



**Minutes of Salix Homs Customer Committee Meeting
held on Tuesday 24 January 2023 via Zoom**

MEMBERS:	Charlotte Haines (Chair) Marta Diaz (MD) Karen Hamilton-Hulse (KH) Jason Marland (JM) Keri Muldoon (KM) Rashidah Owoseni (RO) Charlie Williamson (CW) Vicki Gallagher (VG) Ahmed Abdulmalek (AA)
OFFICERS:	Sian Grant, Executive Director of Operations (EDO) Susan Wilkinson, Customer Engagement Manager (CEM) Nichola Shepard, Director of Governance, Risk and Assurance (DGRA) Lorraine Butler, Customer Service Manager (CSM) Becky Airey, Governance and Policy Officer (GPO)
OBSERVERS:	Greig Lees (GL)
APOLOGIES:	Cynthia Alloyda (CA) Gareth Evans (GE)
The meeting commenced at 18:04	
ITEM	
1.	Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest
	<p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited GL to introduce himself to the Committee.</p> <p>GL informed members that he was currently a member of Salix Homes Board and the Chair of Growth and Development (G&D) Committee, adding that he would be stepping down from both positions at the Board's AGM in September 2023. He highlighted the roles and responsibilities of the G&D Committee of which included strategic oversight of the company's development across Salford and Greater Manchester.</p> <p>Apologies were received from Cynthia Alloyda and Gareth Evans.</p>
2.	Minutes of Last Meeting held on Tuesday 08 November 2022
	The Committee approved the minutes from the last meeting held on Tuesday 08 November 2022.
3.	Customer Committee Action Tracker
	<p>The CEM gave a brief overview of the progress on the Customer Committee action tracker.</p> <p>The Committee noted the progress on the action tracker.</p>

4.	Chairs Update
	<p>The Chair gave an overview of what was discussed at the last Board meeting, which included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board members were assured that Salix were successfully dealing with damp and mould in tenants’ homes and members now received fortnightly updates from the CEO. • Over the period July-September 2022 10 applications had been made to the Customer Support Fund, with 8 applications having been approved. • Board members approved the rent increase of 7% for April 2023. • Salix’s process against EDI commitments had been very positive, particularly in relation to advancing Salix’s culture of inclusion and innovation. • The overall performance of the organisation as at the end of Quarter 2 remained static in line with previous months. <p>The Committee noted the Chairs Update.</p>
5.	Outcomes of Governance Review and Review of Board and Committee Remuneration
	<p>The DGRA informed members that DTP were appointed to undertake a review of Salix Homes’ governance arrangements to ensure continued good governance in line with the organisation’s Code of Governance.</p> <p>The DGRA gave an overview of the findings and informed the Committee that the approach to governance at Salix Homes was found to be effective with no evidence of non-compliance in respect to the Governance and Financial Viability Standards or the NHF Code of Governance. She added that the suggestions made as part of the report were intended for continuous improvement and good governance practice.</p> <p>The DGRA also gave an overview of the Remuneration review and highlighted that the report had suggested Customer Committee members should not be remunerated at the same level as other Board members. She assured members that the Board had agreed to not implement this suggestion with current members.</p> <p>Members were asked to discuss and note the contents of the report.</p> <p>KM disagreed with the suggestion that members should be discouraged from making use of the chat function during meetings and noted she had found it helpful to note points during long meetings.</p> <p>JM expressed that he did not think anyone had an issue with the use of the chat function in the past and felt that it actually aided with the flow of Committee meetings. He added that they would risk reducing engagement if members were to stop using the chat function due to the length of the meetings.</p> <p>VG echoed KM and JM’s comments and noted it would be useful for members to have a Teams channel where they could discuss agendas between meetings.</p> <p>The DGRA assured members that they were welcome to contact officers outside of Committee meetings if they had any questions or wanted clarification. She added that Salix hoped to develop a Customer Committee portal in the future.</p>

