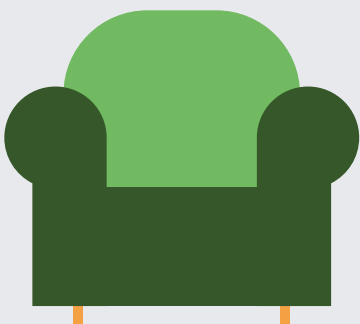


# Annual Health Check



2022

# Introduction

The new Customer Scrutiny Panel have been completing our first customer-led Annual Health Check over the last few months. This follows our co-design work on our new Customer Promises aligned to our Together with Tenants commitments, and our refresh of our Scrutiny Panel. Our new approach enables customers to co-evaluate how South Yorkshire Housing Association are doing against the Promises, to highlight areas where SYHA are doing well, and to offer suggestions for improvements.

## Methodology – How we did our Health Check

The panel have co-designed and co-delivered the way the Health Check was done from the start.

### Data Collection

We held a series of ‘semi-structured’ interviews with people across the organisation, including members of SYHA’s leadership team. Collectively, the Scrutiny Panel have spent 27 hours in interviews. The panel devised the questions together, and agreed and decided how the interviews would work - for example, which interview would focus on which specific promise, and which panel members would be involved at each interview. We also asked SYHA’s Customer Experience Lead to provide the panel with a range of data to analyse and review (E.g. customer satisfaction scores, complaints data).

### Theming and Analysis

The panel held four sessions to collectively agree on the main themes that emerged from the interviews and data, and collaboratively built this report together, drafting and reviewing using a shared document that everyone could access and edit.

### Dissemination

Marketing have offered assistance with dissemination. The panel will deliver the report and findings to SYHA’s Board, and the report will be shared with SYHA’s senior managers. We would like to deliver the findings to SYHA’s senior managers at one of their regular meetings.

# Our Findings

## Promise 1: You'll have a home in that you feel safe and proud to live in, and we will help you to feel settled in your neighbourhood

### Highlights – What are SYHA doing well?

#### Fire Safety:

It feels that fire safety is a priority for SYHA (rightly), and it is good that there are dedicated staff carrying out fire risk assessments.

There also seemed a clear focus on other things that keep tenants safe in their homes (E.g. gas safety policies, new processes for fixed electrical testing). It is good that staff are training in things like hoarding.

#### Damp & Mould:

It is good to see that SYHA are being proactive on this; we know it has been in the media a lot, and we know that lots of tenants are receiving Facebook messages or telephone calls to ask if we are victims of damp and mould.

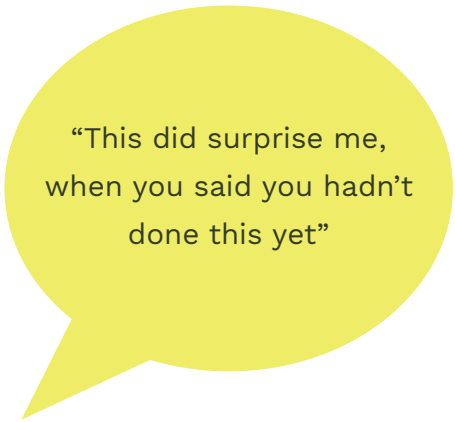
#### Customer collaboration:

It is good that SYHA do collaborate with customers when building new housing and things like that.

### Room for improvement – What isn't going well or needs improving?

#### CO2 monitors in our homes:

We were surprised that SYHA hadn't done this yet. It felt that SYHA were behind on this; we think St Leger Homes for example have done this for some years now. We wondered what the delay and hold up was on this. That SYHA were only installing them this year "really stood out for me".



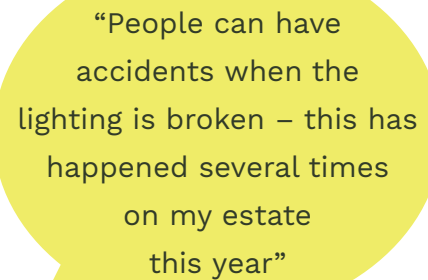
"This did surprise me, when you said you hadn't done this yet"

#### ASB:

There was feedback that expectations around ASB are not well managed or communicated e.g. the things that are within the landlord's control or not, and that the ASB reporting process could be simplified.

