



**Minutes of Salix Homes Customer Committee Meeting held on Tuesday  
06 February 2024 at Diamond House**

<b>MEMBERS:</b>	Charlotte Haines (Chair) Karen Hamilton-Hulse (KH) Marta Diaz (MD) Keri Muldoon (KM) Jason Marland (JM) Rashidah Owoseni (RO) Gareth Evans (GE) Ahmed Abdulmalek (AA)
<b>OFFICERS:</b>	Sian Grant, Executive Director of Customers and Communities (EDCC) Warren Carlon, Director of Communities (DC) Nichola Shepard, Director of Governance, Risk and Assurance (DGRA) Lorraine Butler, Customer Service & Engagement Manager (CSEM) Pete Modral, Customer Communications Manager (CCM) Laura Flint, Customer Engagement Manager (CEM) Zeenet Quraishi, Governance Manager (GM) (minutes)
<b>OBSERVERS:</b>	Mark Beyer (MB) Jim Battle (JB)
<b>APOLOGIES:</b>	Cynthia (Bethel) Alloyda (CA)
The meeting commenced at 18:10	
<b>ITEM</b>	
<b>1.</b>	<b>Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest</b>
	Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited MB to introduce himself to the Committee.  MB informed members that he was currently a member of the Salix Homes Board and the Chair of the Remuneration and Governance Committee.  Apologies received from CA.
<b>2.</b>	<b>Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 07 November 2023</b>
	<b>The Committee approved the minutes from the last meeting held on Tuesday 07 November 2023.</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Matters Arising and Action Tracker</b>
	<b>The Committee noted the changes to the Action Tracker and no matters arising.</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Chair's Update</b>
	The Chair provided members with an update and the following was noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chair thanked the Committee for signing Vicki's leaving card and noted she will be missed and was an asset to the Customer Committee. Fed back Vicki's thanks for the card and voucher.</li> </ul>

- Chair also noted that Charlie Williamson will be stepping away from her Customer Committee role as it has been confirmed that it would be a conflict of interest if she remained on the Committee considering her role as employee in the Customer Service Centre.
- Chair updated the Committee on attendance at Customer Engagement Conference with the CSEM in December and it was positive to hear other attendees' approaches to customer engagement and the different ideas regarding engagement of young people. The Chair also noted the new ways of online repair reporting, which were demonstrated.
- Chair updated members of her attendance at Salix Homes Board where board meeting date changes may result in Customer Committee meeting date changes potentially affecting two meeting dates. An update will be provided in due course.
- Chair confirmed that the Rent and Service Charge setting policies have been approved at Board on 30 January 2024. They also noted that AA made a great point about 2024 having an additional rent week due to leap year, and concern regarding those in receipt of Universal Credit possibly being affected. The EDCC confirmed that the additional week would affect those that were on Universal Credit as the DWP do not make up the extra week and affected customers will need to find the additional weeks rent. It will also affect people who pay their own rent on a weekly basis. Affected tenants can contact us to set up a payment plan to pay the additional week over the full year. This has been explained in the FAQs provided by the CCM.
- Rent and Service Charges 2024/2025 have been approved by Board at 7.7%. This increase still puts Salix at the lower end of rent prices in Greater Manchester and with price increases across the board (energy costs, salary increases, repair costs, cost of materials etc), Chair noted it will still be a struggle for Salix Homes and is in line with what our peers are also being challenged with.
- Chair noted that stress testing scenarios were discussed at the Board Away Day and Board approved the suggested scenarios to stress test.
- The Salix Succession Plan 2024/2025 recruitment proposals were also discussed, and it was noted that during the last recruitment period (when 2 new board members joined Salix Homes) that there was another strong candidate who will be interviewed during February to replace finance skills that are due to leave in March. The Board also discussed the recruitment of a new Board Chair and Chief Executive Officer in preparation for when the current Chief Executive Officer retires in March 2025.
- Chair noted that committee remuneration was discussed with Board following the request at the December SHCC Away Day for this to be aligned to Board member remuneration. Chair requested for this part of the update to be provided by the DGRA.

