

Meeting	FAR Meeting
Date	Wednesday 3 September 2025
Time	9.30-11.30
Location	Teams



Core Members:	
Steve Robinson (SR)	Board Member and Chair
Tony Deakin (TD)	Board Member
Ros Jones (RJ)	Director of Corporate Services
Paul Hayward (PH)	Board Member
Lynn Fonseca (LF)	Tenant Board Member
Harpreet Rayet (HR)	Managing Director
James Wood (JW)	Operations Director
Marie Hill	Head of Finance
Jo Grivell (JG)	Executive Assistant & Minute Taker
Kate Barkley (KB)	Head of People and Culture
Jake Stanley (JS)	Beever & Struthers
Nicholas Burton	Grant Thornton UK
James McLarnon	Grant Thornton UK
Narinder Sandher (NS)	Beever & Struthers
Apologies:	
Irina Wood	Board Member

Item No.		Who	When
<u>1.</u>	<u>Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest</u> SF welcomed attendees. Chair gave a welcome to Marie Hill, the new Head of Finance. No declarations of interest were raised.		
<u>2.</u>	<u>Minutes of Last Meeting & Matters Arising</u> The minutes from the last meeting were accepted as a true representation of the meeting on 4 June 2025. Review of Actions - An updated action tracker was to be circulated. SR said that it is getting incredibly long, and it doesn't seem to be updated with anything meaningful. It doesn't feel like it has improved, despite requesting improvements several times. He thinks the team needs to get more of handle on it. PH said it is a serious governance issue, and it should be a simple administration activity. Someone needs to own it and be chasing officers. HR said it is getting embarrassing now and will be taking immediate action after the meeting. TD said he would expect the governance manager to own it and for it to go to a leadership team to be signed off.		

	Action #46: RJ said will take it to the team. It was agreed that the action tracker would be updated, and the leadership team would review it and send it to the Committee before the formal Board meeting on 15th.	RJ	12/9/2025
3	<p><u>Health and Safety Update – Improvement Programme</u></p> <p>The paper was taken as read. Kate Barkley gave an overview of the status on H&S.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety For is continuing to support and things are progressing really well. • H&S policy - now comfortable to circulate the policy subject to the responsibilities being updated. Request that we have the management. • The Committee's approval was requested to get this out to the employees now. • SR said that their role is to ensure there is a robust review of the policy. HR has had some direct involvement and is comfortable with what is being produced and really keen to get this out to the business. JW said that they hold a weekly operations meeting with Safety For present, and feel that have now got good cover for Health and Safety. • There have been some delays in PQQ process and this was due to ensuring that the correct information is received from contractors. • A few contractors have been added and as soon we have all the paperwork the company is cleared to use as contractors. • Site inspections are ongoing, no massive concerns have been raised but there are some ongoing improvements that we need to keep on top of. The incident related to the contractor was dealt with effectively at the time. The mindset is that slow and steady wins the race with Health and Safety and are making sure that each change is embedded properly with the workforce. <p><u>Discussion and Questions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are six that have failed the criteria required. TD asked if there are any that are in specialist areas where we might struggle to find an alternative. JW said they are not people that will cause us a problem if not utilised. We are upping the anti, on what we expect of our contractors, and some of the historic contractors will not be suitable for STAR. • PH said he is struggling with the Compliance tracker and understand what it is trying to tell us. It would be helpful to make the tracker easier to understand and what the timescales are for completing the activities. Action 47: SR requested a document that the Board could easily understand and track the progress rather than what is used operationally. • PH also was concerned that Operatives did not know how to report incidents. KB said it is very clear how to report an incident, it is a simple icon and that has been reinforced in the Toolbox talk. We are speaking with other organisations about a management system and hope to implement something that is more robust. Anybody can quickly and easily report an incident. The cultural piece is still being worked on. • PH asked has it resulted in an uptick of incidents. There are a few 	KB	3/12/2025

