

Meeting	Customer Services Subcommittee	 Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing
Date	Monday 8 September 2025	
Time	10.00am – 12.00pm	
Location	Teams	

Core Members:

Paul Hayward (PH)	Board Member & Chair
Irina Wood (IW)	Board Member
Lynn Fonseca (LF)	Tenant Board Member
Richard Amos	Tenant Board Member
Ros Jones (RJ)	Corporate Director
James Wood (JW)	Operations Director
Mitch Allan (MA)	Assistant Director of Homes
Nicky Richardson (NR)	Scrutiny Panel Chair
Joanna Grivell (JG)	Executive Assistant and Minute Taker

Apologies:

Rebecca Willmott (RW)	Tenant Board Member
Jenny Daisley (JD)	Strategic Housing and Commissioning Manager (Shropshire Council)

Presenters:

Kasim Riaz	Head of Housing
Gemma Griffiths	Finance Consultant
Emma Jones	Customer Engagement Manager

Item No.	Agenda Item	Who	When
<u>1.</u>	Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest		
	<p>PH welcomed everyone to the meeting and declared the meeting quorate. Attendees introduced themselves as there were a few new members to the committee. There were no declarations of interest.</p> <p>Jenny Daisley sent apologies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PH raised that when compiling future agendas, the items should be correctly marked as to whether they are for discussion or decision. If they can be recorded correctly as approval items and to ensure that there are items for approval too. HQN picked this up the paper in an audit. There are three agenda items where there have not been any papers provided. Customer Insight Engagement, Neighbourhood Management and Complaints Annual Strategy Submissions which was noted for approval paper. RJ advised that the Complaints documents were in draft format, and they required further work so we will need to take those straight through to the Board. It is regrettable but is a symptom of our staffing problems. JW gave a bit of context to the Committee. JW joined on 1 February and on that day the AD of Assets unfortunately went on long term sick leave. At that point MA stepped into the role of 		

	<p>Assets and RP stepped into the role of AD of Homes. The main function of her role is around Customer and Community and unfortunately RP is also out of the business. JW apologised for the lack of the reports and said it is a symptom of a small organisation we don't have a huge number of resources in the background.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no excuse for not providing them, but we have had several challenges on the ground. The team will be moving back to the original structure. • Action 32: Any missing reports Customer Insight Engagement and Neighbourhood management will be circulated to the committee virtually by the end of September. 	JW	30/9/2025
<u>2.</u>	<u>Minutes of Last Meeting & Matters Arising</u>		
	<p>Minutes of the last meeting were approved as being a good reflection of the meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action 12: A number of items still outstanding on the tracker. The Contact centre action relating to data has been on there since November 2024. The technology in the call centre is not fit for purpose. This is being addressed by an external consultant. The results will be brought to the next Committee. PH stated it should remain open on the tracker until it is resolved. Action Ongoing. • PH said the action tracker needs to be reviewed again. There are some actions that have been open for some time. • Action 17: PH highlighted that aides and adaptations was meant to be included in the performance report, but it wasn't. JW said that he needs to bring a report back to the committee on what the new process is. We have referred back a lot to the local Council which has led to delay. Action Ongoing. • RA asked what the timeframes are? JW said it is difficult to provide as there is such a range, a ramp might be done within a few weeks, they might extensions or structural walls and they can take months. It comes down to individual circumstances. MA said the Council does not visit when they make their recommendations it is off a telephone conversation so when STAR goes out the recommendations won't work which is leading to delays. 		
<u>3.</u>	<u>Operational Performance Review</u>		
	<p>Report for 25/26 presented by RJ for noting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report is as at Period 3, end of Quarter 1. There are new management agreement targets set for 2025/2026, and they now align with upper quartile benchmarking. They are higher targets. The targets that are not in the management agreement anymore have been moved to operational targets. • Voids are not performing well – due to some changes in operational practices. We were uncomfortable with some of our contractors, so we now have enhanced compliance checks which leads to a delay. It takes around 24 days. If we do find asbestos it goes to a laboratory which is out of our control. We are trying to reprocure but there are very few laboratories in the country. We have also had to reprocure for the main contractor for voids as I was 		

