

Connecting - Listening - Responding - Growing

Resident Engagement

IMPACT REPORT

2024

Getting involved at Soha can mean as small a commitment as answering the phone to our survey company!

Every social landlord with over 1000 homes has to ask its residents the same core questions about service satisfaction. These are set by the Regulator for Social Housing and, with nearly 8000 homes, Soha has commissioned an agency, Acuity, to conduct a telephone survey of around 300 residents every month.

Your answers form the Tenancy Satisfaction Measures (TSMs). You can see the headline data on our website at www.soha.co.uk/localities and more detail in our resident magazine, *Hometalk* (www.soha.co.uk/publications).

Every time you answer a Soha telephone survey, you're making a difference – not only to the quality of Soha's homes and neighbourhoods and the services that we provide, but also to social housing everywhere! Housing associations are now benchmarked against each other, and against more metrics than ever before. That means that residents and community partners alike can see up to date detail on how any landlord is doing and where they need to improve.

When residents give us views, they let us know how Soha is doing so we have the opportunity to make things better. One thing we've changed as a result of phone survey feedback is how we approach dissatisfaction with repairs. Now, every time a resident tells the survey company that they're unsatisfied with our repairs service because of outstanding issues, we call the resident. We want to hear how we can put things right. We later check back that they are satisfied with the outcome.

The TSMs form a significant part of how Soha and other housing associations are graded on the new (from 1 April 2024) Consumer Standards that are assessed by the Regulator. One of them is the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard which puts a greater focus than ever before on "a culture of greater accountability and openness with tenants".

The survey company caller will also ask you if you'd like to be involved with Soha. If you say you'd like to explore that, we'll be in touch. There is a variety of ways you can do that – from home, at meetings, online or in person – and on page 4 you can click on to our resident engagement leaflet detailing them all.

Whether or not you want to get involved to that extent, every single bit of feedback you give us, informal or formal, whether as a result of a survey, consultation or complaint enables us to

connect, listen, respond ... and grow.

So thank you!

Independently of the TSMs, Soha also develops promises with our residents which we call the Soha Service Standards. These set out what residents can expect from us and are the outcome of extensive consultations. You can also find them on the publications page of our website. See page 9 to hear from a resident who was involved in the process of setting them and how they've used them to hold us to account since then.



Welcome



*Kate Wareing,
Chief Executive*

Welcome to this report, where we reflect on the real effects and benefits of resident involvement in the business year to March 2024.

You have helped to make our services better.

When residents get involved it makes for a stronger community and a stronger Soha. You're not just 'helping out'— you're building a stronger sense of community. Your participation can inspire others and generate support to the initiatives we all care about.

You may have noticed the strapline 'we grow together' underneath our logo. It's only through residents' involvement that we can make that claim. To extend the theme, our menu of involvement ranges from the established, formal gardens of co-regulation activities (think English country house) to the brand new opportunities (the 'green shoots' as it were) coming the way of every community as Locality working settles in.

We're already seeing the first practical outcomes which you can find out more about in this Impact Report, and in coming years we have ambitions to grow these further to show you compelling examples of what we've achieved in partnership together.

You'll have your own view on what is working well and what needs extra attention. Call or email to tell us! Then together we can keep improving how we deliver services. The insights you give us will help us prioritise initiatives that make the biggest difference for you and everyone else in the community.

Thank you for reading, and thank you for engaging with us so we can grow together.

Kate Wareing



You can click on any image in this report which has a 'play' button underneath it to open a little film in Soha's **YouTube** channel. In it, you'll hear directly from the person pictured. They'll tell you what the personal rewards are of being involved, including making new friends, learning new skills, getting to understand the housing system from the inside ... and more. How about joining them?



Why get involved?

Over to our residents ...

Residents get involved with Soha in a large number of ways: from joining us on an estate inspection to coming to a fun day, there's something for just about every interest and time commitment. Many of the opportunities attract a 'thank you' in the form of a shopping voucher. You can find out more here: [Involvement opportunities](#) in the 'Why get involved?' tab of our website, or by contacting us for a hard copy.

The activities range from the occasional and informal to regular commitments over a structured series of meetings and events. This is the 'established garden' where the residents involved in co-regulation activities roll up their sleeves. They are people who regularly give up time to scrutinise, monitor and co-design services alongside Soha staff. Who better than a resident to tell Soha what services residents need?



