promptly. The letter confirmed investigations had been completed and no home standards breaches had been found. Further information had been requested regarding temporary housing, and JT advised that this would not impact the investigation.</p> <p>Governance Review. The Council has committed to undertaking a governance review. This links to the workshop discussions/reflections and understanding STAR Housing and Shropshire Council's responsibilities.</p>	
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		<p>Q: Is there any lessons to learn from other organisations that the Council oversees? Do the Council have a uniform approach? JT responded that she was unsure and agreed to meet with Tim Callard to enquire.</p> <p>Inspection regime commencing April 2024. JT advised that the regulator may attend a future Board meeting. The Chair said he believed the review to be positive and reminded the STAR Board to be mindful of the recent Executive Team changes. The Board needs to focus on what can be achieved within a short timeframe. HR and TF agreed, noting they welcome the ‘live pilot’. The Chair asked if Star Housing would be awarded a grade or an advisory. Lucy confirmed the pilot would be an advisory. They would indicate the grade under the new regime, but this grade would remain confidential. JT added that being part of the regulatory pilot puts the Council in a good position for the future.</p> <p>The Chair asked about universal credit payments being paid directly to tenants rather than organisations. JT confirmed appropriate support packages were in place. JB said she would like to see more transparency in how this system worked and believed this would build confidence to ensure properties are allocated by needs.</p> <p>The STAR Housing Board noted the contents of the Assistant Director Home and Communities Update report.</p>	
6	Update – IT and Business Transformation	<p>I.T. Presentation: Shaw Consulting</p> <p>Alistair McGowen and Chris Shaw from Shaw Consulting joined the meeting to present the I.T. review findings of the last three months with recommendations.</p> <p>Highlights of the report included key observations as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are we now? • Where do we want to be? • How do we get there? <p>Six dimensions were used to evaluate. These included:</p> <p>1. Infrastructure. In general, the Council infrastructure is suitable with a recommendation to continue to use. Recommendations were given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace laptops over three years old. 	

- Implement an annual policy.
 - Install Windows 11 on laptops/PCs.
2. **Application.** Housing Management Solution. Recommendation to 'go out to market' to procure a new solution for the next ten years.
 - Implement a new finance, HR and payroll solution. It was noted that the local Council is reviewing this, and the suggestion was that STAR Housing join them or set up its own system.
 3. **Digital.** Refresh the website, including updates and content management, to ensure up-to-date comms is available for residents. Shaw I.T. Consulting also recommended better use of CRM technologies to improve customer experience and provide better working methods.
 4. **Data.** Adopt better data management and data governance framework.
 5. **Security.** How do we keep it all secure? Install a more flexible cyber security model without impacting the Council.
 6. **Service.** How do we deliver? Adopt IT Service Management best practices and develop intelligent client capabilities.

A discussion took place regarding the residents, and it was noted their needs would need to be part of ongoing consideration as not all residents were 'digital savvy'. What channels of communication could best support residents? Could Facebook Messenger be used more? How could efficiencies be improved? HR advised that an updated system could ensure better engagement, and an up-to-date I.T system would support this. A new CRM would help collate this data. NR recommended the Customer Services Committee discuss this further as part of the investment.

A discussion took place regarding the financial system and how applications would link to the Council. HR explained that current work is recharged via the Council. HR suggested STAR Housing produce their own invoices to create efficiencies and confirmed he would like to explore this further with the Council. Shaw I.T. confirmed the next stage would be to look at a financial solution as part of the review.

A copy of the implementation plan was shared. HR advised staff to work on processes before making any purchase decisions. There would be a requirement to certify all processes are mapped to ensure

