



## Minutes of Meeting

**Meeting Name:** **Shropshire Towns & Rural Housing Limited**  
**Meeting Location:** **Microsoft Teams**  
**Date and Time:** **6<sup>th</sup> July 2021**

**Members present:**  
Vice Chair – Tony Deakin (Independent) TDk  
James Wood (Independent) JW  
James Willocks (Shropshire Council) JWI  
Paul Hayward (Co-Optee) PH

Steve Robinson (Independent) SR  
Mark Jones (Shropshire Council) MJ  
Julia Buckley (Shropshire Council) JB

**Non-Members**  
**Present:**  
Sue Adams (STAR) SA  
Teresa Dagnall (STAR) TD  
Elizabeth Goodman (STAR) EG  
Jane Trethewey (Shropshire Council) JT

Steve Ogram (STAR) SO  
Ayyaz Ahmed (STAR) AA  
Melanie Smith (STAR) MS

## ITEMS 1-6 EXEMPT FROM PUBLIC DISCUSSION

### BOARD MEETING OPEN SESSION

7.	Minutes from STAR Board Meeting 18 <sup>th</sup> May 2021	All members confirmed that the previous Minutes had been received and were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.  A copy of the minutes will be signed and placed on the Minute book.		
8.	Matters Arising	The matters arising from the previous Board meeting have been circulated. There were no further matters arising.		
9.	2020/21 Financial Statements	SO presented the Statements. Grant Thornton presented the report to FAR – anticipate an unqualified opinion. However, there is one matter outstanding and a process has been put in place to address this. Relates to auditors needing to complete the audit of the SC pension fund. Need to stress don't anticipate any issues coming from this and look forward to confirming an unqualified opinion. Pages 18 – 20 are blank – the statements will be inserted in here once received. The second one relates to Board membership. At the time of preparing the document, the Council appointed Chris Schofield to the Board – Julia has subsequently joined and page 2 will be amended to reflect this.  If the Board approves this statement today – we will receive an audit opinion and can then authorise the Chair to sign on behalf of the Board.  TDk noted that the issues with pension were outstanding – this is always the case with the Accounts and probably has been with STAR in previous years, but this is not a major concern. Had an in-depth discussion at FAR Sub-committee. TDk thanked SO and TD for the good progress made.  <b>The Board approved the following recommendations:-</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>The Board approves the Directors' Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2021 (Appendix 1) subject to confirmation from Grant Thornton that the outstanding audit work on</b></li></ul>		

		<p>the Shropshire Pension Fund has been completed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should there be a need to make any amendment to the Directors' Report and Financial Statements, authority is delegated to the Director of Finance and Resources in consultation with the Chair of the Board and the Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.</li> <li>• In the event of any amendment arising from 2.2 a revised Directors' Report and Financial Statements will be circulated to all Board Members for information.</li> <li>• Subject to fulfilment of recommendations 2.1 and 2.2 above, the Chair of the Board signs the Directors' Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2021 on behalf of the Board on the 3 pages required.</li> <li>• The Chair of the Board should sign the letter of representation (Appendix 2) on behalf of the Board.</li> </ul>		
10.	Annual Action Plan 2020/21 Final Report	<p>SA said that due to 2020/21 being an unusual year, there were more items than normal that had not been completed. However, a full report of each individual action and the outstanding actions that have been rolled over will be placed in the next action plan and are indicated.</p> <p>SR fully agree about exceptional year, but interested in the process for making decisions to defer – how does the Management Team decide this? SA noted it was there is not a special process but picked up in our usual monitoring arrangements. On a quarterly basis, line managers have to do a report that goes to the Senior Management Team and then explore with managers in a meeting focused on the Plan and discuss reason for any delay. Decide whether to extend deadline or defer actions or implement any remedial actions to recover the delay.</p> <p>SA worked with JW and PK on a new dashboard report and traffic light system, which, hopefully, has really helped the Board see progress on those activities that were planned.</p> <p>JW did do a piece of work that has added to the visibility of actions and where we are up to – thanked SA for the open approach and note PK's input into the process.</p>		