Meet Vic. He is Vice-Chair of the Members' Forum and has also been Chair of the Soha Board – the first tenant to be appointed to that position. He says: "What I do is really meaningful as residents' voices are most definitely listened to at Soha. It's also very fulfilling as I've been a sole trader (a plumber) all my working life and here I am working, on behalf of residents, with the senior leadership team (SLT) at Soha!

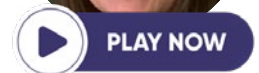
I'd like to see more tenants getting involved at this level because it would help both them and SLT understand better the pressures each are under. We can nearly always reach a common-sense consensus! For me personally, it's meant I've developed the confidence to speak publicly which is really useful."

Eliane is a Portfolio Holder, a resident who has a particular interest in, or wants to learn more about, an aspect of Soha's operations. They give the budget-holders and decision-makers on Soha's staff the resident perspective. In Eliane's case, she looks at Soha's IT. You can see some of the resident-driven ideas we've acted on on page 11.



This is Margaret. She put herself up for election to Members' Forum because "the only people who really get the issues of being an older tenant are older tenants themselves". Margaret's also the Chair of Soha's Seniors' Group.

Hello Doreen! When she first came to the area she says she 'didn't have a clue' about how public services work or the way that Councils and housing providers work together. So she took the plunge and stood for election to Members' Forum and is also now part of the Resident Scrutiny Group. She says: "I can honestly say I'm contributing to building a better future for Soha communities."





If consistent commitment like that offered by the residents on these pages give isn't something you could do, maybe you'd like to be part of a one-off focus group? Soha staff call these every so often - for example when they want to create or review a policy. We ask how it feels to be a resident receiving this or that service? What should residents expect of Soha? Above is a picture of the 14-strong focus group that met to discuss Soha's empty homes, repairs and communal cleaning standards in early 2024. They interviewed the Director of Property Services, the Repairs Manager and the Lettings Manager and made lots of recommendations for Soha to consider. Residents' feedback in that group will now be the basis of a wider consultation by email to a random sample of residents in early Summer 2024. Any proposals will have to be agreed by a minimum of 66% of residents who respond for the changes to be adopted.



Ann-Marie is the current Chair of Members' Forum. She says she joined initially to 'counter the negative'. "I thought that by getting to understand what makes Soha tick and how social housing works as a whole, I could be a much better advocate for my neighbours who seemed to come to me with issues. I've made new friends and it's done me good to hear different viewpoints. Whatever those viewpoints are and whoever makes them, I know we tenants will be taken seriously."



Sarah, a Members' Forum and a Disability Action and Awareness Group member, says: "I'm involved because I want to make sure that great social housing is secure for the long term."

Sonia felt confident to offer herself as Vice-Chair of the Seniors' Group after initially being a Green and Clean Champion (a resident on an estate or scheme who monitors how grounds and cleaning contractors are getting on and acts as liaison between residents and Soha's Estates team). She says: "I want to be sure that Soha is playing its part in neighbourhoods and communities and have a channel through which to hold it to account if it isn't."



Sam says she feels respected and that "just by opening my mouth I'm making a contribution". Find out what else she thinks about involvement at Soha by clicking on the play button.



Soha has residents at the very highest level of decision-making: *on the Board*

The Board's job is to set the direction of the business and make strategic and financial decisions.

It is made up of 12 people; five are Soha residents with relevant experience. You can meet three of them below. They think that the resident voice is really important in running a housing association of around 8,000 homes and 18,000 residents.



PLAY NOW

Victoria joined the Board in September 2018 having studied, with Soha, for an ILM Endorsed Tenancy Leadership Programme. She was on the panel which first considered Soha becoming a mutual organisation, owned by residents and staff who choose to become Members. Her Board membership has enabled her to be a guest speaker at various housing conferences talking about resident engagement. Victoria progressed to Vice Chair after three years on the Board and more recently became Chair of the Personnel and Remuneration Committee of the Board. She says: "As a mutual organisation, I believe it's important to have tenants at the heart of the decision-making process and applying for senior roles on the Board."



PLAY NOW

Meet Martyn: "I was appointed to the Board in September 2023 and having to learn so much so quickly has been a challenge - but great for mental health and confidence. Learning new skills, including getting right up to date with IT, has been a huge positive. Contributing and generally being useful is a great boost to anyone's wellbeing but I'm also enjoying new friendships."



