

Minutes of Meeting

Meeting Name: Shropshire Towns & Rural Housing Limited

Meeting Location: Microsoft Teams

Date and Time: 19th May 2020

Members present:

Chair – Simon Harris (Shropshire Council) SH
Emma Jones (Staff) EJ
Mark Jones (Shropshire Council) MJ
Steve Robinson (Independent) SR
James Wood (Independent) JW
Paul Weston (Co-Optee) PW

Vice-Chair – Nicki Barker (Tenant) NB
Ann Maltby (Tenant) AM
Paul Kelly (Shropshire Council) PK
Tony Deakin (independent) TD
Paul Hayward (Co-Optee) PH

**Non-Members
Present:**

Sue Adams (STAR) SA
Melanie Smith (STAR) MS

Steve Ogram (STAR) SO
Jo Williams (STAR) JOW

1.	Protocol for the meeting	<p>SH opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the first virtual STAR Housing Board meeting. SH advised that the protocols had been circulated to help support the smooth running of the Board.</p> <p>SH noted that we have several new members attending their first Board meeting and asked everyone to introduce themselves.</p>		
2.	Apologies	<p>There have been no apologies received although it is noted that Steve Robinson would be joining the meeting at 3pm due to a diary clash with another appointment.</p> <p>Ann Maltby and Tony Deakin have been unable to join the meeting because of IT issues so far but it is hoped they will be able to join at some point.</p>		
3.	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>		
4.	Minutes from STAR Board Meeting 25 th February 2020	<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>		
5.	Matters Arising	<p>There were no matters arising from the previous Board meeting.</p>		
6.	COVID19 Impact and Issues to be Considered	<p>The report looks at the impact of COVID 19 on the business, which has been broken down into different operational impacts, and the issues to be considered moving forward.</p> <p>STAR have still been able to meet compliance performance indicators (PI's) and are at 100% in terms of gas safety. Staff have been working</p>		

		<p>proactively with tenants, even those who are shielding.</p> <p>The majority of staff are working from home or have been redeployed to other areas of the business if they have been unable to carry out their usual roles.</p> <p>The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is relatively stable, we have spent a little bit of extra money but this has been offset by savings such as staff travel so far – however although there has not yet been an impact financially this may change.</p> <p>The report considers issues around recovery planning and we have put in some information about some PI's demonstrating STAR's position compared to others within the sector.</p> <p>JW asked: "What does the 83% decrease in lettings mean in the longer term clearly higher void rates but any statutory issues with Shropshire Council"</p> <p>SA advised there are no statutory issues. Targets are agreed annually with the Council including those in the Management Agreement, but issues are discussed on a quarterly basis. If there are any issues we will work through them and come up with a plan of action or sometimes a variation in the performance target. We have not been able to let many voids in the lockdown so far so this will be the first priority as part of STAR's remobilisation. We may need to suspend the use of Shropshire HomePoint and target those who are in HomePoint's priority group or those who are currently in B&B but need to be moved on in discussion with the Council. Targets will be discussed at the next client meeting.</p> <p>PH asked: "Staff members feeding back to say that needs have not been met e.g. feedback re provision of IT equipment etc. Have display screen equipment self-assessments been carried out in view of the prolonged homeworking".</p>		
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SO assured the Board that self-assessments have been issued. They were initially sent by email to all staff on 19th March with a reminder sent on 15th April. We have circulated links to the HSE website and published guides that show staff how best to set up a work station whilst working from home. We have encouraged staff to take home whatever equipment is needed and there has been a steady flow of staff calling in to offices to pick up items such as chairs and additional screens, and we are more than happy to support this and make arrangements for equipment to be dropped off where needed and if possible.

IT has been sufficient with just one area with a shortfall – our HSO's have been using small tablets which are not suitable and so we have placed an order for 11 new laptops.

PH asked: "Do we know best/ worst case position of COVID re potential income losses and spend. How much of the reserves are available to cover this".

To date we have spent around £5,000 on PPE for frontline staff, however during this same period we have saved over £10,000 in staff travelling expenses so we are not unduly concerned. Our Financial Rules delegate expenditure to the Director of Finance & Resources of up to £25,000 and of up to £50,000 to the Director of Finance & Resources with the Chair of the Board.