### **Street and communal lighting:**

Where there are faults with lighting, they sometimes seem to take a long while to fix. This can increase ASB and is also dangerous; people can fall. We know that not all street lighting is within SYHA's control, but these issues are also there where there is communal lighting, and communal lighting on stairwells.



“People can have accidents when the lighting is broken – this has happened several times on my estate this year”

### **Recommendations for this Promise**

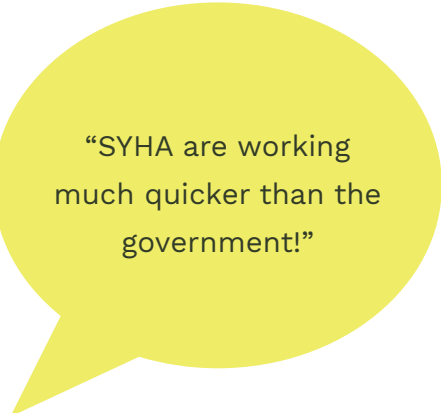
- Accelerate the CO2 monitor installation; ensure that this does get completed this year.
- Consider how expectations around ASB (what is in SYHA's control) are communicated.
- Review the ASB reporting process to see if it can be simplified.
- Prioritise repairs to lighting, particularly in places where there is an enhanced risk of falls e.g. communal stairways.

## **Promise 2: Communication will be clear, timely and helpful, and we'll talk about issues that matter to you**

### **Highlights – What are SYHA doing well?**

#### **Communications on Ukraine:**

The communications on Ukraine have been done very well; there was a real feel that SYHA were striving to find solutions and to help. Communications were proactive and timely, and the information on the website has been helpful about this (e.g. about offering a place in your home).



“SYHA are working much quicker than the government!”

#### **Communications on Damp & Mould:**

Recent communications on this have been good.

## Room for improvement – What isn't going well or needs improving?

### **The things SYHA communicate about:**

This feels quite internal facing sometimes e.g. what SYHA is up to or doing, but we wondered if you could communicate more on things that are 'live' issues to your customers, or the topics that matter to customers e.g. advice on scams that are circulating.

It would also be good to hear more customer stories, and use customer feedback to draw people in. "Customer stories can be very powerful". This is done well at our Work and Wellbeing services, but it would be good to e.g. hear the stories of people who have lived in SYHA houses for years. "People would be able to relate to this, more of people stories would be a good thing to look at".

### **Social media engagement:**


Staff told us that only 8% of customers engage with SYHA on social media and the website; this seems low.

SYHA use Facebook but you have to really search for their information to find it; "I follow the SYHA page on Facebook but it doesn't come to the top – I have to physically look for it". Lots of people also now don't use Facebook; Instagram is becoming much more popular but SYHA don't have an Instagram account.

We wondered when SYHA had last reviewed their use of social media and also considered what platforms most of their customers are using e.g. most of SYHA's customers could be on Instagram but SYHA are using Facebook to communicate and engage.

### **Digital exclusion:**

This felt a key theme that kept coming up when we talked about communication; SYHA need to take this into account when they are planning communications; "How do you reach people who aren't connected to the internet, who struggle working devices".



"Staff keep talking about the portal, but this is very jargony"

### **Keeping people informed:**

Not keeping people updated or informed appeared to be an area of customer dissatisfaction in customer surveys. This would be in any area, from repairs to rents to the services someone received.

### **Customer Portal:**

Staff talk about the 'customer portal' and when customers ring SYHA they are told 'to report it via the portal'. When you visit the website however, nothing is described as a customer portal – the website uses the words 'my account' and doesn't mention a portal. "When you are told to use the portal, you search for it on the website, but then nothing comes up!". This is all confusing for customers, and makes it hard to find things or do things. "Things need to be simple – trawling around a website can be very confusing for people".

