Abbeyfield National Residents' Panel

Minutes 06/10/2026 2pm on Teams

Present:	Resident Engagement
(SP)	Abbeyfield Resident - Esk Moors Lodge, Whitby
(AK)	Abbeyfield Resident - Esk Moors Lodge, Whitby
(BST)	Abbeyfield Resident - Ivy House - Somerset
(JG)	Abbeyfield Resident - High Lane, Stockport
(MB)	Abbeyfield Resident – The Old Vicarage, Somerset
(SF)	Abbeyfield Resident - Girton Green, Cambridge
(AE)	Abbeyfield Resident – Downing House, Manchester
(RS)	Abbeyfield Resident - Girton Green, Cambridge
(PS)	Abbeyfield Resident - Isle of Wight
Claire Lees (CL)	Interim Customer Operations Director - Abbeyfield
Jonathan Earnshaw (JE)	Complaints Manager - Abbeyfield
David Carr (DC)	Board Member - Abbeyfield
Justin O'Brien (JO'B)	Resident Engagement Manager - Abbeyfield
Apologies:	
(MN)	Abbeyfield Resident – Abbeyfield House - Ulverston
(AO)	Abbeyfield Resident - Esk Moors Lodge, Whitby
(PB)	Abbeyfield Resident - Carnarvon House, Nottinghamshire
(RG)	Abbeyfield Resident - Salisbury

	ITEM
1.	**Welcome, Introductions and Apologies:** Justin welcomed residents and guests. David Carr introduced himself as a Board member and outlined his business background and experience of care services. Claire Lees introduced herself as Interim Customer Operations Director, and Jonathan Earnshaw, Complaints Manager.
2.	**Minutes of Previous Meeting:** The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed and approved as an accurate reflection of the meeting.
3.	**Action Log:** The Panel reviewed the action log. Completed actions included the follow-up on Alertacall and the action arising from the previous discussion about how information is presented at resident meetings. Claire Lees had taken the latter issue forward and committed to improving the accessibility of information.

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	The action concerning out-of-hours fire issues remains open. A representative from Health and Safety has been invited to attend a future meeting and a date is awaited. An update on the Wi-Fi project will also be requested, as the project has experienced delays. The Panel confirmed that it did not need the full corporate policy list and was content for resident-facing policies to continue to be identified for review. An update from the Sustainability Working Group remains outstanding. The care survey findings had not yet been discussed because of full agendas. Justin will circulate the draft summary and action plan and bring the item back to the next meeting for resident feedback.
4.	**David Carr – Board Member** David Carr attended as part of the programme to strengthen links between the National Residents' Panel and Abbeyfield's Board. He welcomed questions from residents about the organisation and the Board's role. Residents raised questions about Abbeyfield's appeal to prospective residents and whether its accommodation and services were being marketed effectively. David was asked whether he would personally consider living in an Abbeyfield service. He explained that it would not suit his current circumstances but acknowledged the question. The discussion highlighted concerns about vacancies, particularly at Girton Green, and the visibility of Abbeyfield's marketing activity. Residents suggested that greater communication about marketing initiatives would help them understand what Abbeyfield was doing to attract new residents. A resident asked David and Claire what they considered Abbeyfield's greatest challenges and how the Panel could help address them. Claire outlined the operational challenges facing the organisation and the importance of developing consistent services, policies and procedures. David emphasised the value of the Panel from the Board's perspective. Although Board members visit Abbeyfield services, they do not experience them daily. He explained that hearing directly from residents provides an important insight into how services operate in practice and helps inform the Board's understanding of residents' experiences. Justin confirmed that Panel minutes are shared with Board members, ensuring that residents' discussions and feedback are visible at Board level.
5.	**Claire Lees – Interim Customer Operations Director** Claire discussed some of the key operational challenges facing Abbeyfield, including property vacancies, income and debt recovery, recruitment difficulties in care and support services, and the need to reduce reliance on agency staff. She

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	acknowledged that standards and practices vary between services and explained that work is underway to develop greater consistency across the organisation. Residents raised concerns about what *independent living* means within Abbeyfield and whether there is sufficient clarity about the different types of accommodation and support provided. The discussion highlighted the importance of distinguishing between independent living, sheltered housing, extra care and residential care, particularly in terms of residents' expectations and the support available. Residents also expressed concern that some services can feel disconnected from the wider Abbeyfield organisation. While recognising the need for consistent policies and procedures, they stressed the importance of retaining the individual character and identity of local services. The Panel discussed the long-term consequences of organisational decisions, with residents explaining that decisions made by previous management teams can continue to affect services and residents many years later. Claire acknowledged these concerns and explained that the work to strengthen organisational frameworks and procedures was intended to provide greater consistency and continuity. Vacancies and the future sustainability of services were also discussed, particularly in relation to Girton Green. Residents raised concerns about the effectiveness and visibility of marketing activity. Claire confirmed that vacancies are reviewed regularly by the Executive Team and that additional specialist support had been brought in to assist with leasehold matters. Claire emphasised the importance of understanding residents' experiences when developing and improving services. She welcomed the Panel's feedback and indicated that she would return for further discussions as work progresses.
6.	**Complaints Update** Jonathan Earnshaw, Complaints Manager, presented the quarterly complaints update. He reported a modest increase in complaint volumes and explained that Abbeyfield was examining the themes, trends and underlying causes of complaints rather than focusing solely on the number received. Maintenance issues and delays to repairs continued to feature among the main reasons for complaints, alongside concerns relating to staff and individual services. Jonathan explained that Abbeyfield uses information from the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to benchmark performance and identify opportunities for improvement. The Panel discussed how learning from complaints is used to improve services. Jonathan explained that actions arising from complaints are monitored and that Abbeyfield is working to ensure improvements are implemented rather than simply recorded. He also highlighted the importance of considering whether an issue

