



## ONWARD SCRUTINY BOARD ANNUAL REVIEW 2024/25

Welcome to 2024/25's annual review!

As members of the Onward Scrutiny Board, we dedicate our time on a voluntary basis to take a close look at the services you receive. We highlight what's going well and ask questions on your behalf where services are not meeting their targets. We love what we do and work well as a team. We're a diverse bunch from across the North West and we all bring our experience and ideas together to help Onward make positive changes. You can find out more about our members on Onward's website ([onward.co.uk/get-involved/osb](https://onward.co.uk/get-involved/osb)).

Since our first annual review a year ago, we have continued to meet regularly to hold Onward to account for the quality of the services they provide. Some highlights from 2024/25 include our review of the communications Onward send to customers about rent and service charges. We also looked at the quality of services you receive, including grounds maintenance and cleaning now that these have been brought in-house.

We've also worked closely with Onward to offer positive, practical ideas for improving services. We have developed a positive relationship with Heads of Service and other senior employees across Onward and have had opportunities to influence at governance level through our attendance at Customer Committee (a sub-group of Onward's Board who oversee all services that customers receive) meetings.

Over the next few pages, we'll provide a more detailed look at the work we've been doing to help make services better for our fellow customers. We currently have vacancies for more customers to join us, so if you'd like to get involved, please do get in touch with the Customer Involvement Team.

**The Onward Scrutiny Board**

# OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE.

- ✓ Held **18** working meetings and 4 quarterly meetings to review performance
- ✓ Volunteered over **400** hours to help improve services for customers
- ✓ Asked over **40** questions about service performance
- ✓ Took part in **5** workshops with Onward's board members and directors
- ✓ Attended **5** Customer Committee meetings
- ✓ Made **16** detailed recommendations to improve rent and service charge information, transparency and value for money
- ✓ Attended **2** national conferences



Worked with Onward to make improvements to the Vulnerability & Reasonable Adjustments Policy.



Quarterly meeting held in Liverpool to review and challenge Onward's performance.



Met with Onward's Heads of Service to discuss service charges and understand the antisocial behaviour service in more detail.

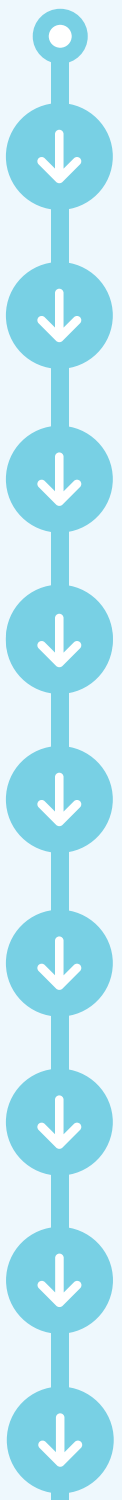


Quarterly meeting held on Microsoft Teams to review and challenge Onward's performance, where we were pleased to hear that the Money Advice Team had raised £3.3million in benefits for customers and challenged the amount of rental income lost due to homes remaining empty for too long.

Attended the Tpas National Engagement Conference in Coventry to learn about new regulations and gain ideas from other social landlords.



Planned our review of service charges, with a focus on communication and service quality.





Met with the Head of Repairs to get an update on the progress of our ideas to improve communications and Onward Repairs. We also held a meeting to discuss waiting times for calls to be answered by Onward's Customer Service Team, and contractor issues that were impacting the time taken to let empty homes.



Attended the Tpas Scrutiny Conference in Loughborough to gain ideas from other scrutiny boards.

Met with the Customer Committee and made recommendations on service charges.



Quarterly meeting held in Accrington to review and challenge Onward's performance, where we saw positive customer feedback about the new Onward Repairs service in Manchester. We also asked lots of challenge questions, such as the letting times for Sheltered homes.



Conducted a review of the way we work and held our annual Christmas dinner.



