



Scrutiny Review

Communications

Role of the Scrutiny Group

- The Scrutiny Group is part of Soha Housing's co-regulatory framework. The Group's role is to scrutinise how Soha Housing's Board and executive team are meeting the current Regulatory Standards and Soha's aims and objectives. Their work will help drive continuous service improvement.
- Acting as a 'critical friend' to Soha, the Scrutiny Group:
 - Continuously monitors and comments on Soha's performance against an agreed set of performance indicators
 - Conducts in-depth reviews of Soha's activities and operations
 - Produces evidence-based scrutiny reports which can be used to draw up service improvement action plans
 - Scrutinises the decisions Soha make that affect residents.

Communications Scrutiny Review

1.0 Introduction:

Communication had been a major part of the last Scrutiny.

Communications what do we know? How does it work? Are there human barriers? Are there technological barriers? Do we know where we are going to develop, grow, and succeed.

2.0 Review team:

Vic Breach Lead Scrutineer

Sonia Brooks

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Angela Harding

Richard Rule

Aurora Acone

3.0 Scope of Review

3.1 To review every area of communications would be too large, so we needed to be selective, and looked at specific areas.

Specifically, we wanted to know:

3.2 How the Communications team relates to all other departments.

3.3 How internal communications works.

3.4 How communications from Soha to residents is planned.

3.5 How communications is helping Localities to achieve the original desire of residents to have a close relationship with Soha staff.

Other Key Questions:

3.6 What can QL do to help communications?

Can it adequately hold the information to satisfy the Regulator's expectation to know Soha's homes and know the residents. Can that information be easily retrieved?

4.0 Methodology

We relied on the Communications team and the Head of Business Transformation to be patient with us while we sought to understand the complexities of the systems.

- ❖ We looked and listened to the Director's and Communications manager's overview.
- ❖ Key Performance Indicators and Tenant Satisfaction Measures.
- ❖ Staff interviews
- ❖ Requests for information from the Director
- ❖ Requests for information from the Communications Manager.

5.0 Desktop Review

- ❖ Corporate plan 2021-25
- ❖ Annual Report 23/24
- ❖ Hometalk back issues and Winter 24-25
- ❖ Soha website.
- ❖ Soha social media Facebook Instagram LinkedIn and YouTube.
- ❖ Soha Service Standards 2023
- ❖ SP35 Communications policy 22-25
- ❖ Social Media policy 12.2.24 Dave Edge
- ❖ Share point information post.
- ❖ Communities Strategy 24/25
- ❖ Organisational and Development Strategy date? Targets end December 2024.
- ❖ Director and Communications Manager overview 18.10.24

..... Desktop review continued

- ❖ Comms priorities 2024-25 paper from Communications manager.
- ❖ Responses to Scrutiny questions regarding Standard and Contactors letters, resident communication preference, the App, dot mailer and Locality newsletters.
- ❖ Evidence from Business Transformation Manager. 19.11.24
- ❖ Evidence from interviews with the Head of Localities and Localities Leads 4.2.25.
- ❖ Examples of Locality newsletter emails
- ❖ Examples of updated departmental standard letters.
- ❖ Examples of printed items to support Localities teams.
- ❖ Podcast - "Soha on the Sofa"
- ❖ The proposed Corporate Plan 2025-2030

6.0 Findings from desktop review

6.1 The Corporate plan 21-25 took Soha through Covid; a remarkable transformation that enabled home working to a new grand scale. The streamline was an amazing new collaborative way of working. Staff still give credit to all the ways they can digitally communicate with one another. Those processes are highlighted now when staff give testimony that it is easy to communicate with one another.

6.2 The Annual Report is a Soha produced document by the Communications team. A very polished product that goes far beyond that which Soha must produce to satisfy the Regulator. The Scrutiny team were not able to assess the readership.

6.3 Hometalk is a very informative publication produced by Communications team, sent to residents three times a year. We do not have readership statistics. while it is an excellently written and attractive magazine which tells residents what Soha wants to communicate; we cannot measure its efficacy.

