



**Minutes of Salix Homes Customer Committee Meeting held on
Tuesday 05 March 2024 via Microsoft Teams**

MEMBERS:	Charlotte Haines (Chair) Cynthia (Bethel) Alloyda (CA) Marta Diaz (MD) Keri Muldoon (KM) Jason Marland (JM) Gareth Evans (GE) Ahmed Abdulmalek (AA)
OFFICERS:	Sian Grant, Executive Director of Customers and Communities (EDCC) Liam Turner, Executive Director of Assets, Growth and Sustainability (EDAGS) Jeanette Green, Director of Properties (DP) Nichola Shepard, Director of Governance, Risk and Assurance (DGRA) Lorraine Butler, Customer Service and Engagement Manager (CSEM) Laura Flint, Customer Engagement Manager (CEM) Zeenet Quraishi, Governance Manager (GM) Becky Airey, Governance and Policy Officer (GPO) (minutes)
OBSERVERS:	None
APOLOGIES:	Rashidah Owoseni (RO) Karen Hamilton-Hulse (KH)

The meeting commenced at 18:03

ITEM	
1.	Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest
	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from RO and KH. There were no Declarations of Interest.
2.	Minutes of the Meeting held on 06 February 2024
	The Committee approved the minutes from the last meeting held on 06 February 2024.
3.	Matters Arising and Action Tracker
	The Committee noted the changes to the Action Tracker.
4.	Chair's Update
	The Chair informed members that the Board had not met since the last Customer Committee meeting although noted that some Board members, including herself, had been involved with preparing Salix Homes' response to the consultation for "Awaab's Law". The Chair confirmed that Salix Homes were already doing most of the tasks outlined in the law and were performing well in terms of tackling damp and mould.

	<p>The Chair requested that Salix Homes' response to the consultation be shared with the members of the Customer Committee.</p> <p>The Committee noted the Chair's Update.</p> <p>Action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circulate Salix Homes' response to Awaab's Law consultation to the members of the Customer Committee.
5.	<p>Repair's Review Outcomes</p>
	<p>The DPS gave a brief overview of the timeline of Salix Homes' Repairs Review. Key highlights included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early 2023 – Salix Homes commenced a review to develop and apply new standards which define what an outstanding repairs and maintenance service should look like; • April 2023 – The process and methodology for the review was agreed and a deep dive into the current delivery model began; • September 2023 – Committee were presented with the initial findings of the review; and • March 2024 – Committee are provided with a full overview of the findings. <p>The DPS noted that performance data from both transactional and perception sources had been analysed and that a number of clear themes had been identified. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time taken; • Unresolved issues; • Poor level of service; • Lack of communication; and • Missed appointments. <p>Members were informed that Salix Homes had commissioned a research agency to undertake the Customer Consultation Survey and received a response rate of 16% which is an average level of engagement. The results clearly demonstrated that waiting times are the biggest cause of concern for customers, followed by concerns around communication, flexible appointments, poor service and functionality of the online portal.</p> <p>The DPS added that there were a significant number of positive responses particularly in relation to satisfaction with operative helpfulness and politeness and the tidiness of the operative carrying out the work and leaving the area clean.</p> <p>Members were informed that customers who had expressed dissatisfaction were invited to attend a focus group to provide a wider insight into the customer experience, equality, relationships and barriers. Combined with the results from the customer survey, it was evident that change is required with the service to meet demand, enhance communication with customers/stakeholders and provide a seamless experience for customers when engaging with Salix Homes regarding repairs and maintenance.</p>

The DPS noted that demand had significantly increased and now outstripped the resources available which has culminated in around 6500 live jobs. The DPS also provided members with an overview of the new Service Delivery Model and noted that the proposal is expected to cost an additional £1.1m per annum - a final decision will be made by the Board in March 2024 when they review the 2024/25 budget.

JM and KM noted that the deep dive sessions were really informative and highlighted:

- The testing of new technology placed greater focus on each individual repair; and
- The new ways of working trial has reduced the number of no access which will hopefully bring down outstanding repairs over the next six-months.

In response to a query from AA about whether operatives would be able to book follow-on appointments for other trade areas if that was required for the job, the DP informed members that the on-site appointment booking would be used in instances where the job is bigger than initially expected or where different materials are required etc. The DP added that the same operative would return to the job and could arrange it with the customer personally instead of having to go through main office. The DP noted that some more complex cases might require other trades, but that this information should already be on the system.

CA noted that it was good that customers felt empowered to speak up, and that Salix Homes was responding to tenants - with complaints having decreased by 50% already.

CA queried what impact the new ways of working had on colleagues who may have been asked to change their work patterns to evenings and weekends. The DP noted that Salix Homes was looking to increase the number of operatives and this would mean that they would work different shift patterns. The EDAGS assured members that while the proposals might impact some roles, it did not place any member of staff at risk.

