



**Minutes of Salix Homes Customer Committee Meeting held on Tuesday  
6<sup>th</sup> June 2023 via Zoom.**

<b>MEMBERS:</b>	Charlotte Haines (Chair) Karen Hamilton-Hulse (KH) Cynthia (Bethel) Alloyda (CA) Marta Diaz (MD) Keri Muldoon (KM) Jason Marland (JM) Vicki Gallagher (VG) Gareth Evans (GE) Ahmed Abdulmalek (AA)
<b>OFFICERS:</b>	Sue Sutton, Chief Executive (CEO) Sian Grant, Executive Director of Customer and Communities (EDCC) Liam Turner, Executive Director of Assets, Growth & Sustainability (EDAGS) Susan Wilkinson, Customer Engagement Manager (CEM) Lorraine Butler, Customer Service Manager (CSM) Becky Airey, Governance and Policy Officer (GPO) (minutes)
<b>OBSERVERS:</b>	Zeenet Quraishi, Governance Manager (GM) Jim Battle, Chair of the Board (JB)
<b>APOLOGIES:</b>	Charlie Williamson (CW) Rashidah Owoseni (RO)

The meeting commenced at 18:09.

ITEM	
<b>1.</b>	<b>Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest</b>
	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.  Apologies were received from CW and RO.  There were no Declarations of Interest.
<b>2.</b>	<b>Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 March 2023</b>
	<b>The Committee approved the minutes from the last meeting held on 22 March 2023.</b>
	<b>Update from the Chair of the Board</b>
	The Chair of the Board thanked the Committee for all of the work they had been involved with and noted that the direction and support the Board had received from them had been extremely important and beneficial. Members were also thanked for attending the Salix Homes Induction events as it was a great way to bring customers and employees together and reinforce that the customer is at the heart of everything we do at Salix Homes.
<b>3.</b>	<b>Matters Arising and Action Tracker</b>

	<b>The Committee noted the changes to the Action Tracker.</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Chair's Update</b>
	<p>The Chair gave an update on the items that were discussed at the and the Board Strategy Day on 5 May 2023. She informed members that the Board had discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current issues and the operating environment for the Social Housing sector;</li> <li>• Salix's current position against the Corporate plan;</li> <li>• The 40 Year Business Plan, including stress testing;</li> <li>• Treasury management;</li> <li>• The circumstances for when a merger may be considered;</li> <li>• The future of the Sustainability Committee and its merger with the Growth &amp; Development Committee to create the Assets &amp; Sustainability Committee.</li> </ul> <p>The Chair informed members that she would circulate a summary of the items that were discussed and approved at the Board meeting which took place on 28 March 2023.</p> <p><b>The Committee noted the Chair's update.</b></p> <p><b>Actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Chair to circulate a summary of the Board meeting that took place on 28 March 2023.</b></li> </ul>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Annual Complaints Report and Self-Assessment</b>
	<p>Item 6 was brought forward due to scheduling conflicts with the CEO and items 5 and 11 being presented together.</p> <p>The CSM provided the Committee with an overview of customer feedback and complaints throughout 2022/23. The key findings were presented to members, which included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The repairs service received the highest number of formal complaints;</li> <li>• The top reasons for complaints were 'time taken', 'unresolved issue' and 'poor level of service';</li> <li>• 46% of formal complaints were upheld or partially upheld;</li> <li>• 164 complaints were de-escalated, a reduction of 83 from 2021/22;</li> <li>• There were 531 expressions of dissatisfaction recorded, an increase of 201 from 2021/22;</li> <li>• The top reasons for dissatisfaction were 'lack of communication', 'time taken' and 'poor level of service'.</li> </ul> <p>The CSM also informed members that the key recommendations included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each service area to use customer feedback and learning from complaints to improve how the service is delivered;</li> <li>• Learning from complaints needs to continue to be reviewed to see whether they have positively impacted on the service and reduced further complaints;</li> <li>• 'Time taken', 'unresolved issues' and 'poor level of service' should be looked at in more detail to see if any improvements can be made.</li> </ul>