6.4 Scrutineers spent time on the Soha website and were pleased to note radical changes that made access easier. Searching is still difficult and hard to navigate. There is still lots of updating required but we presumed each department must be responsible for their area and advise Communications of the necessary updates.

6.5 Social media: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn. The team spent time looking at online social media posts. They noted the professional quality of the work and the human touch of the damp and mould advice. In this case Soha will know the views and know if it has a good reach.

6.6 Service Standards 2023

Communications have produced an excellent readable document to publish Soha Service Standards. There are 11 departments governed by these standards, but Communications is not one of them.

6.7 SP35 Communications Policy January 2022

The Communications policy is robust and good at protecting Soha name and reputation. It gives proper policy guidelines for all communication by any Soha staff member. The policy uses the word respect in relation to colleagues and residents. It states clearly that all staff must follow the Communications policy and that the principles of this policy apply to all other policies.

6.8 Social Media Procedure.

This procedure written 2 years after the Communications policy is thorough and clear.

6.9 Share point document "What can I expect from Communications"?

This document is clear, helpful, and if the advice is followed by every department and colleague, it would ensure that Soha maintains a consistent level of grammar and tone.

6.10 Communities Strategy

This strategy identifies many needs in furthering communication between residents and Soha staff.

6.11 Organisational Development Strategy

Much ambition for interdepartmental working with improved communication making a difference.

The remaining documents discussed at the Desktop review were part of the ongoing interviews and follow up questions, which we report in interviews and correspondence.

7.0 Overview, Interviews and Q&A emails

7.1 The Overview of Communication service with the Director and Manager of Communications was carried out in October 2024. Many of the interests of the Scrutiny team had already been anticipated and were explained and a recognition of the work that needed to be done. The Director and Communications Manager had conducted an internal survey and acknowledged the work needed.

7.2 Comms priorities: This paper produced by Comms explained the most important and pressing matters being dealt with currently. It also explained the need for integration of systems for better Comms and that a complete overhaul of all departments Communications was necessary.

7.3 Delving deeper: Q&A about standard letters, contractors' letters, and residents' communication preferences.

7.3.1 It was clear from the answers, that response from resident satisfaction with letters sent out, was not measured.

7.3.2 The QL system can record information, but retrieval is the problem.

7.3.3 the App is a one-way communication tool

7.3.4 the recorded message on Soha call waiting, suggests residents to use the App.

7.3.5 Communications sent by Dotmailer can be measured by opening and response.

7.5 Interview with Head of Localities and Locality Leads

7.5.1 Localities are confident of the means they have available to communicate.

7.5.2 The teams would like more autonomy in communication.

7.5.3 The teams would like to be able to use text

7.5.4 They know what works which is advance email a week before delivered flyers, on the day door knock.

7.5.5 The team described the way they communicate with the 'unknowns' prompted to them by CS

7.5.6 The teams are confident in communication between each other and with other departments.

7.5.7 The teams would like to be trusted by residents.

7.5.8 The teams would like residents to read more of the comms sent to them.

7.5.9 The teams would like to change tone of their communication to a chattier and more relational tone rather than public information.

8.0 Observations

- 8.1** The Comms department produces many of the publications that Scrutiny rely on when carrying out their reviews.
- 8.2** The Scrutiny team also acknowledge that the department always provides information that we could not source elsewhere.
- 8.3** The Communications Team helps Scrutiny with surveys to assist our work.
- 8.4** Maintaining Soha's reputation and Corporate being is a weighty task.
- 8.5** We do not have readership analytics for the Corporate Plan, Annual Report and Hometalk.
- 8.6** The Communications Policy is robust and clearly states it applies to all.
- 8.7** The Social Media Procedure applies to all and is comprehensive.
- 8.8** The Communications Sharepoint advice is clear and introduced us to 'Soha on the Sofa'

....observations continued

8.9 The Soha plans for technology change will give residents hope of a more personalised way of two-way communication.

8.10 Department information on the website does not appear to be reviewed by each department to see if updates are needed.

