



# Customer Empowerment Strategy 2014 - 2017

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# **CUSTOMER EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY 2014 -2017**

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## **Section One – Introduction and purpose**

### **Purpose of this Strategy**

We recognise that involving residents improves the effectiveness with which services are delivered, bringing also the benefits of new skills and increased confidence for residents. We recognise how critical Resident Involvement is in decision making. We also need to deliver involvement in the new regulatory framework with higher standards which requires a new approach to this important area. The Strategy has been devised to complement Sovini's Code of Governance Framework and meet the Homes and Communities Consumer Standard relating to Resident Empowerment for Sovini's Registered Providers.

In developing this strategy, consideration has been given to current and future regulations, best practice and other internal strategies.

This strategy provides a coherent framework for the evolution and maintenance of Customer Empowerment policies and practices which reflect our core values and which will enable us to achieve our corporate objectives and meet the current and future needs of our customers. It also demonstrates our commitment to involving residents in shaping, scrutinising and monitoring our services.

This strategy covers the period from 2014 to 2017 and will be subject to regular monitoring and review by the Service Review Groups of the Registered Providers and their Executive Management teams.

### **Objectives of this Strategy**

This strategy sets out how we intend to achieve the following objectives for Sovini's Registered Providers:

- Influence Local Service
- Influence Service Review
- Influence Strategic Decisions
- Influence Communication
- Hold all our organisations to account
- Ensure compliance with the HCA consumer standards

## **Section Two – Our Approach**

### **Responsibility for Customer Empowerment**

Everyone at Sovini delivering social housing services is responsible for empowering customers from front line staff to senior management, the Group Chief Executive and the Board of Management.

Customers and staff work together to deliver information and promote empowerment opportunities, with all staff receiving training about their role in developing and promoting customer empowerment.

Each Registered Provider Board is required to consider and approve this Strategy and has responsibility for its implementation and overall direction, which will be reviewed every three years. All Sovini staff are responsible for ensuring our residents are involved and empowered in all decision making. Customer Empowerment Service Standards and Key Performance targets are linked to this strategy and supported by Service Delivery Plans. Managers are responsible for measuring staff and organisational performance against these targets through one-to-ones' and annual appraisals. Managers will support staff to achieve these targets.

The Customer Empowerment Team is responsible for monitoring performance of the Strategy and its accompanying action plan and making recommendations, where appropriate, for improving performance.