### **Recommendations for this Promise**

- Consider what topics you communicate about, and whether you are capturing the things that matter to customers. In particular consider increasing use of customer stories from people who live in SYHA homes.
- Review social media strategy including platforms used, including a profile of what platforms customers are using. In particular consider setting up and using an Instagram account.
- Continue work on digital exclusion, and take into account the percentage of customers who are digitally excluded when you plan key communications.
- Use one set of simple words for what you call the customer portal, and stick to this when you are communicating with customers, both on the phone and on the website. Think about reducing in-house jargon which often means nothing to customers.
- Keep customers informed. This affects almost anything you do – from repairs to rents to LiveWell services.

## **Promise 3: If things go wrong, you'll have simple, fair and effective ways to raise issues and make complaints**

### **Highlights – What are SYHA doing well?**

#### **New complaints process:**

It is good that this has been simplified and made a shorter and quicker 2-stage process. Complaints data is benchmarked against other housing associations and cases have a dedicated 'owner'.

## Room for improvement – What isn't going well or needs improving?

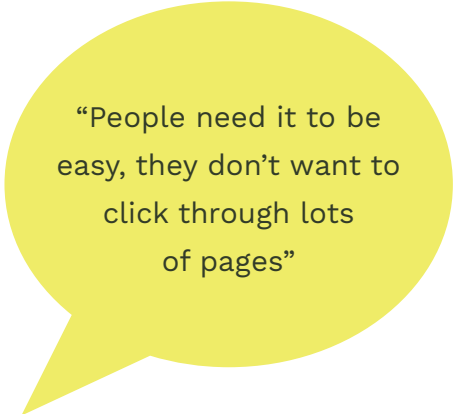
### New complaints process:

We couldn't get much insight into how the new complaints process was working in practice.

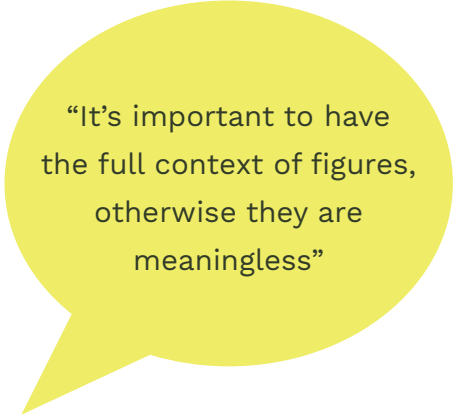
We also wondered how easy SYHA made it for customers to complain. Many organisations now have a simple button or form on their website to complain, and make this really visible on the front page e.g. "If my bus doesn't turn up, it's really easy to put in a quick complain online". We wondered if there could be clearer and more visible communication on the website about how to make a complaint. "You almost need a big button that says complain or feedback here".

### Customer satisfaction surveys:

We wondered about the full context of these surveys, and the number of respondents. E.g. we are told that 80% are happy customers, but how many customers have responded.



"People need it to be easy, they don't want to click through lots of pages"



"It's important to have the full context of figures, otherwise they are meaningless"

## Recommendations for this Promise

- Carry out a review of how the new complaints process is working in practice.
- Review how easy it is for customers to complain, and whether complaints information is visible enough on the website.
- Give the context to customer satisfaction figures e.g. the numbers of people who have responded to surveys on which you base the percentage.

## Promise 4: Your voice is important and will influence our decisions

### Highlights – What are SYHA doing well?

#### Customer collaboration & involvement:

Staff were committed to customer involvement and scrutiny by customers. "We can't make decisions on behalf of our customers, we need to involve them".

There is a lot of work that staff are doing to try and listen. For example, the relatively new Customer Experience team have put a lot of work into how they hear customer voice. Staff fed back that where customer insight work was done well, it brought rich insight.

Customers are for example involved when new maintenance contractors are tendered. Feedback from customers about contractors directly led to the expansion of the Home Maintenance Team

It's also clear that SYHA get customers involved right from the start of things e.g. the Customer Promises work.