**The Committee noted the Chair's Update.**

The DGRA confirmed that the feedback from Customer Committee had been raised at the Chairs Group Meeting, and that as a result, the Board have commissioned DTP to undertake an external review of the level of remuneration for Customer Committee members.

It was noted that DTP undertook the most recent review and have been provided with background information to commence the review. The DGRA noted that, in advance of the outcome of the review, members should be aware of key points including:

- The most recent review from 2022 had identified that Salix Homes Customer Committee members were being remunerated at a higher level than other committee members in the sector.
- The 2022 review also indicated that it was unusual that independent Committee Members and Customer Committee members were remunerated at the same level as Board members given the differing level of responsibility (the review refers to these as “legal and fiduciary” responsibilities).
- The Board of Salix Homes had not implemented any changes to the levels of remuneration for Customer Committee members following the 2022 review.
- Housing providers are not required to remunerate their Board/ committee members – although those that do, do so to recognise the time and level of responsibility that members dedicate to their roles.
- Although the number of meetings has increased in comparison with the previous year, the total number of meetings is less than originally anticipated when members applied for their positions.
- The levels of remuneration are not intended to be a “wage” – but are in recognition of the time, commitment, responsibility and, in some cases, potential losses/ expenses incurred for this time/ commitment (e.g. loss of earnings to attend a meeting).
- The review being undertaken will consider the changes in the level of responsibility and time commitment/ number of meetings now being undertaken by the Customer Committee members.
- Customer Committee members should also be aware that given the increased scrutiny of the sector and the introduction of new a regulatory regime, the Board and other committees of Salix Homes have also increased the number of meetings being held.
- It was expected that the findings of the review would be presented to Chairs Group on 11 March prior to the Board on 26 March 2024.

**5. Customer service strategy consultation results**

The CSEM presented the Customer Service Strategy consultation results to the Committee. The key areas noted as part of the presentation are:

- Professionalism/knowledge/training
- Effective communication
- Knowing customers and accurate use of data
- Appropriate use of vulnerable customer information to deliver services
- Reviewing customer service standards/charter

Within the presentation, the CSEM shared the Customer Service Scrutiny recommendations to the Committee and requested final thoughts/feedback for discussion. The following was noted during the discussion:

- RO queried whether there was enough staff resource to telephone all vulnerable customers which Salix did during the Covid pandemic. The EDCC advised that there are plans to put in place a Customer Support Team to assist in those areas where customers require assistance.
- The EDCC informed Committee that how we manage and understand the data will impact on the services to meet the needs of the customers.
- JM noted that the term vulnerable presents difficulties and how do we manage this and obtain consent. The EDCC responded that there is some vulnerability work

currently being undertaken at Salix Homes as this is an area of need to ensure customers are not treated as a blanket group.

**The Committee approved the Customer Service Strategy Consultation results.**

**Actions:**

- **Circulate the Institute of Customer Service customer survey results to the members of the Committee and feedback to be sent to the EDCC and CSEM.**

**6. Sign up pack and draft tenancy agreement**

The DC provided members with an update on the proposed changes to the Salix Homes Assured Tenancy Agreement, which was circulated in advance of the meeting. The tenancy agreement was last reviewed in 2015 and has since been consulted on with colleagues for review of its rights and responsibilities. The DC detailed the changes to the agreement for the Committee.

The DC welcomed comments and feedback from the members and the following was noted:

- JM queried the disabled parking, the refusal of customers to undertake property updates, and the effect of the changes on the leaseholder. The DC confirmed that the disabled parking will be picked up by Forbes and that we are unable to force customers to undertake property updates. It was also confirmed that the tenancy agreement would not affect leaseholders.
- RO queried regarding pests and the DC confirmed that this will now be the responsibility of Salix Homes.
- Discussion took place regarding the implementation and use of CCTV, ring doorbells, and camera doorbells, and the DC confirmed that this is a complicated area and legal support has been requested regarding this.
- AA noted the report had stipulated there were no EDI implications; however, this is not the case in reference to language barriers, the report cover needs to be reflective of the content.
- MD queried if tenants on the old agreement would still be allowed to keep pets; DC responded that on the new agreement it would not allow pets, however the pets policy is being reviewed and, due to circumstances, is not always enforceable.
- KH queried if external structures/additions to the home required Salix permission and the DC confirmed that yes permission would be required.