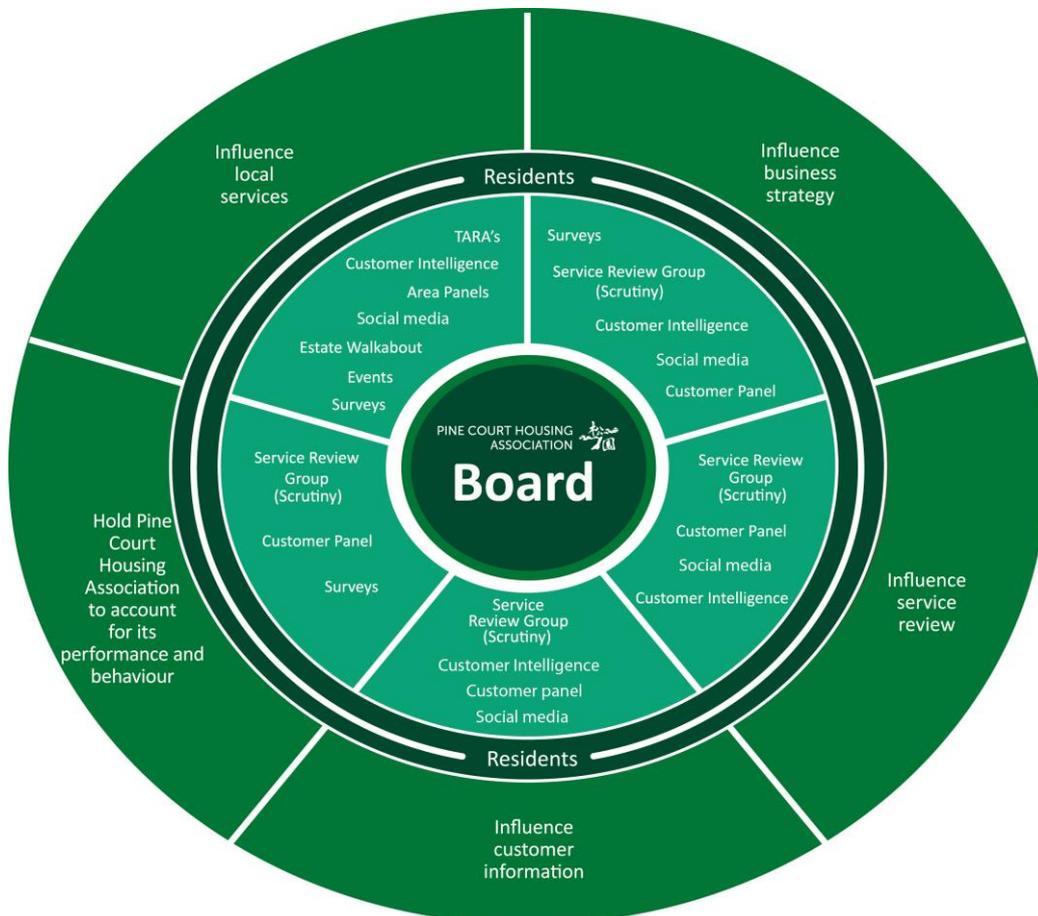
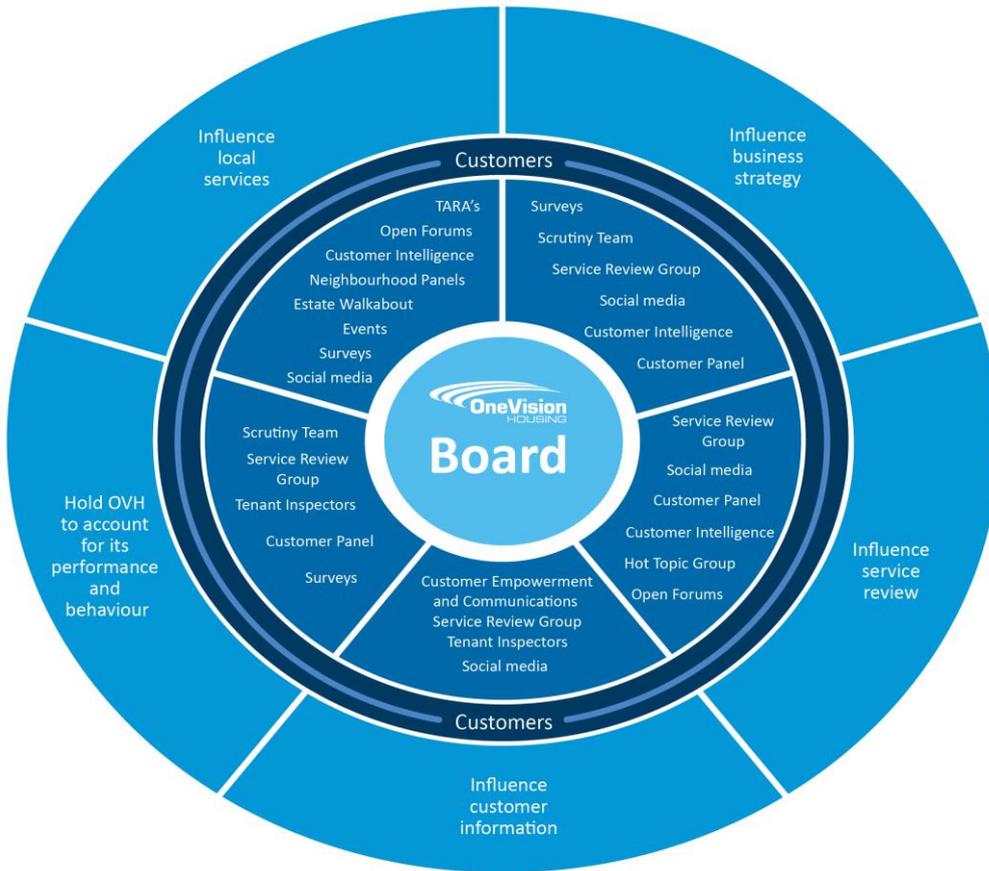
Managers and staff will attend and support customers meetings as appropriate and will proactively promote the opportunities for residents to be involved and support and encourage customers to be empowered.

