



Scrutiny Report – Environmental Services

September 2024

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Following the launch of Our Sustainable Future in July 2023, and the introduction of the new values and competencies, Salix Homes restructured the organisation to place a greater focus on customers and hearing the customer voice.
- 1.2 Environmental Services are a key component in fulfilling the corporate plan “we deliver services and provide support to help our customers and communities to live, grow and thrive, in safe, clean, green homes and communities.”
- 1.3 The topic of Environmental Services for scrutiny in 2024/25 was agreed at the Customer Committee meeting on 5th March 2024 as this area has not been scrutinised previously.
- 1.4 Environmental Services was recommended as an area for scrutiny following an assessment of strategic risk and previous scrutiny or audit. The key reasons for recommending this service area were to:
- Review the caretaking, cleaning and grounds maintenance services provided to ensure they are fit for purpose.
 - Establish whether the services provided by Salix Homes are meeting the needs and expectations of customers.
 - Understand whether the services provided represent value for money.
 - Identify issues within these areas and put any measures in place.
- 1.5 A group of five scrutineers were selected from Salix Homes’ wider scrutiny pool. The purpose of this review was to:
- Understand and scrutinise the effectiveness of caretaking and cleaning services delivered by Salix Homes.
 - Understand and scrutinise the effectiveness of grounds maintenance services delivered by Salix Homes.
 - Scrutinise the value for money in delivering these services.
 - Understand complaints about environmental or cleaning services and identify any trends.

2. Scrutiny Scope

- 2.1 The scrutiny scope is outlined in the table below including key dates for next steps:

Subject	Environmental Services <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effectiveness of caretaking and cleaning• Effectiveness of grounds maintenance• Value for money• Complaints about environmental services
Commissioned by	Customer Committee
Panel	To be sourced from Salix Homes’ Scrutiny Pool (between 4 and 6 members).
Aims / objectives / outcomes	The purpose of this review is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand and scrutinise the effectiveness of the caretaking and cleaning services provided by Salix Homes.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand and scrutinise the effectiveness of the grounds maintenance services provided by Salix Homes. Establish whether value for money is provided as part of residents' service charges. Understand complaints made about environmental services and the positive impacts on service delivery.
Areas out of scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repairs Housing Teams
Key service area involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assets, Growth & Development Directorate
Links to corporate plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure a strong and influential customer voice through our new customer engagement arrangements.
Indicators of success	<p>Percentage attendance of the scrutiny panel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target: 100% <p>Number of recommendations made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target: 8-10 (approx. 2 per objective) <p>Number of recommendations implemented</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target: 100% <p>Satisfaction of the process from Scrutiny Panel:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> On a scale of 1-5 how much do you think that Salix Homes has listened to your views? On a scale of 1-5 how much do you think that Salix Homes has acted on your views? On a scale of 0-10 rating, would you recommend being involved with Salix Homes to your neighbours?
Timescale	See proposed key dates below.
Resource commitments	Proposed cost: £1,500, excluding staff time.

2.2 The key dates for the scrutiny process are outlined in the table below:

Key dates	Activity
2 nd July 2024	Scope Approval from Customer Committee
3 rd July 2024	Appointment of the Scrutiny Panel
4 th July 2024	Share scope and discuss methodology options with panel
8 th July 2024	Meeting 1 - Confirm methodology
9 th July 2024	Information gathering stage
23 rd July 2024	Meeting 2 - Review information gathered
30 th July 2024	Meeting 3 - Recommendations
31 st July 2024	Develop report
13 th August 2024	Recommendations agreed with service manager(s)
20 th August 2024	Final report to be agreed with the Scrutiny Panel
27 th August 2024	Final report to be shared with Customer Committee
6 th September 2024	Final report to be presented to Customer Committee

3. Methodology

3.1 The panel approached the gathering of evidence to inform their review and final analysis in several ways. The scrutineers:

3.1.1 Reviewed relevant policies and procedures in relation to Salix Homes' caretaking and cleaning and environmental services, including:

- Environmental Services Policy **Appendix 1**
- Service Charge Setting Policy **Appendix 2**
- Procurement Policy **Appendix 3**
- Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy **Appendix 5**
- Caretaker job evaluation information **Appendix 6**
- Reviewing the Salix Homes website for information about the services provided.

