



## Minutes of Meeting

**Meeting Name:** **Shropshire Towns & Rural Housing Limited**

**Meeting Location:** **Board Room, Spruce Building, Shrewsbury**

**Date and Time:** **17<sup>th</sup> September 2019**

Members present:

Chair – Margaret Wright (Independent) MW  
Simon Harris (Shropshire Council) SH  
Paul Kelly (Shropshire Council) PK  
Ann Maltby (Tenant) AM

Vice-Chair – Nicki Barker (Tenant) NB  
Emma Jones (Staff) EJ  
Charlotte Parry (Tenant) CP  
John Wood (Independent) JW

Non-Members  
Present:

Steve Ogram (STAR) SO  
Melanie Smith (STAR) MS  
Jo Williams (STAR) JWI  
Nigel Wilson (STAR) NW

Teresa Dagnall (STAR) TD  
Martin Whitelegg (STAR) MWH  
Claire Allen (Shropshire Council) CA

1.	Apologies	<p>MW opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p> <p>Apologies were received from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Richard Grounds (Independent) RG</li> <li>• Mark Jones (Shropshire Council) MJ</li> <li>• Robert Macey (Shropshire Council) RM</li> </ul>		
2.	Declaration of Interests	<p>The Board were asked if they had any interests to declare on any items on the agenda.</p> <p>There were no interests declared.</p>		
3.	Minutes from STAR Board Meeting 9 <sup>th</sup> July 2019	<p>All members confirmed that the previous minutes had been received and were an accurate reflection of the meeting.</p> <p>A copy of the minutes will be signed and placed on the minute book.</p>		
4.	Matters Arising	<p>The matters arising from previous Board meetings were circulated for information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenancy Agreement; CP advised that a recent letter regarding the changes to the tenancy agreement was sent out to tenants and the wording of the letter caused some alarm. The letter was handed up with an intention to serve notice, which caused some upset, particularly to some of the more vulnerable tenants. There is another letter due out shortly and CP asked if we could review the content to avoid any further upset. MWH would be joining the meeting later and would be able to discuss the letter.</li> </ul>		

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Ombudsman Complaint; a full update will be provided at the November Board meeting.</li> </ul> <p>There were no further matters arising.</p>		
5.	Board Governance ICT	<p>STAR have previously considered how it communicates with the Board, particularly in light of the implementation of GDPR. The report highlights three recommendations. We have used different approaches in the past. All Board members had STAR email accounts, however, this caused issues with members having to check two different email accounts.</p> <p>STAR can issue members with equipment – either tablet or laptop – that is used for STAR business. There is a third way, which is a hybrid of the two.</p> <p>Specialist software is available, but this comes at a price. Our Senior IT Officer has looked into this and has discovered that there is an app already available to us through Office 365 called Microsoft Teams. The app can be installed on members own devices or STAR are happy to issue equipment. Members can continue to use their personal email addresses but will need to log on to Microsoft Teams to access Board papers and correspondence.</p> <p>SH asked if the app could be added to Shropshire Council devices. SO advised that there should not be an issue with this but this would need to be confirmed by the Council's IT Team. SO advised that the Council's Data Protection Officer does not consider email correspondence to be a secure link between STAR and the Council and so all emails containing sensitive information need to be encrypted. SH thought this would be a positive move.</p> <p>JW confirmed that he sits on a Board that already uses</p>		

		<p>Microsoft Teams – it works very well and provides protection under the Data Protection Act.</p> <p>NB asked it reports could be edited and SO confirmed that members can annotate them and add comments via the app depending on the way the files were configured. Training will be provided to members and staff.</p> <p><b>The Board approved the following recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Microsoft Teams software is made available to all Board Members with the aim to achieve implementation prior to the Board meeting on 26th November 2019.</b></li> <li>• <b>A suitable Tablet PC will be provided to all Board Members on request for the purpose of supporting Company business.</b></li> <li>• <b>Training will be offered to all Board Members prior to implementation.</b></li> </ul>		
6.	Annual Report to Council	<p>The Annual Report is a requirement through the Management Agreement and goes to the Asset Assurance Board.</p> <p>The Board have seen all of the documents at some point and the report is just for noting.</p> <p><b>The Board noted the contents of the Annual Report.</b></p>		
7.	Terms of Reference Review	<p>There is a requirement that Board members review the Terms of Reference annually. There were some inconsistencies between the Terms of Reference for some of the subcommittees and these have been amended to bring them into line.</p>		