The Resident Involvement team will provide advice, guidance and training for staff to assist in their promotion of resident empowerment.

### **Customer Empowerment Structures within Sovini**

The structure within our organisation was developed in consultation with customers of the Registered Providers through their Service Review Groups. The structure provides an opportunity for customers to move around the structure and to choose the level of involvement they want and at a level they feel comfortable with. The structure is captured within our individual Registered Providers 'Wheel of Involvement'.

# Wheel of Involvement within Sovini Registered Providers



## Community Governance within Sovini

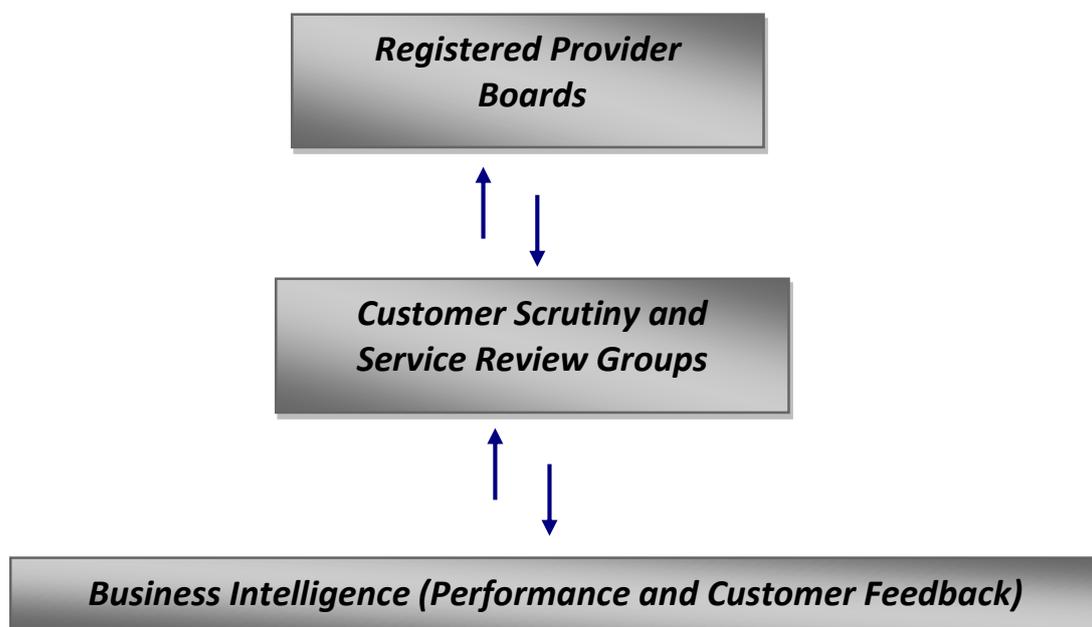
Community Governance is the term we use for ensuring that the communities in which we operate are involved and empowered in making decisions that affect them. This is classified as 'High Level' resident involvement (see below).

Our approach to community governance ensures that we have customer representation on each of our Registered Providers Boards. The Boards have overall responsibility for how we are governed; ensure we have a clear strategic direction, are viable and that our services offer Value for Money.

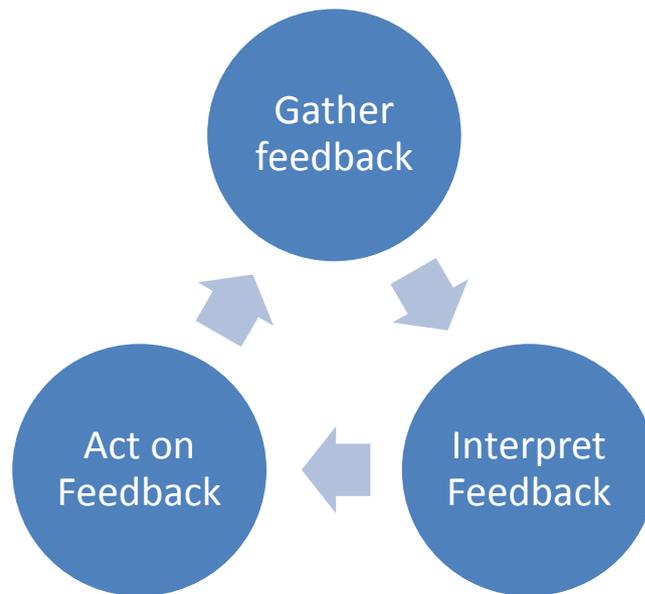
Our governance arrangements are supported by Tenant Scrutiny Members who review and scrutinise how we deliver our services to our communities. They are empowered to recommend to the Board alterations to existing management processes and influence strategic direction through the recommendation of new working practices and service delivery.