Took part in a workshop with Onward's Board members to explore how Onward could use customer information to improve services.



Customers received their new rent and service charge communications and raised less enquiries with Onward following the improvements we had made.



Quarterly meeting held in Liverpool to review and challenge Onward's performance. We asked lots of challenge questions, such as how the performance targets for 2025/26 had been set.

Tpas completed a review of customer involvement at Onward and found our approach to scrutiny to be excellent.



# HOW WE WORK.

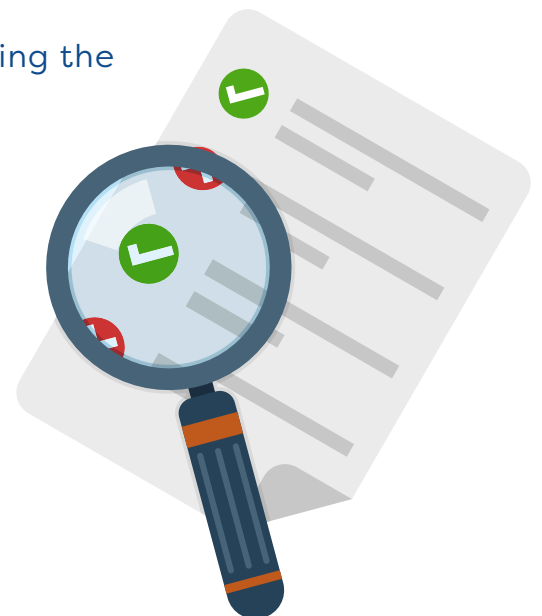


We meet regularly to discuss service performance and every three months review detailed information about how Onward is performing against targets for the services customers receive. This includes things like rent collection, letting homes, carrying out repairs, dealing with enquiries and handling complaints for example.

Our job is to challenge low performing areas and ensure there are plans to improve. We also highlight good performance and praise where it's due. We do this by talking to Heads of Service and Directors from across Onward.

From time to time, our questions can bring up issues that we need to explore in more detail. In these cases, we invite in the relevant employees from Onward to talk to us and explain their plans, so we can outline our ideas and help them get things right for customers.

As well as checking that Onward are meeting the Consumer Standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing, we also take on at least one core project each year to focus on.



# OUR PROJECT.

For our 2024/25 project, we agreed to look into service charges – particularly value for money, and the transparency and accessibility of the information shared with customers. We split our project into two parts. First reviewing the communications sent to customers last year, then looking at what could be done to improve customers’ perception of value for money by making things more transparent.



We planned the scope of our review, which began by looking at the communications issued to customers last year. We compared these communications with the information we found from other housing providers, as well as Shelter and the Housing Ombudsman.



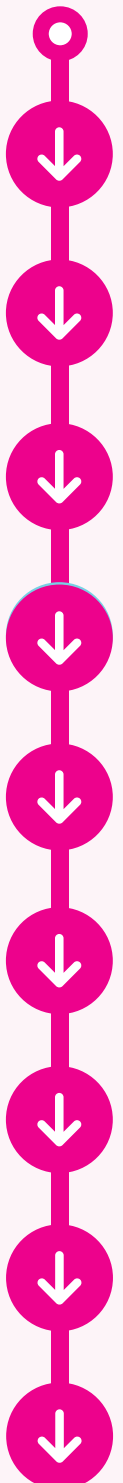
We wanted to know whether customers felt they had enough information to understand the level of service they should expect and the standards, as well as how they felt about the value for money. 225 members of the Customer Engagement Community took part in our survey. 83% of those who responded did not feel they were getting value for money, and 64% were not aware of the service schedules for grounds maintenance, cleaning, and window cleaning.



We planned out the next part of our review and set up meetings with relevant teams across Onward.



We met with the Head of Environmental Services as well as Team Leaders for grounds maintenance and cleaning services. This was useful, as they answered some of our questions about the frequency, standard and cost of the services. Their answers then generated more questions.