The Committee resolved to:

- **Note the proposed changes following the repair's review; and**
- **Approve the approach to implementation.**

6. Customer Engagement Strategy 2024-27

The EDCC provided members with an overview of the current Customer Engagement Framework and noted that:

- Since 2021, the Committee has commissioned six pieces of scrutiny – these have led to a number of service improvements;
- A number of specialist groups have been developed that sit under the Customer Committee;
- Work with our community connectors is ongoing to strengthen links with our local communities and estates; and
- Tenant satisfaction with being kept informed and satisfaction that the landlord listens and takes tenants views into account has significantly increased.

The EDCC noted that the current Strategy could be strengthened in terms of community engagement, so the 2024-27 Customer Engagement Strategy aimed to recognise that

different customers want different things from their landlord and that this may vary over time. The EDCC added that the customer engagement framework is split equally into four quadrants to represent the different ways customers can engage with Salix and influence services, these are:

- Informing - We give our customers information about our policies, services and events that may affect and interest them;
- Insight - Opportunities to give views on service delivery, policy and procedures;
- Involving - Opportunities to influence decision making and service design and delivery at a local and strategic level; and
- Governance - Involvement in the governance structure of Salix Homes and in managing homes and services.

Members were informed that the proposed new Strategy had three customer engagement strategic objectives:

- Develop our customer engagement framework to give customers the opportunity to shape what is important to them;
- Collaborate with our communities to better understand the customer experience; and
- Continue to develop efficient ways of listening to customer-wide views through understanding surveys, sentiment, and trends.

In response to a query from KM about how the Strategy planned to engage with tenants who discuss issues amongst themselves but were less likely to reach out to Salix Homes or the Police to resolve an issue, the EDCC informed members that if the issue relates to the neighbourhood, then the relevant Housing Officers will work with the police to resolve the issue. The EDCC added that Community Connectors can report issues to Salix Homes on behalf of customers and that they hoped to reach more customers by increasing the presence of Salix Homes on estates so that everyone knows who their Housing Officer is. The EDCC noted that Salix Homes currently don't provide feedback to Community Connectors on outcomes so work could be done in terms of communicating with the Community Connectors so they see the value of their role.

KM noted that Community Connectors need more guidance about what powers they have, and what they can and cannot do.

JM complemented how clearly the Strategy sets out its objectives but noted that Salix Homes should circulate the Strategy with the subgroups and create an information pack for tenants. JM added that publishing the information online won't reach every tenant, but there is still a large online community who would benefit.

The EDCC agreed that Salix Homes need to improve how it reports the outcomes of customer engagement so that tenants are aware and can see the impact as this will likely get more people involved.

	<p>CA noted that the Strategy is practical and achievable and represents everything the Committee has wanted, to engage with the wider Salix Homes community to ensure everyone expresses themselves using the avenues that best suit them.</p> <p>MD suggested that hosting events on estates twice a year would improve customer engagement and reach subgroups within the community who otherwise might not get involved.</p> <p>The EDCC noted Salix Homes would like to implement community events on a regular cycle so that it became a regular event that customers would anticipate.</p> <p>The Chair noted that it will be interesting to see what methods will be successful to hear the voices of the more silent customers.</p> <p>The Committee approved the draft 2024-27 Customer Engagement Strategy.</p>
7.	<p>Building Safety Update</p>
	<p>The EDAGS provided members with a progress update against the timeline of actions and noted that five of seven actions had been completed, one was in progress and another was due to start in April 2024. Members were also informed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory occurrence reporting is in use at Salix Homes and customers can voice concerns in a number of ways; • The safety cases and associated reports are currently being compiled for each of the existing 19 high rise blocks which are in the scope of the new building safety regime, in preparation for assessment by the Regulator; • The overarching engagement strategy will be supplemented with block specific customer engagement plans, tailored to meet the individual needs and engagement preferences of our residents; and • Whilst consultation has been sought on the strategy and associated engagement plans, the finalised document will need to be shared with customers and feedback sought to ensure it is fit for purpose and fulfils customer’s needs. <p>In response to a query from KM about whether the Building Safety Regulator wanted to know the number of tenants in a property, the EDAGS informed Members that this information was included in the key building information submitted by Salix Homes.</p> <p>JM noted that Salix Homes could improve their communication to tenants in relation to building safety, such as where all the fire escapes are and that they check the integrity of buildings using drones etc.</p> <p>The Committee resolved to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the update in relation to building safety regulatory requirements; and • Approve the proposed building safety customer engagement strategy.
8.	<p>Scrutiny Plan 2024/25</p>
	<p>The CSEM provided members with an overview of the 2024/25 scrutiny plan and noted that the plan has been developed using performance information, strategic risk and horizon</p>

scanning, previous scrutiny areas, customer influence and voice, and other planned activities/service reviews.