The Scrutiny arrangements are supported by a number of resident led Service Review Groups that provide ongoing review and monitoring in the effectiveness of our service delivery. The Service Review Groups are directed and influenced by medium to low level resident involvement (see below) through customer feedback on our services. Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct have been developed which detailed the functions of these groups.

The following diagram is an overview of the relationship in Sovini's Code of Governance Framework and Community Governance process.



Community Governance is directed and influenced by involvement through customer feedback of our services. This works on a three stage process:



## Levels and options for Involvement within our Registered Providers

We categorise the options for involvement into three levels – high, medium and low; this is reflective of the amount of time required from the resident, as follows:

Low	Medium	High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to 1 hour per month</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to 3 hours per month</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 3 hours per month</li> </ul>

In addition, there are both formal and informal methods of involvement to ensure residents can be involved at a level they are comfortable with. The following list is not exhaustive but gives examples of the different options:

### **Registered Provider Board Membership (Formal – High Level)**

The Registered Provider Boards are made up of residents as well as independent members and Council representatives. Our Boards have overall responsibility for:-

- Setting strategy, policy and direction;
- Ensuring the organisation is self sufficient;
- Establishing plans of action;
- Managing risk;
- Monitoring performance;
- Regulatory compliance.

### **Scrutiny Team (Formal – High Level)**

Scrutiny teams are made up of a cross section of customers from our registered providers. The role of the team is to scrutinise the services being provided from the perspective of those receiving the service.

### **Service Review Group (Formal – High Level)**

The Scrutiny Functions are supported by a number of Service Review Groups (SRG's) that enable our customers to get involved in an area of the business that is important to them. The names of the Service Review Groups are as follows (the service areas covered are included in brackets):

1. One Vision Housing - Customers and Neighbourhoods SRG (ASB, Income Management, Neighbourhood Management, Lettings, CCTV, Supported Housing)
2. One Vision Housing - Sovini Property Services SRG (Social Housing Responsive Repairs, Gas Servicing, Adaptations, Home Improvements)
3. One Vision Housing – Customer Empowerment and Communications Service Review Group (Customer Empowerment, Marketing and Communications)
4. Pine Court Customer Empowerment Panel (ASB, Income Management, Neighbourhood Management, Lettings, Supported Housing, Repairs, Gas Servicing, Customer Empowerment, Communications)

The Service Review Groups monitor service provision by reviewing performance data and customer feedback, and make informed decisions in relation to policy and service priorities and improvement.

### **Tenant Inspectors/Mystery Shopping (Formal – High Level)**

We will train tenants to carry out inspections of our service and we have recruited a pool of tenant inspectors/mystery shoppers who have received formal training. These will provide a method of quality assuring service delivery and in particular assess the customer experience. We will use the feedback as a learning tool to drive continuous improvement.

### **Complaints Panel (Formal – High Level)**

Sovini has a three stage complaints process in place to ensure we act swiftly with any failures in service delivery to our customers. If complainants are not satisfied with the outcome from investigations undertaken at stages 1 and 2 of the complaint will be assessed by a specially convened complaints panel. The panel will consist of tenant representative from the Board of Governance.

### **Neighbourhood Panels/Resident Groups (Formal – Medium Level)**

We will continue to support Resident Involvement at a local level via either Resident Groups or Neighbourhood Panels which meet on a quarterly basis to ensure residents can influence and monitor developments within their neighbourhoods.

### **Customer Events (Informal – Low Level)**

We aim to hold at least one Annual Customer Event, for each Registered Provider as an opportunity to bring together all of our customers both involved and uninvolved. Whilst it is based around a social/community event it is also used to talk to customers informally about how happy they are with our services and to engage more customers in the level of involvement that suits them.