		<p>will work and understand how they work. This could be carried out between October – December 2023. .</p> <p>Service Delivery Plan. The total investment programme required totalled £1,058k, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £150k capital expenditure to replace legacy laptop and desktop services. • £250k cap expenditure to procure and implement new housing management system. • £75k cap expenditure to procure and implement new finance system. • £50k cap expenditure to procure and implement new HR/payroll. <p>The Chair proposed the FAR Committee discuss further. A business case and operational benefits to be brought back to the Board for further consideration.</p> <p>Agreed Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Item to be added to FAR Committee agenda for discussion. A business case and operational benefits to be brought back to the Board for further consideration. <p>The Chair thanked the presenters from Shaw Consulting, and they left the meeting at 15:25pm.</p>	
7.	Performance Update	<p>Performance Update Presentation: Dave Moran for Ros Bridges, Corporate Director</p> <p>A report had been circulated in advance and taken as read. The purpose of the report was to provide STAR Board members with an update on STAR’s performance against its management agreement performance indicators, with the recommendation for STAR Board members to note the organisation's performance in relation to its obligations through the management agreement.</p> <p>DM discussed recent staffing changes, confirming Jo Williams had left the business. DM explained the department had been taking the opportunity to look at performance data detailed previously and consider how the reporting could be streamlined better to be relevant “one version of the truth” using the existing management system.</p> <p>Key areas for consideration included:</p> <p>Performance Exceptions Reporting. Voids. Previously, this information would have come in from various sources. Following work with Capita, the department has revisited the system to find areas of improvement and can now report on minor and significant voids with context. Working towards a ‘one click’ dashboard using existing technologies.</p>	

		<p>Performance Data. Looking at how other similar markets perform. This would give confidence in changes being made within the business.</p> <p>PH noted the percentage of complaints responded to with code timescales (79.17%) and suggested reporting must be clear to ensure it satisfies ombudsman requirements. PH recommended discussions take place at the Customer Services Committee. Action.</p> <p>HR thanked Dave for his work on the business and explained that STAR Housing could “really see the progression in performance”. HR acknowledged that monthly benchmarking would help with this to continue improvement within the organisation.</p> <p>Management Agreement Performance Indicators for Q1 2023/24 were available. The Chair asked whether the current KPIs reflected the current climate. HR suggested he liaise with JT to move this forward. TF added that it is part of PM objectives to highlight early warning indicators.</p> <p>Agreed Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Complaint response times. Discuss in more detail at the Customer Service Committee. ● HR/JT to discuss current KPIs to ensure they reflect the current climate. <p><i>DM left the meeting at 15:40.</i></p>	
8.	Compliance Update and Action Plan	<p>Presentation: Tom Forty, Operations Director</p> <p>A report had been circulated in advance and taken as read. The purpose of the report was to update the STAR Board on STAR’s compliance performance across several key statutory areas to the end of July 2023 and provide an update on the progress being made in the strategic improvement plan.</p> <p>TF was pleased to report that significant progress had been made and thanked the team for their performance around compliance ‘through challenging times’ to ensure STAR Housing meets its statutory and regulatory requirements for keeping properties/residents safe.</p> <p>Key areas for consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fire Safety. Positive progression had been made for both Fire Risk Assessments and 	