**The Committee noted the proposed changes to the Salix Homes Assured Tenancy Agreement**

Members received the following documents as part of agenda item 6 of the Customer Committee meeting:

1. New Customer Welcome Letter
2. New Customer Welcome Pack Folder
3. New Customer Welcome Guide

The CCM circulated the new customer welcome packs at the meeting and provided an update on the options for accessibility and alternate formats. The CCM noted these documents have been shared with the committee in advance to allow members to review, digest and feedback any thoughts at this meeting.

During discussions, the following feedback was noted:

- Members commented on the need for a more secure folder. The CCM agreed and had already picked up that improvements were need to the folder so items did not fall out.
- The CCM confirmed that the postcard and letter would be sent to customers as pre-communication with the remainder information being part of the welcome pack.
- KM noted that images such as the recycling logo could be utilised in the pack on the Furniture Recycling scheme page, for example as a watermark.
- KH queried the frequency of updating the pack and the EDCC responded that it will be checked actively to ensure it remains current.
- Members queried the validity of the QR codes and the CCM responded that the codes will not change rather the information that sits behind the codes may require update.
- Members queried how the pack will be completed and the CCM and DC confirmed that the pack will be completed with the customer, and this will be undertaken together.
- MD commented that the pack was well constructed and feels complete, the CCM informed members that an internal review of the pack is being undertaken with staff.

KH and JM provided feedback to Committee on the clarification panel meeting they attended where two research agencies (One Vision and MEL) presented their proposals to conduct persona development work. KH and JM are due to meet with MEL again separately to further discuss their proposal and meet more of the team and the Committee will be kept up to date on the progress of this.

**The Committee noted the proposed changes and feedback was noted by the CCM and DC to be implemented and considered.**

## **7. Customer service scrutiny report and recommendations**

CEM shared the customer service scrutiny report for consideration and approval. The CEM highlighted the key areas of the report which included the following points:

- The purpose of the review was to understand and scrutinize our customer service standards and how they are embedded across the organization and to understand how excellent customer service is defined, recorded, and good practices implemented across the organization.
- The CEM noted the scrutiny scope as outlined in 2.1 in the report and described the methodology and findings arising from this.
- 10 recommendations made by the Scrutiny Panel as a result of their findings are detailed in the report and were summarised by the CEM to the Committee, and approval for the recommendations was requested.
- The CEM also noted that a clear set of customer standards are required

The following was noted during discussion:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CH commented that the approach is positive with the recommendation and queried if recommendation 6 was feasible. The EDCC responded that with the recruitment of the additional team this recommendation will be actioned going forward.</li> <li>• The EDCC noted that 91% of calls were being returned within 24 hours, and the data has indicated that of the 9% of calls that were unable to meet this target, it would have been unlikely the target would have been met even if a call back was promised within 48 hours. Members discussed the benefits and drawbacks of recommendation 8 and it was noted by members (MB, CH and MD) that allowing for 48 hours may result in taking a backward step in our service to customers, making staff complacent regarding the importance of a call back promise.</li> <li>• AA commented on other options apart from language line such as Google Translate and Google Lens and EDCC confirmed that these tools would be explored.</li> <li>• The CEM informed members that the recommendations have been reviewed and agreed by managers as actionable.</li> </ul> <p><b>The Customer Committee approved the customer service scrutiny recommendations presented.</b></p> <p><b>Actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Accept the recommendations, with the exception of recommendation 6, and add to the scrutiny action tracker.</b></li> </ul>
8.	<p><b>Scrutiny action tracker</b></p>
	<p>The EDCC informed the Committee that CEM is now responsible lead for the Scrutiny action tracker and the scrutiny action tracker had been fully reviewed including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dates column has been refreshed with reviewed dates so that all actions now have a realistic timescale.</li> <li>• For actions which are not feasible reasons have been given and these actions will be removed from the tracker</li> </ul> <p>The EDCC confirmed to the Committee that the actions that have been removed are due to no longer being an effective action because of cost or feasibility (such as having an online termination process). It was also noted that the most recent scrutiny piece was reviewed by service managers prior to sign off by scrutiny panel to ensure that the recommendations were feasible before they were recommended</p> <p><b>The Committee noted the updated Scrutiny Action Tracker.</b></p>
9.	<p><b>Neighbourhood Action Plans survey results update and next steps</b></p>
	<p>The DC updated the Committee on the results of surveys carried out with customers during Working in Neighbourhood (WIN) days and outlined the next steps in developing our Neighbourhood Action Plans.</p> <p>The following was noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CA sent in a query in advance of the meeting asking if the council is accountable for fly-tipping; the DC responded that Salix Homes does have a working relationship with the council; however, it is unable to influence how fly-tipping is managed and</li> </ul>