PLAY NOW

Peter says he applied to the Board because he wanted to be an active resident, an advocate for his neighbours and the wider resident community. In his immediate neighbourhood he's working with residents and Soha to turn a piece of underused land into a community space for everyone to enjoy.

Great for the CV,
great for everyday life ...

35

that's the number of training courses which our Resident Engagement team has sourced, run or facilitated for our residents.

67

co-regulation residents took advantage of these: free training is just one of the rewards of being involved with Soha. Great for the CV, great for everyday life as well as in helping Soha shape its decisions.

Gaining confidence and getting your voice heard - Presentations Skills - National Scrutiny Club - Writing Skills - Tpas (Tenant Participation Advisory Service): Holding Your Landlord to Account - tpas : Maximise the Power of Scrutiny - Residents' Network annual conference - iPad training in-house - Social housing Regulation - Five Ways to Wellbeing workshops - The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Consultation ... and more.

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“I found the content really useful but would have liked more time to cover it. I would definitely be interested in more workshops along those lines as I can see myself putting some of the tips into action.”

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“I found them very helpful, useful and very supportive. Excellent!”

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“Great - very relaxed but appropriate - [the trainer] brings ideas out of us and uses them for the good. We are all so different which she realises immediately and helps us all to use our strengths and weaknesses to the best advantage.”

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“We took everyday matters and through group interaction saw and understood how different people with different backgrounds go through life resolving and working out issues.”

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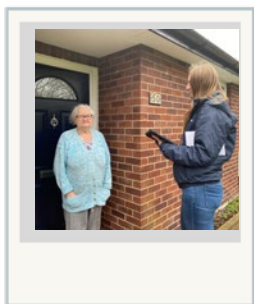
Out and about

Karen is the Locality Lead for the Vale and West Locality. What does Soha's hyper-local model of housing and neighbourhood work mean for residents? Click on Karen's picture to find out!



Put faces to the names of staff in your Locality team who are helping day-to-day in your community:
visit www.soha.co.uk/localities

The Locality teams' activities brought us 191 new connections with Soha residents over the last year! Here are just some of the projects they've been working on. Do you recall that Kate referred to the 'green shoots' of Locality working in the introduction to this report? Well, in the case of Locality working, that has been literally the case in some places! Here are some highlights ...



In **Didcot Locality**, the team started a large-scale consultation with residents of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell. We wanted to find out if residents were happy at how the green spaces at the centre of the community were being used. Would they like to see the space used differently, perhaps with more equipment, that Soha would fund?

In **Thame** residents established with us a new wildflower garden and children enjoyed painting rocks to go in it. Grown-ups enjoyed a skip day at the same event! In **Wallingford Locality**, a community garden was the idea of a resident who runs initiatives to encourage children to be wildlife-spotters. Soha and its grounds maintenance contractors executed the plan which included working with Thames Water to reinstate missing manhole covers in amongst the man-high weeds. Unfortunately the opening was on possibly the worst day of rain we've had for a long time! Children planted up the raised beds on opening day and the school will return for lessons and to watch the wildflower lawn take shape over the Summer.



Vale and West Locality has hosted or been a guest at community events.

Lead Karen (pictured left) says: “It’s always valuable for the Locality team to hold community drop-ins, which we do at regular intervals. I’d say we welcome as many members of the public as Soha residents when we go out. When we attended the Community Cafe pictured (below, top) we had enquiries for various types of information including about Extra Care housing at Soha. We explained Soha’s affordable housing offering. Drop-ins are a great opportunity to link with people who offer support networks. We can’t solve everything but we can signpost residents to options.”



In **Henley Locality**, there’s been an emphasis on community cohesion through green and sustainable mini-projects to create a garden in Sonning Common in partnership with the Parish Council, Guides, Scouts, schools and the Eco SoCo group.



(Concept Plan by thegreenpartnership.com)

The Locality model of knowing what’s needed and being able to react quickly has provided for much capital intervention across our communities, as well: just some examples are bike stores installed and work on paths to lay, clear or light them to help residents feel safer. We’ve also conducted a consultation around CCTV and, in partnership working with a Council, made it possible for a block of flats to recycle.

