

Minutes of Meeting

Meeting Name: Shropshire Towns & Rural Housing Limited

Meeting Location: Shrewsbury Town Football Club

Date and Time: Tuesday 24th May 2022
14.00 - 17.00

Members present: Chair – Tony Deakin (Independent) TDk
James Willocks (Shropshire Council) JWI
Emma Jones (STAR) EJ
Yordan Tolev (Tenant) YT

Steve Robinson (Independent) SR
Paul Hayward (Co-Optee) PH
Paul Weston (Co-Optee) PW

Non-Members Present: Sue Adams (STAR) SA
Ayyaz Ahmed (STAR) AA
Jo Williams (STAR) JoW
Lucy Heath (Shropshire Council) LH
Jane Trethewey (Shropshire Council) JT

Steve Ogram (STAR) SO
Angela Simpson (STAR) AS
Mandy Pullen (STAR) MP
Dean Carroll (Shropshire Council) DC
Lezley Picton (Shropshire Council) LP

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| 1. | Apologies | <p>TDk welcomed everyone to the STAR Housing Board meeting, including the welcoming of LP and DC. The Board agreed to discuss Item 15 (Management Agreement) earlier on the schedule so that they may be present for this discussion.</p> <p>Apologies were received from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Val Jones (Tenant) VJ • James Wood (Independent) JW • Mark Jones (Shropshire Council) MJ | | |
| 2. | Declaration of Interests | <p>TDk asked the Board if they have any interests to declare on any items on the agenda.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No interests declared | | |
| 3. | Minutes from STAR Board Meeting 22 nd February 2022 | <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 electronically signed and placed in the minute book.</p> | | |
| 4. | Matters Arising | <p>The matters arising had been circulated for information.</p> <p>He has a concern about the development committee having enough numbers present, to help remedy this he has offered to be a reserve for the meetings. However he has noted that we may need to consider adding another co-optee, someone with development experience. Board agreed.</p> <p>SA updated Board on Item 12. This will be commented on today with AS here to update the Board.</p> <p>PW queried comment that STAR Housing has retained and realigned to meet objectives of the Council- what does this mean? SA notes the forthcoming business plan and the importance of it aligning with the Council's objectives. In the new business planning phase, we need to be aware exactly of what the Council wants to do and in turn make sure our business plan aligns with this in order to meet their needs.</p> | Recruit a co-optee | MD / Claire Allen |

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| | | There were no further matters arising. | | |
| <i>(point 15 Management Agreement Term Review discussed at this point as Board agreed for LP and DC to be present)</i> | | | | |
| 5. | Board Governance Review 2022 | <p>SA noted this is a further report on the work arising from the external review by BDA and internal audit report on the new NHF Code of Governance.</p> <p>In discussion of the recommendations regarding the Code of Conduct there needs to be a specific reference to suspension of Board Members when investigating misconduct. STAR's legal advisers Anthony Collins said that this is not in the Constitution; hence the recommendation for requesting the Council to amend the Constitution accordingly. JT advised that happy for this to be amended.</p> <p>Revisions were made to the statement of obligations and guidance notes that align to the code.</p> <p>Retirement from Board is currently by rotation. The rotation system currently means Board members may need to step down even if they have not finished their term which seems unfair. It has been verified by Anthony Collins that we can move to a straight fixed term approach.</p> <p>TDk notes that quite a few of the current Board members were appointed at the same time which could cause an issue with a fixed term system. However, the Regulator is looking for Boards to have succession planning- it would be worth looking at fixed terms that are linked to a succession plan.</p> <p>SA mentioned the previous suggestion to add further co-opted members. However, we have had few members who have gone a full term so there seems little evidence that rotation is needed.</p> <p>PW queried as a co-optee whether or not these years count towards the total if he becomes a full Board member. TDk noted that if someone come in through co-opted ranks and then goes onto full membership, legal advice is that in terms of the code, as soon as someone becomes a co-optee it counts toward their term.</p> | | |

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| | | <p>JT advised that she would be happy to see this amended from rotation to fixed terms.</p> <p>The Board approved the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To approve the consolidated Board Action Plan at Appendix 1. • To approve the revised Board Code of Conduct at Appendix 2. • To consider whether the Board wishes to include a specific reference to suspension of Board Members when investigating misconduct and request the Council to amend the Constitution accordingly and then to consider subsequent revisions to the Policy at the November Board meeting. • To review and simplify the Investigation process outlined in the Policy and to be presented to the November Board meeting. • To revise the Statement of Obligations, Declaration of Interests and the Board Meeting Guidance Notes in line with changes in the Code. • To approve the revised Board Recruitment, Selection, and Performance Assessment of Board Members • To consider whether the Board wishes to move to retirement by fixed terms rather than by rotation and to request the Council to amend the Constitution accordingly. • To consider a Board Succession Plan at the Board meeting in November as part of the Annual Review of Board Effectiveness. • To revise the Disqualification Criteria in line with the Policy | | |
| 6. | EDI Strategy | <p>AA reported that the previous strategy is largely fit for purpose and that the main amendments are to the Action Plan and mainly relates to activity to better understand our customer.</p> <p>TDK queried if we have had advice from consultants in regards to best practice. AA confirmed we have had advice from the Board Development Agency.</p> | | |

