



**Minutes of the Customer Committee Meeting held on Tuesday 07 March
2024 at Diamond House**

MEMBERS:	Charlotte Haines (Chair) Karen Hamilton-Hulse (KH) Cynthia (Bethel) Alloyda (CA) Marta Diaz (MD) Keri Muldoon (KM) Jason Marland (JM) Rashidah Owoseni (RO) Gareth Evans (GE) Ahmed Abdulmalek (AA)
OFFICERS:	Sian Grant, Executive Director of Customers and Communities (EDCC) Warren Carlon, Director of Communities (DC) Lorraine Butler, Customer Service and Engagement Manager (CSEM) Laura Flint, Customer Engagement Manager (CEM) Ed Sidley, Performance and Business Intelligence Manager (PBIM) Becky Airey, Governance and Policy Officer (GPO) (minutes)
ATTENDEES:	Cath Davies (Housemark) (CD)
OBSERVERS:	Anthony Reid, Regulatory Engagement Manager (RSH) Natasha Bintley, Inspection Lead (RSH)
APOLOGIES:	
ITEM	
1.	Session with the Regulator
	The members of the Committee had a closed camera session with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH).
	The meeting commenced at 19:03
2.	Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest
	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. No apologies were received. There were no Declarations of Interest.
3.	Minutes of the Meeting held on 05 March 2024
	The Committee approved the minutes from the last meeting held on 05 March 2024.
4.	Matters Arising and Action Tracker
	The Committee noted the changes to the Action Tracker.
5.	Chair's Update

The Chair provided the Committee with an overview of the last Board meeting which took place on 26 March 2024 and the Board Strategy Day which took place on 26 April 2024. Key highlights included:

- Salix Homes has completed a self-assessment of its compliance with the Consumer Standards and is already strengthening and looking to add some additional improvements;
- The outcomes of the Housing Ombudsman's consultation have been published in the new Complaint Handling Code;
- The new Competency and Conduct Standard requires specific roles to meet or hold certain qualifications over the next two years to raise standards within the sector – Salix Homes are currently preparing a consultation response;
- Salix Homes only had one property insurer to choose from for 2024/25 and there were increased costs relating to flood risk;
- Key outcomes of the Legal Compliance Review were provided to members;
- The Board were provided with Salix Homes' operational performance as at the end of Q3 2023/24;
- Members were provided with a Q3 finance update which included Salix Homes' management accounts;
- The Board received a damp, mould and condensation update;
- Members reviewed the feedback from the Effectiveness Reviews – the Chair noted that the feedback was similar for most Committees; and
- The development of Arrow Street will be the first fully social new build Passivhaus scheme.

The Chair informed members that the following items had been approved by Board since the last update:

- Salix Homes' budget for 2024/25;
- Salix Homes' 2024-2065 Business Plan;
- The Treasury Management Policy and Strategy;
- The Performance Management Framework for 2024/25;
- Salix Homes' Governance Framework alongside the updated Terms of Reference for Board, Committees and SHDL;
- The Probity Policy which had been reviewed by the Customer Committee in advance;
- The Customer Engagement Strategy as per the Customer Committee's recommendation;
- The Building Safety Customer Engagement Strategy as per the Customer Committee's recommendation;
- The Board agreed to increase the remuneration of the CEO to match other Registered Providers and to ensure Salix Homes remains competitive; and
- The progression of the Arrow Street Development.

In response to a query from JM about whether the increased CEO remuneration will also be applied in the recruitment of the CEO, AA confirmed that it would and that it will contribute to the futureproofing of the organisation.

