

Customer Experience Panel Meeting
12th May 2026 7pm – 9pm
Via Teams

		Action Owner
1.0	Introductions and Apologies.	
1.1	Apologies were noted.	
1.2	Declarations of Interest.	
1.2.1	No declarations raised.	
1.3	Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising.	
1.3.1	Minutes agreed.	
2.0	Annual Report for Residents.	SJP
2.1	What is the Annual Report for Residents?	
2.1.1	SJP introduced the annual report, explaining that the panel was being involved at the drafting stage for the first time, allowing greater input into the shape and content of the report.	
2.1.2	SJP explained what an Annual Report covers and went through the briefing document.	
2.1.3	SJP explained each part of the report, which shows how the organisation is performing, work done on homes and estates, customer involvement, complaints and lessons learned, and future plans. It is written in simple language with visuals to make it easy to understand. The aim is to be open and show customer show the organisation is working and responding to their needs.	
	What would you like to include in the report?	
2.2	SJP questioned the Panel as to whether they would like to contribute a welcome piece to the report.	
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	Action: A draft template to be circulated with suggested bullet points for members to add their own content.	
	The Panel are happy to contribute a welcome piece as a group.	

2.2.2	SN offered to draft the welcome piece, supported by the template.	
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2.2.4	SJP confirmed Hightown staff will assist with drafting and editing.	
2.2.5	SJP suggested a group photograph to be included if possible if not individual photographs.	
2.2.6	PJ confirmed that she is not willing to have a photograph.	
2.2.7	SJP advised that this has already been noted.	
2.2.8	SJP suggested that the Panel's work on the Barriers to Engagement report, should be referenced or adapted for inclusion in the report.	
2.2.9	MB requested clarification on what is meant by neighbourhood. Is it generic or regional?	
2.2.10	SJP displayed the previous report and explained that neighbourhood was detailing work that has been done including the estate improvements.	
2.2.11	SG questioned as to when the report goes out to customers.	
2.2.12	SJP advised that this is the draft stage. It usually goes to the Panel in July, with the final version ready in August. The final report looks like a magazine, and the Panel review it and give feedback.	
2.2.13	SG asked if any research has been undertaken to identify how many customers read the report.	
2.2.14	SJP advised that the report used to be sent in printed format and they are also available on the website. The communications team can count how many times it has been opened but not read.	
2.2.15	SG suggested producing a short video version of the annual report (approximately 5–10 minutes), as other organisations are adopting this alongside the written version, to improve accessibility for customers who may face literacy or language barriers, or who prefer video content.	
2.2.16	The Panel agreed this was a positive idea.	SJP

	Action: SJP to explore the feasibility of producing a short video version of the annual report with the Communications team.	
2.2.17	BR commented on the number of statistics included in the report and whether there is scope to include comparisons to the national averages so Hightown can be benchmarked as to whether Hightown are over or underperforming.	
2.2.18	SJP explained that the report currently does not include comparisons with other organisations. She offered to explore adding comparisons but noted this may be more appropriate during performance reviews rather than in a customer-facing report. She also confirmed that 12 months of statistics have been compiled. Action: Explore feasibility of benchmarking performance data against other housing associations for the annual report / performance review.	SJP
2.2.19	SJP asked if any specific case studies were wanted. She said the report usually includes examples like tenancy cases, antisocial behaviour, and support provided to customers.	
2.2.20	SG also suggested including a damp and mould case study in the report, reflecting the increasing prominence of this issue.	
2.2.21	SJP confirmed this could be linked to the planned Healthy Homes Roadshow, scheduled for October, providing a natural follow-on narrative.	
2.2.22	SG asked what is covered under building safety?	
2.2.23	SJP explained that there have been significant changes in building safety. The report covers areas such as stock condition surveys and related performance, as well as the 'big six' compliance areas, including gas, electrical, fire safety, and Legionella, along with other key safety checks.	
2.2.24	SG questioned if the census that is being done can be tied in with a stock condition and building safety?	
2.2.25	SJP advised that there is a separate 'Building Safety – Your Safety' campaign, which links to the PEEPs work. The 'Tell Us More' campaign will also be included in the report. Census calls are planned from May to June, followed by time in July to review and gather the data. In August, the team plans to take the 'Tell Us	

