

Minutes of Meeting

Meeting Name: Shropshire Towns & Rural Housing Limited

Meeting Location: Board Room, Spruce Building, Shrewsbury

Date and Time: 21st May 2019 – 2.00pm

Members present:

Chair – Margaret Wright (Independent) MW
Simon Harris (Shropshire Council) SH
Paul Kelly (Shropshire Council) PK
Charlotte Parry (Tenant) CP

Richard Grounds (Independent) RG
Mark Jones (Shropshire Council) MJ
Ann Maltby (Tenant) AM
Emma Jones (Staff) EJ

Non-Members
Present:

Sue Adams (STAR) SA
Melanie Smith (STAR) MS
Sharon Whitechurch (STAR) SW

Steve Ogram (STAR) SO
Chris Moore (STAR) CM
Jo Williams (STAR) JW

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"> • Nicki Barker (Tenant) NB • John Wood (Independent) JW 		
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 26 th February 2019	<p>All members confirmed that the previous minutes had been received and were an accurate reflection of the meeting.</p> <p>MW thanked NB for chairing the Board meeting on 26th February meeting in her absence.</p> <p>MW noted that the wording in Item 16 Options Appraisal needed clarification. It was agreed to amend the minutes and they will be signed at the next Board meeting in July.</p>	Amend wording	MS
4.	Matters Arising	<p>The matters arising from previous Board meetings were circulated for information.</p> <p>One of the matters arising related to the implications of GDPR on the Board. SA and SO have been considering possibilities as to how to deal with this. STAR had initially considered purchasing IT equipment for all members, however, they have also looked at potential IT solutions that will allow some members to continue to use their personal IPads, but access Board papers through a secure app. This will be evaluated over Summer with a view to implementing any changes after</p>		

		<p>the AGM in October. This will likely result in some changes to the way the Board works, and those members currently receiving paper copies of Board papers may need to access the papers online. Any training needs will be identified and training and support given. A paper will be brought to Board in the autumn.</p> <p>It was noted that STAR were successful in bidding for the SUSTAIN contract and a one plus one plus one contract was awarded from 1st April 2019. There is going to be a 14% reduction in funding from 2020 and STAR will need to look at how this may be absorbed. This may need to be managed by reducing the resources being put into the contract.</p> <p>There were no further matters arising.</p>	Add to September Board agenda	SA/SO
5.	Working in Neighbourhoods Strategy	<p>SA introduced the recently reviewed Working in Neighbourhoods Strategy. It was noted that there are no major changes to the Strategy and it is underpinned by STAR's Customer Service Standards.</p> <p>Key areas of the Strategy is neighbourhood management working closely with customers and lease holders and to prevent and reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB). STAR will be shortly rolling out a new ASB system that should make this easier to monitor.</p> <p>Neighbourhood teams have been carrying out lots of work around County Lines, and we were delighted to receive an award for the work carried out in Oswestry. Following this piece of work, West Mercia Police now have a dedicated officer in place.</p> <p>Staff have been working on the Tenancy Agreement and this</p>		

	<p>is currently with Shropshire Council for approval. This has been outstanding for some time. SA is meeting with Mark Barrow tomorrow and will ask if this can be approved asap. There are changes that would help STAR be more efficient in void management, but there are no other issues that affect day to day work.</p> <p>The new Strategy also looks at what checks and audits are in place to ensure that customers are fulfilling their obligations under their current Tenancy Agreements.</p> <p>Estate Management is an ongoing priority as is ensuring communal areas are kept in good order. The Strategy considers ways of looking at parking and traffic management. Income management is another key area.</p> <p>It was noted that resident involvement and engagement has its own strategy.</p> <p>The Strategy has an Action Plan attached outlining the outcomes and activities for the year ahead.</p> <p>Board comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.1; halfway through the paragraph it refers to sample text, which is a formatting error. • 3.5; the policies and procedures listed in this section will need to be revisited once the Tenancy Agreement has been approved and it was agreed that Martin Whitelegg (MWH) would feedback to teams about this. • 8.1; the first outcome has customer satisfaction at an overall rate of 65%, which seems low, particularly when the results of the recent STAR Survey are 	<p>Chase up approval of Tenancy Agreement</p>	SA
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		<p>considered. MW felt this would be more appropriate to be 85%. SA will look into this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9; Grounds maintenance was queried by SH. SO confirmed there are two contractors in place. The bulk of stock and estates under part of Shropshire Council's management, however STAR had tendered a separate service for the sheltered schemes only. SH and AM raised an issue with maintenance at Wilkinson Avenue. There has been no feedback from tenants about this, but we will look into what is happening. It was noted that STAR have signed up to the Take a Stand initiative against domestic abuse that is being run by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH). There will be a set of actions that will stem from this. <p>The Board approved the Working in Neighbourhood Strategy and Action Plan subject to the above amendments.</p>	<p>Look into grounds maintenance at Wilkinson Avenue</p> <p>Feedback activities regarding Take a Stand campaign</p>	<p>SA/MWH</p> <p>MWH</p> <p>MWH</p>
6.	Financial Inclusion Strategy	<p>Chris Moore joined the meeting and introduced himself as STAR's Financial Inclusion Officer.</p> <p>The Financial Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan have been updated for 2019/20.</p> <p>The Strategy has slight revisions and the principles of the Strategy remain the same. The Strategy's main aims are to maximise customer income, address debts, savings, maximise digital support and supporting our customers into work. We aim to support customers to improve their financial resilience.</p> <p>MW noted what good and important work is being done in</p>		