	<p>A member of the Committee informed officers that they had not received any transactional surveys over the past few years, including one for a repair that was carried out last week. The EDCC informed the Committee that surveys are not sent out for all repairs or contacts with the contact centre to avoid survey fatigue. The CSM added that they would look into the issue.</p> <p>The Committee noted that it would be beneficial to get members of the Customer Committee involved with the service area learning workshops to strengthen the dialog between customers and Salix. The CSM agreed that it would be brilliant if members could volunteer and would welcome anyone who wanted to.</p> <p>Members added that it would be useful to extend the volunteer invite to members of the Complaints Oversight Group (COG).</p> <p>In response to a query about whether complaints increased as a direct result of rent and service charge increase, the CSM informed members that there were no trends in the data that would suggest this.</p> <p>The Committee asked if complaints had reduced as a result of officers asking tenants if they had any damp, mould or condensation issues on the back of phone calls. The CSM informed members that they did not currently collect this data, but proactively asking customers hoped to have this effect.</p> <p>Members expressed concern regarding the workload of Salix Homes employees and asked for assurance that they could manage the work to review and learning from complaints alongside the new structural changes. The CSM assured members that, by putting the new strategies and procedures in place, the processes would become more efficient and reduce the workload for colleagues in the long term.</p> <p>In response to a query about whether Salix employed enough service men to respond to repairs, the EDAGS informed members that all operatives were now multi-skilled, meaning that they can respond to most repairs at a property. The EDAGS added that resource would be something that is analysed with the intensive review of repairs.</p> <p><b>The Committee noted the analysis of informal and formal complaints feedback during Q4 and throughout 2022/23.</b></p>
<p><b>5 &amp; 11.</b></p>	<p><b>Our future together &amp; Corporate Plan Update and 2023-25 Priorities</b></p>
	<p>Item 11 was presented with item 5 due to various overlaps in themes and discussion points.</p> <p>The CEO presented the Corporate Plan update and the key priorities for 2023-25. Members were informed that the Board had decided to extend the current Corporate Plan due to it having been delayed as a result of various unexpected events, including the pandemic. The CEO added that the overall themes of the Corporate Plan were still</p>

relevant, despite changes to the economic environment and increased scrutiny of the Social Housing Sector.

The CEO informed the Committee that the Government had not yet consulted on the Decent Homes Standard, so Salix had been unable to prepare/implement the new Standard. Members were assured that they would be consulted when the Standard is published.

The Committee were informed that as a result of the pandemic and the current economic environment, Salix had put on hold its Older People's Strategy to develop a contemporary standard of 'Homes for Older People' as many of the sheltered schemes were no longer fit for purpose. The CEO noted that people were now living longer, and more independently than they had when the properties were first built. T

The CEO informed members that Salix had not fully delivered on data governance, particularly in terms of customer data used to deliver services. Salix would soon be launching a census of all customers, the 'Getting to Know You' survey, which would improve the quality of customer data held centrally.

The CEO also gave an overview of other customer activities delivered and how success will be measured.

Members were informed that they would receive an invitation to the colleague event that would be taking place in September 2023.

In response to a query about how Salix Homes would establish its physical presence in neighbourhoods, the EDCC informed members that they would advertise the dates and times housing officers would be on estates and look to arrange for officers to be present in community locations. The CEO added that they hoped to strengthen the data Salix had on customers, and this would include how customers would like the business to communicate and engage with them.

The Committee suggested that Salix send an email to residents with a presentation which included who their new housing officer would be and key information. It was also noted that it would be beneficial to host an open day so customers could meet their officer face-to-face.

Members noted that Salix should include awards they have won and been nominated for, including the maintenance of its G1 V2 status, despite the pandemic as other housing associations had not fared so well.

The CEO informed members that they would have advertised the business' positive achievements more than they have done but as that the sector has been under scrutiny, the time had not been right.

**The Committee noted the Corporate Plan Review and 2023-25 Priorities.**

**Actions:**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Circulate the Corporate Plan Update and 2023-25 Priorities presentation.</b></li> </ul>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Draft annual scrutiny plan</b>
	<p>The EDCC gave an overview of the draft annual scrutiny plan and informed members that the assessment of customer-facing service areas had revealed five areas recommended for scrutiny.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer service (focus on the basics of customer service including right first time and referrals);</li> <li>• Customer communications (focus on accessibility and tone of voice);</li> <li>• Rent arrears (focus on support provided);</li> <li>• Tenancy support (including starter tenancy process);</li> <li>• 1st Response and security.</li> </ul> <p>The committee were asked to choose two areas from the five for scrutiny during 2023/24. The committee chose Customer Service (focusing on the basics of customer service including right first time and referrals) and Customer Communications (focussing on accessibility and tone of voice) as these are the areas of concern that come up most often when they are monitoring performance and service delivery.</p> <p>The EDCC informed members that they would draw up some scopes for the two areas for the committee and bring them back to the committee for approval.</p> <p><b>The Committee approved the scrutiny plan for 2023/24.</b></p>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Review of repairs service – consultation plan</b>
	<p>The EDAGS gave an overview of the proposed approach to customer consultation and the methodology to carry out a review of repairs and maintenance in response to the Better Social Housing Review. Members were informed that, once the proposal had received approval, a formalised project team would be established to create a detailed project plan, with added detail and specific actions to ensure a thorough and managed review.</p> <p>In response to a query about who would be present at contractor meetings, the EDAGS informed the Committee that the contract manager would typically attend. The Chair thanked the EDAGS for their response and noted that she would send an email for further clarification.</p> <p>The Committee noted that they often felt that communal repairs were not considered a priority despite affecting the whole block of tenants. The EDAGS informed members that they would happily include communal repairs in the review.</p> <p>Members asked if Salix had an apprenticeship programme to reduce the need of outsourcing contractors in the future. The EDAGS informed members that Salix used to have an apprentice scheme and that it would be something to consider in the review. The EDAGS added that there would be some benefits regarding futureproofing the repairs service but that they would still have to contract services such as glazing as the cost of materials would be too high to offer any efficiencies.</p> <p><b>The Committee noted the proposed methodology to customer consultation as part of the repairs and maintenance review.</b></p>
<b>9.</b>	<b>Customer Service Strategy Annual Review</b>
	<p>The EDCC provided members with an end-of-year progress update on the customer service strategy action plan and gave an overview of how customers accessed Salix</p>