Customer Connect and Customer Collaboration teams are working together to involve customers as much as possible.


#### **Diversity of voice:**

It's also good that customer collaboration and involvement has had a focus on achieving a more diverse representation e.g. the new Scrutiny Panel. Customer Connect also fed back that they were "really looking into the customers that aren't talking to us, we need to understand why these customers aren't talking to us and what the barriers that are causing these are".

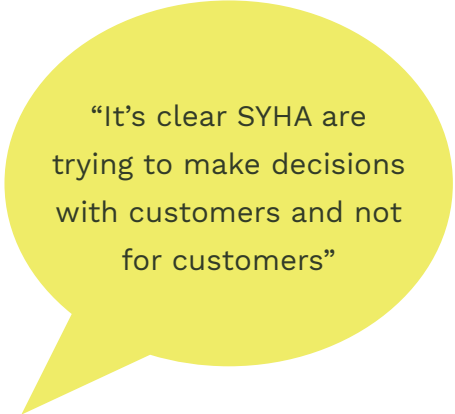
### **Room for improvement – What isn't going well or needs improving?**

#### **Optimising opportunities to hear customer voice:**

We felt that SYHA could consider whether the data captured on systems such as CX or InForm at tenancy outset or start of service, capture enough data and information about how customers want to engage and feedback, and how they want their voice to be heard. Better insight into this would enable SYHA to take a more sophisticated and tailored approach to gathering customer voice, and in ways that suit customers' preferences. (E.g. Do SYHA ask the right questions at outset, such as Can we contact you for feedback in the future, In which ways can we contact you for feedback in the future).



"Grenfell is the example of why and how we need to listen to our customer voice"



"It's clear SYHA are trying to make decisions with customers and not for customers"



## Recommendations for this Promise

- Review whether the data collected at start of tenancy or service optimises the collection of customer voice, and captures customers' preferences around this effectively.

## Promise 5: We'll work together to check how we are performing, and to improve our services

### Highlights – What are SYHA doing well?

#### Customer surveys:


It is good that SYHA get good response rates to customer surveys. "I was doubtful about whether people would respond and whether it was worth sending them out, did people fill them in, but apparently this works".

It's good that the satisfaction surveys have been completely redeveloped recently. The Brilliant Basics surveys (for customers living in SYHA homes last year and focusing on LiveWell services this year) are a good way of capturing what matters to customers about the service that SYHA provides.

The Customer Experience team are doing a good job of getting feedback to the right teams so it can be responded to.

#### Scrutiny Panel:

The existence of the new Scrutiny Panel is a positive thing, and it's good that SYHA facilitate this. Staff said "Fundamentally tenants pay our wages, so they need to hold us to account when things aren't up to scratch".




"It's brilliant for a customer panel to hold us to account"

### Room for improvement – What isn't going well or needs improving?

#### Customer surveys:

Staff told us that they could respond to feedback on surveys "a bit better". Taking action on the back of feedback feels really important. "We listen, but what happens to feedback, and do people get feedback back?... We need to get better at what we do with customer insight. What's the point of collecting the feedback if we don't use it".

We wondered whether much consideration had been put into the range of ways that customers could be incentivised to return surveys. Both Brilliant Basics and the How Are We Doing surveys have used returned surveys being entered into a draw to win a voucher, but we wondered whether SYHA had asked customers how they wanted to be incentivised, and whether SYHA knew that the incentives being used work or make a difference to response rates.



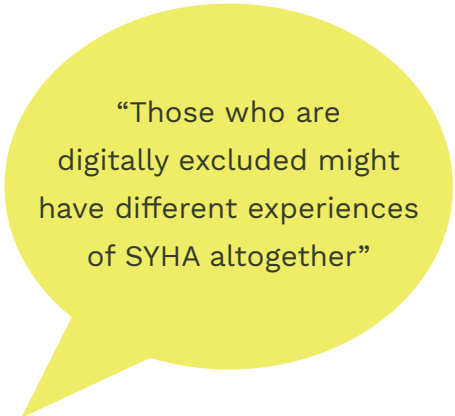
“It’s not just about listening to our customers, it’s about the actions we take after we’ve listened”

The new Tenant Satisfaction Measures [TSMs] are likely to have an impact on how SYHA do things, and they bring potential benchmarking. Staff fed back that the introduction of the TSMs may need new resources and planning.