2.2.26	More' campaign on the road, including door-knocking to reach customers who were not previously contacted. SJP confirmed they will aim to include the suggestions as soon as possible. Jody, Comms, will return from leave next week and begin drafting the content. The team hopes to share an updated version within a week.	
3.0 3.1 3.2 3.2.1 3.2.2 3.2.3 3.2.4	Domestic Abuse policy review. KH provided an overview of the Domestic Abuse (DA) policy, explaining that it sets out Hightown's approach to supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse across its general needs rented and shared ownership stock. Housing officers and home ownership officers take the lead on DA cases, supported by two trained DA champions within the team. Kerry confirmed she is also a DA champion and serves as the strategic DA lead for the organisation. SG agreed to review the briefing document section by section. She also commented positively on the template, noting that it clearly highlights the areas that can be influenced. 1.0 Introduction. BR noted that clause 1.1 of the policy, as drafted, referred only to cases where the customer is the perpetrator. Panel members raised concern that this did not clearly reflect Hightown's commitment to supporting victims. KH confirmed that Hightown does support both victims and perpetrators depending on the circumstances, and that the duty to rehouse victims ultimately sits with the local authority rather than Hightown. MB commented that could the wording reflect Hightown's position that, where the individual committing the offences is not a tenant or customer, their ability to act is limited, and the matter therefore falls more appropriately within the remit of the police rather than Hightown? SJP highlighted the policy focuses on supporting victims. Where the perpetrator is not a Hightown tenant, the organisation's ability to take direct action is limited. The duty to house those fleeing violence sits with the local authority; Hightown's role is to provide support, guidance, and signposting. Enforcement options are restricted where the perpetrator falls outside its remit.	

3.2.5	PJ requested clarification on what Hightown does when domestic abuse is reported.	
3.2.6	KH outlined the process. Reports to Hightown trigger a DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking, and 'Honour'-based violence) risk assessment to determine if a referral to MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) is required. Customers are signposted to the local authority and may be referred to a support worker. Hightown works with the individual to agree an action plan, including regular contact to ensure ongoing support. In some cases, the local authority may provide temporary accommodation while a housing application is assessed, potentially outside the area. 3.0 Definitions. SG stated that the policy adopts the legislative definition of domestic abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour. While the definition cannot be changed, is sufficiently clear for customers and if further explanation or simplification could improve understanding. The Panel discussed the definitions section, noting that examples could be added to aid understanding. Specific points raised: • Clause 3.2 (controlling behaviour) should include additional examples such as intimidation and manipulation, alongside the existing reference to isolation. • The group agreed that examples of economic abuse should be added, such as controlling bank accounts or taking out loans in a victim's name without their consent. • The psychological and emotional abuse definition could benefit from examples such as humiliation and gaslighting. SJP noted that detailed examples may sit better in the procedure document rather than the policy. 4.1 Reporting Abuse. PJ questioned on how domestic abuse can be reported as it is not specified.	
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3.2.11	The Panel feels that the policy should list reporting methods, such as in person, by telephone, by email, or via an advocate, with a note that the victim's identity will always be confirmed directly.	KH
3.2.12	SJP advised Hightown is often not the first point of contact, as cases are usually already known to the police, support services, or the local authority. Where it is the first contact, procedures clearly set out required actions. The housing team includes trained DA (domestic abuse) specialists, with cases escalated to leads where needed.	
3.2.13	KH raised the option of a dedicated domestic abuse phone line, like the existing ASB mobile. The Panel strongly supported this suggestion, describing it as an achievable quick win.	
3.2.14	SJP advise Hightown currently operates an ASB(Anti-Social Behaviour) mobile for out-of-hours reporting, managed and monitored by the ASB team. It was suggested that a similar dedicated line could be introduced for domestic abuse.	
3.2.15	This could be promoted via the website and staff email signatures to provide a clear, accessible point of contact.	
	Action: Investigate dedicated domestic abuse phone line with the IT team.	
3.2.16	SG questioned 4.1 on the briefing document, what would the victim expect to happen if called into Hightown.	
3.2.17	SJP advised that the immediate response would be to provide advice and signpost accordingly.	
3.2.18	SG commented that if a customer called in would they expect more; would they want to be asked if they are safe or get somewhere safe.	
	SJP indicated that that information is listed in the procedures.	
3.2.19	SG raised the point that it appears that if Hightown have set up a phone line for reporting, but all Hightown will do is to refer elsewhere.	
3.2.20	BR advised that where disclosures are made, referrals to specialist organisations would typically be required. Concerns were raised that offering a face-to-face meeting may not always be	
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	safe or appropriate in all circumstances and an alternative should be included. 4.6–4.9 Housing Options. SG established that this is how enforcement actions should be communicated and how frequently should customers receive updates. PJ asked about supporting a victim to stay in their home but what if it the perpetrator? SJP confirmed that the policy supports victims who wish to remain in their home. Where both parties are joint tenants, enforcement action can be taken against the perpetrator under tenancy conditions. Where the perpetrator is not a tenant, action can be more complex and prolonged. In all cases, priority is given to ensuring the victim's safety and supporting them through re-housing processes where required. SG questioned the Panel as to how enforcement actions should be communicated and how frequently should customers receive updates. SJP advised that communication in domestic abuse cases is led by the victim, as circumstances can vary and regular contact may not always be safe or appropriate. Any contact arrangements are agreed between the staff member and the victim and followed accordingly. SG questioned if it was clear enough in the policy for the support given for customers to stay in their homes. Is it an option for examples to be included. KH explained that referrals can be made to Herts Home Security for property safety assessments and additional security measures. Availability is limited to Hertfordshire; however, police may also conduct assessments and install safety measures, particularly in high-risk cases. SN commented if it was worth putting in the policy a brief comment on depending on area. 4.10 Hightown may consider a management transfer.	
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3.2.30	SG queried whether the management transfer process is clear and if timescales should be included within the policy rather than requiring reference to the Allocations Policy.	
3.2.31	BR raised concerns about managing expectations, highlighting the need to clarify what happens when a suitable property is not immediately available.	
3.2.32	KH explained that delays in management transfers can occur due to reliance on property availability and legal processes, such as court proceedings.	
3.2.33	SJP clarified that the primary duty to rehouse sits with the local authority and that Hightown is constrained by nomination agreements; supported adding further explanation and potentially including timescales within this section for clarity. 5.1 Housing Officers and Home Ownership Officers receive training on domestic abuse to ensure they understand priorities, required responses, and are up to date with current legislation and good practice.	
3.2.34	SG noted that section 5.1 confirms relevant domestic abuse training is in place; queried what level of training is expected and whether additional staff groups should also receive training.	
3.2.35	BR questioned as to what training is received by staff.	
3.2.36	KH Kerry outlined the training provided to staff, including DA champion training, refresher sessions on DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking, and 'Honour'-based violence) risk assessments, and input from external agencies including NCDV (National Domestic Abuse Helpline) and IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor) workers. Tenancy sustainment officers are also MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) trained.	
3.2.37	PJ raised the point that if a dedicated telephone line was put in place, it would be monitored by trained staff.	
3.2.38	KH confirmed that it would be monitored by one of the two domestic abuse leads.	
3.2.39	SG suggested adding the word 'regular' to the training clause to make clear that training is ongoing and keeps pace with changing legislation and good practice.	