		<p>financial inclusion and thanked CM and his team.</p> <p>The Board approved the Financial Inclusion Strategy 2019/20 and Action Plan.</p>		
7.	Supplementary Estimate – Customer Insight Officer	<p>SO introduced the report that seeks one off funding of transactional customer satisfaction surveys, and this builds on the biennial STAR Survey.</p> <p>The STAR Survey is commissioned every two years and provides a good benchmark, but it is imperative to undertake ongoing satisfaction surveys throughout the course of the year to help STAR tackle any immediate issues that arise.</p> <p>STAR have found the best approach with customers is direct contact, primarily by telephone. This is currently picked up by staff as an addition to their day-to-day duties and is quite resource intensive.</p> <p>The Senior Management Team have considered alternative options and have found that the preferred and recommended solution is to appoint a temporary member of staff to carry out satisfaction surveys and then correlate the information.</p> <p>This is funded from usable reserves and is entirely affordable. It is suggested to advertise a fixed term post for 12 months and monitor how this works.</p> <p>SH noted this was a good idea, and makes the STAR survey results even stronger whilst providing STAR with up to date information.</p> <p>The Board approved the supplementary estimate of £11,500 for a Customer Insight Officer.</p>		

8.	Universal Credit Update	<p>Chris Moore provided an overview of the situation relating to Universal Credit (UC) and Welfare Reform.</p> <p>The presentation highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of tenants affected by UC. • Measures put in place by STAR to mitigate the effects of UC. • STAR's Trusted Partner Status. • Potential changes to UC and the potential effect on tenants. • Impacts for tenants receiving UC. <p>CM noted that UC is still a relatively unknown entity, however, we should have a clearer picture after a further 12 month period.</p> <p>STAR has an action group that includes staff from financial inclusion, housing support and income management. Any issues are escalated to the DWP – STAR has a Liaison Manager and a very strong relationship with the DWP.</p> <p>One of the biggest challenges with UC has been the change to a completely digital system. CM noted that the team are very proficient in using the system and have been able to assist tenants experiencing difficulties in doing this.</p> <p>Budgeting has also been a challenge for some tenants now that they receive one lump sum, but the team have been supporting tenants in managing this and identifying their priority commitments.</p> <p>MW thanked CM for his update and wanted to relay thanks to the Financial Inclusion team for their good work in this area.</p>		
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		The Board noted the contents of the presentation. Slides are available to view via the STAR intranet.		
9.	Area Panel Annual Review	<p>Sharon Whitechurch joined the meeting to provide an overview of what the Area Panels have been working on over the past year. The presentation highlighted the following key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment; recruitment of new panel members is a priority area over the forthcoming year. Membership numbers have decreased over recent years and the Resident Involvement team are working with the panels to consider new ways of engaging with tenants. • Scrutiny; the panel had previously looked at the Repairs and Maintenance service and made a series of recommendations to be considered to help improve this service. The Panel scrutinising the kitchen and bathroom replacement programmes next as this is an area of high interest for our tenants. • The Panels Code of Conduct and Constitution will be reviewed and brought up to date. Would ideally like one of the tenant board members to attend a future panel meeting to consider this if possible. • Carry out a review of the customer handbook. • Self-assessment; ask the panel to look at what went well and if there are changes they would like to see going forward. • Community Chest; both panels now receive and review all of the applications received. <p>MW noted that the work of the panels is very encouraging and the Board understands the difficulty in recruiting more involved tenants.</p>	Tenant board member to attend panel meeting if possible	SW/NB/AM/CP