	<p>The Chair informed members that the Chair of the Board will be stepping down in September 2024 and that JM will assist the recruitment process.</p> <p>The Committee noted the Chair’s update.</p>
9.	<p>Housemark Complaints Review Outcomes</p> <p>The Chair brought item 9 forward as a discussion point as it would inform the Committee’s discussion on agenda item 6 - CD joined via Microsoft Teams.</p> <p>CD informed members that Salix Homes had commissioned Housemark to carry out an external review of the business’ complaints handling service to provide independent assurance and guidance.</p> <p>CD provided the Committee with an overview of the methodology and noted that the review findings centred around four key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service approach; • Strategic approach, service structure and resources; • Operational delivery and quality of service; and • Performance. <p>Members were informed that Salix Homes consistently put a lot of thought and care into their approach to complaint handling, particularly in relation to meeting timescales/targets and quality of responses. CD added that there is a coherent approach to identifying learning and sharing learning with customers and across the organisation.</p> <p>In relation to customer satisfaction, CD informed members that 46% of complainants expressed that they were either ‘very’ or ‘fairly satisfied’ with Salix Homes’ approach to complaint handling which is above the national median (34%) and above the average from benchmarking data conducted by Housemark (40%).</p> <p>CD also provided members with an overview of the key recommendations from the report.</p> <p>The Committee agreed with the recommendation that the letters should be laid out more clearly as too much information/data could overwhelm some customers. KH added that the initial complaint may become lost in translation and customers could become bored of reading letters that contain too much detail.</p> <p>GE noted that the complaints letter template had been discussed in great detail at the Complaints Oversight Group (COG) and it had been suggested that if customers were provided with all the information relating to their complaint, then they could glean the information they wanted from it but he appreciated this would be a detailed letter that not everyone would want.</p> <p>CD informed members that a balance must be struck regarding giving the right amount of detail in the right way and suggested that the letter could include a section that pinpoints customers to where they can receive further information should they want it.</p> <p>In response to a query from RO about whether Housemark thought Salix Homes were being too harsh with their internal timeframes, CD confirmed that it made it difficult to report</p>

	<p>on compliance as Salix Homes could be externally compliant but not internally compliant. The CSEM informed members that the Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy and Procedure had been updated to reflect the revised Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales.</p> <p>AA noted that the recommendations give the Committee insight into the operational side of complaints and provides them with an additional level of assurance that Salix Homes is actively reviewing and improving their approach to complaints handling.</p> <p>The Committee noted the Housemark Complaints Review Outcomes, approved timescales.</p> <p><i>CD left the meeting.</i></p>
6.	<p>Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report</p> <p>The CSEM provided members with an overview of Salix Homes’ complaints handling performance between 01 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 and highlighted that there has been a reduction in the volume of complaints compared to the previous year.</p> <p>The CSEM informed the Committee that the Housing Ombudsman expects Salix Homes’ Board to publish a formal response to the report which includes our self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code and noted that Customer Committee members’ feedback will also be compiled into a formal response alongside the board response.</p> <p>Members were informed that the report evaluates performance based on the 2022 Complaint Handling Code and Salix Homes’ old policy and procedure but going forward, the report will assess performance against the new Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy and Procedure which aligns with the 2024 Complaint Handling Code.</p> <p>The CSEM noted that a Learning Action Tracker had been introduced following feedback from Committee members that the same complaint themes were recurring, to monitor the progress and assess the impact of Salix Homes’ actions on future learning themes.</p> <p>Members were asked to discuss and approve one of the two Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report templates provided in the appendices based on accessibility for customers who will be reading it from the website. The CSEM also drew members’ attention to the self-assessment and appended evidence for scrutiny.</p> <p>JM suggested that a one or two-page summary should also be provided with the option to click on a link into the full report if customers wanted more detail. JM added that there could be a ‘you said, we did’ section which outlines the activity of the Customer Committee and its subgroups.</p> <p>AA noted that a summary overview/infographic would be particularly helpful to customers whose first language is not English.</p>

The EDCC informed members that they were already working with the Marketing and Communications team to include a 'you said, we did' section to showcase the Customer Committee's achievements and how Salix Homes consulted with customers.

