

Meeting	FAR Meeting	 Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing
Date	5th March 2024	
Time	2.00 pm – 4.00 pm	
Location	Teams	

Present:

Steve Robinson (SR)	Chair of FAR Committee, Board Member
Tony Deakin (TDk)	Chair of Board, Board Member
Harpreet Rayet (HR)	Managing Director
Ros Bridges (RB)	Corporate Director
Tom Forty (TF)	Operations Director
Paul Hayward (PH)	Co-opted Board Member
Rob King (RK)	Interim Head of Finance
Kath Vose (KV)	Shropshire Council Internal Audit

Invited

Dave Moran (DM)	IT & Business Transformation Manager
Helen Zatte (HZ)	Head of Corporate Services
Debbie Gauntlett	Independent Minute Taker

Apologies

Jane Trethewey (JT)	Shropshire Council
Barry Hanson (BH)	Head of Policy and Governance of Shropshire Council

Minute No.		Who	When
1.	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were no new declarations of interest declared. Apologies were received and accepted.		

2.	<p>The minutes of the meeting held on 9th November 2023 were approved as an accurate record.</p> <p>Matters Arising</p> <p>Item 4. Finance in-year Budget commentary. RB reported ongoing work within the Risk Register confirming inclusion at the next meeting.</p> <p>Item 4. Asset Management Report. HR advised that this will be an item agenda for discussion at the Development Sustainability and Strategic Investment (DSSI) Sub-Committee group. The asset Management budget for this year was available within the budget paper presented at today's meeting.</p> <p>Item 4. Vulnerability Data and Vulnerability Policy. Confirmation was given that this will be discussed at the next Customer Service Committee.</p> <p>Item 6. Rent setting report. Work ongoing. Report to be presented at Board on 11th March 2024.</p> <p>Item 6. ASB Draft paper (quality of data). To be discussed at the first Customer Service Committee rescheduled to 3rd April 2024.</p> <p>Item 6. Rent setting report. Work ongoing. Report to be provided on rent collection methodology to explain the differences between weekly and quarterly reporting (RK)</p> <p>Item 7 – Q2 Revenue Monitoring. HR/TD did meet in relation the Business plan and expenditure. Action complete.</p> <p>PH requested as part of Governance future papers should include outstanding action items only with assignee and date expected. Completed actions to be removed. HR agreed. (HR/RD). Action.</p>	<p>RB</p> <p>DSSI</p> <p>TF</p> <p>RB</p> <p>TF</p> <p>RB</p> <p>TF</p> <p>HR/RD</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>To be discussed at CC in April</p> <p>Board meeting to be held on 11th March</p> <p>To be discussed at CC in April</p> <p>Report issued to board</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>Noted</p>

3.	<p>Health and Safety Update</p> <p>HZ, Head of Corporate Services joined the meeting to provide a H&S presentation. Paperwork had been circulated in advance and taken as read.</p> <p>A discussion took place regarding the recommendation for a 'Board member Champion' recently raised at the Health and Safety Committee meeting. Board members discussed the potential conflicts of interest. It was recommended that the Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) committee should be the link contact for health and safety related items. Action. H&S policy to be updated to reflect this change</p> <p>PH requested the inclusion of minutes from Health and Safety staff meetings in reports to provide oversight on disclosed issues. Action. RD to coordinate access to the H&S meetings minutes for the Chair of FAR</p>	Chair	June 2024
4.	<p>Procurement Exemptions</p> <p>In the period RB had approved the direct award of the 5 yearly valuation contract to the District Valuer at a cost of £55,250 (funded by the HRA). The award was made via the Crown Commercial Service Framework. No other procurement exemptions were made in the period.</p>	RD	June 2024
5.	<p>Q3 Performance Report 2023/24</p> <p>DM joined the meeting. A report had been circulated and taken as read.</p> <p>DM summarised the performance report showing that the performance of the business had generally improved year on year.</p> <p>PH questioned whether voids targets are still achievable after seeing improved performance in the report. HR responded that a benchmarking exercise had been completed against similar organisations (less than 5000 units outside of London) and comparing STARs performance against how they are currently doing, STAR would be green across the piece in terms of peers.</p> <p>HR reported that future reports would include separate temporary accommodation data and requested DM amend the agreed targets for the next financial year before being presented to the Board. Action. DM to include separate performance commentary on temp accommodation</p> <p>PH highlighted the importance of addressing complaints and disrepair claims with a focus on investing in an investigative approach to minimise issues. HR agreed confirming a paper would be presented at the Board meeting on 11 March 2024 outlining the fundamental restructure of the Complaints team and the relations with the Ombudsman. Action.</p>	DM	June 2024
		HR	March 2024

