

Regional Scrutiny Boards: March 2020

Update 3

Onward believes that developing meaningful relationships with its customers is critical to achieving long term success. In fact, listening to customer feedback underpins every interaction between the organisation and its customers.

As part of its efforts to engage customers, Onward has three Regional Scrutiny Boards (RSBs) which comprise a diverse range of tenants from the local area. The RSBs meet every three months to formally review Onward's performance and make recommendations for improvement.

Making changes

In response to feedback, Onward has developed an improved process in order to monitor the implementation of recommendations made by the RSBs. The process is robust and will enable the RSBs to hold Onward accountable for the improvement of the organisation's performance.

As part of the process, the Onward Finance and Performance Committee will receive regular reports on progress made, and the committee will be able to challenge the organisation if it finds that the RSBs' recommendations have not been implemented within agreed timescales.

What are our Regional Scrutiny Boards (RSBs) up to?

When the RSBs met in November 2019 to review Onward's performance between April and September 2019 the areas they assessed alongside Service Managers included:

- the performance of Onward's repairs service in Merseyside and Manchester, particularly the quality of communication with customers about appointments and follow up work;
- the quantity of customer complaints regarding compliance issues, particularly gas servicing;
- declining levels of satisfaction with chargeable services such as cleaning and grounds maintenance;
- the number of tenants leaving within 18 months of taking up their tenancy and a high turnover of tenants in some neighbourhoods;
- time taken to re-let properties;
- customer satisfaction with the cleanliness of new homes;
- increasing satisfaction with planned maintenance contractors;
- low levels of rent collection performance in Lancashire compared to Manchester and Merseyside; and
- time taken to deal with complaints.

November 2019 – April 2020

Following their meeting in November 2019, each RSB agreed to focus on a key area for scrutiny.

Merseyside – Communication with customers

The Merseyside RSB agreed to review the quality of Onward's communications with customers about planned maintenance programmes, including the renewal of kitchens and bathrooms.

The RSB agreed to carry out the project in response to a lack of information about planned maintenance programmes on the Onward website and the failure of a number of contractors to achieve customer satisfaction targets.

As well as the project, members of the RSB met with Onward's Repairs Manager to review the improvement plan for Axis, the Merseyside repairs contractor. The RSB decided not to carry out an independent investigation into the performance of the repairs contractor and agreed instead to measure the performance of the contractor against the existing improvement plan.

Lancashire – Requesting adaptations

The Lancashire RSB agreed to review the process for requesting and receiving adaptations.

The RSB decided to carry out the project in response to a lack of information about the process on the Onward website.

Manchester and Cheshire – Gas servicing

The Manchester & Cheshire RSB agreed to review the annual gas servicing process, particularly looking at the process from the customers point of view.

The RSB decided to carry out the project in response to the number of complaints received about the servicing process.

May 2019 – October 2019

Between May 2019 and October 2019, each RSB focused on a key area for review. Here, we take a look at the recommendations made by the RSBs following their reviews.

Merseyside – Application and allocation process improvement

Over the six-month period, the Merseyside RSB assessed Onward's housing application and allocation process and made a number of recommendations to improve the process to better meet the needs of customers and the organisation.

Recommendations

- Involve the RSB in the development of the new Onward website, for which the organisation is in the process of identifying a new provider
- Spot check information on the choice-based lettings sites in order to ensure accuracy
- Improve photographs on the choice-based lettings sites where possible

- Advertise the benefits and support which the organisation offers to new applicants
- Ensure the process is available to everyone, including applicants that are digitally excluded or in need of high levels of support

Lancashire - Empty homes and lettings

Over the six-month period, the Lancashire RSB assessed Onward's process for handling empty homes and lettings and made a number of recommendations to improve the process.

Recommendations

- Produce a Moving Out guide for tenants
- Offer new tenants the option to retain fixtures and fittings left in a property by the previous tenant in a bid to promote recycling and environmental sustainability
- Ensure that the notice period is used effectively ie. to complete inspections, repairs and viewings
- Review the choice-based lettings process in partnership with the provider to ensure that the process is fit for purpose

Manchester and Cheshire – Supporting Neighbourhood teams

Over the six-month period, the Manchester & Cheshire RSB assessed the ways in which Onward can maximise the amount of time available for Neighbourhood teams to interact with customers.

While the RSB recognised that there is work to be done to improve performance in this area, the RSB welcomed the launch of 1st Touch—a mobile computer system designed to help Onward colleagues work more effectively while “out and about” and provide a great service to customers.

Recommendations

- Make better use of “walkabouts”, including conducting door-to-door visits
- Promote ownership of customer enquiries among colleagues in order to ensure enquiries are dealt with quickly
- Improve the information available on the Onward website about planned maintenance and neighbourhood plans
- Build better relationships with local residents' associations

Want to get involved?

If you would like to volunteer or give feedback to help improve Onward's services, then you can become a member of the [Customer Engagement Community](#).

As a member, you can help shape the future of Onward, influence the priorities in your neighbourhood, and access a range of training opportunities to help you develop new skills. And if that wasn't enough, all members are entered into a monthly prize draw.

Onward's Customer Engagement team will invite you to participate in events and feedback session as little or as often as you choose. The team appreciates that members have different lifestyles and, therefore, members have access to different levels of involvement which suit their availability.

Meet Customer Engagement

The Customer Engagement team comprises a number of extraordinary individuals who work tirelessly to engage, listen and respond to customer feedback.

Approachable and friendly, the team love to reach out into the community to meet customers face-to-face and hear their stories.

- **Jo Phillips** Customer Engagement Manager
- **Val Alker** Customer Engagement Specialist
- **Leanne Baldwin** Customer Engagement Specialist
- **Suzanne Londra** Customer Engagement Specialist
- **Samantha Amis** Customer Services Assistant

Get in touch

If you would like to be considered for a role on one of the Regional Scrutiny Boards (RSBs) please contact the Customer Engagement team at customerengagement@onward.co.uk.

Alternatively, if you would like to volunteer feedback and help improve Onward's services please join the Customer Engagement Community [here](#).