Elsewhere, we’ve installed fences when residents have told us that strangers were using Soha communal land without consideration and sometimes for criminal behaviour. Our residents can now enjoy their privacy in safety.

These projects happen because Soha staff are listening to your aspirations for All these things happened because Soha your neighbourhoods at very local level, and partnering with you to make your neighbourhoods great places to live. After serving our communities remotely during the pandemic, we’re investing time and energy in being back and building in-person relationships ‘on the ground’. Please share with us your knowledge of what your community needs and wants: that way we can achieve practical improvements to make our neighbourhoods places where people want to live!

Soha's Service Standards: *devised with residents*

Let's rewind to June 2022 when the journey of creating our new Service Standards began. 40 Soha residents gathered at Benson Village Hall. They (maybe one of them was you?) shared thoughts and ideas in our 'open space' session. From repairs to complaints, environment to contractors, the feedback set the stage for more meaningful conversations and consultations.

Fast forward to November 2022, where 56 residents joined us for some in-depth workshops. We dug deep into our existing standards, dissecting every aspect to understand your expectations. 'Concise', 'easy-to-read', 'informative', and 'consistent' were words we heard over and over again. You told us how we needed to present our promises to you.

In January 2023, we looked at each Service Standard with you to build on your invaluable feedback. With 65 residents involved, we got quite forensic about what you expect of us and aimed to exceed it wherever we could. Thank you to each and every one of you who contributed your thoughts and ideas: you've truly shaped the future of our Service Standards.

Your feedback - whether it's through social media, calls, emails, or face-to-face chats - helps us continuously improve, ensuring that your voices are heard every step of the way.

So thank you for being the driving force behind that journey. Meet Aurora, who shows how important it is to be involved with Soha to ensure your voice is heard and you are part of the decision-making process. Aurora's first involvement with Soha was working on our Annual Report some years ago. She enjoyed getting to know Soha better as a result and was elected to Members' Forum where she is now the Portfolio Holder for Customer Service*.



Getting to know all about Soha has been good for me to understand how Soha deal with its services and delivery. Soha know how important it is for them to know what residents want and hear our views.

I took part in the consultation events when the new Service Standards were being looked at. I can see how the new standards reflect the views from myself and other residents. I attended the all day event we had with other residents. Then I was involved in two days of workshops one was customer services and the other was repairs and maintenance.

There were other workshops that looked at other service areas, that were attended by other residents.

The Service Standards booklet is the result of consulting with residents. You can download your own copy of our promises to residents at www.soha.co.uk/publications

* a resident who has a particular interest in, or wants to learn more about, an aspect of Soha's operations. They give the budget-holders and decision-makers on Soha's staff the resident perspective.



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Our green credentials



Clive has been a Green and Clean Champion* for six years. He's now also on the Green Team, a mixed group of staff, residents and community partners who keep an eye on the 'big picture' of Soha's environmental plans as propose opportunities for environmental projects at Locality level. Clive's passion is seeing barren areas turned into havens for wildlife, which is now happening on Soha land in his village.

He says: "I got up a questionnaire about what people wanted to see on the land and chatted to residents. I wanted to check they realised that wild areas aren't maintained on the same schedule as other communal grounds are. I think my neighbours recognise me as someone who can get things done."

In 2023, Soha embarked on a large retro-fit project to improve the comfort of those homes which are worst performing in terms of energy-efficiency. We want to achieve an EPC rating of C for all our homes. Using £1.7m from the government's Social Housing Decarbonisation programme, match-funded by Soha, tenants will see reduced energy bills, better ventilation, and a more comfortable property. A new Energy and Sustainability team has been spreading the word to residents and supporting them to decide if they would like to take part in the programme by going to community events and regular updates in the Soha magazine for residents, *Hometalk*. The team also held an open morning at Soha with the retro-fit contractors which brought about a real 'you said, we did' moment: there was great interest in solar panels which were not in the original bid but Soha has asked if some of the government grant could be used to install solar panels.

By the time of the 2025 Impact Report, we'll be able to report on a good number of properties and the measures taken to help residents reduce their bills and have more comfortable homes. Some have already even commented about less road noise as a result of the external wall insulation we've installed.

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"The communication with Soha and the contractors, who are very well mannered and helpful, has been excellent. Soha has stepped in if there's anything I've been concerned about. I'm already feeling the benefit of a warmer house!" – a resident enjoying her completed retro-fit works.



