



**Minutes of Customer Committee Meeting held on Tuesday 6th May 2025
via Microsoft Teams**

MEMBERS:	Charlotte Haines (Chair) Ahmed Abdulmalek (AA) Gareth Evans (GE) John Beattie (JBe) Jack Buckley (JBu) Keri Muldoon (KM) Marta Diaz (MD) Rashidah Owoseni (RO)
OFFICERS:	Sue Sutton, Interim Executive Project Support Lead (EPSL) Lorraine Giddings, Customer Service and Engagement Manager (CSEM) Christiana O'Brien, Customer Engagement Manager (CEM) Warren Carlon, Director of Communities (DC) Natalie Farr, Customer Support Manager (CSM) Laura Flint, Complaints Manager (CM) Ed Sidley, Performance and BI Manager (PBIM) Jamie Cockerham, Governance and Policy Officer (GPO) - Minutes
OBSERVERS:	Martin Warhust (MW)
APOLOGIES:	Cynthia (Bethel) Alloyda (CA)

The meeting commenced at 18:04.

ITEM	
1.	Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest
	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from CA. No declarations of interest were made.
2.	Minutes of the Customer Committee Meeting held on 11th March 2025
	The Committee approved the minutes from the last meeting held on Tuesday 11th March 2025.
3.	Matters Arising and Action Tracker
	The Committee noted the changes to the Action Tracker.
4.	Chair's Update
	The Chair provided members with the following updates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sarah Henderson has been appointed to the role of Executive Director of Business Services and Improvement.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment to the Customer Committee is ongoing, with over 80 applications having been received. A longlist of candidates will be produced following eligibility checks for the role, then interview panels will be arranged with the support of the Chair, JBu, KM and RO, who have previously volunteered. <p>MW provided members with an update in relation to the virtual Board meeting on 25th March. He noted that the meeting had focused on Salix Homes' financial planning, with both the Business Plan and Budget for 2025/26 being approved, as well as an updated Treasury Management Policy. Other regular items and updates were also presented to Board, such as the current Management Accounts and an update on damp and mould.</p> <p>The Chair requested that the CEO's update from the Board meeting on 25th March be shared with members. The EPSL confirmed that this would be circulated following the meeting.</p> <p>The Committee noted the Chair's update.</p>
5.	Scrutiny Action Tracker
	<p>The CEM noted the following updates in relation to the Scrutiny Action Tracker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of actions had been completed in relation to Environmental Services, as noted in the tracker. This provides assurance to members that the actions identified through Customer Scrutiny are completed by colleagues on an ongoing basis to ensure that they are embedded into daily work practice. Work is ongoing to monitor and improve the data collected in relation to colleague demographics, as noted in the tracker. Work has begun on the Customer Support Scrutiny piece. Recommendations from this work will likely be brought to the Customer Committee at the meeting in July. The Action Tracker is an important 'live' document that is updated on an ongoing basis, and members are welcome to contact the CEM at any time to discuss its contents. <p>The Chair thanked the CEM for the update and welcomed the ongoing work to explore formal qualification opportunities for Salix's caretaker staff. The EPSL noted that one caretaker had recently moved to a Neighbourhood Assistant position, reflecting both the encouragement Salix is providing toward staff development and the engagement by caretaker teams with this process.</p> <p>The Committee noted the updates to the Scrutiny Action Tracker.</p>
6.	Annual Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report (incl. self-assessment)
	<p><i>RO joined the meeting at 18:27.</i></p> <p>The CM provided a summary of Salix Homes' annual complaints performance, including self-assessment against the Complaints Handling Code, along with the accompanying service improvement report. The CM noted the following key points for members:</p>