	5.4 Hightown will maintain the confidentiality of those reporting domestic abuse.	
3.2.40	KH explained the confidentiality measures in place: all domestic abuse case files are held in password-protected, named folders separate from the main housing system, to protect against subject access requests. Cases are reviewed at a six-weekly safeguarding meeting.	
3.2.41	The Panel was satisfied with these arrangements.	
	6.0 Monitoring.	
3.2.42	SG questioned how should feedback be used to improve services or responses?	
3.2.43	SJP explained that domestic abuse cases are monitored through monthly and quarterly reporting. While themes are not typically identified due to the individual nature of cases, this could be explored if patterns arise.	
3.2.44	KH informed the Panel that feedback is gathered from victims were safe to do so, including surveys and case studies, with positive outcomes highlighted. Regular reporting is undertaken via newsletters and performance data. It was noted that cases increased significantly during COVID-19, highlighting the need for ongoing monitoring and adaptability.	
3.2.45	SJP confirmed that an internal safeguarding and vulnerability meeting is held every six weeks, bringing together the tenancy support team and housing officers to review domestic abuse cases. These meetings ensure appropriate actions have been taken, identify any further support required, and provide an opportunity for ongoing learning and continuous improvement.	
3.2.46	SG suggested that examples such as isolation and controlling behaviour should be more clearly highlighted, as these may not always be recognised as forms of abuse. Including case studies was recommended to improve understanding and awareness.	
3.2.47	BR acknowledged that while difficult to address, coercive and controlling behaviour should not be overlooked.	
3.2.48	SJP It was agreed that this is an area that could be reviewed. Existing information is available on the website, but it was suggested this may need updating to improve clarity and awareness.	

3.2.49 3.2.50 3.2.51	9.0 Roles and Responsibilities. The Panel reviewed the roles and responsibilities section and were satisfied that it clearly set out the responsibilities of housing officers, home ownership officers, managers and the organisation's strategic DA lead. KH suggested adding a reference to the tenancy sustainment team, given their MARAC training and role as a potential first point of disclosure. The Panel agreed and this will be added.	
4.0 4.1 4.2	Any Other Business. SJP provided an update on the Allocations and Lettings Policy, which was reviewed by the panel at the February meeting. Shetal confirmed that all panel recommendations had been adopted. The policy has since been through senior leadership and was approved by the Operations Committee the previous week. The policy is now published and available on the Hightown website. The Customer Experience Panel logo will appear on the policy to recognise the panel's contribution. SJP introduced a forthcoming piece of work around the government's new competency and conduct requirements for housing staff, which have been incorporated into the transparency consumer standard with an October 2026 deadline. Hightown is required to develop a code of conduct and SJP proposed involving the panel in this work from the outset. The June panel meeting will be adapted to include a dedicated session on competency and conduct, rather than a standard policy review.	
5.0 5.1 5.2	Close of Meeting. Meeting closed at 8.55pm. Date of next meeting 09th June 7pm via Teams.	