In response to a query about whether the Committee will have sight of the revised template, the EDCC informed members that they could agree the revised template and report outside of a formal meeting as the report will be going to Board on 4th June 2024 ahead of publication and submission to the Housing Ombudsman on 30th June 2024. The EDCC added that the infographic will be added to whichever template is selected by members today and will also be circulated to the committee for approval before being reported to board on 4th June.

AA noted the benefit of including deescalated complaints in theme analysis as Salix Homes can mark the data against the new goalposts. The CSEM informed members that there is no longer the option to de-escalate a complaint in the new Complaint Handling Code.

Members were informed to email the CSEM if they had any additional comments relating to the contents of the annual complaints' performance and service improvement report.

The Committee resolved to:

- **Approve the annual complaints performance and service improvement report 2023/24.**
- **Approve Template 2 for the annual complaints performance and service improvement report.**
- **Approve the self-assessment against the Complaints Handling Code.**

Actions:

- **The report to be produced in template 2 and to be circulated to the committee for approval.**
- **Marketing and Communications Team to create an infographic to include in Template 2 and this to be circulated to the committee for comment and approval.**

7. Draft Neighbourhood Action Plans

The DC provided members with an update on the Neighbourhood Action Plans (NAPs) and highlighted:

- Salix Homes' Marketing and Communications Team have been working on the design, content and layout of the NAPs;
- The information taken from the customer surveys has been used to identify the top priorities for customers in their neighbourhood;
- 20 versions of the NAPs will be produced to mirror the 20 different housing officer patches, these will be available in both paper and digital formats;
- The NAPs will be distributed through Salix Homes' social media channels, via the website and by Housing Officers when they are out in our neighbourhoods;
- The NAPs will be reviewed annually, but should other priorities emerge in the neighbourhood we will adapt our approach and response accordingly.

The DC asked members for their views and feedback on the draft NAP.

JM asked whether the NAPs will be sent out with the rent increase letters to ensure customers are not receiving multiple communications in the same month. JM added that, as NAPs will be updated annually, Salix Homes could save on postage costs by including the two documents together. The DC noted that NAPs would also be updated and recirculated if a situation in a neighbourhood changes, but that sending it out with the rent increase letters might overwhelm customers as it is a lot of information to digest at once. The EDCC added that the NAPs will be hand delivered by Salix Homes' officers during Working In Neighbourhood (WIN) days.

KM queried whether the NAPs will be available in community facilities, such as local libraries, or whether they will be posted through customers' doors. The DC noted that it was a good idea to include NAPs in community centres, and that each customer will receive a personal copy relating to their neighbourhood.

KM noted that Community Connectors will benefit from NAPs as they will be in a better position to signpost customers to the right people.

CA noted that it is not sustainable/environmentally friendly to create and circulate paper NAPs to all of Salix Homes customers. CA queried whether a QR code could be created for customers who could access a digital copy of the programme and make other provisions for those who are not digitally connected.

The EDCC informed members that Salix Homes have been asking customers how they would prefer to be communicated with via the Getting to Know You (GTKY) Survey and that they will use the data collected to tailor how a customer is communicated with. JM suggested that Salix Homes could use recycled paper.

In response to a query from KR about how customers with accessibility needs will access the NAPs, the EDCC informed members that there are multiple accessibility features on the website. AA noted that some customers that experience visual and audible difficulties may also have other software downloaded on their phones to aid them.

MD noted that Salix Homes should include community event dates on a small card which customers can place on their fridge, and that this information can be replicated via social media.

In response to RO's comment that pages 10 and 15 seemed to be more dimmed than the others in the pack due to them being blue, WC noted that he will pick this up with the Marketing and Communications Team. AA added that Salix Homes should factor in customers with colour-blindness when selecting the colour pallet.

GE queried whether the NAPs will be printed on A4 or A5, as A5 will be easier to post to customers. The DC informed the Committee that the NAPs will likely be A4 due to the amount of information on each page.

