



RESIDENT SENATE - LINKAGES PROJECT
SUMMARY REPORT TO SEVERNSIDE BOARD, July 2012

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 As part of the Senate Annual Workplan 2012, four key projects were identified:

- Linkages
- Strategies
- Customer Standards
- Communication

1.2 This Linkages project directly contributes to Senate's mission, which is:

'To enable residents to influence and shape Severnside now and for the future'.

1.3 The Senate chose the Linkages project as the first project for completion, because it is essential that foundations are laid which enable the Senate to deliver its key duties which are:

"To support the delivery of excellence in the Severnside landlord services by:

- *Monitoring performance and satisfaction data and examining benchmarking information; challenging any areas of low performance and recommending planned improvements;*
- *Providing an interface with customer engagement activities, working with the Severnside Board and the Executive Team on landlord service issues within the criteria set out in these Terms of Reference;*
- *Reviewing, agreeing, challenging customer facing strategies and action plans."*

1.4 In undertaking this project, we have used a range of methods to both ascertain information and test our findings including:

- research;
- meetings with relevant groups and people to consult and conduct

- discussions and put together our recommendations
- interviews,
- a presentation, consultation and discussions,
- testing out some of our ideas, to see how they worked in practice (eg sharing Minutes, slot on other groups' agendas, Green Paper)

2. **SCOPE OF THE PROJECT**

- 2.1 The project was intended to establish links for two-way communication between the following key groups:
- The main Resident Groups . Customer Panel and Resident Inspectors;
 - the Board and relevant Committees;
 - Severnside's Senior Management - the Executive Team
- 2.2 This first project also aimed to start a process which would lead to good two-way communication and information flows between the Senate and other resident groups. We are aware of about 30 such groups. However, we recognised that links with these other groups would take longer to establish, and so the focus for this project was on the key groups already identified . the Customer Panel and Resident Inspectors.
This first project was not intended to consider the links between the Senate and other staff groups . these will be for another project in the future.

3. **AIMS OF THE PROJECT**

- 3.1 The aim of the project was to establish clear, workable processes for two-way communication with the key groups mentioned above.
- The purpose of establishing these processes and links is to strengthen the ways in which residents can shape and influence Severnside on important matters, with the Senate being a bridge between residents and the Board / senior management.

4. **DESIRED OUTCOMES**

We wanted successful completion of the project to deliver the following benefits:

1. Establish / confirm the Senate as being the clear link between the other resident groups and the Board and Senior Management
2. Bring a resident perspective to the Board and Senior Management when they are developing new ideas, policies and strategies
3. Enable other resident groups to feed up to the Senate their ideas on strategies and policies, findings from inspections, and also any key issues, areas of low performance or major concerns for residents
4. and in turn, enable the Senate to feed these up to the Board / Senior Management, particularly when reporting on monitoring of performance,

development of services and strategies

5. and then set out a clear process by which feedback from the Board / Senior Management is given to the Senate and how the Senate then reports back to the other resident groups so that residents know their views and concerns have been considered
6. Set out clear agreements as to how Senate will review and agree customer facing strategies and action plans with the Board /Senior Management and covering the different groups' expectations in this process
7. Provide clarity over roles between resident groups . eg which group monitors which performance and satisfaction data
8. Lead in time to greater understanding for other residents and staff of the role (and achievements) of the Senate due to better feedback from the Senate
9. Provide for two-way communication and feedback including accountability from top down

5. **CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 To be an effective bridge between the resident groups and the Board, it is essential that we have good working relationships and clear processes for two-way communication between the Senate and the key groups - Customer Panel, Resident Inspectors, ET and the Board. This is to make sure residents are able to have a say in the future direction of Severnside, and also to make sure we as the Senate are able to pick up key themes or service delivery issues which will help us in our service challenge role.
- 5.2 We have made a number of recommendations which are set out below. We believe that if these recommendations are implemented and embedded, and good relationships established, we will have succeeded in our aim for this project.
- 5.3 We think the linkages should be kept under review as the Senate and other groups evolve, particularly at a time when concern has been recently expressed at the intention to exclude Senate members and Resident Inspectors from being members of Customer Panel.
- 5.4 As well as processes, good relationships are needed to ensure the linkages project works in practice and we need to work together to overcome any concerns as they may arise.
- 5.5 We ask the Board to consider and approve our recommendations.

6. Our Recommendations

A. Board

The purpose of this part of the project was to establish processes for two-way communication between the Board and the Senate with the aim of assisting residents to shape and influence Severnside now and for the future. The idea is that the Senate will act as a bridge between the Board and the other resident groups.