	<p>KH asked whether the chat bar could be used in the case of an emergency, such as a member experiencing an unstable internet connection, to which the DGRA confirmed this would continue to be a purpose of the chat bar.</p> <p>RO queried whether the Customer Committee would be included in discussions to uptake the recommendations from the report. The DGRA informed members that she would look at how effective Salix Homes' Effectiveness Reviews have been in the past and would like to make this process as inclusive as possible to include all Committees. She added that it was possible that the Effectiveness Survey to get feedback on how the Customer Committee currently functions could be completed via a survey.</p> <p>KM expressed concern that if Salix were to reduce the number of committee meetings and task & finish groups then members would lose sight of various issues facing the sector. She added that groups such as the high-rise forum were essential to ensure Salix remained at the forefront of discussions.</p> <p>The DGRA explained that the meetings generated through the current structure had been seen to be too resource heavy and noted that officers would look to streamline meetings by promoting in depth discussions and debate between members. She added that this would mean officers spent less time explaining the contents of the report and members would spend more time on discussion.</p> <p>The Committee discussed and noted the contents of the report.</p>
6.	<p>Rent and Service Charge 2023/24 – Update and Communications</p>
	<p>The EDO provided members with an update on the annual rent and service charge increase and highlighted that Salix Homes had approved a rental increase in line with the Government's rent cap of 7%. She added that Salix would continue to provide support to customers who were struggling to pay their rent or who were affected by the cost of living and that £30,000 would be made available to customers in the Customer Support Fund.</p> <p>The EDO also presented the proposed rent and service charge letters that would be sent to Salix Homes customers and asked members to provide feedback.</p> <p>CW informed officers that the letter was too long and that it might put some customers off reading it all. She added that the information that Salix was a not-for-profit organisation should be closer to the beginning of the letter in attempt to reduce any negative reaction from customers.</p> <p>JM added that it would be beneficial if the letter compared Salix's rent to other housing associations in the area to show customers they were still getting value for money despite the rent increase.</p> <p>Several members concurred that the letter was too green and came across quite glaring. AA added that the colour combination was not accessible to those with colour-blindness as the writing would not appear visible.</p> <p>MD queried whether all customers received the section on service charges, or just those who paid service charges, as it would reduce the size of the letter. The EDO informed members that she would look into this and feed back to them.</p> <p>MD noted that it might be worthwhile including information regarding upkeep so customers were aware that by spending money on communal areas regularly, they</p>

would actually save money in the long run.

KH commented that the letter was repetitive, especially regarding when the rent increase would start.

In response to a query regarding accessible versions of the letter, the EDO informed members that Salix was currently reviewing how it provided information to customers but that this letter would be produced before a decision came into effect.

MD asked whether it was necessary to dedicate an entire page for the CEO's signature as condensing the number of pages would not only save the business money but also reduce waste.

The Chair reiterated to officers that it should be made clear that financial support was not just for those who were in receipt of benefits and that anyone who was struggling could apply to the Customer Support Fund.

KM queried whether the letters would be a good opportunity to alert customers to coffee mornings held by Salix. The EDO replied that it would be more effective to send out a separate communication to tenants.

VG questioned whether the letter could be condensed by including a link to FAQs on the letter to which the EDO confirmed it was a possibility.

The Committee discussed and noted:

- **The rent increases agreed by Salix Homes Board.**
- **The communications to customers to inform them of the increases.**

Actions:

- **The EDO to ask the Comms Team to amend the Rent & Service Charge Letter.**

7. ICS Survey Results and Action Plan

The CSM summarised the results of the Institute of Customer Service Surveys which had been carried out with customers and colleagues. She highlighted that there was a slight decline in overall satisfaction scores in both surveys but noted that the results were generally positive, with the customer survey often exceeding the public services sector average. The CSM added that scores for both surveys met the threshold for ICS accreditation and that areas of focus for improvement included 'problem handling' (customers), and creativity and consistency (colleagues).

In response to a query regarding surprises in the data, the CSM informed members that she did not find anything overly surprising but noted that she would like to see an improvement in Salix's handling of problems first time.

JM was glad to see that there had been some improvement in the results, although it may not be noticed by customers.

Several members expressed that they were impressed with the new Salix Homes website design and accessibility features, with three languages having been translated extremely well. MD noted that the system had issues with translating the website into Spanish as the sentences often did not make sense.