	<p>uncomfortable with the working practices. The numbers are now coming down. We should be a sector leader. We are setting a target that completion for compliance checks we move 14 days for minors and 28 days for majors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints are slightly better now than it is shown in the table. We have clarified with HQN how we calculate timescales. Initially we were calculating our response times from the date the complaint came in rather than the date it was acknowledged and that has improved the metrics. We only have one Stage 1 and one Stage 2 out of target. The turnaround is usually within a couple of days not the 5 days. • Property Standards non decent homes metric always looks bad at this time of year, because as we start a new year all of the component dates are flagged as out of date but will be recovered by year end. • Compliance the number of properties with an out-of-date fire risk assessment is down. We have a fire risk assessment on all properties and are aware of the risk in all our blocks. The way the FRA have been done by our contractor is to bulk them together, so we have a peak in July and August. We are in the process of smoothing those out. • Repairs have been impacted by the new system, One Housing coming in. It has impacted appointment attendance and timeliness. We would expect a disruption with such a major new system upgrade and do have plans to improve that. • We have added in targets to the operational metrics which was a recommendation from this committee. • It is a mixed bag of performance. <p>Questions/Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action 33: PH said it would be helpful if we could see the most recent position, i.e. the July position. He said it would also be helpful to know the results against the previous year's figures. RJ said will do what they can to make sure have got the most up to date pack. • Action 34: PH said that on the Operational metrics for the contact centre we need to be clear on the abandonment target. We need to understand where the figure of 8% comes from. It still seems high, and it would be good to see how you have benchmarked the figure. • Action 35: PH asked to have a look at the arrears targets as they don't look right. Can someone revise them, so we are sure they are telling the story they need to. 		
4.	<u>Customer Insight & Engagement Update</u>	RJ	8/12/2025
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report was not included and will be covered in the next meeting. 	JW	8/12/2025
5.	<u>Operational Risk Register</u>	RJ	8/12/2025
	<p>JW took the report as read and asked for questions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PH highlighted the recruitment risk and asked what STAR is doing to mitigate it. JW said he doesn't believe there is a major recruitment issue. The challenge that STAR has is being a small 		

	<p>team it has an impact when someone is off sick. We have had some natural leavers, and we have accepted their leaving and have been more than happy to re-recruit. Recruitment is not leading to any operational challenges. STAR is working very hard on its culture and have set up an environment that when we do recruit, we recruit the right people, and we put all the steps in place to retain the talent. The challenge is that people are not minded to stay in organisations as long as they once did. PH said he feels the 4 score is fine for the risk on recruitment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RA asked if it is worth an investment in succession planning. JW replied that grow your own and nurturing talent is key, for example contact centre staff are trained and then can move to their preferred post, and we have allocated a number of training roles within operations, apprentice level roles to grow our own talent. It is quite difficult because a couple of apprentices are equivalent to a full-time role. RA also highlighted risk number 8 on damp and mould and asked what the approach is to get a handle on that. JW said a paper went to the FAR committee on Awaab's law which outlined our approach to improving service and the timelines that will be in place as of October and am confident that we have got the right staff in place to respond. IW asked what incentives there is to retain staff. JW stated that the biggest incentive is the pension scheme. There are car schemes too. He added we are trying to build the culture that has the right behaviours and ethos so that colleagues are happy in the workplace. The new office environment is helping and having a big impact on staff morale. There is more we can do on benefits that come as part of being an employee. PH asked if there have been any risks that have come out since the operational risk review in June 2025. JW said the only one that might need to be thought about as a Strategic risk is the introduction of Awaab's Law. It is not because there is a major concern around compliance of damp and mould but the whole sector is in an unknown place, a reporting time scale that we have never seen before. It is difficult to offer assurance on something we have never seen before. We have been working on this for a long period of time so that our lead into the change, we have spent a lot of time triaging damp and mould cases that are coming in. It is the unknown nature of it. RJ said that we are seeing a shift in the risk profile in the sector and also for STAR where we have a couple of serious incidents. It will be recommended to the Board to have the focused session. This session is planned for 7 November. 		
<u>6.</u>	<p><u>Neighbourhood Management Report</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was no report due to staff sickness. It was agreed to send through by the end of September. Update 13 October: JW contacted PH to advise that several key team members who were responsible for this reporting did not return to work as expected, which significantly impacted our ability to maintain continuity. He stated, "As of 1st October, I have appointed a new Head of Housing and implemented a restructure 		