	<p>HR outlined the importance of understanding what the issues are relating to the complaints and how these could be minimised moving forward. TF added the importance of having a dedicated legal team via the Council to address the repairs backlog to reduce complaints.</p> <p>TF reported that the management team had seen a significant reduction to (approximately 76%) in complaints within timescales by the end of Q3.</p> <p>TF explained that a new Compliants policy will be presented to the Customer Committee in April, which will link to the updated housing ombudsman code, providing a clear definition of a complaint.</p> <p>Action.</p> <p>The Chair asked if the Customer Services Committee will receive reports on complaints and analysis of trends. TF confirmed that this would be on the Customer Services agenda for the next meeting.</p> <p>Action.</p> <p>TD acknowledged the work that had been completed and raised a concern about benchmarking and temporary accommodation costs, the importance of separating accommodation from general needs tenants, and the mechanisms for reporting and financial implications. HR agreed noting the feedback. Action.</p> <p>The Chair asked about specific actions relating to improving antisocial behaviour management. TF outlined a plan to develop an Improvement plan, conduct spot checks, and establish a quality assurance framework to address antisocial behaviour management.</p> <p>TF highlighted the need to improve the management of antisocial behaviour cases, particularly in terms of case resolution and closure times. HR provided context on the benchmark for tenant satisfaction with ASB, noting that only 84% of people are likely to be satisfied with their neighbours, even if they are no longer annoyed.</p> <p>The Chair highlighted the importance of understanding the long-term problems in social housing, i.e. problem families or agencies not delivering, and how it affects investment decisions. TF agreed and mentioned introducing categories for data collection within the system. TF advised that updates would be provided via report. Action.</p>	TF TF RB TF	April 2024 April 2024 June 2024 Dec 2024
6.	<p>Q2 Revenue Monitoring 2023/24</p> <p>A report had been circulated in advance and taken as read. No questions were raised.</p>		
7.	<p>Q3 Revenue Monitoring 2023/24</p>		

	A report had been circulated in advance and taken as read. No questions were raised.		
8.	<p>Q3 Capital Monitoring 2023/24</p> <p>A report had been circulated in advance and taken as read.</p> <p>RK updated the Committee on major repairs and new development programmes noting some delays due to developer insolvency. A retendering exercise will take place which will likely affect timeframes for that development.</p> <p>RK spoke about the Council's struggles with the temporary accommodation program due to assumptions and funding issues.</p> <p>The Chair highlighted the lack of a clear strategy for Development / investment in temporary accommodation, with no single document for board members to refer to. HR and TF agreed that the team was working on improving the approach to temporary accommodation, including creative management and service provision.</p> <p>The Chair raised concerns about the council's ability to manage the temporary accommodation, citing examples of past failures. HR agreed to produce a paper for future meetings. Action.</p> <p>TD agreed with the discussions and suggested that additional resources will be needed to manage the properties and proposed capitalising those costs against the HRA budget. HR agreed.</p>	TF	Sept 2024
9.	<p>STAR 2024/25 Budget Approval</p> <p>Paperwork had been circulated in advance for the Committee to recommend approval at the Board meeting on 11th March 2024.</p> <p>RB summarised the report outlining that the budget proposal aims to continue transformation work with funding from reserves, despite not being balanced.</p> <p>TK expressed concerns regarding the wording about undercharging service charges and the potential impact on tenants. The committee discussed the potential impact of housing benefit changes on individuals including increased rents and limited affordable housing options.</p> <p>TK noted leaseholders may face a significant increase in service charges and insurance costs. TF advised that he look further into this but did not believe it affected many properties.</p> <p>TK advised that he supported the proposal to capitalise costs, and requested evidence of savings within a schedule. Action.</p>	RB	June 2024

