



**Minutes of Salix Homes Customer Committee Meeting held on Tuesday
07 November 2023 via Microsoft Teams**

MEMBERS:	Charlotte Haines (Chair) Karen Hamilton-Hulse (KH) Cynthia (Bethel) Alloyda (CA) Marta Diaz (MD) Keri Muldoon (KM) Jason Marland (JM) Rashidah Owoseni (RO) Charlie Williamson (CW) Gareth Evans (GE) Ahmed Abdulmalek (AA)
OFFICERS:	Sian Grant, Executive Director of Customers and Communities (EDCC) Liam Turner, Executive Director of Assets, Growth & Sustainability (EDAGS) Jeanette Green, Director of Property Services (DPS) Darren Ashworth, Repairs & Maintenance Manager (RMM) Warren Carlon, Director of Communities (DC) Lorraine Butler, Customer Service & Engagement Manager (CSEM) Pete Modral, Brand and Marketing Manager (BMM) Laura Flint, Customer Engagement Manager (CEM) Becky Airey, Governance and Policy Officer (GPO) (minutes)
OBSERVERS:	Paul Martin (PM)
APOLOGIES:	Vicki Gallagher
The meeting commenced at 18:08	
ITEM	
1.	Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest
	<p>AA welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited PM to introduce himself to the Committee.</p> <p>PM informed members that he was currently a member of Salix Homes Board and that he wanted to engage with the Committee to broaden his knowledge of the customer experience at Salix Homes. PM added that the Board were diligent in their decision-making to incorporate the impact they had on tenants.</p> <p>Members were informed that Vicki Gallagher had resigned from her role as a member of the Customer Committee. The Committee noted thanks to Vicki for all she had done for the Committee and Salix Homes during her tenure and agreed to send her a token of appreciation for her support.</p> <p>No apologies were received.</p>

	<p>CW declared her interest as a Customer Service Officer employed by Salix Homes.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange a gift and a card for Vicki Gallagher on behalf of the Customer Committee.
2.	Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 05 September 2023
	The Committee approved the minutes from the last meeting held on Tuesday 05 September 2023.
3.	Matters Arising and Action Tracker
	<p>The EDCC informed members that the plain-English summary of the Customer Committee Terms of Reference had been finalised and will be circulated to members after the meeting.</p> <p>The Committee noted the changes to the Action Tracker.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circulate the plain-English summary of the Customer Committee Terms of Reference to members.
4.	Chair’s Update
	<p>The Chair provided members with an update on the items that were discussed at the Board meeting that took place on 26 September 2023. She informed members that the Board had discussed and/or approved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Modern Slavery Statement; • The Growth and Merger Position Statement; • The Assets and Liabilities Register; • Salix Homes Customer Committee Governance Proposal; • Stakeholder Survey Feedback; • The LSVT Review and Census Observatory Findings; and • A damp, Mould and Condensation Update. <p>The Committee noted the Chair’s Update.</p>
5.	Repairs Review Update
	<p>The RMM provided members with an update on the initial feedback they had received from colleagues, customers and subcontractors but emphasised that the surveys were still ongoing, so the data set was not final.</p> <p>Members were informed that “time to repair” had been identified by customers as the most problematic, followed by “poor communication” and “flexible appointments”. The RMM noted that 27% of customers surveyed felt the service they had received was below expected standards.</p> <p>The RMM informed the Committee that stakeholder meetings were conducted with customers, colleagues and contractors and provided an overview of the feedback and what Salix Homes could do better.</p>

The DPS presented Salix Homes' proposals to address the issues raised in the feedback and informed members that some trial measures had already been put in place to address these, such as new ways of working.

The Committee were also informed of the next steps which included:

- Reviewing the systems processes;
- Reviewing the options to address the growing demand
- Working to appoint all 6500 live jobs;
- Reviewing possible options for new Out of Hours Service; and
- Providing feedback to engaged customers on what had been implemented.