On both surveys and the new TSMs, we felt that there was a lot of learning in and outside the sector that SYHA could potentially tap into, e.g., how do other organisations incentivise survey return, and what are other organisations doing on that works well.

#### **Digital exclusion:**

Digital exclusion came up again as an issue in terms of getting feedback from customers. “We have barriers for customers who are not tech savvy”.



“Those who are digitally excluded might have different experiences of SYHA altogether”

#### **Recommendations for this Promise**

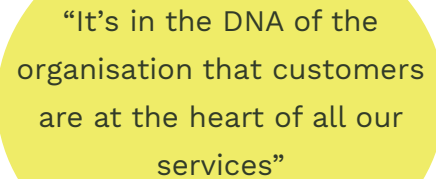
- Make sure that action is taken when customer feedback is received.
- Be prepared for the new TSMs and changes they may bring.
- Review incentives offered for survey return and consider their impact on response rates.
- Take opportunities to learn from inside and outside the sector on customer surveys and the TSMs.
- Ensure that feedback mechanisms work for customers who are digitally excluded, and make a particular effort to gather in the views of those who are digitally excluded.

## **Promise 6: We will respect you, and relationships between us will be constructive and transparent**

### **Highlights – What are SYHA doing well?**

#### **Interactions with staff:**

All the staff that we talked to were warm and welcoming, they answered all of our questions, we feel they do want to interact with us, they are welcoming of the Scrutiny Panel and what we are doing.

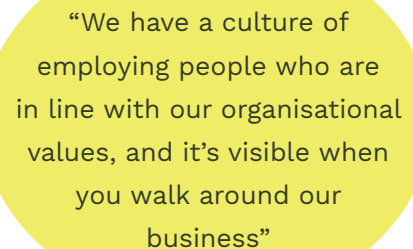


“It’s in the DNA of the organisation that customers are at the heart of all our services”

#### **Recruitment and onboarding:**

It’s clear that SYHA recruit people who want to listen to people, who are respectful of others”.

Staff told us that they were “hopeful that right from the recruitment, customer service and strengths-based approaches are key when we onboard our employees”.



“We have a culture of employing people who are in line with our organisational values, and it’s visible when you walk around our business”

SYHA have recruited independent panel members from diverse backgrounds to challenge recruitment.

Customers are involved in recruitment, and staff fed back that when this happened “Customers views on interviewees can be different to staff, and that’s the critical eye we need on our recruitment process”.

### **Room for improvement – What isn’t going well or needs improving?**

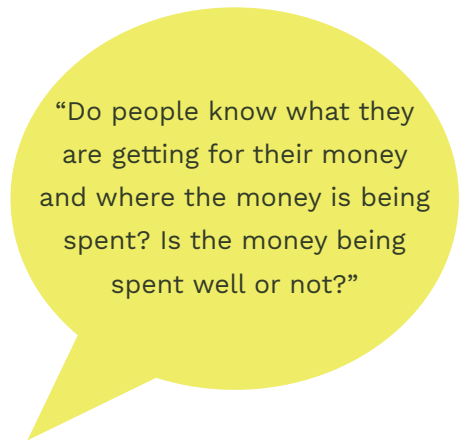
#### **Service charges:**

SYHA need to be more transparent and clearer on what service charges are being used for. It felt that tenants didn’t get a transparent breakdown of what was included in their service charge, and that some people did not really understand what they were paying for.

Staff said that “We don’t gather enough feedback on services that our Neighbourhood action teams deliver, particularly with customers who pay service charge or leasehold charges.”

**Workforce development:**

Staff fed back that SYHA didn’t well enough analyse the impact of the professional training it offers on the development of good relationships with customers.



