

CSG and Board Away Day on 10th October:

Joint Customer Steering Group and Board session – a) Outcomes of RSH Regulatory Judgement and b) Review of Strategic Plan priorities

Customers present: Matt, Jenni, Danny, Rob

Remote: Dan, Bex, Nick

At lunch and for the following session, the Board was joined by members of the Customer Steering Group (CSG). LJ introduced the Board and Exec, briefly explaining their responsibilities, then the members of the CSG.

LJ then reiterated the RSH's feedback relating to the C2 grading, highlighting the areas of strength as well as what were felt to be limitations in the area of tenant scrutiny. LJ commented BCHA was keen to know about customers' experiences – how services were landing on a day-to-day basis – and that these views had influenced strategic direction.

LJ reminded everyone of the agreed principles for customer engagement, which had also been rehearsed at a CSG meeting earlier in the week (*slide 36*). These included appreciating lived experience as an asset, recognising the importance of the customer voice in both future planning and reviewing current practice, and being committed to meaningful engagement. LJ observed the Regulator had been impressed with customer engagement but would like to see a more formal process for tenants to assess overall organisational performance, rather than that for an individual service. The CSG had recently reviewed the quarterly Performance Pack, the priorities for this year's Strategic Plan action plan, as well as the organisation's finances, and had been involved in developing the 24/25 Impact Report.

The meeting then split into groups – each a mixture of customers, Board and Exec – to consider four options or to propose more solutions:

1. Governance focused pathway: a customer attending Board or Committee meetings
2. Organisational performance meetings: customers joining Exec in the quarterly reviews of the risk register and Performance Pack

3. Evolution of CSG: formalising the group – looking at more papers, planning for internal audits, Y3 action plan for Strategic Plan, etc
4. Separate scrutiny function: a new group of 2-3 customers with a specific role, then inviting all tenants to a year-end open day to hear what had been done, findings, what information had been given to Board and Exec.

Feedback covered:

- Attending the Board was felt to be a big ask and could be overwhelming, given the papers and environment, as well as the need for a stable tenant to be able to commit to this. Customers could rotate but it might be difficult to engage and they would need time to understand and acclimatise to the meetings. It would be hard to dip in and out. How many people would be interested?
- Information could be too much / not relatable.
- Lived experience on the Board and with the Exec would be good but the complexity made that a challenge. Customers had the right to join the Board but this entailed certain responsibilities, and the numbers were fixed. Customers would need the right skillset and to know they were adding value to the organisation, although IW pointed out that no Board member came in knowing everything, so all contributed to the discussion, working with others in the room to understand a balanced view. For more specialist areas, a customer could receive mentoring from an Exec or Board member.
- There was concern that a single customer on the Board could be tokenistic and create pressure
- It was noted that some current Board members had been customers at one point
- Attending as an observer would be easier and just meant the customer could not vote, although confidentiality would need to be maintained. An observer role would mean customers had some representation at Board level, which would be empowering. The access would prove transparency. An observer role could be tested for a set period, then reviewed
- There would need to be appropriate preparation if a customer was co-opted.

- Create task & finish / sub-groups to focus on specific topics. How would they come to decisions around those themes / topics, and where would the feedback go?
 - Rather than regularly attending the Board or Exec meetings, where the volume of papers and time needed could be difficult, a Task & Finish Group could have a direct link to the relevant Committee for whatever they had reviewed
 - Use internal audit and cross reference with customer views to decide areas of focus
 - Use intelligence from customers to triangulate the performance data the Board receives, eg complaints says 60% are satisfied but the anecdotal feedback is different. Use customer insights alongside other data, so the Board is not just looking at one data set
 - Areas of focus, i.e. repairs. A task & finish / working group approach involves less commitment
 - Could customers be involved with internal Quality audits (auditing and scrutinising KPIs and outcomes)?
 - Time to read / how information is presented
 - What is important to customers? Eg involve customers in recommissioning contracts as happened with cleaning.
-
- Linking into existing conversations on risk and performance could work, although another mechanism would be needed to scrutinise the Strategic Plan
 - One group preferred the option of joining these Exec meetings, feeling it could be more engaging, but noted it might not cover all the areas of 'scrutiny' required, eg policy reviews
 - Nice to hear about performance but similar barriers to attending these organisational performance meetings
 - Customer experience "in the room" is important
 - Scrutiny of those whole organisation could perhaps better be achieved by customers having conversations directly with the Exec, as this would have an impact at service delivery level