	<p>NB had some queries regarding the changes to the Area Panel Constitution. 5.1.2 – NB understands why vice chair responsibility has been added in but feels this is wrong and the panel should be independent. SO advised that, although he has not been involved with the changes to the constitution, the reasoning behind it was due to the previous issues with numbers on the panels. This is a measure that was put in place so that the business of the panels would not be affected by a lack of numbers and would allow business to be conducted as necessary. NB felt that it was not appropriate for an Officer to act as Vice Chair.</p> <p>NB referred to 7.6 where the Director of Finance &amp; Resources will make decisions where the meetings are not quorate. NB felt this was mixing up roles and was not appropriate. SO advised that he does not attend Area Panel meeting but all grant payments are approved by him in his capacity as Director of Finance. The inclusion of the 7.6 confirms that a payment can be made in the event that it has been approved by a Panel that was not quorate. This clause enables the Panel to undertake business where membership numbers are low. SO continued that he can also reject any grant payment that he considers to be inappropriate but is required to advise the Panel as to the reason for his decision. This an important control to protect the interests of the Company. NB felt that it was appropriate to have officers leading and supporting, but not acting as Vice Chair and having decision making powers. SO believes that the grant controls protect the Company and enable the Panels to continue to conduct business when membership is low.</p> <p>NB noted that when the Panel's Terms of Reference first came to Board they mentioned the panels role was to report to Board, but noted there is nothing specific in the current</p>		
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		<p>Terms to indicate how or when the panel's report to Board.</p> <p>SO advised that panel members have previously attending Board meetings to report on the findings of their scrutiny reports.</p> <p>MW advised that the approval of the changes to the Area Panel Terms of Reference would be deferred until the next Board meeting and the following points to be clarified and reported back to Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why the requirements of the Panel are not detailed in the Terms of Reference.</li> <li>• It is appropriate for Vice Chair responsibility to be undertaken by the Resident Involvement Officers and should the Director of Finance &amp; Resources step in if the area panels are not quorate.</li> </ul> <p><b>The Board approved the following recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove requirement for Board Members to step down from any Subcommittee whilst they remain Members of the Main Board.</li> <li>• Correct Typos Identified.</li> </ul> <p><b>And deferred approval of the following recommendation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approve the Revised Area Panel Terms of Reference at Appendix 1.</li> </ul>	Clarify points raised by members and report back to Board in November	SO/MWH
8.	STAR Survey Action Plan	<p>MWH joined the meeting to present the Action Plan that has been developed following the STAR Survey carried out earlier this year.</p> <p>The results of the survey were very positive, however, the</p>		

		<p>team have drilled down into the information provided by tenants and identified a number of areas where performance can be improved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve tenant port and encourage users to sign up.</li> <li>• Improve communication</li> <li>• Completion of repairs and communication around this</li> <li>• Lower levels of satisfaction in Oswestry area</li> <li>• Grounds maintenance</li> </ul> <p>The proposed action plan picks up these issues, and it is intend to bring back to a future Board meeting to review progress.</p> <p><b>The Board approved the STAR Survey Action Plan.</b></p>	STAR Survey Action Plan progress to return to Board in 6 months	MWH
9.	Tenancy Policy	<p>MW noted there had been concerns about the letter that went to tenants caused concern because of the legal.</p> <p>MWH is aware that some tenants were concerned by the way the letter was worded and the phraseology used. The letter was drafted by Shropshire Council's legal team and had to be worded in a particular way as it related to a legal agreement. MWH felt that the gap of around 7 months between the consultation and the letter going out, did not help the situation. The next letter is very similarly worded, however there will be an explanation of the variances included so it does not have the same affect. MWH will ensure that all staff have a copy of the letter and are informed once it's been sent out. The Board discussed options around the letter, however it was acknowledged that it has to be a legally worded letter, and it is a notice because it is a legal change. It is hoped with better communication and a better framed letter, tenants will</p>		