3.1.2 Analysed customer and staff satisfaction data:

Performance indicators:

- Annual complaints performance for caretaking and cleaning and environmental services 2023/24 **Appendix 8**
- Team Salix staff satisfaction survey results **Appendix 4**

3.1.3 Interviewed the following employees: (**Appendix 7**)

- Ben Cruickshanks, Voids and Environments Manager
- Warren Carlon, Director of Communities
- Laura Flint, Complaints Manager
- Clare DuPreez, Complaints Investigator
- Steve Cass, Grounds Maintenance Man
- Joanne Linney, Caretaking and Cleaning Manager
- Liam Gaffey, Caretaker
- Yvonne Morrison, Cleaning Services Operative
- Sasha Harris, Customer Service Officer
- Jenna Reed, Customer Service Officer
- Paul Nugent, Procurement Manager
- Kerry Parr, High Rise and Sheltered Housing Manager.

4. Findings

4.1 Overview

4.1.1 The scrutiny panel identified that effective environmental services are essential to enable Salix Homes to deliver the objectives set out in the corporate plan.

4.1.2 Salix Homes provides grounds maintenance, caretaking and cleaning services across a range of property types within the housing stock.

4.1.3 Grounds maintenance services and caretaking and cleaning services are delivered by two different service areas. Grounds maintenance services sit under the Asset & Investments directorate, and caretaking and cleaning services sit within the Communities directorate. Nevertheless, there are a number of areas of crossover within these two areas, meaning they work

collaboratively, particularly when delivering services to high rise, low rise, and sheltered accommodation.

4.2 Voids and Environments

4.2.1 The scrutiny panel interviewed the voids and environments manager to understand the services provided within this area and establish whether processes have been followed to ensure value for money. The information obtained is summarised below:

- The scrutiny panel requested background information about the services offered within the manager's remit. It was explained that there is a Salix Homes depot at Orchard Street, comprising an office and the grounds maintenance equipment. There is also a recycling depot, where the furniture from empty (void) properties is recycled.
- The scrutiny panel learned that all members of the voids and environments team are employees of Salix Homes. There are 10 green space officers employed within this team.
- The manager confirmed that the mini sweeper operated by Salix Homes has been off-road for a while needing repairs but is now back in operation. The mini sweeper covers specific hotspot areas where there are recurring issues with litter and debris.
- Salix Homes employs 6 gardeners who specifically look after high rise and sheltered green spaces. The remaining shared green areas on Salix Homes property are looked after the green space team.
- The total costs for staffing this service for 2023/24 are as follows:

Staff	£790,859
Agency	£93,385
Total	£884,244
- The panel wanted to understand more about neighbourhood litter picking and whether this is part of Salix Homes' commitment to adding social value in the community. It was explained that litter picks are routinely done before areas have their communal and shared green spaces cut.
- The panel established that after a successful procurement process, M&Y are the new tree maintenance contractors, and their contract commenced in summer 2023. The contract is for 4 years. The manager confirmed that they are an extremely positive addition and provide great value for money. The costs for this contract have decreased by approximately 50% compared with the previous incumbent.
- It was explained that there is a cost attached to every aspect of work that can be done to a tree, for example. It was confirmed that all trees on Salix land are counted and tagged. The panel asked if the tree count changes, but it was confirmed that this would only happen if Salix Homes have to fell a tree, or a tree was previously unable to be counted due to accessibility reasons.
- It was explained that jobs are allocated to M&Y per quarter, so the voids and environments team can see the progress as it happens throughout the year. All high-risk jobs have been completed for this financial year, so everything is now medium to low risk.
- The scrutineers wanted to understand more about why the jobs were being split quarterly. It was explained that the grounds maintenance manager made the suggestion, to ensure a proactive way of managing the contract and keeping within budgetary constraints.

- It was confirmed that when a tree has been identified as needing work, M&Y will also check any trees in the surrounding area. Each tree is coded, so costs associated with this will be checked against expected work before invoices are approved. This ensures the best value for money and effective deployment of resources.

4.2.2 **Strengths**

- The scrutiny panel members were very impressed with the level of organisation within the team.
- Scrutineers also confirmed the effectiveness and visibility of the grounds maintenance teams at high rise blocks.

4.2.3 **Recommendations**

- Reduce the number of clicks required to reach the grounds maintenance and caretaking sections of the website.