### **Customer Panel (Informal – Low Level)**

The panel is a forum of customers who are happy to receive and complete surveys and attend one-off events.

### **Customer Feedback - Surveys/Market Research (Informal – Low Level)**

We carry out a number of surveys to identify customer priorities and we use the results to allocate budgets, inform Strategy and to improve local services. This information forms our overall Customer Intelligence and is reported to and scrutinised by our Service Review Groups. Information is analysed by geographical location and equality strand to ensure services meet the needs and priorities of our customers.

### **Focus Groups / Hot Topics Forums (Formal – Low Level)**

We will, as and when required, arrange a variety of focus groups to discuss current 'hot topics'. These events are themed depending on customer feedback, specific areas of discussion, or new initiatives.

### **Other Informal – Low Level Options**

Customers can also get involved by:-

- Customer Suggestions
- Neighbourhood walkabouts
- General Customer Feedback/Tenant Talk (*this is an informal conversation with customers to find out how they feel about our services*)

## **Tenant Management and Control**

We will continue to work with, and support any Tenant Management Organisation to enable them to manage the services they provide.

In line with the Homes and Communities Agency (Consumer Standards) we will work closely with any other Resident Groups within our Registered Providers wishing to manage services for their homes. We will provide support and guidance to ensure that they understand the options open to them and have a clear understanding of the implications involved in self management of services.

Any management application would require a ballot of all affected residents before any consent is given to such proposals. This will then be considered by the Executive Management Team and Board members to make the final decision. If this request is supported by Board training and financial support will be provided.

## **Start up grants and financial support**

In order to financially support our tenants, we provide start up grants of £150 for each new constituted tenant group. In addition, an annual top-up grant, up to the value of £150, will be available to all constituted tenant groups that meet the recognition criteria approved by the Customer Empowerment and Communication Service Review Group.

We operate an Expenses and Reimbursement Policy, to ensure our customers are never out of pocket as a result of being involved with us, and this clearly sets out what we will and will not reimburse.

The levels of financial support, in terms of both start up/top-up grants and expenses, were set and agreed by customers via the Customer Empowerment and Communication Service Review Group. This is reviewed annually.

## **Training and development opportunities**

We provide training and support to customers to build capacity and to facilitate full engagement and meaningful involvement.

We recognise that a robust training programme is necessary to ensure that residents are equipped with the skills they need to influence service delivery, provide personal development opportunities, and to enable successful Board succession planning.

We undertake annual training needs and skills audits, targeting those involved with our formal structures initially. In addition, we provide internal and external learning opportunities for all residents to attend, regardless of whether they are part of the formal involvement structure.

## Partnership Working

The Customer Empowerment Team works with a variety of partners in order to achieve our aims. This ranges from outsourcing the delivery of training programmes to specialist providers through to bringing in specific skills such as mystery shoppers etc. The team will signpost customers to different agencies when particular services are required, for example funding.

## Collective Disputes

We are committed to strengthening our framework for successful landlord/residents relations and in doing so, as far as possible, prevent collective disputes arising. Where this is not possible to have in place a viable mechanism for resolution which embeds good practice to prevent further disputes arising, independent arbitration/mediation is a tool which we use in resolving disputes, in accordance with our Collective Disputes policy.

## Equality in Customer Empowerment

We are keen to ensure that resident involvement is accessible to all our residents and aim for our involved residents to be reflective of the wider community. This is monitored via our Customer Empowerment Key Performance Indicators.

We aim to raise awareness of Equality and Diversity issues amongst our involved residents in order for them to be able to reflect the views of the wider community.

We will use our customer profiling data to identify gaps in customer intelligence and use this information to target future surveys/market research. We would also welcome and support non-geographically based organisations such as communities of interest groups (i.e. mother and toddler, disability, Black and Minority Ethnic & LGBT).

All documentation will be translated to meet the needs of stakeholders i.e. Chinese/Mandarin for Pine Court customers.

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure our events are accessible – i.e. ensure venues are Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant and individual needs and dietary requirements are taken account of.