- Year-on-year, Salix has received a significant increase in the number of Stage 1 complaints, from 319 to 434 in 2024/25.
- 88 Stage 2 complaints were received in 2024/25, with 1 having been refused. Typically, complaints are only refused where the customer or Salix has already engaged in legal action in relation to the matter, or the matter is entirely outside of Salix's remit.
- Around 50% of complaints received related to repairs, but this is a reduced percentage in comparison to previous years.
- Ongoing improvements and additional resources to Salix's repairs service has led to changes in the themes of repairs complaints. For instance, time taken to receive a repair has reduced to around 1/3 of repairs complaints. The most common theme relates to unresolved issues.
- 1 complaint was received in relation to the complaints process itself. This was reviewed by an independent manager and was not upheld.
- 93% of Stage 1 complaints were acknowledged within Complaints Code compliant timescales, with 86% responded to within 10 working days. In some cases, timescales can be extended by issuing a delay letter to the customer. These figures are positive and reflect year-on-year improvement.
- 5 Housing Ombudsman determinations were received in 2024/25, with 1 finding of maladministration and 2 of service failures. Compensation in relation to these cases has been paid by Salix.
- Lessons are taken from complaints received and feed into the work done by Salix's various teams. For example, more time will be taken to consult customers over changes to high-rise blocks such as the installation of sprinkler systems. Another aim is to ensure that all communications with customers are logged in CRM, so colleagues can access this and ensure that the outcomes of complaints are fed back to customers in a timely manner.
- When a complaint is upheld, the CM holds monthly meetings with the relevant service manager to discuss issues and actions being taken to address them. This process has had positive buy-in from managers and has been effective in addressing issues and identifying underlying themes across different complaints.
- The team currently have a secondment to a Complaints Investigator role, and the vacant Admin Officer role will be filled on a temporary 6-month basis to provide additional resource.

The following was noted during discussions:

- KM questioned whether CRM is already being used to track communications with customers. In response, the CM noted that most communications, such as for repairs, are tracked and logged. However some cases, such as email exchanges with individual staff, are not always logged currently.
- RO questioned how information is fed back to service managers in cases where a complaint is overturned at Stage 2. The CM noted that, at Stage 2, a service manager reviews the Stage 1 process rather than investigating the case again themselves. While relatively few appeals are upheld at this stage, and are mostly due to the production of new evidence by the customer, the Complaints Team oversee all overturned complaints and identify areas for improvement.

- AA questioned how Salix is ensuring that compensation as a result of a complaint is fair across the board, as the Housing Ombudsman recommends that RPs look into this on a case-by-case basis. The CM commented that compensation levels are identified by the Complaints Team by focusing on the impact on individual customers. Furthermore, she noted that the Complaints Oversight Group (COG) has focused on this area and undertaken reviews of Salix's compensation setting, with the COG independently reaching the same level of compensation as the Complaints Team.
- AA noted an overall increase in the number of complaints being received across the housing sector and questioned whether there is scope for the 6-month Complaints Investigator position to be permanently resourced. The EPSL noted that, while the Complaints Team is handling complaints quickly and efficiently with the new approach, the temporary resource has been put in place to monitor workloads over the next 6 months, and will be reviewed. AA commended the team for their progress and only receiving one finding of maladministration from the Housing Ombudsman over the course of the year.
- JBe noted that, having previously made a complaint as a Salix customer, he is confident that the new approach to complaints handling will be successful and is happy with how the information is presented to Committee.
- MD questioned whether complaint outcomes are discussed with customers over the phone, or only via letter. The CM noted that emails and letter are sent initially, and a follow-up text to confirm that the outcome has been sent. Customers can discuss outcomes on the phone by request, or if this is noted as a request or adjustment within their account.
- The Chair requested clarification in relation to section 3.6 of Appendix A to the report, as to whether Salix is code compliant in this area. The CM noted that the document is a work in progress as data continues to be collected, but that Salix will likely be compliant in this area. The self-assessment submission deadline is in September, once the document has been finalised.
- The Chair noted that she is happy to provide a positive statement on behalf of the Committee in relation to Salix Homes' complaint handling, as requested within the report. The CSEM noted that comments from members will be collected and a statement will be shared with the Chair for approval.