**Recommendations for this Promise**

- SYHA need to be transparent about service charges and ensure that clear information about service charges is well communicated to tenants.
- Assess whether training offered by SYHA has an impact on the development of good customer relationships.

**Promise 7: Our services will be good quality, well managed and**

**Highlights – What are SYHA doing well?**

**Staff:**

“I wanted to give a special mention to SYHA staff, it came out how professional your people are, how well they know the job”.



**Staff:**

SYHA set the bar high, including on repairs satisfaction. “Repairs satisfaction is massively important to our customers, so we set the bar at 90% satisfaction rate for repairs, as we know it is the service that is most important to our customers”.

SYHA’s average void turnaround time is 20-30 days, compared to 100-120 days for local authorities. Voids are reviewed every week.

SYHA are also very collaborative, sharing good practice and learning with other landlords across the region.

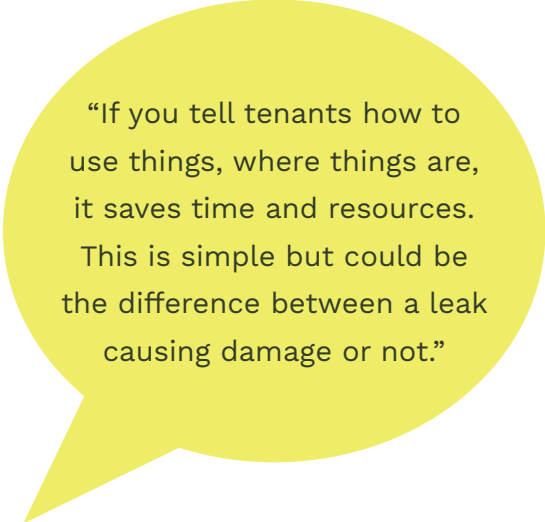
## Room for improvement – What isn't going well or needs improving?

### Repairs:

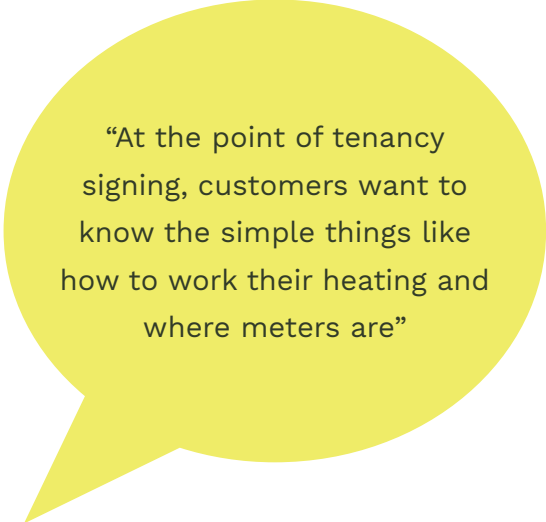
Staff told us that SYHA “can always improve in repairs”. There is a recognition though it is hard to improve our repairs service given the current operating context; “If you can't get the stuff you need for the repair, that's problem – how do you improve?”.

### Lettings:

Staff fed back that lettings processes could be slicker, and that SYHA “bombard” people at tenancy start dates.



“If you tell tenants how to use things, where things are, it saves time and resources. This is simple but could be the difference between a leak causing damage or not.”



“At the point of tenancy signing, customers want to know the simple things like how to work their heating and where meters are”

More work could be done on enabling customers to self-serve the simple things they want to know e.g. having a simple ‘property pack’ online that gives details on things like how heating works, where stopcocks are etc. This would enable customers to access information when they need it, and would save telephone calls into Customer Connect.

### Recommendations for this Promise

- Continue to focus on how repairs service can be improved, within the limits of the current operating context.
- Review the tenancy start/sign up process to ensure it meets customers' needs.
- Consider online ‘property packs’ or information that enables customers to self-serve simple information about how things work in their properties (e.g. heating, where stopcocks are etc).