4.3 **Grounds Maintenance**

4.3.1 The scrutiny panel interviewed the grounds maintenance manager to understand more about the day-to-day delivery of the services delivered. The information obtained is summarised below:

- The manager explained that his areas of responsibility include the gardening and green space teams, and recycling and fly tipping teams.
- The scrutiny panel asked about whether customer satisfaction surveys are still being conducted for this service area. It was confirmed that this was something the service area has done in the past, but it has not been done regularly for approximately three years. It was established this may have been due to a possible outsourcing of survey issue, e.g. if the question wasn't framed properly, the responses weren't what was required.
- The panel discussed whether this could be reintroduced and conducted in-house by Salix Homes employees. The manager confirmed that they have previously employed an administration officer who made 50 customer phone calls per month. This meant that if a survey question was asked and the customer responded, the member of staff could dig deeper to elicit accurate responses. The in-house survey was set up via survey monkey, and there were between six and seven questions asked. Satisfaction scores increased from around 77% to 90% when the surveys were being conducted and accurate feedback was collected.
- Salix Homes recently employed both a caretaking assistant, and a grounds maintenance assistant. This would enable the in-house satisfaction surveys to be restarted.
- The manager confirmed that he proactively contacts customers whenever any dissatisfaction is raised, to find out more and try to resolve it in a timely manner.
- The panel wanted to find out more about the change to working quarterly since the tree management contract with M&Y commenced. It was established that under the previous contract, there was no schedule of work, and the jobs were all ad-hoc, meaning nothing was planned out and budgeted for in the long term. Planning a schedule of works has enabled the manager to break down why a piece of work to a particular tree costs specific amount.

- When the tender for M&Y was under way, the grounds maintenance manager met Manchester City Council, Salford City Council, and Rochdale Borough Housing. All the organisations had different ways of working. Salix Homes decided to break down the jobs lists into the following categories: significant, high, medium, low risk. There are 1200 trees to complete this year, so 300 trees were completed in the first quarter (Q1). Any urgent works would be completed in addition to this. At the end of Q1 the jobs list was reviewed, and a budget meeting is conducted monthly. An approximate monthly cost is worked out, so any overspend can be recouped in subsequent months. There is also a £15k buffer to cover any emergencies during winter.
- It was confirmed that the procurement of M&Y has been a positive addition to the team, both in terms of value for money and effectiveness.
- The scrutiny panel discussed issues with fly tipping, but the proactive approach of caretakers at high rise blocks is helping with this.
- The scrutineers wanted to find out more about the issues with fly tipping on the estates. They learned that most of the fly-tipping is excess bags of rubbish. The operatives prioritise collecting any fly-tipping on Wednesdays every week. They also prioritise collecting larger items on Mondays and Tuesdays weekly.
- The grounds maintenance manager confirmed that the team is well-established and very experienced. The team is a solid unit and they have implemented any recommendations from previous audit or areas of scrutiny.

4.3.2 **Strengths**

- The scrutiny panel members were pleased to hear that value for money is being implemented effectively
- The team is knowledgeable and experienced.

4.3.3 **Recommendations**

- Reintroduce grounds maintenance customer satisfaction surveys conducted via telephone on a weekly basis.

4.4 **Communities**

4.4.1 The scrutiny panel interviewed the director of communities to understand the costs associated with the caretaking and cleaning services. The information obtained is summarised below:

- Grounds maintenance was historically part of the communities directorate, but now sits under asset and investments. This means the grounds maintenance service works separately from caretaking and cleaning, but ensures positive communication is maintained between the two areas.
- The scrutiny panel requested information around the calculation of service charges. It was explained that the service charges are calculated to cover the costs of staff, vehicles, equipment used, and then an overhead for back-office people (around 10%). The total costs for this are then divided by the number of people in each block. The charges are fair and equitable, meaning Salix Homes only charge customers for the services they receive.

