

Customer Board 2014 Annual Report to SARH Board

Introduction

The Customer Board Strategy and the SARH Standing Orders state that the Customer Board will provide an annual report to the SARH Board on the key activities and outcomes achieved by the Customer Board during the year. The Customer Board was created in January 2012 and this is the third such Annual Report produced.

Recruitment and elections

The terms of reference provide for up to nine members on the Customer Board.

There is currently one vacancy which is due to a member having moved home and no longer being a customer of SARH. During the year two customers expressed interest in applying to become members. Both have attended several meetings and taken part in other activities carried out by the Customer Board.

In accordance with the Standing Orders at the December 2014 meeting the members of the Customer Board elected a Chair and Vice Chair. Ruth Knott stood down as Chair, but is continuing as a member of the Board. Shirley Wheat was elected as the new Chair and Craig Royall was re-elected as Vice Chair.

Five members of the Customer Board (Ruth Knott, Shirley Wheat, Gillian Pardesi, Jane Cannell and Craig Royall) have completed their first three year term of office. All five were re-appointed by the SARH Group Board.

Appraisals

In February 2014 the annual appraisals were carried out. Each member completed a self assessment of their own performance and an assessment of the performance of the Board as a whole. Appraisal interviews were then carried out with the Chair and the Head of Governance. The Chair's appraisal interview was conducted with the Vice Chair, a Customer Board member who is also on the SARH Group Board and the Head of Governance.

A summary of the appraisals outcomes and follow up actions is attached (Attachment 1).

Training

Training needs were identified as part of the appraisals. Opportunities were also used to access free training, for example from Tenant Central, as part of the SARH membership of TPAS.

Training provided included:

- Customer Journey Mapping (provided in-house)
- Effective meetings (provided by Tenant Central, hosted by SARH and attended by customers from three other Registered Providers as well as Customer Board members.
- A workshop to analyse the cost and performance benchmarking results from HouseMark and use the results to assess compliance with the Homes and Communities Agency's Consumer Standards

Meetings

During 2014 the Customer Board held seven meetings. Attendance by members during the year was 88%.

All agendas and minutes from these meetings are posted on the SARH website: <http://www.sarh.co.uk/customer-involvement/customer-board/> and copies of the minutes are provided to the SARH Group Board.

The Chief Executive met with the Customer Board three times to discuss the Corporate Plan 2014-18, governance arrangements, the work of SARH, key challenges for the future and proposals to introduce Board member remuneration.

Issues considered and outcomes

During the year the Customer Board:

- reviewed and monitored performance against Key Performance Indicators;
- considered quarterly reports on complaints;
- monitored customer satisfaction results; and
- contributed to reviews of policies including the Complaints Policy, Void Management Policy, Income Management Policy and the IT Strategy.

Other issues considered included the performance of the Customer Services Centre, use of text messaging in relation to repairs appointments, the Get Digital campaign and the proposed introduction of a chargeable repairs service.

Scrutiny work and Customer Journey Mapping

The Customer Board completed two scrutiny projects in 2014:

- An assessment of the extent to which the Customer Board and the Customer Inspectors provide value for money. This was the first time that the Customer Board and Customer Inspectors had worked together on a project. It was facilitated by DWA Consultants and as part of the contract they provided training on value for money, report writing and presentation skills. The report concluded that the work undertaken by the Customer Board and Customer Inspectors offers the organisation excellent VFM:
 - For an investment of the equivalent of an average salary the returns are impressive and contribute significantly to the performance of the organisation.

- Over 1,000 hours of voluntary work is focused totally on improving the performance of the organisation. Members of the Customer Board and Inspectors team have a wide range of skills and experience which it would be difficult, if not impossible to provide if the work they do was carried out by one or two paid employees.
 - It helps to deliver full compliance with regulatory requirements.
 - It delivers service improvement recommendations across a wide range of services.
 - It has raised the profile of the organisation both locally and nationally and contributed to its good reputation.
- Evictions: this scrutiny assessed compliance with the policies and procedures relating to evictions, and looked at the impact of welfare reform on the number of evictions as well as a comparison of the number of evictions carried out by SARH compared to other Registered Providers. The report on the findings will be presented to leadership Team early in 2015.

The Customer Board undertook five Customer Journey Mapping exercises involving three customers who had work carried out by Housing Worx (one customer who had a new kitchen fitted, one who had a new bathroom and one who had new internal doors) and two customers who had aids and adaptations work carried out by SARH contractors. The findings were reported back to SARH and Housing Worx and all recommendations made were accepted resulting in improvements to the communication with customers and the way that work is carried out.

More Customer Journey Mapping is planned for 2015.

2013/14 Annual Report for customers

Customer Board members were involved in agreeing the design and content of the 2013/14 Annual Report for customers

TPAS Award

During 2014 the Customer Board won the TPAS central region award for Excellence in Co-regulation.

A submission has been entered for the 2015 TPAS awards, in the Excellence in Tenant Led Scrutiny category (a submission relating the work of the Customer Board and Customer Inspectors).

A submission entered for the Housing Innovation Awards has been short listed for an award in two categories: Most Innovative Community Engagement and Most Innovative Small Housing Provider. The submission relates to the community engagement work undertaken, focusing primarily on the work of the Customer Board and Customer Inspectors. The award ceremony will be held on 18 February 2015 in London.

Other work

Other work carried out by the Customer Board includes:

- the Chair and a member of the Board meeting each month with the Chief Executive (or a Director) to consider the nominations for the Aspiring for Excellence award and select the winner and runner up; and select the Team of the Year.
- selecting the winner of 'The Voice' – the SARH member of staff to record the telephone message that callers hear when they ring SARH.
- two members of the Customer Board sit on a Complaints Panel to consider complaints that reach the final stage in the SARH complaints procedure. During 2014 four panels were held.
- input into SARH Board awaydays with the SARH Group Board and Housing Worx Board.
- attending the SARH AGM.
- Attending a stock tour to see examples of the new homes being built.
- attending a Strategic Planning event held by SARH for stakeholders.
- Attending four 'Fun Fridays' held by SARH during the Summer of 2014 – Customer Board members engaged with customers to promote details of the work of the Customer Board.
- Contributing to the work of several Working Groups including: the Hesketh Road Design Group; a Group to design information packs for Housing Worx customers; and a Group involved in the design and content of a new SARH website.

Areas for scrutiny in 2015 and other work

A work plan for 2015/16 will be agreed by the Customer Board. Work identified so far for inclusion includes:

- Customer Journey mapping – of the experience of customers who have had work carried out by Housing Worx and by SARH contractors as part of the major investment programme. As well as mapping the experience whilst the work is carried out the Customer Board will carry out a follow up review six months after the completion of the work.
- Further scrutiny of complaint handling.

The Customer Board will liaise with the Customer Inspectors regarding their respective programmes of work for 2015.

Budget

The annual budget for the Customer Board for 2014/15 is £10,780. Spend to the end of December 2014 is £3,550. The main items of expenditure are: support / independent facilitation of scrutiny work, refreshments and travel & subsistence. The spend on independent facilitation of scrutiny work related to the work on assessing the extent to which the Customer Board and Customer Inspectors provide value for money. The main underspends are on training as most of the training has been provided in-house or free of charge through membership of tenant organisations.

Working together

The Customer Board would like to thank SARH and Housing Worx for the support received during 2014 and the constructive approach to working together.

Shirley Wheat
Chair, Customer Board
January 2015