

Meeting notes
Service Charge Network Group

Date: 16 January 2026

Time: 2pm

Housing 21 Chair: Tracy Jones - Head of Operational Development

Resident Chair: Tom Long

Attendees: Housing 21 Representatives:

- Richard Wheeldon - Head of Retirement Living - West
- Anthony Walker – Head of Retirement Living South West
- Lucy Nixon - Resident Communications Manager
- Amber Crick – Resident Engagement Coordinator

Housing 21 residents: AA, DD, ID, MR, RB, TL and SM

Date of next meeting: 13 February 2026

Time of next meeting: 2pm

The Years dates - 13/03/26, 10/04/26, 08/05/26, 05/06/26, 03/07/26, 31/07/26, 28/08/26, 25/09/26, 23/10/26, 20/11/26 and 18/12/26

Title of agenda item	Summary of discussion
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1.	Welcome and Introductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracy opened the meeting by welcoming attendees and wishing everyone a Happy New Year. • Introductions were bypassed due to all members being familiar with each other.
2.	Review of Previous Meeting Minutes	<p>Promotion of Vlogs (Ongoing)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teams and residents continue to be reminded about vlogs. • Group agreed this remains an ongoing action to maintain momentum and visibility. <p>Service Charge Brochures on Notice Boards (Completed)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All confirmed brochures were displayed. • Tracy observed them during recent scheme visits. <p>Sharing the Toolkit Guidance (Completed)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amber previously shared the toolkit guidance document. <p>Circulating Meeting Dates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group agreed to receive full-year dates in advance. • Amber will include full-year meeting dates in the minutes. • Amber to also re-send the meeting link on the morning of each meeting. • Note: Housing 21 systems cannot add invites to external Outlook calendars due to data-sharing restrictions. • Discussion on the limitations of Outlook invites and external calendar sharing. <p>Learning from the Complaints Panel</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tom shared insights from the Complaints Panel on working “alongside” outdated systems. • Suggestion made to connect with Vanessa to explore their successful workflow methods. • Action: Tracy and Amber to contact Vanessa. <p>PFI Clarification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement to organise a separate meeting between Tracy, ID, and Jenny to prepare a PFI-focused vlog.
3.	<p>Ideas for Vlog Topics</p> <p>The group proposed a structured year-long vlog plan, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service charge coding categories • Managers pay & management fees • Repairs • Utilities • Admin fees & leasehold admin fees • Cleaning & office supplies • Tenure types (rented, leasehold, shared ownership, PFI etc.) • Value for money expectations • PFI-specific content (Kent/Oldham/Walsall) <p>Vlog Schedule Approach</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement to record several vlogs in one session, then release in short, edited “bite-sized” pieces. • Aim for one vlog per month, but flexible based on relevance. • Build a library of content that can be reused and refreshed annually. <p>Increasing Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideas to show vlogs during: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Coffee mornings ◦ Cheese/wine evenings ◦ Resident meetings ◦ On scheme smart TVs • Suggested involvement of Housing 21 Digital Inclusivity Team (led by Jessica Ettridge). • Action: Invite Jessica Ettridge to the next meeting. <p>Representation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group noted gender imbalance in attendance; Amber confirmed more women have recently shown interest. • Tracy will personally invite potential new female members during scheme visits.
4. Section 20 Dispensation for Utilities	<p>Overview from Richard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing 21 historically purchased energy annually to avoid triggering Section 20 consultation thresholds.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Market changes mean a longer-term dynamic procurement model now offers better value.• However, long-term contracts automatically trigger Section 20 consultation requirements. <p>Why Dispensation Is Needed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Section 20 requires 60–90 days consultation, incompatible with fast-moving energy markets.• Tribunals generally grant dispensation if:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Landlords demonstrate thorough resident engagement.◦ They show why Section 20 cannot practically be followed. <p>Resident Engagement Plan</p> <p>To meet tribunal expectations, Housing 21 proposes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Clear letter explaining Section 20 and reasons for dispensation.2. Q&A document in plain English.3. Feedback route for residents to respond.4. Newsletter articles.5. Podcast/vlog explaining the process.6. Virtual multi-scheme meetings – as used successfully during the emergency call system procurement. <p>Ensuring Wider Participation</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion on ensuring more schemes engage in virtual sessions. Emphasis on supporting managers to set up TVs/HDMI/Smart TV displays. <p>Closing the Loop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Important for Housing 21 to provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Response summary to resident feedback. Update following tribunal decision.
5.	Rent Letters – Final Print and Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final rent letter has been signed off and sent for printing. Letters will be issued end of February. All resident panel feedback was incorporated. Tracy to share a copy of the final version with the group (read-only).
6.	Reflections: How Did Last Year Go? What Has the Group Achieved?	<p>Year-End Presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tracy proposed producing a short annual review vlog or presentation showcasing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achievements over the past 12–18 months Improvements to service charge clarity Vlogs produced Resident engagement successes ID and TL confirmed a draft review document is being prepared for discussion on 26th with Kris, Sophia, Jamie etc. Tracy will attend the meeting (invite to be sent by Amber).

	<h2>6.2 Survey Results – Initial Findings</h2> <p>Tracy presented early results from the service charge meeting survey (260 responses):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% received information at least 7 days before meeting • 95% said meetings were scheduled at a good time • 95% said budgets were well or very well explained • 96% felt able to voice opinions • 94% said managers were knowledgeable • 98% found meeting format accessible • 92% satisfied with value for money explanation • 93% felt engaged in contractor choice • 62% do not want more detailed breakdowns • 94% overall satisfaction with the process <p>Key Reflections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to review schemes with zero returns (supportive approach). • Value for money remains an area to develop. • Continue promoting year-round service charge understanding.
7.	<p>AOB</p> <p>Procedure for Budget Meetings</p> <p>Accuracy of Draft Budgets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TL highlighted examples where incorrect figures were provided to residents. • Emphasised need for:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Pre-meeting accuracy○ Clear manager support○ Early correction before circulation <p>Manager Confidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many managers come from care backgrounds, not finance.• They need:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Training○ Support○ Scripts/templates○ Encouragement to say “I don’t know, but I’ll find out.” <p>Monthly Monitoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group agreed budgeting should be reviewed monthly, not once a year.• Managers encouraged to use coffee mornings to discuss actuals vs budgets. <p>Positive Momentum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Despite challenges, group acknowledged:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Major progress since last year○ Better consistency○ Strong foundations for next year’s improvements
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		<p>Meeting Close</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracy thanked everyone for excellent engagement and confirmed next meeting date. • Lucy invited volunteers for upcoming vlogs; several residents agreed to participate. • Meeting ended.
8.	Follow-up tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action: full-year meeting dates at the top of minutes - Amber • Action: Meeting link to be re-sent on the morning of each meeting - Amber • Action: Contact Vanessa, to explore their successful workflow methods in complaints - Tracy and Amber. • Action: Prepare a PFI-focused vlog, a separate meeting to be organise between Tracy, Ian and Jenny. • Action: Invite Jessica Ettridge to the next meeting about suggested involvement of Housing 21 Digital Inclusivity Team • Action: Copy of Rent Letters, the final version to share with the group - Tracy