

CUSTOMER FOCUS COMMITTEE

Monday 20 February 2023

16.30

SHG Boardroom, Cornerstone

**PRESENT / IN-ATTENDANCE:****Members (Present):**

- Nasrin Fazal
- Jenny Osbourne (Chair)
- Christine Woolridge

Observers (Present):

- Bob McGechan, Customer Scrutiny Panel Member

Officers (In-attendance)

- Sandra Coleing, Assistant Chief Executive (Lead Officer)
- Chris Hannon, Assets Manager
- Christian Hartley, Head of Customer Finance
- Joe Keating, Head of Assets
- Jonathan Kelly, Governance and Scrutiny Officer (Minute Taker)

01	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	Action
	Alistair Chapman and Jo Hague sent their apologies for absence. There were no declarations of interest.	
02a / 02b	MINUTES AND ACTION MONITOR FROM MEETING 21 NOVEMBER 2022	
	The Minutes and action monitor from the meeting on 21 November 2022 were noted and approved.	
03	CUSTOMER THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY PANEL (CSP) REPORT ON DAMP AND MOULD (DECISION)	
	<p>The Customer Scrutiny Panel Member introduced the report to present the CSP's report of its review of Damp and Mould. Questions were invited. The discussion covered:</p> <p>The Committee commended the report. They asked for an update regarding the implementation on the actions that the CSP recommended. The Head of Assets confirmed that the majority of the actions had already been implemented. He provided an update on the implementation of the Rapid Response Team and the call back service, which he felt would have a significant impact. He added that the changes have added significant demand to the service but it is expected that this will return to a normal level. The Assets Manager added that in the past, customers may have received information or a hygrometer when reporting damp, mould or condensation, but now they will receive a physical visit from trained inspector, which is a much more efficient process for the customer and should uncover issues faster.</p> <p>The Committee asked whether all of the extra work was at the cost of any other services, due to the demand on resources. The Head of Assets explained that in the short term there wouldn't be any negative impact on other services but highlighted that the increased demand was not sustainable. He added that the service will monitor what funding is available to help continued investment.</p>	

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	<p>The Committee discussed how the service uses data to identify homes and customers that are at risk of damp, mould and condensation. The Assistant Chief Executive provide an update on the role that the new Head of Data will have in ensuring that Stockport Homes utilises data more effectively going forward. She added that the possibility of creating a propensity model to better highlight potentially problematic properties will be explored as part of this. The Head of Assets provided assurance to the Committee that the service do currently analyse data, but as the CSP report highlighted, there is room for improvement in this area going forward.</p> <p>The Board discussed the negative feedback that was received from the survey. The Governance and Scrutiny Officer explained that the survey was circulated the day before the terrible news regarding Awaab Ishak broke. He explained that it was felt that this would increase the likelihood of negative feedback being received on the survey. The Committee took assurances however due to the service contacting every customer who received the survey, to arrange an inspection if it was still required.</p> <p>Overall, the Committee commend the speed at which Stockport Homes have moved to address the issues highlighted in the report.</p>	AL
	<p>RESOLVED: The Customer Focus Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Considered the content of the CSP's review report (appendix one); ii. Approved the CSP Damp and Mould Service Action Plan (appendix two) 	
04	DAMP AND MOULD UPDATE (ASSURANCE)	
	<p>The Head of Assets and the Asset Manager introduced the report to provide information to Customer Focus Committee on the actions that SHG have taken to address homes affected by damp and mould following an external audit, a customer scrutiny review of procedures and following the news of the death of Awaab Ishak. Questions were invited. The discussion covered:</p> <p>The Committee discussed the Internal Audit report on Damp, Mould and Condensation. They were pleased to see only one medium and one advisory finding. An update was requested in relation to implementation of those recommendations. The Asset Manager provided an update with implementations, explaining that both actions being addressed effectively since the audit.</p> <p>The Committee highlighted that they had taken assurance from the update on what Stockport Homes are doing and continue to do in relation to damp, mould and condensation. They noted that Stockport Homes could be a sector leader on this, when the recommendations from Internal Audit and the CSP are fully implemented.</p>	
	RESOLVED: The Customer Focus Committee note the content of this report	
05	UPDATE ON RENT ARREARS PERFORMANCE AND PROACTIVE WORK TO SUPPORT CUSTOMERS AND MINIMISE ARREARS (ASSURANCE)	
	The Head of Customer Finance introduced the report to present an update on rent arrears performance at the end of December 2022. This includes	