The CSM informed members that Salix does not currently have data on user experience of the new website but that this would likely come through at the next

	<p>survey in October 2023 or January 2024.</p> <p>RO complemented officers that Salix’s overall Colleague Survey Results was higher than that of the local government sector.</p> <p>AA reiterated RO’s comment and informed members that there was likely to be a dip in everyone’s satisfaction results due to rises in cost-of-living.</p> <p>In response to a query regarding performance related pay, the CSM informed members that staff at Salix did not receive bonuses for good performance.</p> <p>The Committee discussed and noted the ICS Survey Results and Action Plan.</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p>Customer Scrutiny</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenancy Termination Process report • Scrutiny action plan progress
	<p>The CEM provided members with an overview of the Scrutiny report and highlighted various recommendations, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-introduce the pre-termination inspection with the Housing Officer. • Open Salix Homes’ reception again full time for customers. • Provide the customer with a checklist of tasks they must do before moving out. • Provide deceased customers NOK with 2 weeks grace period to allow them to clear the property, which may provide encouragement to clear it sooner. <p>The Chair asked for clarity as to why Appendix 3 and 4 appeared to only contain questions and no answers. The CEM informed the Committee that the questions were those asked of the officers at Salix and that they had been included so members were aware of what had been asked.</p> <p>KH asked what would happen if a tenant did not inform Salix that they were moving and how Salix would recover the money. The EDO informed members that if a property had been abandoned, officers would follow the Abandoned Tenancy process whereby officers would visit the property to confirm it had been abandoned and issue a 7-day letter. If there was not response to the letter a Notice to Quit would be served. The EDO also explained that Salix would sometimes take tenants to court to reclaim the lost income.</p> <p>RO queried how realistic the recommendations in the report were, taking into consideration cost implications. The EDO informed members that not all recommendations were feasible, and that Salix would produce a Management Response which would look at capability, capacity, cost and resource.</p> <p>JM suggested that whatever decision Salix made regarding deceased customers, they would still receive backlash as it was a sensitive subject. He added that a lot of organisations do not have a bereavement period and Salix would not be able to claim any money back from the estate. The EDO informed members that Salix would need to look at the cost effectiveness of the bereavement period and a decision would be made depending on whether two weeks of missed rent would result in a significant loss.</p> <p>The Committee discussed and noted the contents of the report.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>Customer Charter Performance and Action Plan</p>

	<p>The EDO gave an overview of the service area performance against the Customer Service Charter and informed members that the services assessed in Quarter 2 were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income Management • Environmental Services and Estate Services <p>The EDO also informed the Committee that Salix would implement the actions highlighted in the service assessments against the customer charter, carry out Q2 assessments and report progress back to the Committee against the actions agreed in previous assessments.</p> <p>JM queried whether a property became a Void at the time it became empty or when the business began to lose money on the property. The EDO informed members that a property became a Void four calendar weeks following the notice.</p> <p>JM asked the EDO if Salix got a property back before the four-weeks, would the property still be classified as a Void. The EDO explained that it would depend if the tenant had paid for the four-weeks or not and that people could return during the four-week period.</p> <p>JM also asked what would happen if a deceased tenant had paid a year up front to which the EDO informed members that Salix would return the payment to the tenant's next of kin.</p> <p>The Committee discussed and noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The performance of each of the service areas against the Customer Charter. • The recommended actions for improvement against the Charter.
10.	Sub-Group Minutes – PP & COG
	The Committee reviewed and noted the minutes from the COG Sub-Group.
11.	Any Other Business
	<p>The Chair informed the Committee that Jo Tripney and Maggie Bryant had stepped down from being members of the Board due to getting promotions in their jobs.</p> <p>She added that KM had been nominated for Citizen of the Year Reward and congratulated her on her achievement.</p> <p>KM queried why some elderly residents received decorating vouchers instead of the option to have their property decorated by a Salix painter and decorator. The CEM informed members that the Repairs Manager always spoke to the elderly tenant or their family to ask for their preference before sending out vouchers.</p> <p>JM complimented Salix's Twitter team who, over winter, had pinpointed areas where people could keep warm and thought it was really positive. He also complimented Salix's front door survey which asked short, focused questions and felt that it was an effective data collection method.</p> <p>KM asked whether the Committee would be able to see the reports from the fire on Murray Court. The EDO informed members that she would look into it and report back to them.</p> <p>KH expressed concern regarding the number of outstanding actions allocated to Clare</p>

	<p>Taylor. The EDO informed the Committee that she had raised the issue with the relevant colleagues and Clare's actions would be kept under review.</p> <p>The CEM updated members on attending Teatime sessions and asked if there was anything that they would like to focus on.</p> <p>The Chair asked if the Committee could have training on how to navigate Microsoft Teams as many members were unfamiliar with the system.</p> <p>AA offered to share his Teams guides with members should they need them.</p>
12.	Date of Next Meeting
	Tuesday 7th March 3023, 18:00-20:00.
<p>The meeting closed at 20:11</p>	