## **Cross Cutting Themes – The things that kept coming up...**

### **Digital exclusion:**

This came up as a consistent theme, and that people who are digitally excluded from SYHA may be having a different experience of SYHA to those who are digitally connected.

### **Feedback leading to action:**

This was a consistent theme, and highlighted by lots of staff as an area for improvement. “It’s really important that customers know that something has been done on the back of feedback”.

### **Keeping things simple for customers:**

There was a consistent theme of keeping things simple for customers. This came up in things as varied as the way SYHA communicates about service charges, the number of ‘clicks’ needed to do things on the SYHA website, and the way SYHA talks about the customer portal. “Make things simple for normal people; I didn’t know where to start”.

## **Our Learning from carrying out this Annual Health Check**

### **What worked & didn’t work this year?**

Staff fed back that being able to access the Scrutiny Panel via online meetings made them much more accessible, and made it easier to get them involved in things.

Doing everything on screen had pros and cons, particularly when we started to do the theming and analysis.

It has taken a long time to do and pull together; enough dedicated time needs to be set aside.

### **Change for next time?**

This year we spoke to a lot of staff; it would be great to get more views and insight from customers on how SYHA are doing in relation to the Promises. We’d like to take the Annual Health Check ‘on the road’ and talk to more customers. We know that customers talking to customers often brings out different insights and views.

## What's next for the Scrutiny Panel

We've identified 3 things we'd like to dig into in more detail over the course of this year. We're aiming to do some deep-dive scrutiny on these:

### **Service charges:**

Are service charges transparent and is information about service charges well communicated so that tenants understand them?

We have agreed with the Head of Landlord Services to look at this topic next, so that any learning or changes can be incorporated into next years' communications to customers on service charges/rent increases.

### **Staff training:**

Is staff training good enough for the work staff need to do? Is it fit for purpose in terms of equipping staff to form good relationships with customers, and in terms of meeting professional standards? Do SYHA monitor well enough how effective staff training is and the impact it has?

### **Digital communications to customers:**

Why do so few customers engage with our digital communications and our social media?

A cross-SYHA group is collectively working on further embedding the Customer Promises this year, and members of the Scrutiny Panel are part of that working group.

## **Final thoughts from the panel**

It's the first year we've done this, and we hope it's successful. It's the beginning and the first step for us.

We hope it leads to actions and is followed up, and that later on we can evaluate and check progress.

We've put an enormous amount of time and work into this, but we also want to acknowledge the time that SYHA staff gave to us in interviews, as well as their honesty and openness about what they could do better. It's evident that people who work for SYHA are eager for customer feedback, and want to reach and listen to more customers so they can improve what they do.

### **Authors:**

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Reminder Odeghe

**SYHA Customer Scrutiny Panel May 2022**



## **Appendix 1: Full list of recommendations:**

### **Promise 1:**

- Accelerate the CO2 monitor installation; ensure that this does get completed this year.
- Consider how expectations around ASB (what is in SYHA's control) are communicated.
- Review the ASB reporting process to see if it can be simplified.
- Prioritise repairs to lighting, particularly in places where there is an enhanced risk of falls e.g. communal stairways.

### **Promise 2:**

- Consider what topics you communicate about, and whether you are capturing the things that matter to customers. In particular consider increasing use of customer stories from people who live in SYHA homes.
- Review social media strategy including platforms used, including a profile of what platforms customers are using. In particular consider setting up and using an Instagram account.
- Continue work on digital exclusion, and take into account the percentage of customers who are digitally excluded when you plan key communications.
- Use one set of simple words for what you call the customer portal, and stick to this when you are communicating with customers, both on the phone and on the website. Think about reducing in-house jargon which often means nothing to customers.
- Keep customers informed. This affects almost anything you do – from repairs to rents to LiveWell services.

### **Promise 3:**

- Carry out a review of how the new complaints process is working in practice.
- Review how easy it is for customers to complain, and whether complaints information is visible enough on the website.
- Give the context to customer satisfaction figures e.g. the numbers of people who have responded to surveys on which you base the percentage.