	<p>Home's services across multiple channels.</p> <p>One of the aims of the customer service strategy was to increase the use of self service channels for transactional interactions and increase the time available on the phone for transactions that required more time and support. Members were provided with an overview of how the channels customers used to transact with Salix over the last four years had shifted from predominantly phone with very little use of My Salix to a significant increase in MySalix transactions and a significant decrease in telephone transactions</p> <p>The committee were also provided with progress against the 2022/24 action plan and details of the 2023/24 action for approval.</p> <p><b>The Committee approved the 2023/24 Customer Service Strategy action plan.</b></p>
<b>10.</b>	<b>Customer Voice Report</b>
	<p>The EDCC presented the Customer Voice report to the Committee to provide them with assurance that Salix Homes have listened to, and acted on, the customer voice in the last 12 months. Members were provided with an overview of the key areas, which included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer Committee – training and learning</li> <li>• Customer panels: Apartment Living Forum, Complaints Oversight Group, Procurement Panel</li> <li>• Customer scrutiny</li> <li>• Community connector and community activity</li> <li>• Customer surveys</li> <li>• Complaint handling</li> </ul> <p>The Committee asked that information on food pantries and community events are included in the report.</p> <p><b>The Committee approved the Annual Customer Voice report.</b></p>
<b>12.</b>	<b>Consumer Standards Self-Assessment</b>
	<p>The EDCC gave an overview of Salix Homes' self-assessment against the Consumer Standards and informed members that they were fully compliant with all elements. Members were also provided with an action plan to strengthen compliance.</p> <p><b>The Committee resolved to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Note the evidence provided in the 2022/23 self-assessment of compliance with the Consumer Standards.</b></li> </ul>
<b>13.</b>	<b>2022/23 Performance</b>
	<p>The EDCC presented the Performance report for the year ending March 2023. Members were informed that there were 23 PIs that were reported on, and of these 13 were at or above expected levels, 3 were slightly underperforming and 7 were underperforming.</p> <p>In response to a query about what provisions had been put in place to improve the average standard relet time, the EDAGS informed members that there had been a reduction in the number of voids and that this had improved relet time. The EDAGS added that it was often more cost effective to have a longer relet time and use inhouse services than hire subcontractors.</p> <p>The Committee expressed concern about the number of average annual days lost per employee due to sickness absence as it had caused communication issues amongst</p>

	<p>staff. The EDCC informed members that Salix had a tight rein on employee sickness and that they received a monthly report of cases to ensure there was minimal impact on services.</p> <p><b>The Committee noted the 2022/23 Performance Report.</b></p>
<b>14.</b>	<p><b>Internal audit updates</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Repairs audit</b></li> </ul>
	<p>The EDAGS provided members with an update on the repairs internal audit including the findings of the audit, and the progress of recommendations. Members were informed that the findings and recommendations from this audit would be used in conjunction with the review of repairs and maintenance which is being undertaken.</p> <p><b>The Committee resolved to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Note the recommendations and management responses arising out of the audit review.</b></li> <li>• <b>Note the progress made in relation to the recommendations of the report.</b></li> </ul>
<b>15.</b>	<p><b>Sub-Group Minutes (ALF)</b></p>
	<p><b>The Committee noted the minutes from the ALF Sub-Group.</b></p>
<b>15.</b>	<p><b>Any Other Business</b></p>
	<p>The Chair asked the Committee if members would be interested in returning to in-person meetings. All members that were present confirmed that they would but that there should be provisions in place for people to join virtually if meetings were scheduled for school holidays.</p>
<b>16.</b>	<p><b>Date of Next Meeting</b></p>
	<p>Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2023.</p>
<p>The meeting closed at 20:18.</p>	