- The panel wanted to learn more about how the service charge calculations are communicated to customers. It was confirmed that the costs were communicated to customers when the service charge model was introduced. Customers then receive a headline figure for service charges with their annual rent statement. The headline figure and basic breakdown includes the costs for caretaking and grounds maintenance, cleaning and security. Customers can look on their MySalix account, but an overall charge isn't there because it differs from customer to customer.
- The panel established that Salix Homes' service charge costs would have been compared with other registered providers when the service was reviewed, but not recently. It was suggested that service charge comparisons to other registered providers would be useful to enable customers to confirm the value for money of the services provided by Salix Homes.
- The panel confirmed that the standards of caretaking, cleaning and grounds maintenance are appropriate according to the service level agreement. They agreed that caretaking is a difficult job, and an effective caretaker can be proactive in solving problems before they escalate.
- Caretakers receive lower salaries than a number of other roles, but their salaries are competitive with similar roles in the private sector. The panel learned that recruitment for these roles can be a challenging area. Some caretakers stay in the role long-term, but for others they are looking to move onwards and upwards, so it can be an area with a high staff turnover.

4.4.2 **Strengths**

- Strong communication between the Asset & Investment and Communities directorates maintains effective service delivery.

4.4.3 **Recommendations**

- Cost comparisons for service charges provided by Salix Homes and other registered providers to enable customers to confirm the value for money of the services.

4.5 **High Rise and Sheltered Housing**

4.5.1 The scrutiny panel interviewed the high rise and sheltered housing manager to establish an overview of the caretaking and cleaning services delivered at the blocks. The information obtained is summarised below:

- The panel learned that although there are basic standards of service to be delivered across all high rise and sheltered housing, each block is different so there are different requirements.
- Regular block inspections are completed by housing officers as well as caretakers, so the Sweep-up app makes communication and reporting any issues simple and effective. The caretaking and cleaning manager regularly quality checks their work. Tasks can be tailored specifically if a issues arise on a day-to-day basis.
- The panel wanted to find out what happens if a job is missed. If a job hasn't been completed and a customer notifies Salix Homes, the relevant caretaker or cleaner would be sent straight back to complete the job.
- The scrutineers enquired about the functionality of the Sweep-up app and whether this could be improved. It was confirmed that the app is more

effective for the high-rise blocks than the low rise or sheltered schemes. It can be time-consuming for the cleaners in the low-rise blocks, but it remains the most effective system that has been used.

- The panel wanted to find out more about staff satisfaction amongst caretakers and cleaners. They learned that the working environment in high rise blocks can be quite challenging, but the caretakers get to know the customers so they tend to take things in their stride, due to their awareness of the vulnerabilities of some of the customers they interact with.
- The panel established that there is a recommendation from a previous piece of scrutiny and in the customer service strategy for all customer-facing staff to take part in customer service training.
- The scrutineers expressed concerns about wellbeing support for caretaking and cleaning staff if there are issues when they are out in the blocks. It was explained that members of staff are supported if they encounter issues, Salix Homes can take tenancy action against customers if appropriate.
- Panel members asked what happens if, for example, a high-rise caretaker gets into difficulties. It was confirmed that all colleagues have a lone worker device. The member of staff would be advised to remove themselves from the situation, call their manager and the police if appropriate.
- The panel discussed the level of pay for caretakers. They felt that the level of challenge involved isn't reflected in their salary and the pay isn't competitive enough.
- It was discussed that there is a need for an improvement in internal communication regarding planned maintenance to caretakers. For example, the water supply was turned off in one block, but the caretaker and housing officer weren't told. This meant they were trying to support customers and deal with questions without having the answers.
- The panel questioned whether there are opportunities for caretakers to upskill themselves and mentor others. There are no formal development opportunities, but a number of caretakers have moved into new roles within the compliance or housing teams.
- The panel enquired as to whether the training provided to caretakers and cleaners involves formal qualifications or whether they are Salix Homes internal training courses. It was confirmed that all training modules are internal. Panel members felt that caretakers require more opportunities to upskill themselves, particularly those who are long serving.

4.5.2 Strengths

- Effective support measures in place for the challenging situations faced by some members of staff.

4.5.3 Recommendations

- Re-evaluate the job role profile and salary scale for caretakers and cleaners.
- Ensure communication regarding planned maintenance at blocks is passed on to caretakers.
- Provide opportunities for experienced caretakers to mentor others.
- Explore formal qualifications for caretakers e.g. NVQ or similar, relevant to their job.