The EDAGS reminded members that GE and JM had volunteered to review the new online reporting tool.

The Committee expressed that they were glad to see that the Leaseholder surveys had begun as this had previously been looked over but that they were disappointed that communal repairs had not been included despite the issue having been raised at a previous Committee meeting.

The DPS informed members that further consultation regarding communal areas would be required and that they would visit apartment blocks to receive this type of feedback as customers hadn't approached them.

Members suggested that the DPS should also attend the High-Rising Living Forum to incorporate the discussions into feedback regarding communal areas and minor repairs.

In response to a query about whether Salix Homes could provide customers with more accurate timeslots regarding repairs to accommodate for people who worked during the day, the EDAGS informed the Committee that this would largely depend on what the new planning process looked like as they would need to demonstrate that the repairs teams were able to meet the specific times provided. The Committee suggested that customers could select a flexi-slot.

Members asked whether Salix Homes would utilise existing staff to trial the new ways of working, as this would allow them to benchmark their productivity against the current system. The DPS confirmed that they have selected a number of operatives who have worked for Salix Homes for some time.

The Committee were disappointed to see that they had only received 849 responses to the survey and suggested that Salix Homes could visit customers on weekends and evenings to expand the response rate.

The Committee approved the Repairs Review Update.

Actions:

- **Circulate the Repairs Review presentation to the members of the Committee.**

6.	<p>Customer Service Scrutiny Scope</p>
	<p>The CSEM informed members that customer service was recommended as an area for scrutiny by Committee in June following an assessment of strategic risk and that the key reasons for recommendation were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from the transactional surveys about time taken to respond to referrals and the need to improve right first time; • Issues with listening and communication; • Link to EDI in terms of access to services; and • Need to refresh customer service strategy. <p>The Committee expressed concern that the scrutiny might be overtaken by repairs and queried whether repairs could be addressed elsewhere.</p> <p>The CEM informed members that the customer service scrutiny would not focus on the repair itself, but how the repair was handled and the customer’s experience.</p> <p>The EDCC also informed the Committee that the results of the scrutiny will inform a revised Customer Service Strategy which will be much wider than just repairs.</p> <p>The Committee approved the proposed customer service scrutiny scope.</p>
7.	<p>Communications Review Update</p>
	<p>The BMM reminded members that they had approved the proposals to review and improve all customer communications at the last meeting and that the three values underpinning the review were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing customer communications that are informed by our customers; • Making customers feel reassured and keeping our promises; and • Delivering first class services to support customers and communities. <p>The Committee were informed that they had spoken to both customers and Housing Officers about the process of moving into a Salix Homes property and that these insights led to a proposal to introduce a new customer care programme called ‘Settle in with Salix’.</p> <p>The BMM provided members with an overview of Settle in with Salix and highlighted the various steps of communication that would span eight weeks.</p> <p>The Committee were also presented with visual examples of the Settle in with Salix packs and postcard.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the team for creating the Welcome Packs and complimented how they addressed customers with respect.</p> <p>In response to a query and whether accessible formats would be made available, the BMM confirmed that they would and that the Getting to Know You Survey had captured how customers preferred to receive information from Salix Homes.</p> <p>One member expressed that they had not received adequate information or guidance when they moved from a flat to a house which had made them feel that Salix Homes did not care about current tenants.</p>

In response to a query about whether the Welcome Packs would be amended and made available for pre-existing customers who were transferring or swapping properties, the BMM confirmed that they would produce targeted packs and the content would differ depending on the property and the tenant, whether they are existing and new.

Members asked how Salix Homes planned to maintain the communication with tenants after the eight-week period to which the EDCC noted they will keep in touch with new tenants during their first year, and not just the two months outlined in the slides. The EDCC added that some tenants will not want this level of communication but for others it will help ensure they sustain the tenancies.