## **Section Three – The way forward**

### **The Future of Customer Empowerment within Sovini**

As Sovini grows and develops it is important that we have a Strategy for our Registered Providers that will support the continued importance of empowering are customers to be involved in and influencing decision making – this is an important element of Community Governance and re-inforces co-regulation. As part of the review of this Strategy customers from the Customer Empowerment and Communication Service Review Group identified a number of key priorities. These priorities will be delivered through the Sovini Corporate Plan in support of this Strategy:

#### **Ensure our Empowerment and Community Governance arrangements are representative of our communities and neighbourhoods**

With the increasing focus on Co-regulation and Customer Empowerment together with the customers' role in shaping our services it becomes crucial that we engage with all our diverse service users and involve them in that service design and delivery.

Effective involvement must take into account:

- Equality and diversity issues and avoid discriminatory practices to ensure all tenants have the opportunity to contribute and to be heard.
- Identify underrepresented groups, work out what barriers exist and develop approaches which maximise opportunities.
- Actively encourage/target underrepresented groups to become involved and ensure that the profile is more representative of the tenant base.

The customer insight gathered by all our group members will allow us to target underrepresented groups to ensure our involved residents reflect the communities and neighbourhoods we serve.

#### **Increased number of customers Involved**

We will use our Customer Insight and tracker intelligence to identify our 'need to reach' residents, and contact those who have previously not been involved with a view to increasing their involvement.

#### **Facilitate involvement at a neighbourhood level to support our 'Local Offers'**

We have developed Neighbourhood Panels, made up of customers within the neighbourhoods in which we operate, who can influence decisions at a local level and empower them to develop future 'Local Offers'. We will review the effectiveness of the Panels alongside a review of our Neighbourhood Plans during 2014/15.

## **Section Four – Monitoring and Review**

### **Ensure the effectiveness of the strategy**

We monitor the effectiveness of delivering the objectives within this Strategy through a range of Service Standards and Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), developed and approved by residents.

Performance against the Service Standards and Indicators will be monitored and reported to the Resident Involvement and Communication Service Review Group on a quarterly basis.

### **Customer Empowerment Service Standards**

We will:

- Provide a variety of methods by which customers can become involved in our management and decision making process and promote these to customer.
- Provide a budget for central customer empowerment activities which will be monitored by the Customer Empowerment and Communication Service Review Group.
- We will keep you informed about what we are doing in a variety of ways, including our newsletter, leaflets, annual reports and internet.
- Provide access and support for customers who wish to get involved
- Actively support existing resident groups and encourage the development of new ones
- Provide training opportunities for customers to make participation easier.
- Review the Customer Empowerment Strategy menu of involvement and service standards annually.

We will assess these standards by:

- Keeping copies of all the information we produce.
- The RI budget will be monitored by the Customer Empowerment and Communication SRG.
- Having information available on all involvement opportunities on our website, in our newsletter and in our local offices.
- Keeping a record of all residents' associations that are set up
- Advertising our training programme for customers on our website, in our newsletter and in our local offices

- Keeping an up to date list of all customers who are involved

### **Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)**

The following KPI's will be used to measure the effectiveness of our Customer Empowerment activities.

- % of recommendations from our involved groups that we have acted on
- % of satisfaction that we listen to your views and act on them
- % satisfaction with training opportunities for involved tenants
- % expenditure on Customer Empowerment training
- Total spend on Customer Empowerment per property (£)
- Number of Customer Empowerment contact interactions recorded via our Customer Relationship Management System

Performance will be discussed at our Customer Empowerment and Communication SRG on a quarterly basis for review and scrutiny with identified improvement actions feeding our Service Delivery Plans.

### **Customer Empowerment Impact Assessments**

All involvement opportunities/activities are subject an annual cost benefit assessment to measure their returns on investment and effectiveness.

### **Periodic Review**

This Strategy has been approved by the individual Registered Provider Boards of the Sovini Group prior to approval by the Sovini Group Board

The Strategy is subject to a formal full review to be undertaken every three years. This will be jointly undertaken with customers via the Registered Providers Service Review Groups and relevant Executive Management Teams. It is then subject to approval by Sovini Registered Provider Boards. The date for this next full review will be July 2015.

An annual review/refresh is undertaken based on customer feedback and performance relating to the service standards and KPI's. An assessment against current legislative and regulatory requirements will also be undertaken.