4.6 Caretaking and Cleaning

4.6.1 The scrutiny panel interviewed the caretaking and cleaning manager to understand more about the day-to-day delivery of these services. The information obtained is summarised below:

- The scrutiny panel stated that having read the policy, and based on their experiences, the caretaking and cleaning service is absolutely being delivered to standard.
- The panel wanted to find out more about the background and experience of the caretaking and cleaning manager. The manager confirmed that she has been employed by Salford Council and then Salix Homes consecutively for 28 years. She has extensive experience within the housing teams prior to her current role. She has been in her current post 5 years.
- There are 29 employees within the caretaking and cleaning team. Salix Homes provides services for 20 high rise blocks. There are 21 caretakers employed for these blocks (Artifex has two caretakers who work 8am-8pm shifts). There are two additional pool operatives to cover for absences and where needed. The team also contains six low-rise cleaners. They clean the sheltered schemes daily, and the low-rise blocks once a week.
- The panel requested clarification around what Salix Homes classes as low-rise. It was confirmed a low-rise block is three storeys or lower. Wynt View is a new low-rise block, there will be two further low-rise blocks completed soon.
- The panel wanted to know how the daily work is scheduled for the operatives. They learned that the Sweep-up app is installed on the caretakers' mobile phones. The app allows 1 hour per sheltered scheme per day. The daily time schedules for high-rise blocks can vary between 15 minutes and one hour, depending on the size of the block. The work is allocated for each day for the members of staff, so the expectations are clearly laid out.
- The Sweep-up app has been used by Salix Homes for around five years and is much more effective than the older paper diary systems used. The app also enables caretakers to report any health and safety concerns whilst completing their duties.
- The service manager explained that she will ask for recommendations from experienced caretakers regarding, for example, how to clean a floor where marks are stubborn. These recommendations and suggestions are shared with the rest of the team, particularly to support the less experienced members of staff.
- The scrutineers wanted to find out more about customer satisfaction rates. The service manager stated that their team satisfaction surveys have not been conducted on a regular basis for a significant period of time. However, the team now has a new administration assistant who has the capacity to commence sending surveys to customers via email.
- It was confirmed that high-rise housing officers complete block inspections once per month to support the caretaking and cleaning teams and be visible for any customer queries. The caretaking and cleaning manager stated that she has conducted low-rise block inspections when a customer has raised dissatisfaction.
- The scrutiny panel enquired about whether there are any issues or difficulties when recruiting new team members. The service manager explained that the number of experienced caretakers is low, so shortlisting and recruiting is challenging. It was also discussed that the

caretaking and cleaning staff are among the lowest paid employees at Salix Homes.

- The panel also asked what personal protection measures are in place for caretakers and cleaners. The manager confirmed that they have lone worker devices and have conflict management training every three years.
- The planning and structure of staff on blocks is the most effective set-up due to the caretakers becoming familiar with the blocks and the personnel on each block. Each block having a designated caretaker also gives the customer a familiar face who they can raise issues with. The caretakers having their own designated block allows them to build a rapport with the customers, identify problem areas and provides the caretakers with a sense of ownership. There are additional pool operatives to cover for sickness and leave. If the pool operatives aren't available, the neighbouring block caretakers would be used to cover their shifts.

4.6.2 The panel wanted to find out more about the experiences of the members of staff who deliver these services. A high-rise caretaker and low-rise cleaner were interviewed. A summary of the findings is below:

- Both employees stated that they enjoy meeting and chatting to people day-to-day.
- The panel wanted to find out more about the typical issues faced by the members of staff. They confirmed that some of the most common issues are anti-social behaviour in the surrounding areas, homeless people in stairwells and people doing drugs in communal areas within blocks.
- The issue with drug-taking in some of the high-rise blocks has been exacerbated by the nearby homeless shelters and is increasingly becoming a problem. People are attracted to the area because of this, and it causes problems in the blocks.
- The caretakers stated that they rarely attend meetings collectively, apart from formal training sessions. Caretakers are more likely to phone each other to chat and ask questions, rather than waiting for opportunities in meeting. The high-rise caretakers all know each other and have good working relationships. They stated that the positive relationships established within the team means they feel valued.
- The employees confirmed that the recruitment process was simple in terms of application and interview. Their line manager is very approachable.
- The panel enquired about the functionality of the Sweep-up app. Staff members confirmed that the app is effective in some ways, but there is an element of walking into the unknown each day, particularly in relation to high-rise blocks. It was confirmed that the low-rise and sheltered schemes have fewer issues than high-rise blocks.
- The members of staff stated that they regularly receive in-person feedback from customers. They estimate that around 90% of customers are very positive and only 10% or less are not, and this is often in relation to minor issues.
- Caretakers confirmed they find the job rewarding and enjoyable, particularly getting to know customers and being able to provide assistance and reassurance.
- Caretakers and cleaners mainly interact with the housing officer for the relevant block, but don't have in-person interactions with other

colleagues on a regular basis. The panel felt that this is an area for improvement, particularly for those working in high-rise blocks and less experienced members of staff.