		<p>JWi asked if this causes managers problems for following year with the rollover capacity wise. SA noted it was a consideration when considering new activities for the following year and took these into account – less new actions than would normally have because we knew had quite a lot of work to consider from this financial year.</p> <p><b>The Board approved the following recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>To note the report on the delivery of completed actions in 2020/21</b></li> <li>• <b>Note the rolled over actions to be included in the Annual Action Plan 2021/22.</b></li> </ul>		
11.	STAR and the Wider Shropshire Housing Landscape	<p>Jane Trethewey from Shropshire Council talked through a presentation. This is attached to the minutes.</p> <p>JB noted losing 31 homes through RTB –a net loss year on year - SO noted there is a new build programme and 140 new homes have been made available for renting and shared ownership. However, the RTB trend is not losing its' attraction and the loss in housing stock could be more significant in future years.</p> <p>Have also purchased some open market acquisition. Stock in 4240 in 2011 and closing in March 2021 was 4061, including 39 shared ownership homes. Net loss has been off-set somewhat but RTB remains a concern.</p> <p>JWi is climate change a standing item for the Board? TDk noted there was a major presentation at a recent Board meeting. Consultants are doing some further work on this, but a recognition that we need a presentation and discussion with the Local Authority and members. Not only is there decarbonisation, but also need to consider the impact of issues and remedial measures on fuel poverty. Feel that a major exercise is needed to look at costs, options and the impact on tenants. Right that is should be a major item at future Board meetings, key aspect to have a discussion with LA and education with councillors about what are the options. There is a paper due to the Board in September.</p> <p>JWi noted the impact of a larger number of older people in the County on the housing stock and the reduction in availability as the demographic is growing, net</p>		

	<p>effect of a 142% loss is going to be significant. JT noted this is right and is a priority for the Council. In conversation with Adult Social Care to consider how this considered and have the right Homes going forward. See lots of applications for Care Homes, but it is more important to have the right sort of housing for people to remain independent in their own homes for as long as possible.</p> <p>McCarthy &amp; Stone – very expensive and imports older people into the county rather than serving the people who already live here, does not serve the affordable end of the market for older people. Very much appreciate ongoing help from STAR and other providers.</p> <p>SR - how many social housing units are there in the county and how many social landlords are there? Given traditional providers will have a sizeable stock in Shropshire what is their commitment to dealing with the agenda the council has talked about. Have they proved to be really committed to the agenda or more passive players? JT noted there is just over 15,000 affordable homes in the county. Numbers of providers not that many because some have merged together. Wrekin is one of the largest and was originally a stock transfer from Telford. Bromford is a reasonable size, but they have advised they are withdrawing from their development programme. Wrekin are very ambitious in terms of new build. Housing Plus Group, incorporating Severnside, which was a stock transfer - they are still developing in the county, but have merged with other associations out of the county so less focus on Shropshire. People like Shropshire Rural who are small and do a very specific job only or the other significant one is Connexus, an amalgamation of stock in Oswestry and stock in the south – they also work in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. Is an issue because of the mergers and boundaries their attention is split across different focusses.</p> <p>The benefit with STAR is it is fully Shropshire focussed. Fair to say those who attend the Social Housing Forum do demonstrate a commitment to the agenda. Wrekin Housing chair that meeting and is active in trying to drive forward the agenda.</p> <p>SR unclear about role of STAR v Cornovii – both building houses – why two people doing the same job or how do they complement one another.</p>	
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	<p>JT noted two companies – both owned by the Council. STAR's main job is managing and running HRA housing and social housing. This is not what Cornovii has set up to do. STAR has a development programme but that is focused on affordable housing.</p> <p>Cornovii has been set up specifically to build housing for sale. Identified a gap in the market – lots of house building was at the top end of the market does not address the needs of entry level home buyers and there was limit on the amount of stock like that. Cornoviis task is to deliver that. They have to deliver a certain proportion of affordable homes. Council ensures it delivers affordable housing to the maximum it can on any site too. So far it has been in conversation with STAR about purchasing that into the HRA, they have different jobs to deliver. Cornovii is a company established to make profit in a way that STAR isn't. Cornoviis profit goes to the council to be spent on council priorities.</p> <p>SR noted in terms of loss of stock for STAR, is it possible for STAR to try and increase affordable housing and use this as a tool. JT said this is a goal and will always be limited by the amount of HRA capital that is available to spend, but will make the most of that and apply all of the funds available.</p> <p>SO added the new build programme since STAR took over was restricted by the borrowing cap imposed on HRA. In 2018 this was lifted by the Government so STAR has taken this opportunity and looked at potential capacity to seek additional borrowing and there has been Council approval in principal. Now have an additional competing pressure on the green agenda and the requirement to take initiatives to reduce emissions in the original stock. This places pressure on the limited resources that the HRA can offer.</p> <p>TDk noted trend away from city living as people now realise the advantages of a garden in times of lockdown – any pressure from executive house builders to react to this. Any section 106 opportunities? JT noted there has been an impact in people wanting to move to Shropshire – rental is becoming increasingly competitive. Cornovii has picked up on this in understanding the market – not having an impact on affordable housing so far. Hopefully some opportunities for STAR to take advantage of.</p>	
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		<p>There are reports that some councils are looking at moving more residential accommodation into town centres as many perceive 'the death of the town centre'. JT said that the Council has already invested in shopping centres to be re-purposed; Riverside in Shrewsbury is an example. And it could be a great opportunity for housing development. JT confirmed that all vacant spaces in town centres, empty spaces over shops are being explored by colleagues in Empty Properties. Whether this is an opportunity for STAR will be discussed over time. Don't want to add things that will be difficult to manage or locations may be problematic.</p> <p>TDk thanked JT for the presentation.</p>		
12.	Development Sub-Committee 1 <sup>st</sup> June 2021	<p>Live sites largely completed works. In the interim periods have been preparing new sites to continue building:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development Manager have been working hard on a number of new developments. One in Whittington and Weston Rhyn progressing through the planning process. Whittington likely to be onsite in Q3 this year.</li> <li>• Appointed a Senior Development Officer due to start in August. This will give JoD more capacity to explore potential developments.</li> <li>• Mindful that Board would like to get together soon to explore as a team and how it reports back into board to ensure a full picture of development activity and ensuring this is developed on target and within time and budget constraints.</li> </ul> <p>TDk noted community chest on service report. Appreciate the restrictions that COVID has incurred on the Scheme, but wondered if STAR is doing enough to advertise what we are doing and whether it would be possible to get some pictures and stories of some of the schemes, local councillors, promotion of community chest? Getting the name and brand out there.</p> <p>SA recognised we do need to do more to get activities better promoted within the Community. Have had a number of different communication partners over the years and none of them have delivered what we have wanted. We have restructured our Team and now have a more focused resources so will be looking at this with our new Partner – Stockport Homes, an award winning Comms team.</p>		