8.11 We did not review the website because much work has been done to make it more accessible, and it would be good to be invited to review at a later date.

8.12 Communications are effective at imparting information and produce publications and social media product. The concern is measuring the receipt of that information.

9.0 Recommendations

9.1 We recommend that the Business Transformation team prioritise action to ensure that all compliance data across the organisation is secure, accurate, and accountable. This is essential for maintaining tenant safety, meeting regulatory requirements, and enabling effective decision-making.

We ask that the staff team consider:

- ❖ Reviewing current data systems and processes for gaps or risks,
- ❖ Implementing or upgrading tools to improve data integrity and security,
- ❖ Assigning clear ownership and responsibilities for maintaining compliance records,
- ❖ Providing regular reporting and oversight mechanisms to support accountability,

9.2 Soha may want to have "residents at the wheel" but residents are not responsible for maintenance. If the vehicle is to remain roadworthy all areas require MOT. None more necessary than communication with residents at the departmental level. It is hoped that an outcome of this Scrutiny is that departments will take a hard review of their systems and standard communication to see that they are in line with the current Soha Communications Policy and that in house and contractors' communications with residents have 'consistent sense, grammar and the Soha tone.' They should not wait for an extremely busy and committed Comms team to reach their department.

....Recommendations continued

9.3 There is no Service standard or TSM for Comms so we must have a measure of success of reach and efficacy of The Corporate Plan, Annual Report and Hometalk. Currently, there is no formal service standard or Tenant Satisfaction Measure (TSM) for communications. However, it is vital that Soha can demonstrate the reach and impact of key publications such as the Corporate Plan, Annual Report, and Hometalk.

Recommendations:

- ❖ Create clear service standards for communications that reflect expectations around clarity, accessibility, and responsiveness, aligned with Soha's Communications Policy.
- ❖ Establish and track measurable indicators for communication reach and impact. This could include:
- ❖ Report Back on Impact, could be Included a short section in the Annual Report or a future Hometalk edition summarising how well key communications are performing, and any improvements made based on resident feedback.

9.4 Localities should write their own monthly emails and get them checked by Comms. That way they can achieve their Locality tone.

....Recommendations continued

9.5 Locality Events on the website, on Social media and in newsletters should not have buttons and links and drop downs. They should stand alone or be very quick to view.

9.6 We recommend that Soha take further steps to make it easier for residents to join the conversation and share their views on matters that are not currently covered by formal Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs).

Recommendation:

Develop and promote a short, accessible resident survey that asks honest, open-ended questions about everyday experiences with Soha's services, communication, and decision-making. The survey should:

- ❖ Focus on areas not captured by TSMs
- ❖ Be easy to access (e.g. paper, online, text link)
- ❖ Be clearly communicated as a way to influence change
- ❖ Include space for residents to raise their own priorities or concerns
- ❖ Listening more widely and regularly will help Soha gain a fuller understanding of resident views and build trust by showing that every voice counts.

....Recommendations continued

9.7 We recommend that the current call centre hold message be reviewed, particularly the repetitive promotion of the Soha App.

❖ Recommendation:

Amend the call centre message to ensure it is informative without being repetitive or frustrating for callers. Specifically:

- ❖ Reduce the frequency of references to the Soha App within the hold message
- ❖ Ensure a balance of information is provided, including alternative ways to get support
- ❖ Consider incorporating brief updates or messages that acknowledge wait times and thank callers for their patience

9.8 The Communications policy should be cited on every policy in accordance with that policy.

The team acknowledges

The Director Housing and Communities for his insight and personal aspirations about future comms

A very patient and helpful Comms team who all contributed so much to this Scrutiny

Thank you to the Head of Localities and Localities Leads for their knowledgeable input on how they would like to communicate with residents

The Head of Business Transformation for an excellent Social Media Procedure and patience in explaining the intricacies of QL

The ever enthusiastic and hardworking CEX Team Administrator