* a resident on an estate or scheme who monitors how grounds and cleaning contractors are getting on, acting as liaison between residents and Soha's Estates team.

Playing with Words *for dark evenings*

To celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2022, Soha set up a creative writing project, *Playing with Words*. Residents, staff and members of the public were guided by a professional writer to put down their thoughts on the subjects of ‘home’, ‘community’ or ‘belonging’. It culminated in their work being shown and performed at a summer gala evening at Cornerstone Arts Centre in Didcot. You can see a short film about it at www.youtube.com/SohaHousing



Then the winter of 2022-23 came: dark and cold, with the frightening rise in the cost of living on everyone’s minds. A group of staff extended *Playing with Words* by taking poetry, prose and music out to each of Soha’s Extra Care schemes in the dark evenings during the early months of the year.

Topics covered were chosen by residents and ranged from pets to travel to the inconveniences and joys of later life. A year on, prompted by the Soha-organised sessions, one of the schemes has continued meeting monthly, calling theirs ‘The Power of Words’!

If you’d like to start a group in your community, speak to your **Locality Lead**.



“We had about ten people in our group and a number of things were written by each member of the group on the subject of ‘Dreams’” - referring to the second session of the newly-formed, resident-led group ‘The Power of Words’.



Partnerships

Partners co-deliver services with us and give us expert advice. They might be statutory services, elected representatives or organisations, charities or agencies - all help us help our residents.

Below are just some of those whose expertise we have called upon, or whose partnership working with Soha has benefited our communities in 2023.

Abingdon and Witney College	Orders of St John Care Trust
AgeUK Oxfordshire	Oxfordshire Community Foundation
All Care	Oxfordshire Discovery College
Ark Consultancy	Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service
Aspire Oxfordshire	Oxfordshire Good Neighbour Scheme
Be Free Young Carers	Oxfordshire Head Injury Services
Bioregional Oxfordshire	Oxfordshire Play Association
Christians Against Poverty	Oxfordshire Recovery College
Citizens Advice	Parity Projects
Community First Oxfordshire	PlaceShapers
Connection Floating Support	Quest for Learning
Crisis Skylight Oxford	Radis Community Care
Didcot PowerHouse Fund	Reduce the Risk
Eco SoCo	Refuge
Eco Energy Services	Refugee Resource
E.ON Energy	Refugee Support
Elmore Community Services	Response
Guiding Sonning Common	Sava Intelligent Energy
Harwell Science and Innovation campus	SOFEA
Homeless Oxfordshire	South Oxfordshire Muslim Association
Home-Start	The Scout Association Sonning Common
Housing Quality Network (HQN)	Sustainable Didcot, Wallingford and Wantage
Low Carbon Hubs	The Insulation Assurance Authority
Lumensol	Topaz LGBT Youth Group
MIND	Transition by Design
MyVision Oxfordshire (formerly OAB)	United Communities (Bristol)
National Housing Federation	Yellow Submarine
	YMCA

Find out more about resident engagement at Soha



- Check out **our website and the ‘involving you’ page** to see all the engagement opportunities open to you: one-off or regular, in person, online or from home.
- Find out what’s going on for residents on our website calendar – **www.soha.co.uk/events**
- Chat through what you’d like to see in your neighbourhood with your Locality team. Contact **neighbourhoodteam@soha.co.uk** or call them on **0800 014 15 45** (Freephone)* and ask for the Neighbourhood team.
- Talk to the Resident Engagement team about opportunities to observe, or to stand for, the Members’ Forum on **ri@soha.co.uk**.
- Keep an eye on Soha’s Careers pages to see vacancies on Soha’s Board.
- If you are a resident in Independent Living, talk to your visiting Housing Officer
- Give us your feedback on our services at any time by

- dropping in to our offices opposite Didcot Parkway railway station (what3words for directions to our main entrance; **///booklets.under.zones**; what3words for directions to our car park: **///curiosity.juggler.escalates**)
- phoning us on **0800 014 15 45** (Freephone)*
- filling in a form on our website **www.soha.co.uk/contact**
- using MySoha. You can register as a Soha resident using this QR code or at **www.soha.co.uk/MySoha**
- getting in touch via social media



* You can find out what the current wait time is for calling into Soha on the website page **www.soha.co.uk/contact**

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