	<p>not be too worried.</p> <p>The revised Tenancy Policy combines the previous Tenancy Policy and the Tenancy Management Policy that have been merged. The Area Panels have been consulted about the policy and minor issues raised have been addressed.</p> <p>EJ noted that page 9 refers to fixed term tenancy management, and the notice period has a 6 month window. MWH confirmed that is the case and in that period of time have to make a decision about the future of the tenancy. If the tenancy is coming to an end it has to be no more than 6 months before, however, the likelihood is that another 5 year fixed term tenancy can be offered.</p> <p>NB queried assignment rights on page 13, and noted that it read that you can assign your property to anybody. MWH confirmed the tenancy start date would have to be before 2012, and it can only be assigned to someone over the age of 18. MWH will add something to this paragraph relating to succession and assignment, making it clear that this must be someone who is eligible to take up a tenancy and must be an adult.</p> <p><b>The Board approved the Tenancy Policy subject to the above amendment.</b></p>		
10.	<p>Supplementary Estimate</p> <p>The report seeks additional in year funding to create a new temporary 6 month post for a HR Support Officer.</p> <p>STAR procure HR support through a SLA, and has a member of staff permanently seconded to STAR for 4 days a week. This is insufficient to meet the current needs of the</p>		

	<p>organisation and have looked at other options to provide support. Have tried to provide support on an informal basis through an existing member of staff but it is evident that there needs to be something more formal in place. The proposal is to offer this out on a secondment basis initially and backfill the other post if an internal candidate is successful. The situation will be reviewed during the 6 month period and if necessary this matter will be brought back to the Board at a future meeting. STAR has usable reserves in the region of £3m so the proposal is affordable.</p> <p>JW noted that HR is such an important function and believes this is essential. SH also realised the importance of having HR staff in place.</p> <p><b>The Board approved a Supplementary Estimate up to a maximum of £16,360 is approved to fund a 6 month temporary post of HR Support Officer and the position is initially offered on a secondment basis within the Company.</b></p>		
11.	<p>Staff Survey Results</p> <p>The summary results of the staff survey had been previously circulated to Board. CA and MS looked at the results in more detail.</p> <p>The Board were pleased to note that overall staff satisfaction with STAR as an employer had risen slightly and were delighted that there had been such a vast increase in satisfaction with 121s and performance management. It was noted that there has been a decrease in the number of staff submitting learning requests and this is something that has been promoted at recent staff briefings.</p> <p>SH asked if training was highlighted in job adverts. CA</p>		

		<p>responded that it's not as we want to ensure that the right qualified person is appointed for the role and this is more tailored at staff already within the organisation to enable them to enhance their skills and experience. PK asked if STAR were able to access the apprenticeship levy and CA advised that we haven't tipped into this yet.</p> <p><b>The Board thanked CA and MS and noted the contents of the presentation.</b></p>		
12.	People Strategy Update	<p>CA provided the Board with an update on targets within the People Strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 80% Vacancies filled at first advert – 14 vacancies were advertised during financial year 18/19, 12 vacancies were filled at first interview – 86%.</li> <li>• 4 Apprentices employed - At end of financial year 3 Currently 5 Apprentices employed across the business.</li> <li>• 90% staff who are satisfied with STAR as an employer – Staff Survey 2019 – 91%</li> <li>• 85% existing staff who would recommend Star Housing as an employer – Staff Survey 2019 – 89%</li> <li>• Number of early leavers during probationary period – During financial year 18/19, 2 employees left during probationary period 16% of new starters, should note 1 voluntary and 1 involuntary</li> <li>• Maintain voluntary staff turnover under 10%. – Voluntary turnover 18/19 – 12.93%</li> <li>• Feedback received from Exit Interviews – 85% of respondents would recommend STAR Housing as an employer – need Mel to review this on Survey Monkey</li> <li>• 80% Apprentices successfully completing</li> </ul>		

		<p>Apprenticeship Framework – 2 apprentices have completed their apprenticeships this year represents 100% of apprenticeships successfully completed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 85% of staff feel they have access to Training and Development opportunities – Staff Survey 2019 – 81%</li> <li>• 100% of staff have a clear understanding of how to access organisational policies and procedures – Staff Survey 2019 – 86%</li> <li>• Reduction in the average number of days lost due to sickness per employee to 8.5 days (PI) At the end of the financial year 18/19, the average number of days lost was 9.95, this compares to 10.16 days in 17/18 and represents a 2% overall decrease.</li> <li>• 80% of staff satisfied with arrangements for team meetings- Staff Survey 2019 – 80.68%</li> </ul> <p><b>The Board thanked CA and were pleased to note the progress made.</b></p>		
13.	Leap into Learning Briefing	<p>Board members have been given access to the Leap into Learning Module. This is the learning platform used at STAR and there are a wide range of online modules to be completed.</p> <p>There are some mandatory modules such as Data Protection, Equality &amp; Diversity, Cyber Security that Board members will be asked to complete.</p> <p>MS will email the Board regarding usernames and passwords and advised that STAR would be launching the Data Protection module to staff and members shortly.</p> <p><b>The Board noted the update.</b></p>	Email Board Leap into Learning login details	MS