The Committee resolved to:

- **Discuss and approve the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2024/25;**
- **Discuss and approve the Self-Assessment against the Complaint Handling Code and confirm that the Committee are satisfied that the evidence provided gives assurance of our compliance with the Code; and**
- **Provide a response to the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report including stating whether the Committee feel the self-assessment is a true reflection of the Salix Homes' complaint handling.**

Action:

- **CSEM and CM to share a summary of member comments for approval by the Chair, to be uploaded along with Board comments.**

7.	Neighbourhood Action Plans
	<p>The DC provided a progress update to members on the delivery of Neighbourhood Action Plans. He highlighted the following key points for members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each Housing Officer's patch is covered by a dedicated Neighbourhood Action Plan, including an introduction to the officer and other relevant colleagues, such as caretakers for high-rise blocks. • Common themes across the plans include approaches and actions relating to fly-tipping, littering and ASB. The plans contain details such as how to report issues to Salix, updates on investments being made and local resources available as well as opportunities to get involved in Salix's work. • Since launch in September, there have been around 3,000 page views from around 2,000 individual users of the Neighbourhoods landing page. Neighbourhood Action Plans are also promoted via email, with these receiving a high opening-rate of around 61%. • Teams will continue to focus on the 20 priorities outlined in the plans and will review the priorities in each area later in the year. <p>The following was noted during discussions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chair welcomed the high levels of engagement from customers with the plans and associated marketing. The Chair suggested that updates be provided on a 6-month basis to allow more time for data collection. The DC agreed to this change. • The CEM queried whether paper copies of the action plans were also available for customers. The DC noted that 1000 action plans and 1000 postcards have been printed to date and will continue to be circulated to customers. • RO thanked the DC for the update and noted that she would like to see further advertisement of events such as skip-days so customers can prepare for these. She further questioned how pet nuisance is dealt with in cases where customers had not requested permission to keep a pet with Salix. The DC commented that these issues would be picked up with customers by housing officers, and permission can be retroactively granted such as when customers were not aware of this requirement. This would be handled according to policy if, for example, the pet ownership has been raised as an issue or nuisance. • MD questioned how the revised approach to managing car-parking spaces is being handled, as per section 2.5.2 of the report. In response, the DC commented that the High-Rise Team are looking at maximising the availability of parking spaces, such as by limiting visitors to blocks after certain times, and that this will be implemented as part of Tenancy Management procedures. • JBe noted that a broken gate to the car park in his building has impacted on the car-parking trials being implemented by Salix. He requested an update on when this issue will be addressed as current notices only reference works being completed 'in due course'. The DC responded that he would look into this and confirm an estimate on where works will be completed. <p>The Committee noted the Neighbourhood Action Plans update.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbourhood Action Plan updates to be reported on a 6-monthly basis to Committee in future. • The DC to provide an update to JBe relating to the car park gate issue discussed.
8.	Customer Service and Engagement Strategies Annual Update
	The CSEM provided members with the annual update on progress of actions from Salix