	<p>The Chair acknowledged the work by RB and the team and the Committee approved the recommendation to present to full Board for approval. Action.</p>		
10	<p>HRA Business Plan Update</p> <p>The HRA Business Plan update had been circulated and taken as read.</p> <p>RK summarised the refined Business Plan and investment appraisal models with updated data, using them to inform capital programme and budget decisions.</p> <p>RK reported that the Council faces significant challenges in managing limited development and debt to meet zero carbon goals by 2050.</p> <p>HR reported that the Council aims to secure £5 million for affordable housing in February 2025.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the business plan and its validation, with a focus on independent expertise and sector background knowledge.</p> <p>HR highlighted the importance of sustainable compliance and the need to keep up with safety measures and component replacements.</p> <p>The Committee agreed the recommendation to present the HRA Business Plan at the next Board meeting on 11 March 2024. Action.</p>	RB	March 24
11	<p>Corporate Plan and Strategy Update</p> <p>HR summarised the Corporate Plan and explained that this is often confused with the Business Plan. HR confirmed a working group had been set up to include staff, board members, residents and Council members. A Corporate draft plan had been drafted and recommended this is signed off before the end of the financial year.</p> <p>The committee agreed the recommendation.</p>		
12.	<p>Audit Update</p> <p>The Internal Audit report had been circulated in advance and taken as read.</p> <p>KV summarised the report and revealed the recommendations and common areas for updates that included the organisations' policies, procedures, and data (outdated or inaccurate), hindering effective governance and decision-making.</p>		

	<p>RB explained that internal systems had been put in place to consolidate and respond to audit recommendations, with a central log shared with SMT for tracking and follow-up.</p> <p>The Committee members supported the more rigorous approach to audits after previous issues with incomplete or inaccurate reporting and requested reassurance of actions. Action. Regular update to be presented to the board on the action plan associated with audit recommendations</p> <p>TF reported that the Executives prioritise areas for improvement in audits, avoiding "ringing endorsements" while focusing on high-importance areas aligning with transformation processes.</p> <p>The differences between Internal audits and external audits were discussed highlighting the different approaches and scope, leading to differing opinions on budgeting and auditing.</p> <p>KV reported that the draft report will be presented, discussed and recommended at a future FAR meeting prior to the final report being prepared.</p> <p>The Chair thanked KV for the work and looked forward to the complete report in due course.</p>	STAR Exec team	June 2024
13.	<p>Audit Forward Plan 2024/25</p> <p>The Audit Forward Plan 2024/25 had been circulated. The Committee endorsed the proposals set out and agreed delegated authority to the Chair of FAR and Director of Corporate Services.</p>		
14.	<p>Strategic Risk Register Update</p> <p>The report had been circulated. HR highlighted the financial pressure that the local councils are experiencing as a risk and this will be ongoing for both STAR and the Local Authority.</p>		
15	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>PH requested that Committee papers be uploaded to SharePoint for easy access and not emailed moving forward. Action.</p> <p>With no further items for discussion, the meeting closed at 4.00 pm.</p>		

Meeting	Shropshire Towns & Rural Housing FAR Subcommittee		
Date	5th March 2024		
Agenda Item	Action	Who	Status
	Matters Arising		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Item 4 - Vulnerability Data and Vulnerability Policy. To be discussed at the Customer Service Committee. Reports are to be included in FAR papers moving forward. 	TF	On-going – Added to forward planner
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Item 6 - Rent setting report. Work ongoing. Report to be provided on rent collection methodology to explain the differences between weekly and quarterly reporting. 	RK/DJ	On-going – Rent setting paper went to SMT on 4 th June
	Health & Safety		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include health and safety staff meeting minutes in future board reports 	TF	On-going
	Q3 Performance Report 2023/24		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review temporary accommodation strategy and STAR's role, and provide a report to the Board in the next 6 months 	DM	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure temporary accommodation costs can be accurately identified separately. 	DM	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement improved antisocial behaviour (ASB) management - policy, procedures, quality assurance, metrics. 	TF	On-going
	Q3 Capital Monitoring 2023/24		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A clear strategy for temporary accommodation is required with a paper that the Committee can refer to. 	HR/TF	On-going
	STAR 2024/25 Budget Approval		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate leaseholder service charges and insurance costs. 	TF	On-going