STAR's current reserve is £4.8 million and we are confident we can weather this storm.

So has carried out some early modelling and has looked at arrears and void losses, assuming that voids may double for approximately 6 months and then return to normal. We are hoping to make a start on programming in some of this work in coming weeks.

The HRA reserve is at £10m and we have a further £9.5m in capital and so

		<p>we believe the HRA as well is well placed to weather any short medium targets.</p> <p>SH noted that STAR are financially in a very good position.</p> <p>The Board noted the contents of the report and approved the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To approve the collection of Pls in Appendix 1 and for these to be reported at each Board meeting • To use the Considerations developed in 2.4 to develop and implement recovery plans when the ending of the lockdown phase of response to the COVID 19 pandemic is announced. 		
7.	Whistleblowing Policy	<p>The Whistleblowing Policy has been recently reviewed, as there are no legislative changes required, the policy has only had some minor amendments made.</p> <p>TD noted that: “Elsewhere I have seen that the Whistleblowing Policy covers both Employees and Board Members”.</p> <p>SA confirmed that the Policy does indeed relate to both in Section 3.1. However this will be amended slightly to make it more specific at the outset.</p> <p>TD asked: “Noted that in experience reports go to the Audit Committee (to maintain confidentiality and independence from the operational chain of command) and are then only reported to the Board as part of the minutes of that Committee unless there is a major issue that does need to be brought to the Board’s attention. How will this work at STAR”</p> <p>SO confirmed that this is how it works at STAR. The individual circumstances surrounding the case will be considered, however, in a previous instance we commissioned an independent audit report and took the findings to the Finance, Audit & Risk Subcommittee and then reported</p>	Amend Whistleblowing Policy	MS

		<p>back to Board through the minutes of the meeting.</p> <p>The Board approved the Whistleblowing Policy subject to the above amendment.</p>		
8.	Appointments	<p>Following the recruitment of Board Members and some appointments made through the Written Resolution volunteers were sought for the remaining positions on our subcommittees.</p> <p>Volunteers came forward and, as there is positions available for all volunteers, there is no requirement any further selection process.</p> <p>The appointments are:</p> <p>Finance, Audit and Risk Subcommittee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tony Deakin – Chair of FAR subcommittee • (note that Paul Kelly will continue as Vice-Chair) <p>Development Subcommittee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Wood – Chair of Development subcommittee <p>Remuneration Panel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steve Robinson – Chair of the Remuneration Panel • Tony Deakin – Member of the Remuneration Panel • Paul Kelly – Member of the Remuneration Panel • Paul Weston – Member of the Remuneration Panel <p>Health and Safety Representative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emma Jones – Health and Safety Representative of the Board <p>The Board approved the recommendation to appoint the Board Members and co-optees to the subcommittee positions as outlined in the report.</p>		

9.	Remuneration Panel Terms of Reference	<p>The Remuneration Panel was set up in 2016 and the Terms of Reference are reviewed at Board annually.</p> <p>The suggested new Terms of Reference have been circulated and the Board are asked to agree them.</p> <p>The Board approved the reviewed Terms of Reference for the Remuneration Panel. It was noted that EJ was not available for the vote.</p>		
10.	Q4 Performance	<p>JW introduced the Q4 Performance Report, Out of 27 indicators, 6 of those have fallen outside tolerance and we will consider those:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A1i – Average time to Relet Voids (General & Major); Year-end 18/19 performance was 36.68 days. Continuing to review approaches to improve turnaround bearing in mind the impact now of the pandemic. Over 20% of relets received Major Works throughout the year. • A1ii – Rent Loss due to void properties as % of Rent Due; Decrease from this time last year, which finished at 1.72%. This was being addressed and was improving. • A2ii – % of Tenants evicted due to rent arrears; 2 evictions in Bridgnorth & 8 in Oswestry. Year-end total for 18/19 was 6 evictions. Oswestry has a higher proportion because there has been an influx of tenants going in and out of work has had an impact on them getting into issues with arrears. SH noted that he would like to travel to Oswestry when able to meet with members to discuss issues in Oswestry. • .A4i – % of ASB cases resolved successfully; this has come up because of the low numbers of cases. Out of 36 cases, 35 were successfully resolved and the 1 case that wasn't skews the figures. – • A4iii – Customers registered to access online services; this is a new indicator this year and looks at the number of tenants registered on the online portal. On average 20 new tenants a month are signing up to use the portal. It is worth noting that in our last satisfaction survey 50% 		