14.	Review of Sheltered Housing	<p>NW joined the meeting to discuss the sheltered housing review with MW. The following points require a decision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To change to name of Sheltered Housing to Independent Living Community</li> <li>• To approve the creation of an Enhanced Independent Living Community at Greenfields Court in Bridgnorth. Board asked if we could consider restricting this to residents with a local connection. The option of providing a higher level of assistance to tenants can also be made available and it is proposed to create an 'Enhanced' Independent Living community at Greenfields court in Bridgnorth with additional staffing being funded by applying a higher level IHM charge to tenants living in that community. MWH advised that we could but would not want to exclude people who need extra help. There were concerns about some of the existing residents that are not on full housing benefit and have different housing needs. NW and MWH explained that all residents would be fully consulted with and supported and would not be pushed out. It was proposed to carry out a period of consultation and look to implement changes from April 2020. This would give a 7 month period to consult with tenants and ensure that everything is in place for a change. MW asked NW/MWH to report back to the Board at the February meeting once the consultations have been conducted.</li> <li>• To approve increases in Intensive Housing Management charges. On average IHM provides about 20 minutes per week. This costs £11 per week and is considerably lower than other providers. The charge for this has not been agreed yet – this will be determined as part of the budget setting process and</li> </ul>	Return to Board with consultation results and agreed charges	MWH/NW/ SO
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		<p>will be worked out by the Finance team in February 2020. The amounts of the increases in IHM charges will be agreed with Revenues and Benefits so that tenants will be entitled to claim in full for the increases in IHM and will not suffer financial hardship as a result.</p> <p><b>The Board approved the following recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Board To change the name of Sheltered Housing to Independent Living community</b></li> <li>• <b>To approve in principle the creation of an Enhanced Independent Living community at Greenfields Court in Bridgnorth</b></li> <li>• <b>To approve in principle increases in Intensive Housing management charges.</b></li> </ul>		
15.	Q1 Budget Monitoring	<p>TD introduced the standard quarterly finance report. These are presented slightly late due to the timing of the Board meeting, and there have been issues in reporting from Business World, the new system.</p> <p>At this stage we are projecting a small surplus of £50,000, however, we will closely monitor this.</p> <p>The Financial Rules have been amended slightly to reflect that SAMIS has been updated to Business Worlds. This was not a major change that needed full Board approval but needs to be noted.</p> <p><b>The Board noted the contents of the report.</b></p>		

16.	Q1 Performance	<p>JOW joined the meeting and looked at those targets that were not within tolerance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A1ii rent loss due to void properties as a % of rent due; as the year's rent roll increases, the % rate improves. Decrease from this time last year (2.42%)</li> <li>• A2iii former tenant arrears as a % of rent due; as the year's rent roll increases the % rate improves.</li> <li>• C1i % of non-decent homes; 37 properties outstanding due to newly arising.</li> <li>• A4iii customers registered to access online services; this is a new target and cannot be benchmarked.</li> <li>• D1i &amp; of complaints responded to on time; this is a new indicator. 17 cases out of 21 were responded to within target time.</li> </ul> <p><b>The Board were pleased with the performance and thanked JOW for the presentation.</b></p>		
17.	Development Subcommittee Minutes	<p>JW summarised the minutes of the recent Development meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baptist Chapel, Shifnal is progressing well. There have been delays with solicitors approving the wayleave that still need to be resolved.</li> <li>• Bowling Green Way is also progressing well and is due to be completed on target.</li> <li>• Weston Rhyn; there are still issues with drainage on site. Currently looking at options and will need to get this signed off by Welsh Water.</li> <li>• SH has fed back to the Council that STAR are very good at small developments and Cornovii, the new Housing Development Company should concentrate on the larger developments and give STAR first option on any smaller sites. SO acknowledged that this has</li> </ul>		

	<p>been a message that we have been trying to put forward for some time and the lack of land supply is an ongoing source of frustration for STAR.</p> <p><b>The Board noted the contents of the minutes.</b></p>		
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**ITEMS 18 – 21 EXEMPT FROM PUBLIC DISCUSSION**