		<p>SW advised that the skip days are used to target those interested tenants and tenants are also asked on sign-up.</p> <p>EJ thought that the sign-up may not be the best opportunity to try and engage new tenants, but could pick up those tenants at the 4 - 6 week follow up visit. EJ suggested the Resident Involvement team design an eye catching leaflet or card highlight what resident involvement is or can be.</p> <p>SW noted that social media is more widely used and we are targeting the tenants that use this method of engagement.</p> <p>MW suggested that the Customer Insight Officer could be prompted to ask tenants about involvement.</p> <p>The Board thanked SW for the presentation and noted the content of the presentation. Slides are available to view via the STAR Intranet.</p>	<p>Develop materials to promote the Area Panel and review when it would be best to introduce new tenants to involvement opportunities and whether customer insight officer could also offer opportunities.</p>	SW / MWH
10.	Year End Performance	<p>JOW joined the meeting and introduced the year-end performance reports, with a focus on any items in the Management Agreement report that did not achieve target and were not within tolerance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average relet times; a number of properties were brought back into use after feasibility studies and those utilised by the Housing Options team, which affected the year end figure of 28 days against a target of 20 days. It was noted that some stock at Willow Gate, Oswestry had also impacted on this figure. The designation status of some of the upper floor flats were changed from sheltered to general needs as these had been difficult to let. SA advised the Board, that whilst 		

	<p>this is an important target, STAR are here to provide a service for the Council – currently approximately 1% of stock is utilised by the Housing Options team at the Council and this adversely impacts on the target but it helps achieve their responsibilities. JOW advised that the year-end position of 28 days has significantly improved 6 weeks into the new financial year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenancies terminated as a % of properties managed; target 8, actual 8.55%. Termination numbers have declined this year – there was some impact from tenants leaving to go to new build properties with other providers in our traditional areas. • No of properties with a SAP score of 35 or less; We do not have a score for 13 properties, but it is less than 35. 12 of those are tenant refusals. The last one is a listed building – not obliged to carry out EPCS – this has now been improved. We are considering incentives to have work done, perhaps to move. • Number of new homes completed; 20 currently under construction. There has been a slight delay due to drainage issues, but the two schemes at the Baptist Chapel and Bowling Green Way are on track to be completed in July and November respectively. It was realised during the course of the year that we would not achieve the new build target. Therefore we have actively sought to purchase properties on the open market and have purchased 6 properties in the course of the financial year which mitigated our right to buy. We will seek to get the KPI revised to include this in the future. <p>MW thanked JOW for the update and reminded the board that this is an exception report and focuses only on those targets</p>		
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		<p>not being achieved, but noted there are many targets being met or exceeded. SO confirmed that he is currently finalising the Directors Report for the external auditors. The report gives an overview of performance over the year and out of the 24 management agreement KPI's, 18 have achieved or exceeded target, 2 were within tolerance and 4, as mentioned above, fell outside tolerance.</p> <p>The Board thanked JOW for the presentation and noted the contents of the report.</p>		
11.	Finance, Audit & Risk Subcommittee Minutes	<p>SO outlined the minutes of the FAR Subcommittee meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both the internal and external audit teams attended. • Health & Safety is a standing item and there were no major incidents to report. There was one accident that happened in December 2018 but was not reported until February 2019. Angela Douglas has continuously reminded staff of the importance of timely reporting. The Council's new Business World system has an option for online reporting of accidents which will help. • Ceri Pilawski from Internal Audit presented a report for regarding audits in the last financial year. Of the 9 undertaken, 3 achieved a reasonable assurance and 6 achieved a good assurance level (highest level). Ceri gave a positive opinion of the company's controls. • The internal audit plan for the next year was approved. • Grant Thornton went through their risk assessment and audit plans. They are due on site shortly. <p>The Board thanked SO and noted the contents of the minutes.</p>		

ITEMS 12 – 14 EXEMPT FROM PUBLIC DISCUSSION