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| | | <p>SR queried how to create the right culture around EDI as we work in a community of a largely white population. AA responded that we still have customers of many different heritages including refugees. We as a company need to better understand who our customers are and all their needs, segment what the population make up is. In turn we need to understand our staff population and ensure they can understand and respond to those needs.</p> <p>In terms of building a culture there are things that will come out of this process of what we need to deliver, for example there is a community in Oswestry who we need to know how to engage with based on language / cultural differences. We may consider whether we create a customer focus group to talk with these specific areas/communities? AA advised that we do not have all of the answers at this point, but it is looking at the population census, and feedback from staff as to how we can build that.</p> <p>AS noted as an example she has been tasked with getting women trade staff. This is incredibly difficult to achieve. Examples of action are that she will be attending an event for women in construction in Shrewsbury in a few weeks and is excited by this prospect. We will work hard to get women encouraged to look at male dominated roles. She sees this as an opportunity to encourage women to look into this area of work and notes that STAR has a number of women in traditionally male led roles who are great role models.</p> <p>SA mentioned one of the things we will be implementing soon is customer service training to reflect the individual needs of clients rather than one size fits all, meet individual people's needs, delivering tailored services to individuals which can be imbedded into our practice. SA mentioned an example where we had to change the building to meet customers' ability to manage their property and not always seek to change customer behaviour especially if due to illness or age.</p> <p>JW replied that it is important to look at it through a customer lens and the diverse communities that they live in. He agrees with the idea of focusing on the client as an ideal.</p> | | |
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| | | <p>LP noted if you have a balanced decision maker you have a balanced decision. Also, age is something to consider- age, ethnicity and gender. This all starts at the top, if you can show it at the top it's much easier for it to filter down the organisation.</p> <p>TDk replied that showcasing good role models is also helpful and he thinks we do not do enough to publicise what we've achieved already.</p> <p>The Board noted the contents of the report and approved the revised Equality and Diversity Strategy and Action Plan.</p> | | |
| 7. | Disturbance and Decant Policy | <p>AA noted this outlined STAR's approach to clients that are required to leave their homes (for reasons such as major repairs or disposal of properties) and noted that the statutory payment will be increased to £7100. Fairfield Close is an example of a currently running disposal of units project which will result in decant and disturbance payments to the tenants. AA is asking the Board to approve this policy and noting this will affect the Fairfield Close payments.</p> <p>The Board noted the contents of the report and approved the updated Decant and Disturbance Policy for STAR Housing for 2022 (attached Appendix 1).</p> | | |
| 8. | Asset Management Strategy | <p>AS noted we are waiting to see where we are going with the Decent Home Standard and the detailed guidance on the Building Safety Act. We will have to come back to this and revise as various legislation, standards and guidance comes out.</p> <p>AS mentioned that we may spend a lot of money on properties for them to then become Right to Buy. We need to consider how best to protect our assets and investments as part of that strategy.</p> <p>SA reiterated the Asset Management Strategy is still an interim document as we are still waiting on the consultation on the new Decent Homes Standard. NFA have been in discussion about this but it all seems a bit random what is proposed that will be added to the standard. The NFA have advised that there will be a survey about the HRA and its sustainability in light of some of the demands that have been made. This question has not yet been answered so it makes updates difficult, as we are</p> | | |