Members were informed that areas recommended for scrutiny include:

- Repairs and disrepair – scrutiny of success of changes implemented as part of the repairs review;
- Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) – scrutiny on vulnerability policy, approach and whether we make reasonable adjustments;
- Rent arrears management – scrutiny on support provided;
- Customer engagement – scrutiny of success of the revised customer engagement framework and strategy;
- Customer support and tenancy sustainment including safeguarding – scrutiny of support to sustain tenancies and potential starter tenancy processes;
- Tenancy management – scrutiny of key tenancy management processes;
- Environmental services – scrutiny of service quality prior to service charge review; and
- First response and security – scrutiny of services provided.

The CSEM added that the Customer Communications scrutiny is currently outstanding and is due to take place in the first quarter of 2024/25.

In response to a query from the Chair about whether language barriers classed as a vulnerability, the EDCC informed members that if they included language barrier under vulnerability it would form a small part of the overall theme. The EDCC added that they will have to clearly define the scope of the vulnerability scrutiny in advance, so it could be included in that scrutiny. The EDCC noted that language could be picked up under Customer Communications Scrutiny as this is where it would have the most impact.

KM noted that EDI was a growing movement and that it would be beneficial to scrutinise this area.

In response to a query from CA about how Salix Homes would define and measure EDI, the EDCC informed Members that the aim of this scrutiny would be to focus on how Salix address and manage customer vulnerability.

CA noted that it would be beneficial to scrutinise environmental services and provided members with anecdotal evidence of overdue bin collections, unkempt communal gates and gardens. CA added that tenants would benefit from knowing who were responsible for these issues.

In relation to safeguarding, CA noted that it would be beneficial to focus on customers who live alone and queried how success would be measured.

JM noted that Environmental Services has not previously been audited or scrutinised which would make it a good area to focus on.

MD and AA noted that language barriers also extended to the technical language used by repairs operatives, such as plumbers and electricians. The CSEM informed Members that they recently had a conversation with operatives about the use of trade terminology when engaging with customers.

In response to a query from MD about who was responsible for reporting environmental issues such as potholes, the EDCC informed the Committee that Housing Officers report estate and environmental issues to the council during estate inspections. The EDCC noted that Salix Homes should be addressing these issues in tandem with Salford Council.

AA noted that Salix Homes should ensure First Response services are fit for purpose and that it provides the business good value for money.

In response to a query from JM about whether First Response and Environmental Services could be combined into one scrutiny piece, the EDCC informed members that Salix Homes wanted to get an idea of customer views of environmental services as these services were due to part of a wider customer consultation of service charges. Scrutinising environmental services and First Response together would be a very large piece of scrutiny. The EDCC suggested the Apartment-Living Forum (ALF) could review First Response as this service was only provided to customers living in high rise.

CA noted that the areas should not be combined, nor should environmental services be reviewed by the ALF as this service charge affected tenants who did not live in high-rise tower blocks.

GE noted that rent arrears management would be a good area to scrutinise due to the cost of living crisis and it being an areas of income for Salix Homes.

AA noted that tenancy management would make more sense over rent arrears because it tied in with language barriers and customer communication.

The Committee approved the following areas for scrutiny in 2024/25:

- **Customer Communication – to include language barriers;**
- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion;**
- **Customer Support and Tenancy Sustainment; and**
- **Environmental Services.**

The Committee agreed that First Response should be reviewed by the Apartment Living Forum (ALF).

9. Committee Effectiveness Review

The GM provided members of the Committee with an overview of the 2023/24 Customer Committee Effectiveness Review highlighting that:

- The survey allows members to review the activities and performance of the Committee to make sure they are meeting expectations and supporting the decision making processes of Salix Homes;
- Combined feedback will be presented to Salix Homes Board at the end of March;

- The surveys included yes and no questions to a series of statements and also provided opportunities for additional commentary to be captured;
- The data collected during the review process has been anonymised and broad themes have been included within the report; and
- The collated feedback is positive and demonstrates that the Customer Committee are successfully managing the affairs with an appropriate degree of skill, independence diligence, effectiveness, prudence and foresight.

The GM noted that members identified what the Committee did well, the key emerging themes being:

- Displaying commitment and passion in their role to deliver the best outcomes for Salix Homes customers;
- Working well as a team and having respect for the views of each other;
- Their ability to “speak up” for Salix Homes customers; and
- Their ability to challenge the Board and Executive team of Salix Homes.