In response to a query about whether Salix Homes has the resource to sustain communication with tenants considering the scope of the project, the EDCC informed members that each Housing Officer will know who settles in their patch and will be able to issue them with a post-card to begin the early contact.

The Committee suggested that these documents could be compiled into a Salix Homes app so that customers can refer back to these documents should they lose them or want to refer back. The EDCC noted that developing an app is not currently within Salix Homes' budget and that they have not yet found an affordable solution but assured members that they would continue to look at options.

Members asked if there would be any cost implications in terms of increased communication with customers. The BMM informed the Committee that Salix Homes hoped to see a saving in the long-term as they are currently producing various different comms that do not often align. The BMM added that the concept has already been paid for.

The Committee suggested that Salix Homes should allow current tenants access to these Welcome Packs as a 're-welcome to Salix' so that they can easily access all the relevant information. Members added that this would ensure Salix Homes were thinking of existing customers as well as the new ones.

The BMM assured members that this was possible to do and that postcards will be made available to all existing tenants, with Housing Officers hand-delivering them to residents.

In response to a query about whether Housing Officers could encourage tenants to create a MySalix portal account when they sign the Tenant Agreement by bringing a tablet to show them, the BMM informed members that this was in the plan but that they would have to look at the logistics and the costs of the tablets.

The Committee noted the Communications Review Update.

Actions:

- **Circulate the Communications Review presentation to the members of the Committee**

8. Customer Committee Forward Plan and Meeting Schedule

The EDCC provided the Committee with an overview of the proposed meeting schedule and forward plan for 2024. Members were informed that the decision to increase the number of meetings was due to the Committee having been given delegated responsibility from the Salix Homes Board.

The Committee queried whether the timings of the Strategy Days could be changed if requested as it may be challenging for shift workers to attend full-day meetings in-person.

The EDCC informed members that they required the full 6.5 hours to have deeper dives into discussions, but it may be possible to split Strategy Days over two days or the weekend.

In response to a query about whether the dates were fixed, the EDCC noted that the dates had been planned around the schedules of the Board and the Committees, but it would be possible to reschedule Strategy Days.

Members asked whether meetings scheduled to take place at Diamond House could also be hybrid to which the EDCC informed the Committee that it was not encouraged as it was difficult for the Chair to manage these types of meetings.

The Committee agreed to cancel the meeting scheduled for August and to move the proposed agendas items to July and September.

Members asked that the Strategy Days are rescheduled so that they do not take place on a Tuesday, but that they are given enough notice to book annual leave from work.

In response to a query about whether Teatime sessions would be built into the meeting schedule, the EDCC informed members that they were not going ahead with Teatime sessions for the Committee as learning would take place during the meetings instead to ensure members can make informed decisions.

The Committee resolved to:

- **Approve the proposed meeting schedule and move to monthly meetings.**
- **Approve the forward plan.**

Actions:

- **Remove the Customer Committee meeting scheduled for August 2023.**
- **Circulate dates for the Customer Committee Strategy Days to members.**

9. Complaints Half-Year Report

The CSEM provided the Committee with an overview of customer feedback and complaints received during Q1 and Q2 in 2023/24. Key highlights included:

- The number of formal complains received in Q1 of 2023/24 was very similar to the previous quarter but lower than the same quarter last year;
- There was a reduction in formal complaints in Q2;
- 37% of all complaints were initially reported by customers via their MySalix online account;
- There were 150 formal complaints in total, of which 28 escalated to Stage 2 review;
- The repairs team received the highest volume of complaints;
- The most prevalent reasons for formal complaints were “unresolved issues”, “time taken” and “lack of communication”;
- Of the 82 complaint responses in Q1, 32% were fully upheld and 26% were partially upheld; and
- Of the 66 complaint responses sent so far in Q2, 42% were fully upheld and 27% were partially upheld.

Members were also informed that Salix Homes had received an appeal outcome from the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) today and this included a very detailed account of how the HOS had come to the conclusion to increase the level of compensation. The CSEM noted that this letter is helpful to better understand how the HOS makes its decisions regarding appeals.