	<p>We will be more proactive to get those good news stories out. The role is quite a new one and will take some time to establish, but we will be more active locally in terms of getting these stories out.</p> <p>JWi underpin there is some great stuff going on there and the great work that STAR is doing. TDk thought a lot of councillors that see services being run by the Council, but it is different with housing and unless you're in Oswestry or Bridgnorth it may not be so immediate – there is an organisation under council ownership doing these things.</p> <p>JW noted there is a bit more work to do around advertising and making ourselves more known to the wider community and think that STAR has been hampered somewhat by limited capacity and the size of the Team, Jason covers a lot of ground, but with the additional staff we will be able to put more time and focus into putting ourselves out there as an organisation.</p> <p><b>The Board noted the contents of the Minutes.</b></p>	
13.	<p>Finance, Audit and Risk Sub-Committee (FAR) 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2021</p> <p>Had the update re financial statements, and that occupied most of the Sub-Committee meeting. The Team received a very good response from the External Auditors from SO, TD and the wider team – wanted to draw this to the attention of the Board. Standing item is Health and Safety – no issues of concern, an update of how things were going. Final item was on risk and a review of the major risk in organisation. Insurance – we have a good claims record and use Zurich via Shropshire Council. TDk said there had been an increase as noted by the national housing headlines. For STAR however, not a major problem – asked for feedback on repairs, complaints etc. to come to the next meeting for reassurance.</p> <p><b>The Board noted the contents of the Minutes.</b></p>	

**ITEMS 14-15 EXEMPT FROM PUBLIC DISCUSSION**

		<b>Date of next meeting: 21<sup>st</sup> September 2021</b>		
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