The GM also gave an overview of the feedback received from members regarding the effectiveness of the Committee and presented the suggestions for potential improvements for consideration by members. The suggestions included:

- **Timekeeping** – Customer Committee to discuss how best to manage time and remain on topic with agenda items;
- **Feedback on decisions** – The Chair will continue to provide an update at the beginning of each meeting, this will include outcomes of decisions and recommendations made to Board;
- **Reports** – Report authors will be reminded to avoid the use of technical or complex language without a full and proper explanation being provided; and
- **Agendas** – The governance team will work with the EDCC to establish whether fewer items can be scheduled for each Committee meeting.

JM noted that the new format of the Committee will likely resolve many of the points raised in the Effectiveness Review and asked whether ‘all members’ meant that there was a 100% response rate. The GM confirmed that all members participated in the review.

Following comments about allowing members appropriate time for discussion whilst keeping to the anticipated timings on the agenda, the DGRA encouraged members to continue discussing, debating and scrutinising papers during meetings. It was noted that work is ongoing with officers to ensure that they present the reports in a focused and concise manner to allow for sufficient discussion time. The DGRA added that members could support the improvement of timekeeping by reading the reports in advance of the meeting and preparing targeted and focused questions. The DGRA also noted that the feedback from the Effectiveness Review showed that members feel empowered to contact report authors prior to meetings which was really positive.

KM reiterated that members should try and submit questions ahead of the meeting to ensure discussion is more concise.

	<p>The Chair noted a high level of member engagement and for officers to take the papers as read by the members ahead of the meeting. Officers should limit their presentation of reports and provide only a brief overview allowing increased member discussion time.</p> <p>The Committee resolved to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the findings of the Customer Committee Effectiveness Review for 2023/24; and • Approve the suggestions and proposed actions for improving the effectiveness of the Committee.
10.	Revised Meeting Dates and Forward Plan
	<p>The EDCC informed members that a number of Board meetings had been rescheduled and two of them now clashed with Customer Committee meetings. Members were provided with three alternative dates.</p> <p>The Committee noted the revised meeting dates and forward plan and chose to reschedule the following meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuesday 04 June 2024 to Tuesday 11 June 2024; and • Tuesday 03 December 2024 to Tuesday 10 December 2024. <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance to reissue Customer Committee meeting invites to members.
11.	Probity Policy
	<p>The DGRA provided members with an overview of probity and integrity and noted that Salix Homes is committed to achieving the highest standards of integrity, probity and good governance across all areas of the business.</p> <p>The DGRA also gave an overview of the revised Probity Policy, noting that it provided further clarity relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The implications of not following the policy; • ‘Relevant persons’; • Payments to members, officers and employees; • Gifts and hospitality; • The rehousing of officers, colleagues and relevant persons; • The approval of granting a shared ownership home to an officer; • The employment of officers and relevant persons; • Salix Homes’ position in terms of Executive/employee membership on the Board/Committees; and • The use of Salix Homes colleagues/contractors in a private capacity. <p>The DGRA emphasised that the Policy is not a checklist of what members and officers cannot do, but rather what can be done and how to be transparent about it. Members were provided with a brief overview of what is allowed within the spirit of the Probity Policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telling a friend or relative about a job opportunity at Salix; • Applying for a home (incl. shared ownership); • Sending flowers to colleagues and members for special events; and • Shopping at retailers used by Salix Homes.

	<p>In response to a query from KM about what constituted a ‘close connection’, the DGRA informed members that it was a more difficult question for the members of the Committee as they engaged with Salix Homes tenants on a daily basis. The DGRA clarified that members should not use their position as a member of the Committee to influence decisions relating to recruitment or property allocations to an individual who they know.</p> <p>AA noted that Salix Homes should be careful not to penalise employees due to their relationship with the business, such as declining a property or job application. The DGRA assured members that no one would be penalised for their involvement with Salix Homes and that the Probity Policy aimed to protect individuals not just the organisation.</p> <p>MD noted that members will not abuse their position if they follow the same procedures and processes as every other tenant.</p> <p>The Committee noted the updated Probity Policy.</p>
12.	Scrutiny Action Tracker
	<p>The CEM informed the Committee that they would remove any items which were not achievable and those which had been superseded by other actions.</p> <p>The Committee noted the scrutiny action tracker recommendations.</p>
13.	Customer Oversight Group (COG) Minutes
	<p>The CEM noted that the membership of the COG had increased to include KM and two other members from the Scrutiny Group. The Committee were informed that the groups had discussed how best to engage in between meetings to keep members up to date.</p> <p>The Committee noted the COG minutes.</p>
14.	Any Other Business
	No other business was discussed.
15.	Date of Next Meeting
	Customer Committee Strategy Day - Friday 12 April 2024
The meeting closed at 20:06	