	<p>within the Operations Department. This has been a necessary step to ensure we now have a stable and fit-for-purpose platform to operate from. The interim period has been challenging, with resources stretched to cover all bases. Given the extent of the changes, I do not believe it would be a productive use of time to ask individuals who were not in post to retrospectively complete reports. Accuracy would likely be compromised, and I would prefer that colleagues focus their efforts on current business operations.</p> <p>All members of my senior management team are now fully briefed on expectations regarding future reporting. I am confident that this issue will not recur and that reporting will be more robust and timely going forward.”</p> <p>Linked to Action 32: PH asked that the Committee members are advised that the reports will not be circulated as agreed and a full update will be provided for the next meeting.</p>	JW	30/10/2025
<u>7.</u>	<u>Complaints Annual Statutory Submissions for Approval</u>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will be part of the STAR Board pack for discussion on 15 September. 		
<u>8</u>	<u>Big Check In Feedback</u>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RJ said that the event in July was a resounding success. The report provides full details. • The main objectives were to engage with our customers and improve the completeness of our data and raise awareness of our new customer portal. • We met with 50% of our customers through the exercise. There are a lot of records that we were able to update. We had 332 new signups on the customer portal which is more than double on the previous portal. • Staff feedback was also great; we paired up back-office people and with frontline staff which was hugely positive in terms of collaboration and starting to understand how the business works. It was really valuable for the back office. • We would like to make it an annual event. The major cost is the staff out of the business, but the benefits outweigh that. <p><u>Questions and Answers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RA said huge congratulations on the exercise. On reflection were there any surprises that came out of it. RJ said she was surprised at the level of engagement from the staff and how positive the team were and how they responded to everything that happened on the day. The major learning was the positive impact on the staff and what they have taken away from it. • RJ said we were worried that there would be a huge number of repairs reported to the staff, but we did not have that many and there was some floating staff on call to pick up emergency reports. 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JW said we were surprised at the comments about the condition of the homes. Tenants were really pleased to see us. He added that he was able to have lunch with staff at the community rooms and it was great for staff to share experiences. It really was a great event. • RA said it is good to hear that you are considering making it an annual event. Are there any plans in the pipeline to build on the momentum? JW said the aspiration is to have the regular check ins, but it might be something slightly different next year but still focused on engaging with the tenant. RJ said we are looking to open multiple channels for example setting up a WhatsApp group. • NR thanked STAR. She said the two people that came to her house were incredibly polite and friendly. The staff were a credit to STAR. NR asked if there was anything that didn't work well. JW said there was nothing. NR said it was nice to see STAR staff in my house, seeing that we are looking after the home and being good tenants. • PH said hopefully it will come through in the perception surveys. He said what we didn't see in the report is any feel for where there might be some data gaps and protected characteristics and vulnerability. It would be good to see where we were and where we have moved to as a result of the exercise. RJ said we do accept we have gaps. We checked the data and a number of them didn't need changing so that was some assurance in the data we have. The sort of things we were updating was where we have new people coming into the properties and where we haven't quite captured vulnerabilities, and that the vulnerabilities change and how do we keep that up to date. RJ said that we do have the diversity data. We use Acuity to do our transactional surveys, and they do analysis of the data for us which will come forward in Board reports. PH confirmed that RJ is confident the EDI data held is accurate. • PH said he couldn't get a feel for the number of damp and mould cases and if there are any signs of under reporting. JW said that there were a few instances but nothing that was not in hand or could be easily addressed. 	
<u>9.</u>	<u>Repairs Maintenance & Voids Update</u>	
	<p>Report presented by MA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There have been changes to the repairs and housing management system which has caused some issues. To their credit the repairs manager and his team have put in a lot of work and have managed to reduce the current WIP from 934 to 691 in the reporting period. It is actually down to 609 as of now which means STAR is running at about 3 weeks' worth of work in progress. • We are now concentrating on overdue works. There will always be some that run over. If we have to do asbestos checks, that means it will take longer while we wait for the report on whether it is asbestos to come through. Things like pest control takes 5 weeks to do. We raise the job anyway. • Voids have changed the process and are making significant progress in reducing the total number of voids, we have 2 contractors with a third one coming online. We have had some 	