We met with some of the Supervisors and Operatives for grounds maintenance and cleaning services. These conversations were friendly, informative, and gave us a real insight into what it's like to deliver the services. We were blown away by the positive attitude of the cleaning supervisor and his team gave him a glowing commendation. We got a good understanding of their plans to improve the service. We used the insight gathered during these meetings to make further recommendations about communication and value for money, particularly for the services delivered by Onward Environmental.

We also had an opportunity to review the revised communications that were going out to customers for 2025/26's rent and service charges, and were pleased to see our recommendations had been included.



We made recommendations around transparency and value for money for Onward Environmental, and our conversations around how we could improve services continued into the new financial year.

Throughout the project we had plenty of opportunities to influence Onward, which resulted in a range of improvements and additions.

#### Outcomes included:

- Communications being improved, with better descriptions for each type of service charge and what customers can expect from Onward, such as grounds maintenance and cleaning schedules. Clear explanations for the cause of any increases in costs were also included, as well as a graphic showing how we spend every £100 of the rent we collect and frequently asked questions.
- A new newsletter from Onward Environmental, which is sent out regularly to customers who receive these services.
- Clearer guidance for colleagues handling customer enquiries, and more feedback from operatives on the ground about customers' views.
- More involvement from our Customer Engagement Community, who are monitoring the services they receive from Onward Environmental and regularly sharing their feedback.

It has been great to see the impact that our project has made, and how this has helped to improve customers' understanding of the services they pay for, so they can judge whether they provide value for money. We have more ideas make next year's communications even better, and look forward to working with Onward on this.



# LOOKING TO THE FUTURE.

We hope that you have enjoyed reading about our work in 2024/25.





In 2025/26, we will be developing and enhancing our role to make sure we can work positively for customers in this new and challenging regulatory environment. We'll also be looking at Onward's performance against the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM). The top issues mentioned by customers in 2023/24's TSM survey were repairs and service chargeable services. These areas have formed the topics of our last two reviews and we have already seen improvements to these services following our recommendations. Customer feedback in 2024/25's survey has reassured us that we are getting things right in choosing to look at what matters to customers.

We will continue to look at the issues that matter most to our fellow customers and will make suggestions to help Onward improve. And as Onward are looking to revise and expand their approach to customer involvement in 2025/26, it's clear that our remit as the Onward Scrutiny Board remains an essential role.

## GET INVOLVED.

### Interested in joining the Onward Scrutiny Board?

We currently have vacancies for more Board members, so if you'd like to get involved, please get in touch with the Customer Involvement Team by:

-  filling in a form on Onward's website ([onward.co.uk/get-involved](https://onward.co.uk/get-involved))
-  visiting the My Onward Portal ([onward.co.uk/portal](https://onward.co.uk/portal))
-  emailing [customerengagement@onward.co.uk](mailto:customerengagement@onward.co.uk)
-  calling **0300 555 0600** or messaging **07418 344 603** on WhatsApp between 8am-6pm Monday to Friday and 10am-6pm on Wednesdays



If you need any help understanding this document, please give us a call on **0300 555 0600**, send us a message on WhatsApp to **07418 344 603**, or send an email to **customerservices@onward.co.uk**.

Jeśli potrzebujesz pomocy w zrozumieniu tego dokumentu, zadzwoń do nas na numer 0300 555 0600, wyślij nam wiadomość na WhatsApp na numer 07418 344603 lub wyślij e-mail na adres [customerservices@onward.co.uk](mailto:customerservices@onward.co.uk).

إذا كنت بحاجة إلى أي مساعدة في فهم هذه الوثيقة، فيرجى الاتصال بنا على 0300 555 0600، أو أرسل رسالة إلينا على [customerservices@onward.co.uk](mailto:customerservices@onward.co.uk) رقم الواتس 07418 344603 أو أرسل رسالة بريد إلكتروني إلى

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