	<p>more incidents but no accidents. HR said we have invested a lot in H&S working practices of our DLO. From his perspective the reporting could be more transparent but we have removed some of the hazardous work and given it to specialist contractors and with all the training and investment in the staff and working practices he would expect the incidents to be reducing not increasing.</p> <p>The Committee was happy to approve the management system/ policy.</p>		
<u>4.</u>	<p><u>Procurement Exemptions & Pipeline Update</u> Report was presented by Marie Hill.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There has been one exemption, since last quarter and that it TWC compliance software which is in place now and working well. • In terms of current procurements, there is nothing new to report. Everything is as it was last quarter. • We are engaging GBS to support us with management of the contract register. <p>The content of the report was noted.</p>		
<u>5</u>	<p><u>STAR and HRA Outturn Report – Q1</u> MH provided an overview if the Outturn report.</p> <p>STAR performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A pressure of around £150K due to uncertainty in staffing structures that we had at that time. • That has increased by a further £30K since then and there is real pressure on the bottom line. • We now have an approved staffing structure. We need to ensure that they are timed together so where there is an overspend it is offset by an underspend. • We now developed a management information tool referred to as the Blue Pack and all the information that management need. • There have been a few issues related to recharges to the Council. • Action 48: TD asked why annual leave is not capitalised for certain work as if it was done by an external company it would be. Is it a dispute with the local Council of what we can charge or is it an accounting issue. MH to pursue this possibility. • PH asked about the marketing consultant coming in when there was no budget. What are the safeguards to ensure that we have the budget it seems crazy that we have recruited someone without the budget or knowing how to fund it. HR stated that was incorrect. Agency staff have to be approved by EMT and there has to be identified budget. A lot of the agency staff relate to development due to the difficulty recruiting. • TD highlighted the impact of delays on developments and that when we talk to the Councillors it should be highlighted. A lot of our delays are where we are with development overall, compliance checks, services and sub-contractors overall. 	MH	3/12/2025

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SR said that the new portfolio holder for housing, and Liberal Democrats were elected on a promise that they would deliver more social housing, they should want to see a review of the whole development of affordable's process. He asked if this could be highlighted to the politicians. Action 49: HR said it would be helpful for the Committee to highlight that at the Board meeting because the Housing portfolio holder attends the Board. <p><u>HRA</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rental income position is affected by the delays in the development schemes. Major repairs have been slow at Q1 there was only 38 completions. There are now 81 completions at Period 4. It will meet the budget that we have. Changes from a 48-week to a 52-week rental charges. Customers do seem to be in support of it. Action 50: PH said that it should be transparent about the 53 week change which happens every four years and asked that it be covered in the consultation. <p>Business Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There have been some delays due to changes in government legislation but do have an opening position for this financial year's business plan, this is being focused on now. It is hoped to be in place imminently. 	SR	15/9/2025
6.	<p><u>Financial Statements 2024-25</u> Report was taken as read. MH stated:</p> <p>There were 3 outstanding items in terms of the audit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intercompany balances with Council – they have been chased several times but remain outstanding. Pension Fund sign off which is always one that is delayed Post balance sheet events With exception of those items the audit is complete. Turnover is very similar to the previous year. There has been less reserves usage and that is because we have reduced the transformation. TD asked about the Virgin Media versus the NTL Pension trustees. He said he has seen it be explicitly shown as contingent liability in other accounts. Action 51: He asked Grant Thornton if they are content with how it is shown in STAR's accounts? James McLarnon said he will need to refresh himself on that case so will take it away. TD said as long as STAR's treatment is consistent with other clients it would be OK. SR said well done to the team for the work done on the closing the accounts. <p>The FAR was asked to recommend Board sign off and delegate approval for any changes to Ros Jones. This was agreed.</p>	MH/ JM	30 Sep 2025
7.	<p><u>Rent Convergence</u> Ros Jones shared a presentation on rent convergence.</p>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will allow social landlords to increase rents up to the target rent, which currently a number of social landlords are just not at that target rent level. Target rents are set on a specific formula to do with the size of the property, value of the property and average earnings so that determines what the rates should be for rent. Quite often we're set quite a bit below that. • As a sector we are under consultation about how we move to getting up to that target rent number. • They are proposing that they would allow us to raise rents by either £1 or £2 above the CPI plus one inflation mechanism that we currently have and they're asking us to make a judgement on that value, but also how quickly we would like to converge. • The consultation has now closed and we've responded to it. • The Council's obviously responded as landlord and we've supported them with the information. • The full presentation can be found here. <p>07. SC HRA Rent Convergence - August 2025.pptx</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If we uplift by £1 over a 10 year period it would yield an uplift of £ 8.2m into the HRA. If we went for £2 it would converge more quickly at Year 6. Or average £1.95 per week. • STAR wants to go for the £2 increase to protect from unforeseen policy changes. • If we go for £2 tenants rent on average would increase by 4.9% with a maximum on 6% and minimum of 3%. • STAR want to go for the £2 per week to get to convergence more quickly. The government will make their decision in November. • TD highlighted that there should be a Hardship Fund to support tenants if needed. 		
<u>9</u>	<p><u>Grant Thornton Audit Findings</u></p> <p>Report presented by NB/JM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The audit findings have been provided and the audit is substantially complete and anticipate being able to issue an unmodified opinion on the financial statements for this year end. • Hope to finalise the final items within the next few weeks and have the sign off the accounts coincide with the AGM. • GT recognised and thanked and support from the STAR team. <p>Full details of the findings highlighted can be found here: 09. The Audit Findings - STAR March 2025 (draft) - Grant Thornton.pdf</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TD said it was good set of accounts. There are some areas where there is room for improvement but otherwise, he is pleased with the outcome. This was agreed by all members. 		
<u>10</u>	<p><u>Annual Terms of Reference Review</u></p> <p>The Terms of Reference require an annual review. It was agreed that there were no changes required to the TOR for FAR.</p>		

