

Housing Customer Partnership

Note of meeting 24th July 2025

Present

Julie Layton (Chief Executive); Mark Coates (Board member) Jackie Russon (Customer Engagement Manager); Lucy Sivasundram (Executive Director of Housing); Louise Riley (Head of Marketing, Communications and Customer Engagement).

Grant Paton (Customer); Jonathan (Customer); Phil Maskell (Customer), Sophie Lord (Customer).

Apologies: Chris Skillings (Customer); Teresa Chambers (Customer).

1. Welcome and Introduction

Members introduced themselves and gave examples of things they are proud of.

2. Scrutiny Group

Customers have introduced an additional quarterly meeting – the Scrutiny Group – which met for the first time in May.

The purpose of the Scrutiny Group is to look into aspects of performance and service delivery in more detail so that customers are better equipped to challenge.

Grant (Customer) gave a presentation to Partnership members on what had been discussed at the May meeting.

The Group had reviewed TSM performance report and heard from Ian Bonshor (Housing Officer) about the role of the Housing Officers.

Challenges from customers:

- The number of customers completing the (TSM) survey is fairly low – how will you improve this?
- Shared owners are not as happy as tenants, especially with complaint handling. Members would like a better understanding of why this is.

There was a discussion about plans for the upcoming survey which will be outsourced to Acuity this year. Louise explained they will be running a pilot to test the survey methods in August, followed by the main survey in September. There was a discussion around incentives, but members felt that it was most important to communicate to people **why** they should complete the survey.

Members also wanted to know how Acuity would know about customers' contact preferences. Jackie explained these would be sent over with the customer list.

The Scrutiny Group had been interested to learn about the breadth and complexity of the Housing Officers' roles and the large geography they cover. They asked:

- Could we consider specialist roles to take the pressure off Housing Officers, for example a rent officer who just dealt with issues around rent.

Lucy explained that the thinking is that Housing Officers are best placed to deal with rent issues as they have the relationship with the customer, but recognised there are arguments for specialised roles. She also explained that improvements to the Housing System would play a key role in doing some of what members were asking for in terms of going through records and flagging rent issues which should help to take pressure off the Housing Officers. These will be implemented in Q3 – Q4 (ie. Between October – February.)

Phil questioned whether it was realistic that Housing Officers could have a relationship with customers if they only met them once a year.

The frequency and effectiveness of Housing Officer visits is something the Partnership has discussed before and is on the action plan to progress. Lucy explained that she would be looking at how we do things in the tenancy and leasehold team and which roles deliver which services, but this is likely to be next year.

Scrutiny members felt the key areas for improvement are:

- Contractor communication
- Holding contractors to account through obtaining feedback on repairs.
- Improve Advance's internal records on methods of communication.

3. Performance

Members reviewed the new scorecard which is based on the Tenant Satisfaction Measures and customer priority areas.

Members would like us to look in more depth at the repairs performance figures: particularly 'completed in timescale'. They felt the statistics were not reflective of experiences they have had or heard about from other customers or what is coming through in complaints and other feedback.

There was a discussion around timescales and how these could be extended (e.g. if waiting on parts) with jobs still showing as 'completed in timescale'.

Jon asked whether there was a definition of what is reasonable in terms of extending timescales.

Members challenged us to think about the definition of 'completed' and look into other ways of measuring whether it is completed in the eyes of the customer.

Lucy explained that the Repairs journey mapping exercise had revealed gaps in how we track communication from contractors which we will address.

There was a discussion about when repairs are classified as an 'Emergency'.

Members agreed that it would be useful to know when you report a repair what it has been classified as. This should happen with Customer Services.

This is an area customers would like to see explored in more detail and will be picked up by the scrutiny group at their next meeting.

Members questioned why contractors don't carry out the repairs satisfaction surveys and felt this is something that could be looked at in the tender process.

Members felt that the call abandon rate was not very useful as an indicator given the context. We will look at reporting on proportion of calls answered instead.

Members asked about the gas servicing figures and what happens if people don't allow access into their homes.

Lucy explained there is a legal process for gaining access to people's homes. But we have to make sure we've done everything we can first.

Sophie felt it is important for customers to understand why we need to get into their homes and would like to pick this up in the customer newsletter.

Lucy explained that we have developed an action plan in response to the feedback from the Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey. This includes:

- Complaints – dealing with them in teimescales and using information to learn and improve services Using customer feedback to shape our services
- Training for contractors
- Reviewing housing officer visits and other contact
- Method of communication (Web chat is due to be introduced soon)

4. Board Update

Julie gave an overview of what the Board has been looking at during the quarter.

- A review from an external organisation said that Advance's Governance is effective. It found that we are on a journey in relation to customer involvement and Julie noted it was encouraging to see that progress has already been made since then. She felt that customers had brought some really good challenges to the meeting and said that Advance welcomes that challenge.
- Board members are enjoying hearing from customers – through videos and looking at partnership notes and wider feedback. Board are also pleased to hear about the additional challenge we're getting from customers through the complaints panel. Julie said it feels really positive the work that customers are doing and helps us understand how we need to design our services.
- A new people and culture committee has been introduced. This will help to make sure values are embedded with staff and contractors and customers are at the heart of what we do.
- Work has started on Advance's new strategic plan for March 2026. This will set out our objectives for 2026-29. Board have started to have conversations about this. We also want to speak to as many customers as possible to get their input into the strategy and understand what they want us to be focusing on.
- We have also looked at the Asset Management Strategy and the 30 year business plan. This is to make sure homes are safe and well maintained and that Advance can continue to operate long into the future.
- Board had an away day where they looked at the Regulator of Social Housing's inspection process. We are likely to get inspected later this year.

- Board have committed to making sure a Board member attends each of the Customer Partnership meetings.

Mark (Coates) provided an update from the Service Quality Committee.

He explained its role is to look at the quality of our services and drive improvement.

They have reviewed:

- TSM report and action plan
- Customer contact centre developments
- Complaints – performance and action plan.

5. AOB

There was no other business.