	<p>Homes' Customer Service and Customer Engagement Strategies 2024-27. The following key points were highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Customer Service Strategy proposes the introduction of a bespoke set of customer service standards. This is suggested to be moved into Year 2 of the strategy, and to be incorporated into a wider review of Salix's standards, such as TSMs and the customer charter. • Significant progress has been made against most actions within the Customer Engagement Strategy. It is suggested that the proposal for development of an online engagement tool be moved into Year 2 of the strategy, and be discussed at a future Strategy Day of the Committee. <p>Members supported the proposals from the CSEM for actions to be carried over into Year 2 of the Customer Service and Customer Engagement Strategies. RO commended the team for their hard work in ensuring that the level of completed actions within the strategies was high.</p> <p>The Committee noted the progress of actions contained within the Customer Service and Customer Engagement Strategies at the end of year one.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the following actions be rolled over to Year 2 of the Customer Service and Customer Engagement Strategies, as per the report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a bespoke set of Customer Service Standards relevant to each department. - Investigate and introduce an online customer engagement tool including ability to have online polls, consultations and conversations.
9.	Safeguarding Update
	<p><i>The CSM joined the meeting at 18:40.</i></p> <p>The CSM provided members with an overview of Salix Homes' safeguarding activities for 2024/25. The following key points were highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2024/25, there was an overall increase of 53% in the number of safeguarding issues being reported to Salix in comparison to 2023/24. • High profile safeguarding cases, such as that relating to Awaab Ishak, have raised public awareness of safeguarding issues which has been further supported by central government awareness campaigns. The COVID-19 pandemic may also have contributed to an increased awareness of issues within local communities. • Salix's safeguarding figures are reflective of the demographic trends across Salford, with around 73% of referrals being made in relation to white British customers and around 55% of referrals relating to men. • The majority of safeguarding issues relate to mental health issues. Salix is engaging with the local Salford Manbassadors group to address this issue, by reducing stigma around mental health and providing safe spaces for men to seek support in the early stages of a mental health crisis. • Mandatory safeguarding training for has been reviewed to ensure that all colleagues are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. Work is in progress to upskill frontline colleagues, such as customer services teams, in this regard. <p>The following was noted during discussions:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chair requested that the chart break down of safeguarding referrals by category in 2.2. of the report be shared in colour, so members can distinguish between the categories. • The Chair welcomed Salix's involvement with the Manbassadors campaign, and noted the inclusion of further information within the Snapshot email for colleagues. • KM welcomed Salix's focus on mental health issues, but commented that people facing mental health issues, particularly when exacerbated by poverty and drug use, may struggle to engage with support groups such as Manbassadors and other groups already operating in Salford. The CSM noted that the campaign is aimed at targeting individuals who fall through the cracks of normal safeguarding processes, but acknowledged that not all people are in a position to sit down and talk about their issues. She noted that further work on mental health safeguarding is in the pipeline for the next 18-24 months and suggested meeting with KM separately to discuss local issues. • RO highlighted the importance of training all Salix colleagues about safeguarding, especially within communities that may be mistrusting of authority and struggle to reach out for support. She noted that Salix does not have the resources to address issues alone but can work with local partners to address problems. For instance, repairs operatives may be able to identify safeguarding issues when attending properties for routine maintenance. • AA thanked the CSM for the comprehensive report and the range of perspectives reflected within it. He questioned why, as outlined in 3.5 of the report, 231 domestic abuse cases heard a MARAC related to Salix Homes tenants but only 34 safeguarding referrals were made to Salix. The CSM noted that Salix receives referrals from a range of teams and partners but may not always be notified in the first instance. For example, some of the referrals may have been made to the Local Authority in the first instance, rather than directly to Salix. • AA requested a gender breakdown of domestic abuse data within future reports, so that Salix can further understand local issues and offer targeted support. The CSM commented that she will look into tracking this data as this would be important in reducing stigma towards male victims of domestic abuse. She further noted that Salix will also look at making referrals to support perpetrators of domestic abuse, where it is possible to do so without being at the expense of the victim. The Chair noted that historic data may have been skewed by previous practice, such as directives for police officers to always arrest men during domestic abuse calls. <p>The Committee noted the Annual Safeguarding Update.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSM to investigate providing a breakdown of gender in relation to domestic abuse data.
10.	Q4 Performance Update
	<p><i>The PBIM joined the meeting at 19:34.</i></p> <p>The PBIM presented the quarterly performance update to members. He highlighted the following key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance across 2024/25 has been strong, with improvements recorded against a number of Performance Indicators (PIs). • Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) are now in their second year of being recorded. As part of this, 12-question surveys, set out by the Regulator, are asked of customers to score Salix in a range of areas. There are some areas for improvement, such as satisfaction with complaint handling, but Salix's scores