		<p>subsequent Fire Risk Actions. Of the 90 Fire Risk Assessments required, STAR is 100% compliant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit Request. Shropshire Council had completed an internal audit check. They checked 10% of everything and reported on the following issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asbestos in communal areas • Documentation/storage. • Misalignment of gas/electrical. Reasoning communal supplies and looking at updating the system to ensure one-to-one of every property. • Electrical testing - Currently reviewed annually, although legislation requires review on a 5-year cycle. It was recommended the review be moved from annual to a 3-year cycle. The Board agreed that the target of annual electrical testing for communal areas is updated to move towards a 3-year cycle of testing rather than an annual cycle of testing. • Compliance Policies. Drafted and developed. Shropshire Council is taking legal advice to review to ensure clear responsibilities are included. • Strategic Plan Update. Significant progress. GAP analysis completed and signed off by the Executive Team. • The initial data validation exercise involving visiting all 206 communal buildings or sites was completed in August 2022. This exercise identified 143 compliance-related components that needed to be added to our systems. The scope of the data captured is to be revisited and managed through the Open Housing system. • Compliance Manager. Successful appointment made with a start date of December 2023. <p>PH highlighted the direction of several arrows recorded in the monthly compliance summary report and queried the number of ECR's rising to 49. He asked how these were being addressed. TF explained it was an ongoing cycle with an expectation to improve. TF agreed to discuss with the supplier on how best to utilise the legal avenues available.</p> <p>JW congratulated the STAR Housing team for their progress around compliance, confirming that the report reassured the Board member that the STAR Housing were doing everything possible to ensure compliance.</p> <p>The Board agreed that the target of annual electrical testing for communal areas is updated to move towards a 3-year cycle of testing rather than a yearly cycle of testing.</p>	
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		<i>5-minute break taken at 15:52 pm</i>	
9.	Draft Report – STAR Housing and Council Workshops	<p>Presentation: Harpreet Rayet, Managing Director</p> <p>A draft report for the STAR Housing and Council Workshops (appendix A) had been circulated in advance and taken as read.</p> <p>HR reported that workshops had taken place between May 2023 – August 2023 and attended by STAR Housing personnel, Shropshire Council personnel and other key providers to agree shared strategic objectives relating to a sustainable HRA, ensuring tenants receive an excellent service, statutory obligations are met under the home’s standard and social housing bill.</p> <p>HR highlighted several recommendations within the report to get all homes up to an EPC C by 2030. This would result in a cost to the HRA and as part of the Corporate Plan any initiatives will be fully costed and included with the 30-year business plan and annual budgets. Workshops between May - August, STAR, Council and other key providers.</p> <p>Following the review, it was agreed that four workshops would be held. The themes outlined:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Homes, 2. Business Planning and Finance, 3. Growth 4. Governance. <p>Key considerations included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are homes compliant and safe? • Ensure stronger resident involvement. • Joint strategy between STAR Housing and Shropshire Council. <p>HR recommended the STAR Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the content of the final draft report. 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree that the identified shared priorities are used as the basis for the STAR Housing 2024-2027 Corporate Plan. • The Chair, Customer Board Members, council board representatives and a Committee Chair join a steering group to give oversight to the development of the STAR Housing 2024-2027 Corporate Plan. <p>SR acknowledged there was a significant amount of work involved. HR agreed and proposed presenting at the March 2024 board meeting for approval as part of the Business Plan and Corporate Plan).</p> <p>The Board agreed the recommendations and proposal.</p> <p>JT thanked HR, noting the workshops were ‘really good and valuable’. HR thanked everyone for their involvement.</p> <p>Agreed Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present at the March 2024 Board meeting. 	
10.	Consumer Regulation Update	<p>Presentation: H Rayet, Managing Director and T Forty, Operations Director</p> <p>A report had been circulated in advance and taken as read. The purpose of the report was to update the STAR Board that The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) had begun consulting on a new consumer regulatory framework following the passing of the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023.</p> <p>Key areas for consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Regulations include the completion of a self-assessment against the consumer regulatory standards and the completion of a self-assessment against the consumer standards. • Volunteering for a pilot inspection from the RSH. Already discussed. • Housing Quality Network. Readyng the residents to be part of the journey. TR said he felt that the residents were on board with being part of a strong resident connection community, and HQN will be supporting with this activity. <p>An action plan would be implemented following the first scrutiny exercise and presented to the STAR Board in January 2024. Lucy had agreed to sit on a Steering Group.</p>	

		<p>It the first information gathering session with residents would take place within the next two weeks. This was being promoted on the social media platforms. It was highlighted that there may be challenges with residents' attendance, however, TF was confident that his previous experience in similar marketing would help, noting residents' feedback would be vital for comms.</p> <p>The STAR Board noted the emerging changes to legislation, including the introduction of a new consumer regulation framework.</p> <p>The STAR Board agreed to support the completion of a self-assessment as stated in the report.</p> <p>The STAR Board agreed to support the work to develop a new resident scrutiny framework.</p> <p>Agreed Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Action plan to be presented to the STAR Board in January 2024 following the first scrutiny exercise. 	
11.	Sub Committee Update – FAR 4 September 2023	<p>Presentation: S Robinson, Chair of Finance Committee.</p> <p>Minutes of the last FAR meeting held on 4 May 2023 were available for information and taken as read.</p> <p>The Chair of the Committee reported on two positive meetings since the last full board meeting.</p> <p>Key areas considerations for Board approval.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strategic Risk Register / Risk Workshop. Further risks were identified regarding data management and finance management. CB to contact individuals regarding support. ● Finance. Confirmation that the Committee supports the restructure in finance for Board approval. ● The FAR committee recommends the Board agree to purchase the Abovo Business Plan and Rent Planning Tool. <p>The Board agreed the recommendations from the FAR Committee.</p>	