4.6.3 Strengths

- The scrutiny panel members liked the use of the app for effectively assigning jobs to caretakers and cleaners.
- The members of staff in this area demonstrated clear pride in their work and commitment to providing excellent service.

4.6.4 Recommendations

- Informal monthly meetings for caretaking teams to discuss issues, share best practice, and improve in-person interactions.
- Annual personal safety and conflict management refresher training for caretakers and cleaners.

4.7 Procurement

4.7.1 The panel wanted to find out more about the processes for procuring grounds maintenance contractors and ensuring value for money is achieved when delivering services. Panel members interviewed the procurement manager. A summary of the findings is below:

- The panel requested information about how often the contracts go to tender. It was explained that contracts with a value greater than £5m are put out to tender every four years. Salix Homes usually operates a 2+2 model, so a contract would be offered for two years initially, during which time the contract will be closely monitored, and then extended for a further two years if the contract is being fulfilled.
- The scrutineers were interested in finding out more about the procurement process for M&Y, and whether they had been used previously by Salix Homes. The procurement manager explained that the contract was issued to the full market, which enabled a wide range of bids to be submitted, as long as they met specific criteria.
- It was confirmed that this contractor costs only around half that of the previous contract. They also have high recycling targets to ensure they perform well in terms of sustainability. They offered local community projects and work placements, plus an additional £1000 of tree planting. Their bid also included £250 annual donation to a charity chosen by Salix Homes.
- The Salix Homes social inclusion manager reviews the contract during the term, along with the relevant manager, to ensure the contractual commitments are met. All commitments to social value from contractors are required to be specifically centred around Salford.
- The panel asked about the consequences if or when the social value commitments are not being fulfilled. It was confirmed that Salix Homes would then break the contract after the initial two-year period.
- There are quarterly operational meetings to score contractors against the KPIs for the contract. M&Y are currently scoring 'green' on all areas, meaning they're performing very well.
- The panel commented on the amount of work involved in the process when a contract goes out to tender. The procurement manager

explained that this is one of the reasons Salix Homes opts for longer contracts.

- The scrutineers enquired about how many bids were submitted for this contract. It was confirmed that 34 expressions of interest were submitted, and 10 formal bids. It was also stated that this is a high number of bids to review, meaning the process is time-consuming, but very important to select the best bid.
- The procurement manager confirmed that the bid criteria is set by Salix Homes for each contract. The customers who are members of the Procurement Panel were involved and wrote some of the questions around social value.
- The involvement of customers in the procurement process has been a huge positive, but the amount of time this involves can be prohibitive. It was suggested that a more effective use of customer time would be to identify one customer with a particular interest in each contract to support the procurement of each one. For example, a customer with interest in grounds maintenance could have supported the procurement of M&Y instead of the whole customer panel being involved.

4.7.2 Strengths

- Customer members of the Procurement Panel being involved in the procurement of the new subcontractor has been an extremely positive experience for both the customers and Salix Homes.

4.7.3 Recommendations

- There are no recommendations for this service area.

4.8 Customer Services

4.8.1 The panel requested information about the typical communications between Salix Homes and its customers in relation to caretaking and cleaning and grounds maintenance. Two customer service officers were interviewed. A summary of the findings is below:

- The officers explained their roles and the variety of different calls and communications they receive from customers. It was confirmed that the main issues reported around grounds maintenance, caretaking and cleaning are stairwells and windows being cleaned, fly tipping, and customers making a mess in the lifts. The officers stated that these calls come in on a regular basis.
- The panel members wanted to know how quickly complaints and issues are responded to. It was explained that advisors try to resolve issues whilst on the call with the customer, either by transferring it to a manager or raising a call-back to be completed within 24 hours. Sometimes issues cannot be resolved immediately, so a formal complaint would then be raised. The customer service officer will take all the information from the customer, and it will be picked up by the complaints team.
- The officers confirmed that it would be helpful if the team had the full information about caretaking and cleaning schedules, particularly when trying to assist with out-of-hours queries. It would have been

particularly helpful with a recent complaint regarding the start and finish times of caretakers.