	<p>The Chair noted that ‘neighbour’ and ‘neighbourhood’ is incorrectly spelt throughout the document and that this should be picked up when finalising the document.</p> <p>The Chair suggested that the wording ‘housing officers will support you on a day-to-day basis’ (page 10) should be changed to something more general like ‘housing officers will support your community’ to manage expectations as some customers might take this literally.</p> <p>The Committee asked that the revised NAPs are circulated to members rather than be brought to another meeting.</p> <p>The Committee approved the Neighbourhood Action Plan template subject to changes as discussed.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The DC to revise draft NAP template and circulate it to members via email.
8.	<p>Scrutiny Plan 2024/25</p>
	<p>The CEM provided members with an overview of the 2024/25 Scrutiny Plan for final approval including dates for each scrutiny and noted that the Committee had proposed the following areas for scrutiny;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; • Customer communications; • Customer support and tenancy sustainment, including safeguarding; and • Environmental services. <p>The CEM added that the dates will be tight to enable Salix Homes to complete all pieces of work throughout the year.</p> <p>In response to a query from the Committee about 1st Response scrutiny, the CEM informed members that the DC would be conducting the review and that the Apartment Living Forum (ALF) would feedback to the Committee on their scrutiny of this service.</p> <p>The Committee approved the Scrutiny Plan 2024/25.</p>
10.	<p>Performance Management Framework 2024/25</p>
	<p>The PBIM provided members with an overview of the 2024/25 Performance Management Framework and highlighted that there are six key components that underpin the framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Principles; • Performance Hierarchy; • Corporate Plan and Priorities; • Data Integrity and Governance; • Communications and Awareness; and • Power BI. <p>The PBIM noted that the introduction of the ‘performance hierarchy’ is a key change to previous frameworks and that it establishes what Performance Indicators (PIs) will be reported on in 2024/25.</p>

Members were informed that the Performance Team are in the process of finalising the mobilisation of the framework and scorecards, and that a final version will be available at the end of May.

The Committee thanked the PBIM for including an explanation of performance hierarchy so that members were able to fully understand the content of the report.

In response to a query about what Power BI is, the PBIM informed members that it is a tool created by Microsoft to allow teams to share data across the business and enable people to access live reports where they can find whatever relevant information they require. The PBIM added that it can pull different sources of data together from different systems.

JM added that Power BI can turn information into graphs and charts to allow people to visualise data too.

In response to a query from AA about what 'other reporting areas' meant, PBIM informed the Committee that it identifies other locations where data are consumed, i.e. some damp and mould data is kept in scorecards, but it is also circulated to Assets and Sustainability Committee. The PBIM added that some reporting areas can get so big that 'other reporting areas' ensures that it encapsulates data that do not fit within the framework.

JM queried whether members of the Committee can access data via Power BI using their Salix Homes email address. The PBIM confirmed that they could set a workspace up for members.

AA noted that this reaffirms Salix Homes' commitment to transparency.

The Committee noted the Performance Management Framework 2024/25.

Actions:

- **PBIM to enable Customer Committee members to have access to Power BI through their Salix Homes' accounts.**

11. Apartment Living Forum (ALF) Minutes

The CEM provided members of the Committee with an overview of the ALF minutes and noted that the group has agreed to meet more frequently.

In response to a query from the Chair about the dynamics of the group, JM informed the Committee that the group had so much to discuss at each meeting because they only met each quarter and now that they meet every other month it has given them time to digest and resolve issues. JM added that the group has become more streamlined as a result.

The CEM noted that a Teams channel has been set up so members can access documents and stay connected in between meetings.

	<p>In response to a query from GE about how an action is logged if it has been discussed but cannot be resolved, JM informed members that this is part of the project they are currently reviewing.</p> <p>The Committee noted the ALF minutes.</p>
12.	Any Other Business
	No other business was discussed.
13.	Date of Next Meeting
	Tuesday 11 June 2024 (virtual)
<p>The meeting closed at 20:29</p>	