**Promise 4:**

- Review whether the data collected at start of tenancy or service optimises the collection of customer voice, and captures customers' preferences around this effectively.

**Promise 5:**

- Make sure that action is taken when customer feedback is received.
- Be prepared for the new TSMs and changes they may bring.
- Review incentives offered for survey return and consider their impact on response rates.
- Take opportunities to learn from inside and outside the sector on customer surveys and the TSMs.
- Ensure that feedback mechanisms work for customers who are digitally excluded, and make a particular effort to gather in the views of those who are digitally excluded.

**Promise 6:**

- SYHA need to be transparent about service charges and ensure that clear information about service charges is well communicated to tenants.
- Assess whether training offered by SYHA has an impact on the development of good customer relationships

**Promise 7:**

- Continue to focus on how repairs service can be improved, within the limits of the current operating context.
- Review the tenancy start/sign up process to ensure it meets customers' needs.
- Consider online 'property packs' or information that enables customers to self-serve simple information about how things work in their properties (e.g. heating, where stopcocks are etc).

## Appendix 2: SYHA Customer Promises:

# Customer Promises

You'll have a home that you feel safe and proud to live in, and we'll help you to feel settled in your neighbourhood.

Communication will be clear, timely and helpful, and we'll talk about issues that matter to you.

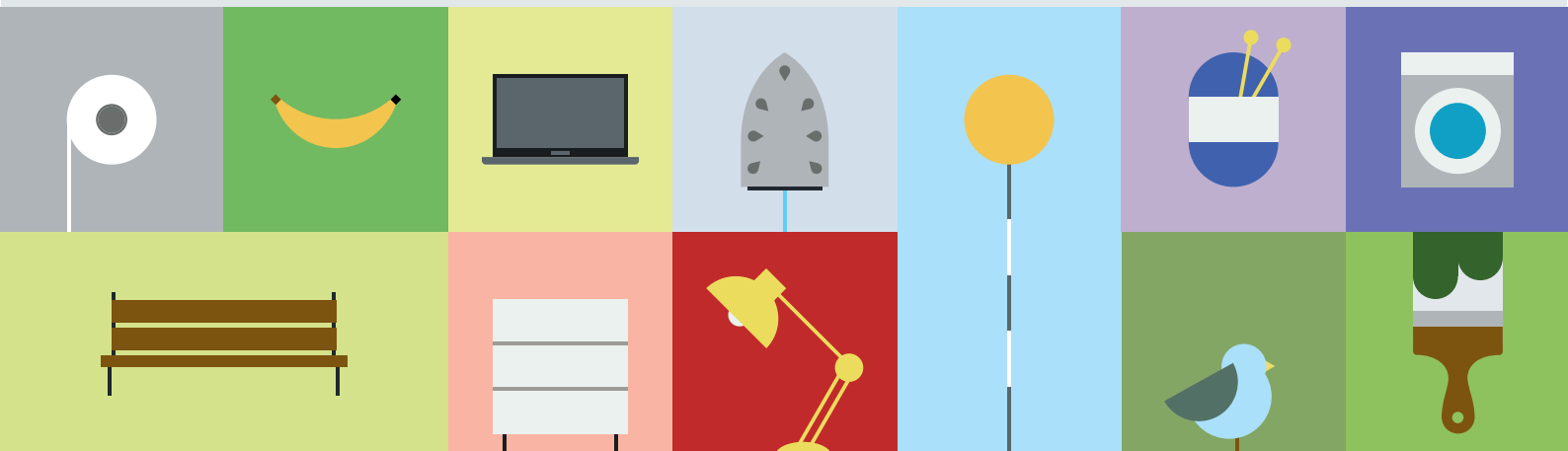
If things go wrong, you'll have simple, fair and effective ways to raise issues and make complaints.

Your voice is important and will influence our decisions.

We'll work together to check how we're performing, and to improve our services.

We will respect you, and relationships between us will be constructive and transparent.

Our services will be good quality, well managed, and responsive.





[syha.co.uk](http://syha.co.uk)