Recommendation	Progress	Key Outcome
1. There be a slot on each Board meeting agenda for an update from Senate	Tested, seems to be working well . what is the Board's view?	1
2. There be a slot on each Senate agenda for links with the Board to include Board agenda for next meeting, and any feedback from Board to Senate	Tested, working well	9
3. That Senate receive draft Board agenda and draft customer facing papers in advance of the Board meeting (2 weeks in advance if possible or sooner for items such as the Neighbourhood Strategy) . this has been discussed with ET and the general view was that to allow this to happen, for practical reasons, the Board meetings would need to be put back by at least a week . this will need to be agreed between Board and Exec Team . once agreed a written protocol+be drawn up and put into place as a binding agreement for the future	The Board agendas and a summary of the papers have been received by Senate but not the full papers as yet . there are some practical points around timing which would need to be agreed between ET and Board. The Senate has been consulted well in advance about the Neighbourhood Strategy and Equality and Diversity Strategy.	2
4. That Senate sends written views and comments to the Board on key issues, performance, strategies for approval, etc by way of a Green Paper+which would usually be circulated to the Board directors with the rest of their Board meeting papers. Sometimes this would be a stand-alone paper and	Tested with first Green Paper on Rent Increase and Affordable Rents. Next Green Paper drafted to accompany Equality and Diversity Strategy.	2

<p>sometimes it would be attached to other papers, eg a report on a strategy. Sometimes a Senate member would attend the Board to present the report(s) and other times these would go with the other papers and the link Board Director (Rory) would highlight the key points</p>		
<p>5. That each %Green Paper+would have a space at the bottom for %Management Comment+which would allow senior management to comment on the Senate's paper without altering the Senate's words</p>	<p>Hope to test this with our forthcoming Green Paper</p>	<p>4</p>
<p>6. Sometimes papers were sent to the Board as initial consultation papers . for these, that Senate input is sought after the initial Board discussions had taken place</p>	<p>Not yet tested</p>	<p>6</p>
<p>7. That the Board provide feedback on Senate reports. this is important. This could be by passing an extract of the relevant Minutes to the Senate which would then allow the Senate to pass on the feedback to the other resident groups to show how their views had been taken into account and that a difference was being made. Or it could be a specifically written response.</p>	<p>Written feedback from Board Chair and Chief Executive on first Green Paper was very constructive. At the last meeting, an extract from the Minutes was received and this method also worked well.</p>	<p>9</p>
<p>8. That Senate members attend Board meetings to find out more about what happens at the meetings, that sometimes it may be appropriate to share training alongside Board directors and the importance was making everyone feel welcome</p>	<p>Two members of Senate to attend next Board meeting as observers. Shared training on Regulatory Framework worked well.</p>	<p>1, 5</p>
<p>9. That when the Senate becomes an all-resident group in due course, at such time the Senate should appoint one person to be the %Board link+</p>	<p>To be considered more fully in due course- we think this will be important in order to continue a smooth relationship between Senate and Board</p>	<p>8</p>

B. Audit and Risk Committee

These links will help strengthen the way we monitor standards and assist in our scrutiny role.

Recommendation	Progress	
1. There be a link Senate member+to attend each Audit and Risk Committee meeting, to assist with linkages and bring forward a resident viewpoint where relevant	Discussed with Chair of Committee. Needs clarification of role, and slight amendment to terms of reference of each Committee. Senate member has been invited to next Committee meeting to assist with these links.	7
2. To discuss and agree a protocol for future working between the Senate and the Audit and Risk Committee	Discussions have started. We aim to have more suggestions once we start our Scrutiny / Standards project	9

C. Executive Team (ET)

The purpose of this part of the project was to establish clear, workable processes for two-way communication with ET, to help strengthen the ways in which residents can shape and influence Severnside. As with the Board, the idea was that we would be the bridge between the rest of the residents and the senior management. Some matters would go to the Board, some go to ET, depending on their importance. So as a Senate, we need to be able to link with both groups.

Recommendation	Progress	
1. That when a member of ET plans to introduce or review a customer-facing strategy then the formal process proposed in the Strategies project is followed which includes involving the Senate at an early stage	This has been tested with a couple of Sue Groom's new strategies . for more details as to how this is working, see the Strategies project	4
2. That draft customer-facing Board papers come to Senate two weeks in advance of the Board meeting, to allow time for Senate to produce written comment in the form of a Board paper (See above . Recommendation 3 on Links with Board)	So far, Senate have started to receive draft Board agendas with short summary of relevant papers. ET supported the idea, although for practical reasons the timings were difficult to achieve and it had been suggested that board meetings would need to be put back by at least a week . this would need agreement between Chief Exec and Chair of Board.	5

3. That when Senate drafts a Green paper to the Board, ET are given the opportunity to add a management comment in a box at the end of the paper.	Not yet tested, although hope to test this shortly	6
4. Senate and ET should further consider how best to link together and to discuss and agree priorities for performance monitoring and departmental support for Senate	Some suggestions were made by members of ET for work which they would like Senate to consider, and support for Senate was offered. These discussions will be followed up. We hope to have more suggestions once we start our next Standards / Scrutiny project.	7
5. Consider proposal that there should be one Senate member as a key liaison for each member of ET	We considered the proposal but have decided at the moment not to take this up . there are advantages and disadvantages.	8

D. Customer Panel (CP)

The purpose of establishing these links was to make sure there are clear, workable processes for two-way communication and information flows in order to strengthen the ways in which residents can influence Severnside. We wanted the Senate to be a conduit to take key issues from the rest of the residents to the Board and Senior Management and feed back to the residents on the outcomes of this.