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	<p>insight into how customers are managing rent payments during the current Cost of Living Crisis; presents plans to support customers with rent and service charge increases from April 2023; and seek Board Members' views on the plans. Questions were invited. The discussion covered:</p> <p>The Committee asked whether the Customer Finance Team was sustainably resourced, to deal with the growing demand. The Head of Customer Finance explained that an additional Money Advisor had recently been appointed for the next 18 months, which should ensure that the service can continue to meet demand. He highlighted that it is more important than ever to support customers and ensure that they claim if they are entitled to, which is important to help people in the current cost of living crisis.</p> <p>The Committee highlighted their concern that customers may be unaware of the rising heating charges, when they are applying for a new home. The Head of Customer Finance explained that there has been an increased focus on ensuring that there is sufficient information relating to energy prices being promoted throughout the process of applying for a home.</p> <p>The Committee noted the work that Stockport Homes have carried out in 2022-23 and asked whether it will receive similar financial support from Stockport Council to be able to do so again in 2023-24. The Head of Customer Finance provided assurance that it is likely that the financial support provided from Stockport Council will be similar in 2023-24 and therefore Stockport Homes will be in a positive position to support customers.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the further Household Support funding to Local Authorities, that the government have committed to providing in 2023-24. The Head of Customer Finance confirmed that as long as the money is committed for spending, the Department of Work and Pensions will not recall any of it, if it is not spent immediately.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the HRA Hardship Fund and asked whether Stockport Homes have discretion on how this is spent. The Head of Customer Finance explained that Stockport Council understand that Stockport Homes are best placed to identify how the money should be utilised and therefore provide autonomy to Stockport Homes.</p> <p>The Committee asked whether there are still other ways to help customers through the cost-of-living crisis, which haven't yet been explored. The Head of Customer Finance explained that there are still things Stockport Homes can do in the future, such as finding additional income sources for customers. He highlighted the United Utilities Trust Fund, which is something that hasn't been utilised across the sector recently, but explained there is a potential for this to be explored as tangible funding source for customers.</p>	
	<p>RESOLVED: The Customer Focus Committee considered the current arrears position and activities planned to support customers with the proposed rent and service charge increases from April 2023</p>	
06	<p>INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN CONSULTATION (SLIDES) (ASSURANCE)</p>	

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	<p>The Assistant Chief Executive introduced the report to provide an update to the Committee in relation to the Internal Audit Plan for 2023-24, to seek comment on the proposals and identify any additional areas for consideration. Questions were invited. The discussion covered:</p> <p>An update was provided to the Committee that the Internal Audit of Responsive Repairs will likely be pushed back to 2024-25.</p> <p>The Committee discussed Damp, Mould and Condensation and suggested that due to its significance within the sector, it should be considered whether reassurance from Internal Audit should take place in the next 12 months. The Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that this will be considered.</p> <p>The Committee asked whether an audit on Data had been considered. The Assistant Chief Executive provided an update on the role of the recently appointed Head of Data. She explained that due to there not being anyone in post for this role in 2022, Housemark were commissioned to carry out a review of how Stockport Homes uses data, providing recommendations to form the basis of a new Data strategy</p> <p>The Committee asked whether there will be any pending review on the Stockport Homes Group structure and whether it is effective and achieving the desired objectives. The Assistant Chief Executive explained that this is something that is in the pipeline, however this will be a VFM review rather than an Internal Audit.</p>	SD / JKEA
	RESOLVED: The Customer Focus Committee commented on the proposals and identified any additional areas for consideration.	
07	CUSTOMER FOCUS COMMITTEE UPDATE REPORT (INFORMATION)	
	<p>The Committee was invited to consider the report.</p> <p>The Committee commended the work of the Anti-Social Behaviour Team.</p> <p>The Committee requested an update from the Customer Excellence, Engagement and Experience week. The Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that that it was extremely well received and that a more comprehensive update will be include in the Chief Executives Report to Stockport Board on 20th March 2023.</p>	MS
	RESOLVED: That the Customer Focus Committee note the report and provide comment.	
11	FORWARD PLAN	
	The Governance and Scrutiny Officer introduced the forward plan of the expected business for the remainder of the year.	

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