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| | | <p>working a bit in the dark as to what our ambitions are, or how to meet those ambitions.</p> <p>AS and SA recently met with Rt Hon Philip Dunn MP and Mike Price (Project Manager). We advised of the impact of Right To Buy on our investment decisions. Our current focus is on compliance to current standards and acquisitions and new build as we currently do not know all of the new obligations.</p> <p>SA notes that in some instances we are ahead of the curve, for example we already install carbon monoxide monitors that will shortly become a requirement.</p> <p>AS notes there are obligations around net zero, however we are still working towards how we will meet these obligations as there is limited funding available. SA advised we dip into funding if available such as the Social Housing Decarbonisation Funding that we have recently accessed.</p> <p>TDk asked in an overview of strategy options, what are the different choices given the current options? AS noted we had advice from the Bratch consultancy. They could attend a future meeting for an update. JT would welcome a sense from us of the options we've been considering and how this fits in relation to the strategy.</p> <p>LP mentioned that in her experience houses being voluntarily sold off is her biggest member's complaint. AS replied that for reassurance we voluntarily sell very few properties. Riverside was sold as it wasn't appropriate social housing and had other large issues with flooding.</p> <p>The Board noted the contents of the report and approved the Asset Management Strategy (appendix 1).</p> | <p>Organise a presentation from Bratch at a future Board meeting.</p> | <p>AS</p> |
| 9. | Contract Procedure Rules | <p>SO notes the original Contract Procedure Rules was drafted in 2013 and was revised a few times with the last update in 2017. The current update has made changes to reflect the UK departure from EU. The Government has now placed reliance on the Public Contracts 2015 as an interim measure. We have spoken to the Council's procurement team -the rules have been fit for purpose but now needed updating.</p> | | |

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| | | The Board noted the contents of the report and approved the Contract Procedure Rules May 2022 attached as Appendix 1. | | |
| 10. | Review of Responsive Repairs | <p>AS talked through a presentation. This is attached to the minutes.</p> <p>SR asks what the challenges Responsive Repairs faces are. AS replied that recruitment following the restructure and getting the right Repairs Team Leaders in posts. However, they are now in post and ready to go.</p> <p>Training for them includes Thursday meetings each week with the planners to discuss resources. SA noted we also have the Competent Managers Training Program in addition to what AS is doing which features a number of different courses that are required by managers in all different areas of the business.</p> <p>PH adds he doesn't have a feel for what tenants themselves would say in terms of repairs- how are we measuring this going forward? AS replied that we do customer surveys for satisfaction which we regularly monitor. However currently we do not get a large proportion of replies plus some confusion about how the survey questions are set out. YT confirmed this seems very confusing. AS notes we are working with tenants to get the wording right.</p> <p>TDk has questions over the systems we use and links to what PH was saying in regards to the customer earlier. To give the Board assurance on how service is in operation, it would be good to have a session booked between the Board and AS's team (MP and ST) to further discuss this topic.</p> <p>The Board noted the presentation.</p> | <p>Have a meeting with Board, AS team (ST and MP) with the Board- to be scheduled for informal session before start of next Board meeting.</p> | <p>AS / ST / MP</p> |
| 11. | Update on Sustainability Strategy | <p>AS notes in regards to recruitment for a Sustainability Officer we have advertised the post with limited success- no applicants had the correct qualifications or experience so we are still in the recruitment phase.</p> <p>To support projects we have therefore approached a consultant to act as project manager for the Social Housing Decarbonisation Scheme as this needs to get on site as grant funding must be completed by march 2023.</p> | | |

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| | | <p>We are also putting in additional administration support to review our EPC records.</p> <p>Environmental works have been carried out via the ground maintenance team. We have been working with Shropshire Council as a part of the Queen's Canopy project and have planted 32 larger native trees. Our mantra is "right tree, right place".</p> <p>AS noted key issues with damp and mould- as energy prices are going up there is a potential for damp and mould becoming more prominent. Line managers in all customer facing teams have been asked to remind their teams if they see any issues to feed them back to action.</p> <p>We can seek advice and involve the financial inclusion team if it's not something related to us- this is for the health and wellbeing of our tenants plus avoidance of additional work for STAR teams if a disrepair comes in.</p> <p>YT queries is there a chance for people to send in photos of repairs needed? Sometimes it can be difficult to explain the issue that needs a repair, but if the tenant can send in photos via apps like Whatsapp this may be a good, easier option for tenants.</p> <p>AS advised tenants can submit photos via the website but it is worth looking into other forms of submission such as Whatsapp and will follow that up.</p> | <p>Look into other apps for submitting repairs photos</p> | <p>AS</p> |
| 12. | Review of Dealing with Domestic Abuse | <p>AA talked through a presentation. This is attached to the minutes.</p> <p>AA believes we need to separate our ASB and Domestic Abuse policies.</p> <p>A successful growth bid will fund campaigning for the next 2-3 years in regards to the White Ribbon project.</p> <p>JW asks in our view, when do clients become a victim or perpetrator? AA replied there is a set criteria and generally it is dealt with as an ASB. At the point of report is when we consider them under these terms.</p> <p>EJ notes we've had two cases- it has to be recognised so much of domestic violence is behind closed doors and is hidden. The White Ribbon project will help with this but we may need to do awareness training with our staff. A possible remedy to</p> | <p>Separate ASB and Domestic Abuse policies</p> <p>Develop training following development</p> | <p>AA</p> <p>AA</p> |

