

Customer Voice Panel
Agenda and minutes
18th May 2026

Meeting notes:

Annual Complaints Review and Performance Insights: Joanne presented the annual complaints review to the group, including Mark, Shuna, Natalie, John, and Cllr, highlighting complaint volumes, compensation trends, and improvements in handling complaints, with a focus on regulatory compliance and customer journey enhancements.

- **Complaint Volumes and Trends:** Joanne reported a decrease in stage one complaints year-on-year, with 704 stage one complaints received compared to 817 the previous year, and 177 stage two complaints down from 184. The escalation to stage two is often driven by compensation expectations rather than service failures, and the team is focusing on improving stage one resolutions.
- **Compensation Policy and Outcomes:** Joanne explained that 65% of closed cases at stage one were upheld, with total compensation paid amounting to £140,000, down from £160,000 the previous year. A new standalone compensation policy has been introduced, aligning with Housing Ombudsman guidance, to ensure robust and transparent compensation calculations.
- **Housing Ombudsman Determinations:** The group discussed an increase in Housing Ombudsman determinations, rising from 6 to 10 cases, with maladministration and service failure determinations also increasing. Improvements such as the new complaints module, compensation policy, and enhanced record-keeping have been implemented in response to Ombudsman feedback.
- **Customer Journey and Continuous Improvement:** Joanne highlighted the appointment of a Customer Journey Manager, Emily, and the shift in focus for the internal insights action panel towards continuous improvement. The new complaints module allows for more granular reporting and root cause analysis, aiming to predict complaint trends and address recurring issues.
- **ASB and Repairs Complaints:** Repairs complaints remain the top category, though they have decreased by 22.4%. ASB complaints have increased, particularly in Q4, and the team is addressing resource implications and improving the customer journey for these cases. Case studies were shared to illustrate learning and improvements.

Scrutiny Review and Panel Governance: Shuna led a discussion with Mark, John, Cllr, and Natalie on the scrutiny review process, panel governance, and the separation of scrutiny and customer voice functions, addressing capacity challenges and the need for broader customer engagement.

- **Scrutiny Report Submission:** Mark described difficulties in sending the completed scrutiny report and was advised by Shuna to copy the content into an email for easier submission. Shuna will compile Mark's findings with additional points from previous meetings into a concise report for review and amendment by the group.
- **Panel Structure and Roles:** The group discussed the original separation between the customer voice panel and scrutiny panel, with John and Cllr expressing concerns about the workload and capacity required for effective scrutiny. Mark volunteered to continue scrutiny work, while others preferred to focus on customer voice.
- **Customer Engagement and Feedback:** Mark and Cllr emphasized the importance of hearing from a wider range of customers, noting that many residents are reluctant to complain or provide feedback. The panel discussed ways to increase engagement and ensure that customer insights inform service improvements.
- **Recruitment and Future Panel Composition:** Shuna announced a planned direct mail-out in June to invite wider customer participation in panel activities, aiming to

address capacity issues and potentially restructure the panel to better separate scrutiny and customer voice functions.

Service Charge Disputes and Complaint Handling: Cllr and John raised concerns about service charge disputes, double charging, and the distinction between formal complaints and disputes, with Joanne clarifying processes and promising greater transparency and follow-up actions.

- **Distinction Between Complaints and Disputes:** Joanne clarified that disputes about service charge calculations should be handled as disputes, not formal complaints, unless there is a service failure or lack of response. The formal complaints process is not intended for contesting the amount of service charges, which is a matter for the first tier tribunal.
- **Transparency and Auditing:** Joanne assured the group that all service charges are audited before statements are sent out, and any double charging should be quickly resolved through the dispute process. April and Joanne will provide greater transparency on cleaning charges and calculation methods.
- **Follow-Up Actions:** Joanne committed to clarifying the distinction between disputes and complaints in communications, and to follow up on specific cases raised by John and Cllr where disputes were not properly handled. Shuna will record these actions for further review.

Customer Communication and Portal Issues: Mark and John discussed challenges with customer communication, portal functionality, and staff responsiveness, with Joanne and Shuna agreeing to investigate portal faults and review call recordings for learning and improvement.

- **Portal Functionality Problems:** Mark reported issues with uploading photos to the portal, which sometimes fails and results in error messages. Shuna and Joanne agreed to log a fault and raise a ticket to resolve the issue.
- **Staff Responsiveness and Tone:** Mark described a negative experience with a staff member who was defensive and unhelpful regarding a repair request. Joanne promised to review the call recordings and provide feedback to the staff involved, emphasizing the importance of empathetic and timely communication.

Panel Feedback on Policy, Empathy, and Customer Voice: The group, including John, Cllr, Mark, Joanne, and Natalie, discussed the challenges of balancing policy-driven decisions with empathy, the need for consistent and transparent policies, and strategies to improve customer engagement and feedback.

- **Policy Versus Empathy:** John and Joanne discussed the risk of becoming overly policy-driven, which can lack empathy and alienate customers. Joanne emphasized the need for staff to deliver empathetic messages and consider vulnerabilities, while maintaining consistency and evidence-based decisions.
- **Customer Engagement Challenges:** Natalie highlighted difficulties in engaging shared owners and obtaining feedback, noting low response rates and the importance of broadening engagement efforts. The group agreed to prioritize actions that increase customer voice and ensure feedback is heard by decision-makers.

Follow-up tasks:

Scrutiny Report Submission: Send the completed scrutiny report content by copying the text from the Word document into an email to Shuna for inclusion in the panel review. (Mark)

Scrutiny Panel Report Compilation: Compile the points from Mark's scrutiny report and previous meeting discussions into a short report, circulate it to panel members for review and amendments. (Shuna)

Service Charge Transparency and Cleaning Costs: Arrange a meeting with April and the estate team to demonstrate and explain the calculation of cleaning service charges to panel members, addressing concerns about double charging and transparency. (Joanne, April)

Dispute vs Complaint Clarification: Clarify and communicate the distinction between service charge disputes and formal complaints, ensuring customers and staff understand the appropriate process and service levels. (Joanne)

Portal Photo Upload Issue Investigation: Log a fault ticket and investigate the issue with photo uploads failing on the customer portal, particularly when submitting repairs with images. (Joanne)

Housing Officer and Caretaker Introduction: Schedule and facilitate introductions between the new housing officer and caretaker for South Earlswood and Drygate South areas and Councillor Robin to support neighbourhood engagement. (Joanne)

Panel Recruitment Outreach: Conduct a direct mail-out to all customers in June to gauge interest in joining the panel or scrutiny functions and assess wider customer engagement. (Shuna)

Follow-up on Service Charge Handling Failure: Investigate and follow up on John's unresolved service charge handling issue, including lack of response from the home ownership team and closure of his complaint, and provide feedback to John. (Joanne)