12.	Sub Committee Update Development, Sustainability and Strategic Investment 6 September 2023	<p>Presentation: J Woods, Chair of DSSI Committee.</p> <p>JW highlighted key areas discussed at the September 2023 meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighted a weakness and skill shortage within the Committee and recommended consideration. The Chair and HR agreed to recruit co-opted members to support. • 70 Castle Foregate. Requirement for HRA reserves of £400k. • Recommendation that the STAR Board gives the Executive Team authority to purchase buildings within the Business Plan up to £5m and anything about would have to go to the Council or STAR Housing Board for approval as a subsidy requirement. • Agency Agreement for CDL to deliver development programme. <p>The Board agreed they were content with the financial plan and the discussions to ensure the best interest of all organisations.</p> <p>Agreed Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment process for co-opted Trustees. 	
13.	Sub Committee – Customer Services	<p>Presentation: T Forty, Operations Director</p> <p>A report had been circulated in advance and taken as read. The report's purpose was to update the STAR Board on the progress in establishing the Customer Services Committee and seek approval for amended Terms of Reference.</p> <p>TF reported that the first Customer Services Committee would be scheduled to take place by the end of October 2023.</p> <p>Membership. A change to the proposed membership to 7 members comprised of two tenant board members, 2 additional board members, an independent co-optee, a tenant co-optee and Chair of STAR's tenant scrutiny panel. JB agreed to Chair the Committee and PH agreed to consider being a member, dependent on other commitments. The Chair of the Board recommended governance seeks an independent co-optee with relevant housing experience.</p> <p>A discussion took place regarding engaging residents to ensure they are part of the opportunity to go through a scrutiny process. It would be essential to hear their views on what is and is not working. A suggestion was put forward that meetings could be held in the evenings.</p>	<p>Agreed Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • .

		<p>The Board approved the amended Terms of Reference.</p> <p>Agreed Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Governance. Recruitment process to take place. 	
14.	Sub Committee – HR and Remuneration	<p>Presentation: H Rayet, Managing Director</p> <p>New Committee. Terms of Reference were shared, and HR asked members of the STAR Board if they were content for VH to be Chair. No objections. Membership to be discussed further. HR and RD, Governance Manager to meet to discuss co-opted options. It was recommended appointing someone with strong Executive HR skills. Three co-optees required in total.</p> <p>Agreed Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recruitment for members to begin. 	
15.	Operational Update	<p>Presentation: T Forty, Operations Director</p> <p>A report had been circulated in advance and taken as read. The purpose of the report was to update the STAR Board on operational performance activity up to the end of period 4.</p> <p>Key areas for consideration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● RAAC update. 31 blocks require further due diligence. Completed 30 inspections. 50/50 split across Oswestry - used building surveyor. Tests continue, but currently, there is nothing to report but further updates will be given to the Board when available. ● Damp and Mold. Area of concern. Table available within the paperwork. One bad case was identified during the last two weeks. As soon as identified response had been swift and resident moved to a hotel. When asked how the situation had arisen, TF provided a confidential update on the resident. TF confirmed the team were working with the resident regarding compensation and ensuring furniture was moved into storage. ● Gas. TF reported 43 properties have had their gas capped (since 2015). TF has requested assurance on the properties. A discussion occurred, and the Chair expressed concerns regarding compliance, danger and policy. HR agreed a consistent approach was required (to include electrics) to ensure it does not happen in future. Firstly, need to investigate how and why the properties had been capped and understand the rationale. 	

		<p>The STAR Board noted the content of the report.</p> <p>Agreed Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gas cap to be investigated. 	
19.	Any Other Business	<p>Parish Rooms. HR. option to purchase Parish rooms. Required £150k subsidy. Looking to draft report to bring back to Board. Feels have ability under £500m available HRA reserves. LA will support with 30% Section 101. Paper to be circulated to Board. Chair Q: how many other buildings within the county where RP's decide to withdraw? Julie Finance LA unable to answer. Needs to be added to 30 year Business Plan to understand</p> <p>Development Appraisal Drafted for Board.</p> <p>Christmas Dates. Concessionary day in line with Council requested. The STAR Board Approved.</p> <p>Audit at Sheldon Court. Discussed.</p> <p>Future Board Meetings. The next meeting to be held at the new offices. 2024 dates to be circulated.</p> <p>STAR Board Christmas meal. Dates to be arranged.</p> <p>Agreed Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 	
		<p style="text-align: center;">Date of Next Meeting Monday 27 November 2023 at STAR Housing new offices</p>	