	<p>remain higher than the national average.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building safety PIs are on target with the exception of electrical safety measures. Salix has set out actions to address this. • Income and arrears PIs are on target. • Repairs performance has been improving year-on-year and in relation to targets. • Complaints performance is on target, although the service is facing increased pressure in line with national trends. • Voids performance is just below target. • Assets performance is on target. Aspirational targets to undertake stock condition surveys have been met, with 2552 surveys undertaken in 2024/25. Only 0.15% of homes have failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard, and work is ongoing with customers to mitigate the issues at these properties. • People services performance is on target. <p>The following was noted during discussions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chair welcomed the positive results outlined in the report. • In regard to the below-target complaints handling score, AA noted that Salix is unable to create a bespoke TSM survey for customers and therefore is required to collect complaints scores even from customers who have not been through a formal complaints process. The PBIM agreed with this, and noted that further analysis of the data has shown that, of all customers to have marked down Salix for complaint handling within the last 2 years, only 1 customer has made a formal complaint within the previous 12 months. He further noted that Kwest, the organisation that conducts TSM surveys on Salix's behalf, has been asked to probe with supplementary questions to determine why customers are expressing dissatisfaction. • RO questioned whether access to properties affects Salix's building safety certificate scoring. In response, the PBIM noted that lack of access is the main issue in achieving the 5-year electrical safety certificate targets. He noted that this issue had reduced over the course of the year, but that there is further work to do against this measure. In some cases, Salix is required to engage in a legal process to gain access to properties where there is continual no-access, but this is a lengthy and time consuming process which SLT is kept informed of. <p>The Committee noted the Q4 Performance Update.</p>
11.	Customer Support Fund Update
	<p>The CSM summarised the support provided to customers during 2024/25 through Salix Homes' Customer Support Fund (CSF). In particular, she noted the following key points for members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CSF can be used by customers for financial support in a range of circumstance. For example, it can be used towards rent, one-off expenses and tenancy sustainment measures. • Salix overspent against the CSF budget by £7170 in 2024/25, but all individual cases were justified based on customer need. • The CSF policy sets out a maximum payment of £500 per customer per year. However, this can be exceeded based on individual circumstances. For example, £2340 was allocated in one case where a vulnerable customer had been unaware of support available with a hoarding issue. This expenditure was justified as legal costs associated with accessing and removing items from the property would have exceeded the CSF costs. • Salix has committed to providing a CSF again in 2025/26m, and the new customer support team also has a discretionary pot of money available to support

	<p>customers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CSM handles most CSF applications but those in relation to rent arrears are handled by the income team. • Demographic data will be collected in relation to CSF payments in 2025/26, and colleagues will focus on making customers aware of the support available to them through the CSF. • The EPSL noted that Salix is currently undertaking a 'deep-dive' review of the CSF, in order to ensure that payments are not masking issues, such as long-term inability to pay rent arrears by customers. Therefore, the CSF budget will not be increased until issues are understood in more detail and it is ascertained whether more specialist support is required, particularly for individuals who have made CSF applications in multiple years. <p>The following was noted during discussions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chair welcomed the further analysis being done in relation to the CSF, and highlighted the importance of monitoring use of the CSF to ensure that it is not masking issues such as difficulty in handling personal finances. • KM questioned whether CSF payments were monitored through CRM. The CSM commented that customers can apply for CSF directly with officers or online. Salix requests information such as bank statements and details of individual circumstances from the customers so that we can look at wider support available whilst assessing applications. <p>The Committee noted the Customer Support Fund Update.</p>
	Any Other Business
	<p>The EPSL noted that Governance would be in contact with the Chair and AA regarding their availability for Committee member appraisals.</p> <p>The EPSL confirmed that the proposed Strategy Day on Friday 16th May would not be going ahead due to a lack of availability from members. She apologised for the short-notice of this meeting and the last minute cancellation of the planned Strategy Day on 11th April. The Chair requested that a survey be created for members to confirm their availability for the Strategy Day to be re-scheduled in June.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members to be surveyed for their availability for the Strategy Day to be re-scheduled in June.
	Date of Next Meeting
	Tuesday 3 rd June (Diamond House)
The meeting closed at 20:08.	