

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

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 shared insights from the Complaints Panel on working “alongside” outdated systems.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

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

- Market changes mean a longer-term dynamic procurement model now offers better value.
- However, long-term contracts automatically trigger Section 20 consultation requirements.

## **Why Dispensation Is Needed**

- Section 20 requires 60–90 days consultation, incompatible with fast-moving energy markets.
- Tribunals generally grant dispensation if:
  - Landlords demonstrate thorough resident engagement.
  - They show why Section 20 cannot practically be followed.

## **Resident Engagement Plan**

To meet tribunal expectations, Housing 21 proposes:

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.

## **Ensuring Wider Participation**

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion on ensuring more schemes engage in virtual sessions.</li> <li>• Emphasis on supporting managers to set up TVs/HDMI/Smart TV displays.</li> </ul> <p><b>Closing the Loop</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important for Housing 21 to provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Response summary to resident feedback.</li> <li>◦ Update following tribunal decision.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
5.	<b>Rent Letters – Final Print and Feedback</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final rent letter has been signed off and sent for printing.</li> <li>• Letters will be issued end of February.</li> <li>• All resident panel feedback was incorporated.</li> <li>• <b>Tracy</b> to share a copy of the final version with the group (read-only).</li> </ul>
6.	<b>Reflections: How Did Last Year Go? What Has the Group Achieved?</b>	<p><b>Year-End Presentation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Tracy</b> proposed producing a short annual review vlog or presentation showcasing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Achievements over the past 12–18 months</li> <li>◦ Improvements to service charge clarity</li> <li>◦ Vlogs produced</li> <li>◦ Resident engagement successes</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>ID</b> and <b>TL</b> confirmed a draft review document is being prepared for discussion on 26th with <b>Kris, Sophia, Jamie</b> etc.</li> <li>• <b>Tracy</b> will attend the meeting (invite to be sent by <b>Amber</b>).</li> </ul>

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

- Pre-meeting accuracy
- Clear manager support
- Early correction before circulation

## **Manager Confidence**

- Many managers come from care backgrounds, not finance.
- They need:
  - Training
  - Support
  - Scripts/templates
  - Encouragement to say “I don’t know, but I’ll find out.”

## **Monthly Monitoring**

- Group agreed budgeting should be reviewed monthly, not once a year.
- Managers encouraged to use coffee mornings to discuss actuals vs budgets.

## **Positive Momentum**

- Despite challenges, group acknowledged:
  - Major progress since last year
  - Better consistency
  - Strong foundations for next year’s improvements



		<p><b>Meeting Close</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Tracy</b> thanked everyone for excellent engagement and confirmed next meeting date.</li> <li>• <b>Lucy</b> invited volunteers for upcoming vlogs; several residents agreed to participate.</li> <li>• Meeting ended.</li> </ul>
8.	<b>Follow-up tasks:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Action:</b> full-year meeting dates at the top of minutes - <b>Amber</b></li> <li>• <b>Action:</b> Meeting link to be re-sent on the morning of each meeting - <b>Amber</b></li> <li>• <b>Action:</b> Contact <b>Vanessa</b>, to explore their successful workflow methods in complaints - <b>Tracy</b> and <b>Amber</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Action:</b> Prepare a PFI-focused vlog, a separate meeting to be organise between <b>Tracy</b>, <b>Ian</b> and <b>Jenny</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Action:</b> Invite <b>Jessica Ettridge</b> to the next meeting about suggested involvement of Housing 21 Digital Inclusivity Team</li> <li>• <b>Action:</b> Copy of Rent Letters, the final version to share with the group - <b>Tracy</b></li> </ul>