	<p>issues with flooring and are out for quotes on that and we are also going to train our in-house own operatives to do the Polysafe flooring for kitchen and bathrooms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lettings team is under a lot of pressure because of all the new builds that have come online and because we are taking more complex people we are asking for a full risk assessment of the Band 1 and 2 people that are coming into our properties. For mutual exchange we have brought online Home swapper which allows customers to source properties in the area and with other social landlords not just STAR. <p><u>Questions and Answers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PH asked about any learning from the IT project to take forward into other projects. MA said the learning is to do exhaustive user acceptance testing, to understand what would cause problems. A number of them didn't arise during testing so we weren't aware of them at the time. You want to run both systems parallel for a period but that duplicates the work. 		
<p><u>10.</u></p>	<p><u>Changes to Tenancy Agreement – 52 Week Rent Charging Model & Service Charges</u></p> <p>GG gave an overview.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The scrutiny panel were supportive of the changes. We have detailed in the report a consultation timeline. At the time of writing were waiting for a response from Shropshire Council legal which we have now had. As a result, we have amended the timeline slightly. The two reasons for adjusting it was internally we wanted to have more time to review the lease and ensure that more than one manager does a review of it. SC also suggested to allow longer than 28 days for the consultation to allow for the postage to get to and from STAR. The official statutory 4-week period is 14 October to 9 November, and we have included a week either side. Responses to be reviewed by mid-November and we will submit it to the Council for approval at the end of November. NR said from a scrutiny panel perspective the consensus was that most other authority have stopped these rent-free weeks. Most people get paid monthly. We think it is a good idea but need to be mindful of the people on Universal Credit, they might rely on the two rent free weeks. We do understand we need to move with the times, and they should note that they are paying less. KR said the annual cost is not changing and that will be made really clear in the documentation, what it will do is reduce their weekly rent charge. Universal Credit already base the benefit on 52 weeks. KR said it is a genuine consultation where we are asking our customer base. We have scripted the questionnaire, and it is really focussed on the charging model of 48 weeks to 52 weeks. There is no real change to the service charges. It is fixed model and all that is being done is it is being made clearer in the tenancy agreement. RA said that it needs to be very clear that they are not paying more. KR the frequently asked questions that will go with the paperwork, will include a breakdown and example for a customer 		

	<p>to clearly show the annual charge is not changing and will give an example of the 48 week charge and the 52 week charge which will show the reduction per week.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GG said we will have a specific email address for people to contact us and people will respond to any queries. • RA like to receive information in different ways. Is there a way for people to meet in person rather than if the post doesn't work for everyone. KR said the Scrutiny panel had raised this. One of the biggest challenges is the geographical spread of all our customers so it would not be possible to get around everyone. We are going to send the letters out, will have the contact emails and social media channels and we are currently looking to see if we can use the community rooms to do a few drop-in sessions. • LF stated understanding that their monthly cost is going to be lower than what they are paying now. • LF asked if we know what percentage of tenants are on the 48 weeks. KR said every customer is on the 48 weeks. LF disagreed and she said hers is 52 weeks. GG clarified that everyone's calculated over 48 weeks, but you can choose how to pay it, over 48 or 52 weeks, or over 12 months. • LF asked what percentage are receiving the 4-week rent free weeks. Every single rent account is set up with a 48 week-charging model. Every tenant has the two rent free weeks in March and two in December. • Action: GG said she would get the information and send that to the Committee. Note this action was not added to the tracker as GG provided the following response prior to the minutes being circulated. <i>"We currently have 322 tenants who pay by Direct Debit and have their Direct Debits stopped for the 2 weeks in December and 2 weeks in March (providing their accounts are not in arrears) under the current 48 week rent charging model. Having reviewed the payment records, we estimate that circa 280-380 cash payers are also taking advantage of the 2 x 2-week payment breaks, however it is difficult to produce an exact number as cash payers do not always pay in consistent weekly/fortnightly patterns.</i> • <i>We therefore believe that the change from a 48-week rent charging model to a 52-week rent charging model will directly affect 600-700 tenants. This gives an estimate of between 15-18% of tenancies."</i> • NR asked if the rent is on the tenant portal. It needs to be very clear that the amount might be cheaper, but they are paying it over 52 weeks. • PH asked that the 53 weeks Universal Credit is very transparent – every four years that there are 53 weeks in Universal Credit. He asked for it to be more explicit. GG said they have included in the FAQ what will happen in the years that have 53 weeks. • PH asked if you consider changing the tenancy agreement to monthly rather than weekly. KR said that it wasn't considered. That would have had more implications for customers. 		
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	<p>The Committee was asked to approve proceeding with the consultancy and approve the change to the tenancy for clarification on the service charges. This was approved.</p>		
<u>11.</u>	<p><u>Programme Strategy Update</u></p>		
	<p>RJ gave an update on the delivery against the 8 strategies spanning from 2024 to 2027.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have not had a programme support officer in post for several months but plan to include this as part of the new Corporate Services Coordinator role. That post is out to advert. • Projects are progressing and we now have a Power BI Dashboard so we can easily see where projects are at. • We have delivered 9 projects in the first Q1. These include the procurement and contract review, and the new systems that we have introduced for example the new tenant portal. • One project is off track to do with the Property Standard, it is more complex than we originally thought, so we have changed the project lead, and will cover our expectations related to sustainability and Awaab's law. • There are 3 projects at risk. They do have a year-end delivery date, but the project leads think they may slip. The asset data, customer feedback on all channels and implementing Anthony Collins recommendations. • We are making progress. <p><u>Questions and Answers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action 36: PH asked for RJ to share the programme action plan, so everyone knows what is covered. • PH asked what the sign off is for projects is. EMT will determine if the project has completed. 		
<u>12.</u>	<p><u>Annual Terms of Reference for Review</u></p>		
	<p>RJ stated that every sub- committee has an opportunity to do an annual review of terms and conditions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action 39: LF stated that she had raised before the statement in TOR regarding the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel. RJ said she would circulate to confirm those changes had been made. This will affect the Board TOR too. • Action 40: PH said we need to look at the membership and make sure it aligns to recommendations being made for all the committees. • Action 41: PH said he would like a statement address reflecting the action trackers and action points and the commitment that the action is completed by the deadline set • Action 42: RA asked that if papers are not going to be sent for any reason that this communicated in advance of the meeting. 	RJ RJ/JM RJ/JM RJ/JM JM	8/12/2025 8/12/2025 8/12/2025 8/12/2025