		<p>of people surveyed felt they did not need to be on the portal as they access services in other ways. NB advised that she has joined the portal. SA noted that the portal does not have as much functionality as some of the other portals available. We have looked at upgrading but there is a cost involved and it is not a priority for our IT projects but is something to consider for the future. SH thought that more people may jump on the portal in the current situation and JOW advised we would potentially see this in the results in Q1.</p> <p>TD noted that the KPI suite needs to be an area of priority for training for new Board Members and added that it would be useful to have an understanding of any consequences or implications of not meeting targets and would like to understand the background to some of the targets. SA confirmed this is certainly something we would be happy to provide and SA will be in touch with members to arrange this.</p> <p>PH asked if there a separate action plan to deal with any performance areas outside of target and if so, where is this reported to?</p> <p>SA advised that action plans are reported as and when we report back on performance and there may be special reports on particular issues, for example, a specific report on voids performance was brought to the previous board meeting for consideration. In relation to our contract with the Council, STAR has quarterly client meetings with the Council discussing performance and look at any issues. If there is a good reason some performance targets may be varied and this is then report to the Asset assurance Board meeting, which is a Council run board that scrutinises STAR Housing.</p> <p>We also have the Annual Action Plan (AAP) that may address improving performance or performance issues that we may want to addresses (however not all of the actions relate to PI's).</p> <p>PW agrees with the need for additional training and is trying to understand</p>	<p>Arrange PI training sessions with Board members</p>	<p>SA</p>
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		<p>why indicator c2 % of residents satisfied with repairs is not included with the exception reporting. JOW advised that some of the satisfaction survey results were distorted at the end of Q4 due to the lockdown and being unable to contact as many tenants and therefore the results were not statistically valid so was not included.</p> <p>PH noted that Q4 Star PI 1. Average number of days sick - unavailable. Issues with new software. We reported in the COVID 19 update 2.1 that sickness levels are lower than average. Which implies that this information is available?</p> <p>MS advised that we were able to easily identify those staff who had had COVID related sickness absences and so we were able to manually calculate this, however, there continue to be issues with reporting sickness from Business World. SA confirmed this is something that has been raised with the Council many times.</p> <p>NB asked JOW to feedback to repairs, bearing in mind how far we have come in terms of where we started, that this is an excellent set of results. JOW thanked NB and agreed to feedback to the team.</p> <p>SH thanked JOW for the report and presentation.</p> <p>The Board noted the contents.</p>	P	ass on positive feedback to Repairs	JOW
11.	Finance, Audit & Risk Subcommittee	<p>PK ran through the minutes of the FAR Subcommittee meeting held on 27.04.20</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Health & Safety report highlighted there had been a lot of work going on around COVID19 and teams had been working hard with tenants and maintaining emergency repairs and only entering properties when needed. At the time of the meeting PPE had been sourced and there was sufficient supply to last around 3 weeks. • Internal Audit reported that all planned work had been completed 			

		<p>and gave STAR a good substantial year end opinion. All completed audits had received a good assurance level with no significant or fundamental measures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Internal Audit plan for 2020/21 • Grant Thornton attended to go through the External Audit plan highlighting areas of risk that had been considered. • Committee work plan was approved <p>TD asked if SO was assured that the Internal Auditors have got the staffing resources to complete the 20/21 programme within the reduced timescales given the impact of COVID19.</p> <p>SO confirmed he had had a conversation with the Audit Manager and is not anticipating having any issues. The audit team will undertake audits remotely where possible. One variable may be if additional risks are identified in light of coronavirus and we may need to add in some additional works.</p> <p>The Board noted the contents of the minutes.</p>		
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