<p><u>11</u></p>	<p><u>Audit Status Report</u> Report presented by RJ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This update covered the internal audit programme. There had some concerns about the delivery of the actions. There has been some improvement but still a way to go to close down the 23/24 actions and the 24/25 actions. Beever and Struthers will be doing a follow up to make sure that we have made the changes. • There are two audit reports provided for information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive Housing Management is in draft. We are going to respond following the Board meeting which will influence the actions we propose to take on the IHM before we go back to the auditors. • Property Compliance • Shropshire Council are no longer our partners for the internal audits. • PH is concerned of the numbers overdue. The key task of this committee is that audit recommendations are done as they should be. PH said it is also questionable that they are still outstanding. • PH property compliance highlighted the partial partial finding. Most of those recommendations have an end of August or end of September target date, he asked for reassurance that the August ones been completed. • HR said there is 10% that are outstanding. HR said he will come back to the committee. Once we talk through the outstanding actions and why they are overdue, we can provide the context of other work being done in the organisation. There are some that are out of our hands for example IT and having an SLA with the local authority. STAR has been chasing the Council for 9 months. HR suggested spending an hour going through all the audit recommendations to give the committee an understanding of what is happening with each and why they are outstanding. • HR also stated that some of the compliance issues, we are quietly confident that we will be able to demonstrate that they have been addressed. The HQN audit self-assessments should also give the committee some comfort. • Action 52: Chair to agree who should be included in that session and for it to be arranged. PH said the follow up would be worthwhile because it reads that there are 30 overdue and 18 of which relate to asbestos. • HR suggested doing the separate session for compliance in October after the follow up audit. JW clarified that since the audit there is a whole new team in place. There is a full line of sight of those recommendations and the follow up audit will show a demonstrable outcome. 	<p>HR/JG</p>	<p>3 Dec 2025</p>
<p><u>12</u></p>	<p><u>Internal Audit Programme Update - Beever Struthers</u> NS gave the following update on progress:</p>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 24/25 plan is complete. The Gas and Fire reports were the last to complete. • There are couple of requests to move the timing of some audits. • The council have requested that some reviews are included in BS internal plan. BS don't think there is a need to make any additions as they are all covered. • 2025/26 has been outlined and when the reports will be produced. • PH asked for reassurance that the 11 outstanding items are included in the plan, and this was confirmed by NS. • PH asked if there is there any flexibility to add audits when there is any emerging themes. For example Awaabs Law. NS said there is complete flexibility. On Awaabs Law they are doing a sector comparison's on how the sector is dealing with this and will share with STAR. • All the actions are incorporated in the follow up plan and will provide updates regularly. • TD asked are the audits representative of what BS sees in the sector i.e. key risks. TD said he would be concerned if the Council is asking to do an audit and STAR is incurring costs when they are not a key risks and are superfluous. NS shared his thoughts and said the plan was based on a risk-based approach, we think about what we are seeing elsewhere in the sector. Out of courtesy have listened to what the Councils want and have mapped out where BS think they are covered. He gave assurance that the Council has not influenced the plan in any way. <p>The internal audit plan was endorsed by the Committee.</p>		
<u>13</u>	<p><u>Landlord Health and Safety Compliance</u> Report was taken as read.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the topic of C3's since the last meeting have introduced an AI assisted product that triages and reading all the certifications that come into the business. That has been in place for about 5 weeks. • Every C3 is recorded through that and brought forward into a planned programme. C2's are done in 28 days and C1's immediately. • The regulator wants to know what our plan is for C3's. We don't let any voids with C3's. STAR understands its C3 position and do have a plan of how to deal with them and need to document what are plan is on historic certifications. This will be brought forward in due course. • Action 53: PH said he found it difficult to read the PPT report. It feels like they have been given an operational report. He asked if could revert back to the previous style of report. • Action 54: PH would like to have sight of what is going on with the 40 Gas capped properties. One of the Committees need to have sight of it. JW said that there is work to understand the root cause of why there are capped properties. 	<p>JW</p> <p>JW</p>	<p>3 Dec 2025</p> <p>3 Dec 2025</p>