The CSEM also noted that there was an ongoing consultation regarding the Complaints Handling Code and that the HOS are seeking feedback before 23 November 2023.

The EDCC added that the consultation evidenced how seriously the HOS are about upholding the views of the tenant and ensuring that they have a voice.

Members noted that they had been receiving the same information from the executive team regarding “lessons learned” since the formation of the Committee and noted that, from a customer point of view, it did not appear that Salix Homes was learning much from the complaints. The Committee suggested that as soon as a complaint is upheld, it should be placed onto an action tracker so that officers remain accountable, and that the organisation can prove to the regulator that they are being transparent.

The EDCC agreed that they have reporting the same lessons learned to the Committee and that Salix Homes had not been learning from the complaints and thanked the members of the Committee for continuing to hold the executive team to account.

The CSEM noted that if Salix Homes improves its communication to customers through then complaints would likely reduce.

Members noted that Salix Homes will be supporting managers to reach the 10-day response time but queried whether this would have an impact on the quality of the investigation. The Committee noted that they would prefer to know Salix Homes have done a thorough review rather than sending out a letter for the sake of meeting a deadline.

The CSEM agreed that Salix Homes should always strive to conduct a thorough investigation, but it is not acceptable to miss the 10-day response time where a complaint has not been prioritised or has been overlooked due to workload.

The Committee noted the analysis of informal and formal complaints feedback during Q1 and Q2 2023/24.

Action:

- **Email members a summary of the proposed changes to the Complaints Handling Code.**

10. Customer Support Fund (CSF) Update

The DC presented the Customer Support Fund Update and informed members that the fund will provide up to £300 for help towards rent arrears and £500 for other circumstances, with higher amounts only being considered in exceptional circumstances.

Members were informed that:

- The total spend from April 2023 to October 2023 was £21,640.30 from the total budget of £50,000;
- Salix Homes anticipate a higher volume of applications during the winter months and over the Christmas period, which would be closely monitored;
- The average CSF payment is £270.50 per application; and
- There was one CSF payment which exceeded the parameters (of £650) to support an elderly disabled couple who were struggling with the condition of their garden.

The DC also informed the Committee that six applications had been declined for a variety of reasons, including:

- Financial assessment demonstrated sufficient income;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative sources of funding available; • Application outside the parameters of the scheme e.g. to support a business; • Income and savings sufficient to cover costs; and • Second application within the 12-month period. <p>In response to a query about whether awards to cover arrears was paid directly to tenants or whether Salix Homes deducted the amount from the customer's account, the DC informed members that the award was often paid to tenants, but they could set up a direct debit to make the payment automatic to Salix Homes if they wanted to.</p> <p>The Committee asked whether Salix Homes would consider a second application within the 12-month period in exceptional circumstances. The DC confirmed that they would consider the application but needed to ensure that the money from the fund helped customers who were most in need.</p> <p>The EDCC informed members that information regarding the Customer Support Fund could be accessed via the Salix Homes website under 'How we can help you' and 'Rising cost of living'.</p> <p>The Committee noted the Customer Support Fund Update.</p>
11.	Performance Half-Year Report
	<p>Members were asked to email the EDCC if they had any questions.</p> <p>The Committee noted the Performance Half-Year Report.</p>
12.	Scrutiny Action Tracker
	<p>The EDCC informed the Committee that the Scrutiny Action Tracker will be presented at the Senior Managers Meeting to ensure action owners keep the tracker up to date and confirmed it wouldn't be appropriate for members of the Committee to attend these particular meetings.</p> <p>The Committee noted the Scrutiny Action Tracker.</p>
13.	Any Other Business
	No other business was discussed.
14.	Date of Next Meeting
	<p>Strategy Day – 01 December 2023</p> <p>Committee Meeting – 06 February 2023</p>
<p>The meeting closed at 20:06</p>	