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	raised by one resident might affect others who have not complained, allowing Abbeyfield to take wider corrective action where appropriate. Residents were asked whether they had noticed improvements in complaint handling. Feedback was mixed. One service reported a positive experience, with a recent complaint having been resolved satisfactorily. Other residents described ongoing concerns, including unresolved rent and financial matters, and expressed frustration about delays and difficulties obtaining clear responses when issues involved several departments. Jonathan agreed to follow up on the individual matters raised. The discussion also considered anti-social behaviour (ASB), particularly where a resident's behaviour may be linked to health conditions or additional support needs. Residents highlighted the impact that challenging behaviour can have on other people living in a service and questioned whether staff in independent living settings always have the knowledge and support required to manage these situations. Jonathan explained that work on ASB guidance and training would help colleagues recognise different circumstances and respond appropriately, while considering the needs of everyone affected. Residents also raised concerns about the cost, responsiveness and effectiveness of Abbeyfield's repairs arrangements. Questions were raised about whether local managers could have greater flexibility to use local contractors and manage smaller repairs. Jonathan confirmed that contractors are now involved in discussions about learning from complaints. Justin agreed to invite the Head of Property to a future Panel meeting to explain Abbeyfield's approach to repairs and contractor arrangements and respond to residents' questions. The discussion highlighted the importance of ensuring that learning from complaints results in demonstrable improvements to services and residents' experiences.
7.	**KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) – For Discussion** The panel were presented with a selection of property and compliance Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Panel to consider, with a view to identifying which measures residents would find most useful. Residents questioned the value of some compliance indicators, noting that many relate to statutory requirements and offer limited opportunities for residents to influence performance. The Panel suggested that measures more closely related to residents' day-to-day experiences would be more meaningful. Food safety was highlighted as an example, including the importance of food hygiene ratings. Residents also suggested that information relating to individual services could be more relevant than organisation-wide performance figures.

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	It was agreed that the Panel would revisit KPIs in six months, considering a broader selection of measures that includes property and compliance information alongside indicators more directly relevant to residents' experiences and priorities.
8.	**STAIRs update and discussion** The panel were provided an update on the Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements (STAIRs), which became part of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard from 1 October. The Panel had received the new STAIRs policy and was shown the STAIRs section of the Resident Hub. The page brings together information under seven themes, including organisational information, spending, priorities and performance, decisions, policies, registers and housing services. Justin explained that STAIRs applies to social housing rather than care services. The Panel was positive about the approach and welcomed the increased transparency. Residents highlighted the need to ensure that people who are less confident online are also made aware of the information. Justin agreed to send the Resident Hub poster, including its web link and QR code, to Panel members. It was also agreed that the Resident Hub QR code could be included in the minutes. Justin confirmed that Resident Panel minutes will also be published so that other residents can see the issues being discussed and how the Panel contributes.
9.	**Policy Review – Standing item** The Panel revisited its request for clearer feedback after reviewing policies. Justin explained a new process agreed with the corporate policy lead: resident feedback will be sent to the policy owner with a short template asking them to explain what feedback has been accepted, what changes have been made and, where appropriate, why suggestions have not been taken forward. The completed response will then be shared with the Panel, allowing residents to see how their contribution has influenced the policy. The Panel supported the approach and agreed to trial it. A suggestion was made that completed feedback templates could also be published alongside Panel information to demonstrate the impact of engagement. It was agreed this would be considered.
10.	**Forward Plan** The Panel considered items for future involvement and representation, including family/carer involvement and attendance at the Customer Committee. Justin asked the Panel to consider, in principle, whether there could be a role for family members or carers following an approach from a relative of a care resident who is unable to participate directly.

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	Different views were expressed. Some residents saw value in enabling family members to contribute, particularly where a resident cannot communicate their own views. Others were concerned that the Resident Panel should remain a forum for residents and that introducing relatives or carers could change its purpose or lead to discussion becoming focused on individual services or circumstances. The Panel agreed that no change should be made at this stage. Justin will explore possible options, including whether relatives or carers could be involved through a separate or complementary route, and bring proposals back to the Panel for consideration.
11.	**Any Other Business** **Customer Committee** The next Customer Committee meeting is scheduled for 20 October. Justin reminded the Panel that resident attendance is intended to rotate so that different members have an opportunity to meet Committee and Board members. Several residents expressed willingness to attend, and the representative will be confirmed separately. The Panel heard examples of resident-led activity at Ivy House, including one resident regularly reading to another resident, fundraising for the Alzheimer's Society and Macmillan, monthly lunches and plans for a Christmas lunch. These were welcomed as positive examples of residents supporting one another and maintaining links with the wider community. It was also reported that a Salvation Army choir group had been booked to visit Newport.
12.	**Next Meeting:** **Tuesday October 3 at 2pm on Teams**

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