<u>14</u>	<u>Serious Incident Update</u>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have had a number of serious incidents recently. • One of our residents at 14 Bowling Green Way sadly passed away. That tenant came from the Tannery, which is a temporary accommodation property. We did not meet with him to sign him up and there was no evidence that he had moved into the property and as a result we didn't do the appropriate checks. We did visit the property and thought it was abandoned. We put forward an NTQ to take possession of the property. We should have done a welfare check. The Council has undertaken a STAR focussed investigation, which is still being drafted to understand what has happened and why and what lessons can be learned. • HQN are undertaking an investigation our behalf to look at the management of data between various departments in particular the support team. The Council has asked us to consider the culture and working practices within our housing management support team. • We have contacted all our residents, and undertaken some fundamental changes, in relation to the management of data, to ensure that all data is kept in one area of the housing management system. • Action 55: Plan to do an interim review in December to ensure the recommendations from HQN and the Council have been implemented by the wider organisation. • Have arranged new working arrangements with the Council in the way we triage and consider complex cases coming into our property and we have started the process to be clearer on roles and responsibility. • Have met with the tenant's family and advised we will make a referral to do serious case review. The application has been made, and we are waiting for the feedback. The Coroner is likely to report back in November/December time. • Shakespeare Martineau are giving us legal advice and reviewing our documents. • This has identified some shortcomings, on how we triangulate data and make decisions and how teams are structured and what we need to do to improve on. There are lessons to be learned. AS executive team will pursue all the recommendations. • SR stated that it is clear EMT know what needs to be done. The organisation has had radical change in the last couple of years and you are really trying hard to bring about the change. It is clear that there is the need to ensure that the basics are really solid. The Committee is fully behind the management team and will help and support. 	HR	30 Dec 2025
15	<p><u>Housemark Benchmark Report</u> Report was taken as read.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This reflects feedback from the Board, where previously we were comparing against Councils and ALMOS's with less than 5000 units outside London. Have extended that to cover RP's too. • Overall, the report shows that as an organisation that there is an improving position in a number of areas when compared to our peers. 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data management needs improvement. We have been using the ASB module incorrectly. The recording of emergency repairs has been done incorrectly where we have been waiting until the repair has been completed before we close the emergency repair, whereas it should have been closed when it was made safe. • PH said that it is very positive in terms of the direction of travel. • PH said it is disappointing that TP08 – culture of the organisation has dipped and is something a regulator would pick up on it. 		
<u>16</u>	<p><u>HQN Self-Assessment</u> HR gave the following update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have worked with the Local Authority and agreed would undertake self-assessment in line with what the regulator would test us on. It is important to understand that when the regulator comes in they don't see STAR and the Local Authority they just see Shropshire Council. • In many areas we are coming out a C1. Where we came out as a C2 is around the property side of things. The risk is that the Council is in a C4 situation for anything sitting within the general fund, due to a lack of understanding of the stock, and lack of engagement within their organisation and a lack of data. • STAR has got some areas for improvement but overall we are doing OK according to HQN. • TD asked what tools the regulator would have to address where the ALMO is doing OK but the Local Authority isn't. He asked if it is possible to raise with Eamon McGoldrick MD NFA in terms of the ALMO network for thoughts from the others in the network. HR said he spoke to Barnsley and they would just see it as Shropshire Council. HR said he has spoken to Heather Kidd and to others and in essence they would not look at bringing STAR in house, and as a consequence of what we are doing at the moment they now want to bring more residential property into STAR to take away the risk. • PH asked who would be named by the regulator. HR advised it would be Shropshire Council irrespective of how they manage their stock. • PH asked what the next steps are. HQN are coming to our Board to present the findings. The Council have taken advice from Anthony Collins to understand if what HQN have looked at falls into the regulations. They have commissioned an external audit. We are also doing a project for anything related to Project related to residential which is currently managed within the General Fund which could be passed over to the HRA. There is due diligence being done on the appropriation. Their improvement plan will be part of the improvement plan already being done by STAR. • The Council are in the process of checking if they need to self-refer and that is why they are talking to Anthony Collins. STAR is waiting for the Local Authority to inform us on their decision. • SR said there appears to be a lack of oversight related to Housing in the council and thinks STAR should be raising the issue about the C4 with the Council. 		