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| | | <p>abuse is re-housing the perpetrator but hard to see as a positive action. However the view that it may help the victim and their family is the best way to look at this.</p> <p>AS does note that legally if people are removed from a tenancy, we must have some type of police report or legal documentation to do so.</p> <p>SR queries how well do different agencies (police, children services etc.) share relevant information of this nature? How do we achieve a robust approach to this that stops further issues down the line? SR notes very little money is spent on preventing issues such as this, whereas large sums are spent on the after effects. He highlights the example of children in care vs prior to care.</p> <p>AA mentioned that in terms of local contact, a very experienced officer at Connexus has now been appointed to Shropshire Council as the Domestic Abuse Coordinator. This will help the Council in developing and coordinating action across Shropshire and we will play our part in that. The Sustain contract supports victims and perpetrators</p> <p>The Board noted the presentation.</p> | <p>of ASB and Domestic Abuse Policies</p> <p>Work with Shropshire Council to develop a co-ordinated approach to Domestic Abuse</p> | AA |
| 13. | Q4 Performance 2021/22 | <p>JoW joined the meeting to discuss the Q4 performance results and reported on those targets that have not been met. This included a presentation which is attached to the minutes.</p> <p>Programed repairs: We are hoping to meet target by Q1. AS noted we have employed a contractor and are looking at using them on items like fencing to assist with catching up on targets.</p> <p>ASB: JW notes a decrease in cases, with 38 cases last year. Three unsuccessfully resolved- one is still on-going, others unable to contact tenants who have moved.</p> <p>TDk asked what these percentages mean in regards to some of the figures with low numbers. There is a general decline in performance across all businesses due to Covid, how does our performance compare to others? He worries over the context of stats versus amount of data actually involved.</p> | | |

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| | | <p>SA notes issues around repairs due to backlog from Covid with problems such as getting materials and staff. Generally across the board there are some issues but what we've found is that we've just about got on top of this now and performance is starting to improve. We've looked at the backlog and identified issues that would have been seen earlier without Covid but are now being dealt with.</p> <p>TDk asked about the number of indicators. JoW noted TDk's point over the sheer number of Pl's we have to look at. SA advised that Pls set through discussion that we have with LH and the Council as a part of setting measures for the end of this year. In terms of visibility with the regulator, it may be best to focus on the TSMs rather than reporting on lots of other measures. We need to be able to show we're managing the business effectively.</p> <p>TDk notes at the end of the day you want to be able to compare against others. SA agrees, especially for the regulator. Historically we have performed very well compared to others (ALMOs and England in general). The fact we are with a benchmarking group has helped to drive our performance- those who haven't will have much more to worry about than we do.</p> <p>Discussion about some of the performance issues. SA noted that we had the first 12 months of Covid and saw the end of that year's figures which were still good, then the second year of Covid naturally saw more issues. PH said that he cannot see if we have the same amount of repairs from year 1 to 2.</p> <p>AS explained that issues arose not so much in volume but other issues such as problems not being reported to us initially, not having the resources to be able to do the repairs, and recruitment issues where everyone's struggling to get staff. She notes companies resorting to poaching other companies' staff with the benefit of higher salary.</p> <p>TDk mentioned he would like to be able to compare it from year to year via a dashboard to be discussed at Board. AS agrees this may be an idea to put this together for the meeting discussed between the Board and AS's team in order to review the data a bit more clearly.</p> <p>PH notes arrears performance has been very good.</p> | <p>Create a dashboard to compare year to year data (to be discussed at pre-Board meeting above)</p> | <p>AS</p> |
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| | | <p>SA notes a perception survey can cost up to 15k per survey and is recommended annually. We are working with Voicescape to see if we can update this more frequently in a better way and this will then feed into TSMs requirements.</p> <p>LH notes it is a piece of work for us to do. She suggests to look at what is presented to the AAB to get a better view of the detail.</p> <p>The Board noted the contents of the report and presentation.</p> | | |
| 14. | FAR Subcommittee (21.04.2022) | <p>EJ gave an update on the recent FAR Subcommittee meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H&S policy reviewed • Discussed TRADA qualifications • Usage of solo protect- quite low, AS has done quite a bit of work on trying to get staff to use this and usage improving. AS notes first of June RTL will get reports. • Internal audit came back well, 100% • Internal audit plan approved • External audit plan approved <p>SO noted the external audit is due to start towards the end of this week. We are still in discussion about the going concern. Auditors have had links to press releases but this is still an ongoing item. LH was in a conversation with them but they may still comment on this in the accounts.</p> <p>The Board noted the contents of the minutes.</p> | | |