Recommendation	Progress	
1. That Customer Panel share its Minutes with Senate.	The Minutes of CP are circulated to the Senate along with their formal meeting papers. This enables the Senate to see what the main items of discussion were at the last CP meetings.	3
2. That Senate share its Minutes with Customer Panel	The Minutes of Senate are circulated to Customer Panel at the CP meeting. This is accompanied by the verbal and written Senate update report to the meeting.	5
3. That there be a slot on every agenda of Senate to discuss any main themes or issues coming from Customer Panel (to see whether these need to be referred to the Board / ET)	The Chair of the CP (Sue Dell) verbally highlights the key points from the previous CP meetings to the full Senate meeting which enables discussion to take place. This will enable Senate to fulfil its scrutiny role and prioritise scrutiny work.	4

4. That there be a slot on every agenda of Customer Panel to receive an update and feedback from Senate	A verbal and written update is given to each CP meeting by Senate members, to provide information about the work of the Senate, and feedback from the Board / ET	4
5. That the Senate give a presentation to CP to explain their role	This was carried out in June 2012	8
6. That the Senate and CP discuss and agree between them which group should do what, to ensure the groups fit together like pieces of a jigsaw+	Discussion started at CP in June 2012. Agreed so far that CP will be asked for their comments on customer procedures such as opening hours, texting service, and some policies. Senate will be the main link to the Board. Both groups will have an input into strategies and key policies in different ways. Both groups will play their own parts in producing the annual report for residents. We agreed to continue this consultation at future meetings of CP.	9
7. That Senate are involved in determining the CP's terms of reference, to make sure the two groups are complementing each other and not duplicating each other	At time of writing, the CP terms of reference are under review and it is proposed that the full Senate meeting will discuss these and give feedback.	6
8. That Senate continues to forge links with CP to ensure good relations and free flow of information between the two groups.	In progress. The postcard to the Senate+ was introduced as one of the alternative ways in which CP can pass information or questions to the Senate and this was well received at the last CP meeting.	9

E. Resident Inspectors

The main purpose of the link between Senate and the Resident Inspectors is to enable the Inspectors to share their reports and work with Senate, and to work together on scrutiny projects from a residents perspective.

Recommendation	Progress	
1. That Resident Inspectors share their proposed work plan, Minutes and Reports with Senate	Previous work plan received. New work plan is being sent to July Senate meeting. There has been some delay whilst Resident Inspectors reports are %Severnsided+. one report came to the July Senate meeting.	5
2. That Senate share its Minutes with Resident Inspectors	This is being done	5
3. That Senate include a slot on each of their agendas for an update from the Resident Inspectors and to provide feedback to the Inspectors	This has been tested and the Chair of the Resident Inspectors is invited to attend the Senate meeting to highlight the key issues coming from their work	8
4. That the Senate commission work from the Resident Inspectors	We hope to be doing this as part of our next project on Standards and our Scrutiny projects	3
5. That Resident Inspector reports should generally be shared with CP first, unless they have been commissioned by the Senate.	This is currently what happens. Senate is keen to receive reports.	5
6. That the Senate and Resident Inspectors discuss and agree who will be doing what	Discussion started to take place at the last CP as Chair of Resident Inspectors was there. To be continued	3/5

F. Other Resident Groups / Members of A-Star

The purpose of these links is to enable the Senate to receive information from the wider group of residents generally, to identify any trends or themes coming from the grass roots. We also want people to know who we are and what we do, and how we can make a difference by working together.

Recommendation	Progress	
1. To enable Senate to identify any common themes or issues, that the Senate receives a report with details about all groups which have Severnside resident involvement, and regular information is provided from these groups to the Senate, particularly any issues,	This is still in its infancy . Sue Dell has agreed to take a copy of our questions to each of the groups. So far, Sue has only started her introductory meetings so we are not receiving information from these groups at the moment.	1/9
2. That Senate continue to look at different ways to communicate with residents	Leaflet, stand, blog in Pillar, Facebook, Postcard to Senate, email all developed. Attendance at customer events. Consultation at Community Fayre showed Facebook and Severnside website were popular . we want to develop these as part of forthcoming communication project	1
3. That in due course, Customer Panel becomes the bridge between the various resident groups and the Senate	The Chair of CP has advised that this is not possible at the moment and we thank Sue Dell and her team for agreeing to take up this role for the present time.	8

G. Links with Regional and National Resident groups and other Scrutiny Groups

The purpose of these links is to keep up to date, share information, experiences and ideas.

Recommendation	Progress	
1. That Senate members continue their links with regional and national resident groups. Senate members have the opportunity to meet Scrutiny groups from other organisations, and Senate members research what these groups are doing	June is particularly knowledgeable about the national and regional groups. External training courses assist in building links between ourselves and other Scrutiny groups in other organisations.	2

MANAGEMENT COMMENT