<p><u>17</u></p>	<p><u>Approach to Awaabs Law</u> The report was taken as read.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PH said the update was useful but he would like some reassurance that the changes to the KPI are reported to the Board so they can monitor. Action 56: JW said that will be picked up in future reports. • TD some housing organisations are saying there are significant additional costs associated with Awaabs. TD asked that the team try to understand what those implications might be. JW said we have relatively simple housing stock and generally an easy architype when it comes to damp and mould issues. STAR has been running pre-emptive programmes, particularly fan and window installation will have a big reduction in damp and mould issues. We might face some pressures but with the resizing of the DLO and the skills to address the issues. Nobody can quite quantify the impact of it and it just needs to be carefully monitored. 	<p>JW</p>	<p>3 Dec 2025</p>
<p><u>18</u></p>	<p><u>Strategic Risk Register Update</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RJ advised had fed in the updates recommended last time. HR said what we have identified over the summer, and the audits done by BS. HR said there are new Board members and new sector risks and a different business model that is evolving so it would be beneficial to have half a day session, get somebody external with risk expertise and housing expertise to facilitate and make it more focused on the areas that have been identified. It was agreed to do in person and have it between Board and the AGM. Action 57: To get the risk session set up. A provisional date has been set of 30 September. • SR asked that there be clarity of the roles and responsibility of who does what, each committee, the board and the EMT. 	<p>HR/JM</p>	<p>30 Sep 2025</p>
<p><u>19</u></p>	<p><u>Policies Update</u></p> <p>RJ gave an update on the policies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EMT has been working with the teams to progress the update and review of policies. As a result of the delays the dates for the completion of policies has now been mandated and there is a schedule of when they are due. • There was some inconsistency on how they were being forward so we have a introduced a process where they need to be clear about what changes they have made and any external verification they have had and once the policy is signed off, how they intend to roll it out within the business. • The approach is to stop it being a tick box exercise. • The plan is to have all the high-risk policies will be over the line by the end of the calendar year. • Action 58: PH said that need to make sure that the up-to-date policies are on the website and to do that as quickly as possible, as this is something that any inspection would look at. 	<p>JM/EP</p>	<p>3 Dec 2025</p>

<u>20</u>	<p><u>Forward Plan Review</u></p> <p>There were no comments raised.</p>		
<u>21</u>	<p><u>AOB</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action 59: HR mentioned that there will new Board members joining. HR will bring forward some recommendations for new committee membership for the Board to approve in principle with formal agreement at the AGM. • HR also highlighted that it was Steve Robinson's last FAR meeting and would like to put on record for all the help and support from Steve. • Whistle Blower case – KB had circulated the papers related to the case. The background to this is the Council had received a whistle blowing letter from a former employee. TD commissioned some legal advice from Anthony Collins who advised needed to appoint an internal investigating officer and this was KB. External solicitors said there is no case to answers on HR related issue. • Agreed to just minute the next steps. • Need to come to a decision on whether the allegations are valid or not and need to get back to the individual and report this to the Local Authority. Any letter that goes to him it is signed off by Anthony Collins solicitor to make sure that STAR is covered. • PH had not received the reports as they may have been sent to his STAR account not his personal account. Action 60: KB agreed to send them to him. PH to raise any points he might have to KB. If content KB will email Anthony Collins to say we want them to advise/write the letter to the individual so it is legally tight. 	<p>HR</p> <p>KB</p>	<p>15/9/2025</p> <p>30/9/2025</p>