	The Terms of Reference were agreed subject to the two changes suggested and they would be recirculated.		
<u>13.</u>	<u>Forward Plan Review</u> The call centre review has been moved to the December meeting, and a report would be provided for that meeting. Action 37: PH suggested to add Scrutiny Panel feedback and updates for future meetings.	RJ/JM	8/12/2025
<u>14.</u>	<u>AOB</u> <u>Board Member Induction and Training</u> EJ briefed the committee. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Tenant Board members induction process is to have a light touch induction offer tailored to their needs. As a first step it is proposed to send out of a short survey, to see if there are any needs, what support will be most helpful. • The support offer could include formal training for example TPAS offer various courses, so would like to include some mandatory online courses for example “Introduction to being a Board Member of a Housing association. They would be a couple of short mandatory courses, and then a pick and mix and tenant board members can pick the most applicable. • There could also be some mentoring with other experienced Board Members. • There could be some shadowing opportunities so that they can understand what goes on operationally by spending some time with employees. • EJ said if anyone has any suggestion to speak to her separately. <u>AOB Other</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LF said that it is important that the Scrutiny Panel give up their time and effort and they need to be assured that their views are taken on Board. The first scrutiny was on Repairs, and its annual review was due in June. It makes the panel members feel like what they are doing is not important and not valued. • NR said we are thoroughly enjoying doing the work but need to have feedback afterwards on whether the outcome was good. We are also itching for new topics to get involved with. • JW said that he appreciates the feedback and understand that we need to close the loop. JW will look at this and come back to you and make sure that EJ has the support she needs. • RJ stated what you do is extremely valuable and we need to be delivering the feedback. • Action 38: RA asked if there a term of reference for the Scrutiny panel in includes some feedback loops within it. • <i>Further to the meeting JW provide the Committee with the following update on 27/9: “Emma has shared a summary of her recent engagement with the panel, and from our perspective, some of the feedback appears to be at odds with the nature and tone of</i> 	JW	8/12/2025

	<p><i>that engagement. That said, we fully acknowledge the concerns raised and have taken them seriously.</i></p> <p><i>Following a meeting this morning, we've agreed to implement a more structured and aligned feedback mechanism to ensure greater consistency and transparency in how we engage with the panel moving forward. Additionally, we've identified a number of business-critical items that we will be putting forward for the panel's review, which we believe will support more meaningful scrutiny and constructive dialogue."</i></p> <p><i>PH said in response "It would be great if the action plan progress could be shared with the scrutiny panel and updated at the next CSC."</i></p>	
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