- The officers stated that they always try to do things 'right first time'. It can be very challenging if they are unable to do that, especially when dealing with out-of-hours queries. In those circumstances, the focus is to take all the information from the customer and pass it on to the relevant team. They will always try to help customers, and get as much information as possible, to enable teams to get things right first time. Officers stated that it would be helpful if there was out-of-hours cover for these areas, because they can only do so much. Customer service officers always raise the call backs, and there are very few instances where customers have called to say they haven't received a call back.
- The panel stated that it would be unreasonable to expect things to always be done right first time, every time, but it's good to be aware of areas where improvements can be made. The officers stated that it would be useful if all customers were aware of the services, and the limitations of these, because it would enable staff to manage expectations and often reach a resolution or compromise.
- The panel enquired about performance targets for this team. It was confirmed that calls are monitored every week, and there is a list of things to mention to customers in every call, for example, checking whether there is any damp or mould in the property. It was also confirmed that some customers receive a text message at the end of a call, enabling them to provide feedback via a survey. The survey asks about the customer's satisfaction with the most recent transaction.
- The scrutineers wanted to find out whether the performance targets are realistic. The officers stated that taking a call and speaking to customers, taking notes and reading them back to the customer can be time-consuming. It is essential to take as much detail as possible down, because the officer is acting as the customer's voice.

4.8.2 In addition, the panel wanted to understand what types of complaints are made about these services, and the number of complaints received in the last financial year. The panel interviewed the complaints manager and were provided with data relating to this.

- The panel discussed how colleagues react when customers make an expression of dissatisfaction or wish to raise a complaint. The complaints manager explained about the formal and ad-hoc training delivered to a range of teams across Salix, and always with new starters within the first few weeks of them joining the business.
- The complaints manager stated there only 18 complaints in total in 2023/24, seven were formal complaints and 11 were informal complaints. Of the four complaints about grounds maintenance, none were upheld. Two were about an unresolved issue. Of the three formal complaints about caretaking and cleaning, only one was upheld (staff attitude).
- Three compliments were raised on the CRM system, all about caretaking and cleaning.

4.8.3 **Strengths**

- The low number of complaints for these service areas shows a high standard of service is being maintained.

4.8.4 Recommendations

- Compliment slips to be made available for caretakers, cleaners and grounds maintenance operatives to enable them to collect feedback when out on the estates and in block.

4.9 Complaints Performance Information

4.9.1 The panel wanted to compare complaints performance in these service areas with the complaints data in other service areas across the business.

Row Labels	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Grand Total
Repairs	22	27	60	109
Disrepair & Subcontractor	9	6	17	32
Housing South	11	4	7	22
Community Safety	14	3	5	22
Leasehold & Contracts	3	4	11	18
Housing North	14	2	2	18
Customer Service Centre	3	3	12	18
Housing High Rise & Sheltered	12	2	3	17
Asset & Investment	3	1	6	10
Income Management	4		3	7
Building Safety	1	3	3	7
Finance	3	2	1	6
1st Response	5	1		6
Compliance	2		2	4
Voids	1	2	1	4
Grounds Maintenance	4			4
TSPD	3			3
Allocations & Lettings		2	1	3
Caretaking & Cleaning	2		1	3
Health & Safety	1		1	2
Tenancy Specialist		1		1
PSL			1	1
Complaints Support		1		1
Governance		1		1
Grand Total	117	65	137	319

5. Recommendations

Recommendation number	Recommendation details
1	Reduce the number of clicks required to reach the grounds maintenance and caretaking sections of the website.
2	Reintroduce grounds maintenance customer satisfaction surveys conducted via telephone on a weekly basis.
3	Ensure communication regarding planned maintenance at blocks is passed on to caretakers.
4	Provide opportunities for experienced caretakers to mentor others.

5	Explore formal qualifications for caretakers e.g. NVQ or similar, relevant to their job.
6	Informal monthly meetings for caretaking teams to discuss issues, share best practice, and improve in-person interactions.
7	Review personal safety and conflict management refresher training for caretakers and cleaners.
8	Compliment slips to be made available for caretakers, cleaners and grounds maintenance operatives to enable them to collect feedback when out on the estates and in block.