- Use layman's terms rather than 'business speak' to make it easy for everyone to understand. Serious time would be needed to 'de-jargonise' information or to reconcile competing audiences
 - Use of language: 'scrutiny' feels negative and suggests conflict. Consider alternative softer words, eg a critical friend, review...
 - Set out the 'why'
-
- The CSG is effective in what it does, so a separate scrutiny function was preferred by one group as this would avoid disrupting the CSG
 - Another felt it would be better to combine or develop the current set up rather than create extra bodies
 - More formalised structure for customers linked into Exec / Board, rebranded as scrutiny / governance
 - Enough committed / eloquent customers to take part / be recruited. One group felt we would be able to attract customers
 - Another suggestion was to give each member of the CSG a particular area to oversee; they could feed into the Exec or Board member representing that area. This would lend itself to training and development. Individuals could have mentors on the Exec / Board (specialisms)
 - Involve customers in developing a training offer to ensure it is genuine and useful. Co-design it with the individual: what do you think you need to do this role and how can we support you? (As is the case with new Board members)
 - Hands-on training was preferred by one
-
- Wider membership is needed: how can we recruit, diversify (make it more accessible), incentivise (eg vouchers), remove barriers to accessing? What about tenants who work?
 - Draw in more customers via Housing
 - Encourage more customers into the whole framework: surveys mixed with paper, recruitment drive, a customers' conference...

- Make the structure clear – how customer meetings feed into the CSG, then to the Board – a pictogram or other visual tool
- Regular scheme-level meetings → CSG → managers (a filtering process)
- Weekly house meetings give residents a voice on a subject but need to be chaired well so they don't become 'a shouting match' or a list of complaints. A focus for house meetings provides better structured insights
- Two-way communication is needed, so the staff members can also get across any messages
- Demonstrate and communicate the achievements, eg the garden and raised beds at George House are something tangible the residents were involved in.
- The magnet? Closing the communication loop / issue. Managing expectations (respectfully)

LJ thanked all for the fruitful discussions, welcoming any further ideas over the following week to feed into the draft improvement plan, which would provide a pathway showing how BCHA planned to continue the evolution of tenant scrutiny whilst staying aligned to its principles.

Strategic Plan 2024-29

LJ expressed pride in the Strategic Plan, which she commented genuinely included the voice of customers, colleagues and stakeholders. LJ reminded everyone of the 5-year aims (*slide 38*) and summarised the Year 2 progress so far (*slide 40*), noting the focus on core landlord responsibilities. LJ listed what was planned for the remainder of Year 2 (*slide 41*), then returned to group work, this time considering what should be the priorities for Year 3.

Feedback highlighted:

- *Identity*: a 'charity' not just a housing business. How we get funding streams. Link to Y3 work planned on rebranding. We need to understand the impact of our services, linking activities back to our strategic purpose – an organisational

theory of change or impact roadmap. What differences will we see and how will we measure them?

- *Learning*: taking stock of the first two years; how does that inform what happens next? What is the impact of the external landscape, eg the Government's new Homelessness Strategy?
- *Improvement plan*: implementing the plan for V, G and C, including embedding tenant scrutiny
- *Housing transformation programme*: tracking whether the outcomes set out at the start have been achieved: housing officers more visible, smaller patches leading to more engagement with customers. Is the generic role working?
- *Allocations Policy (general needs)*: review with a stronger customer voice on decisions (families in some buildings affected by other tenants who are drug dealing). Scrutinising ASB cases and themes. A risk-based approach to allocations: is our risk tolerance correct? An emerging piece for the CSG.
- *Transition support*: more training for new tenants, including peer support groups; how can these be supported and how can others access them? The Factory previously had training courses, eg plumbing, decorating and tiling, as well as support groups. What customer activities could take place and how could they be funded?
- *Communities*: continue to develop these
- *People Plan*: working on staff retention to support a more consistent service and better customer outcomes. Hybrid working? Continue to review the value proposition for staff, including training
- *Net zero*: start to include this in our plans. Storage heaters can be unaffordable for customers. Explore net zero on both a customer and organisational level
- *Green initiatives*: review the stock in terms of building and land; can we come away from the grid? Investment leading to returns.
- *Building homes*: don't lose sight of the homelessness issue – "Build, baby, build!" Continue to develop within our financial constraints
- *Empty buildings*: explore whether these can be repurposed as this is a sustainable approach. One national organisation has an empty building programme, so perhaps we could learn lessons from that?
- *Performance reviews*: embed customer involvement in performance review - ongoing work to ensure this is effective and make any tweaks required

- *Data / technology*: much work has taken place on transformation – what next?

LJ thanked all for their input, which would feed into a draft Year 3 action plan which would come back to both CSG and Board for further review before it was finalised.

LM thanked the customers for their contribution to the Away Day, and they, CS and MK then left the meeting.