	<p>controlled.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RO requested for fly tipping to be included in the Neighbourhood Action Plans.</li> <li>• Members also discussed the smartphone app, Fix My Street which allows residents to map and report street problems to the councils responsible for fixing them – anywhere in the UK.</li> </ul> <p><b>The Committee noted the progress made in developing Neighbourhood Action Plans (NAPs) and suggested the inclusion of fly-tipping within the plan and the use of the Fix My Street smartphone app.</b></p>
10.	<p><b>Draft Internal Audit Plan 24/25-25/26</b></p>
	<p>The DGRA confirmed to members that this report presents the draft Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25 for comment from Customer Committee. The DGRA noted that the draft included in this pack was correct at the time of writing, although some of the areas for review had been amended following comments and feedback from SMT.</p> <p>The DGRA provided background relating to the internal audit and the plan – noting it is an important part of our internal controls in providing assurance to Borad and committees as well as the business. It was confirmed that the plan is reviewed and updated each year to take account of the operating context and risks facing the business and the sector.</p> <p>The draft plan in the appendix identified the proposed areas to be audited during 2024/25. The DGRA noted that the areas relating to rent setting, service charges, customer insight, compliance reviews and asset management directly impacted on customers. It was also noted that the SMT had suggested that an audit of ASB and a continuation of cyber reviews replace the original proposal for business planning and treasury management. This strengthens the audits impacting on customers.</p> <p>The DGRA requested comments or feedback from the Customer Committee. A member (JM) queried how rent setting and services charges would be audited. The EDCC responded that an internal audit ensures that these functions are being conducted in accordance with our internal policies and procedures as well in accordance with the Rent Standard. In instances where this is found not to be the case, the auditors can make recommendations for improvement which would be implemented by Salix Homes.</p> <p><b>The Committee noted the Draft Internal Audit Plan 24/25-25/26.</b></p>
12.	<p><b>POG Report</b></p>
	<p>The POG presentation report was circulated with the papers in advance of the meeting. AA noted on page 3 of the presentation - Procurement KPIs – point 4 regarding the Total spend with Contracts was a targeted figure of 70% and an actual of 75%, and it is unclear if this was an overspend. The EDCC will seek clarification regarding this point and feedback.</p> <p>The EDCC informed Committee that the POG and the Apartment Living Forum will both be reviewed to ensure they remain fit for purpose.</p> <p><b>The Committee noted the POG Report</b></p> <p><b>Action:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EDCC to clarify if there is an overspend with the Total spending with Contracts targeted figure of 70% and an actual of 75%.</li> </ul>

<b>13.</b>	<b>COG Minutes</b>
	<p>The last COG took place on 14 November 2024. The CEM noted that there had been a reduction in the number of escalations to stage 2 review. The CEM stated that this reflects the improved quality of stage 1 responses. The next COG meeting takes place on 12/02/24.</p> <p>The Committee noted the COG Minutes</p>
<b>14.</b>	<b>Any Other Business</b>
	No other business was discussed.
<b>15.</b>	<b>Date of Next Meeting</b>
	<p>Committee Meeting – 05 March 2024  Strategy Day – 12 April 2024</p>
The meeting closed at 20:19	