

# Somer Community Housing Trust

## Resident Involvement Strategy

2009-2014



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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Somer Community Housing Trust's (SCHT) purpose is to:

- Provide homes where people can thrive
- Provide services which enable people to fulfil their potential
- Invest in the creation of neighbourhoods where people want to live

1.2 Our resident involvement strategy 2009-2014 is our commitment to involving residents in shaping services and improving neighbourhoods. We will continue to involve residents in the running of the Trust, with residents sitting on our management board, helping to make strategic decisions and contributing to our business plan.

1.3 Our overall aim is to maximise opportunities for residents to become involved in all aspects of the decision-making processes of Somer Community Housing Trust (SCHT). We will seek to involve residents in ways in which are most effective, with the main aim of involving residents we normally do not hear from. This strategy meets the strategic objectives of SCHT's Business Plan (February 2008) which puts significant importance on involving specific communities of interest, such as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, new communities, families and younger residents.

1.4 The strategy has been developed following a Best Value Review of the Trust's Resident Involvement service. Residents in partnership with staff were fully involved in the review and their priorities, comments and challenges together with national and local requirements have formulated the aims and objectives for resident involvement over the next five years.

1.5 The Trust is committed to involving residents in improving services, and residents have told us that they wish to continue being involved in deciding how services should be developed and how our communities should look in the future. Engagement of our residents is vital to the success of the organisation. We offer a variety of ways in which we engage residents at a range of levels, both formally and informally. These methods are set out in our new Resident Involvement Booklet and our Resident Partnership Agreement.

1.6 This strategy has several key objectives, and these will be delivered over the next five years, to ensure we continue to be a landlord of choice that delivers excellent services.

1.7 The following objectives form the strategy's short, medium and long term approach to resident involvement:

### **Short term**

- Increase opportunities for involvement for all sections of the community and evaluate current opportunities
- Ensure that residents are at the heart of decision making providing local solutions to local issues
- Ensure our governance structure strengthens accountability and improves transparency to residents

### **Medium term**

- Fully understand who our residents are and their needs and aspirations
- Increasingly shape our services according to resident needs and aspirations

### **Long term**

- Create neighbourhoods where people want to live
- Deliver fully customer-focussed services

## **2. Somer Community Housing Trust vision and values**

2.1 The Trust's Purpose and Values have been developed in partnership with residents, staff and partners at the end of the Trust's first ten years and the completion of its Transfer promises. The new Purpose and Values are ambitious, challenging and forward thinking and will steer the work for the next ten years to 2020.

2.2 The Trust's Values are:

- **Respect**
- **Involvement**
- **Community**
- **Affordable for our customers**

2.3 The Strategy, its goal and strategic objectives reflect the Purpose and Values of the Trust, as well as addressing the priorities detailed in the Resident Involvement Best Value Review.

2.4 The Strategy also links with the Trust's Corporate Objectives detailed in Appendix B; these links are detailed in Appendix A – Resident Involvement Action Plan. The development of the Trust's 10 year vision during 2009 will take full account of the objectives of the Resident Involvement Strategy and will fully integrate its objectives within the goals it sets out from 2010-2020.

### **3. How we involve residents in influencing decisions and improving services**

3.1 Residents have told us that offering opportunities for everybody who uses our services to have their say and be involved in how these services are run and developed, is important to them.

3.2 We know that residents overall are very satisfied with our services. A Customer Satisfaction Survey in 2007 showed that 80% of people were satisfied with the service we provide, and 65% of people responded said they were happy with the way we involve them in decisions made about their home. However, they have told us to improve how residents are involved with us, in a way that suits an individual's needs.

3.3 We currently offer residents a range of opportunities to have a say at various levels, by providing good quality information and opportunities for consultation, participation and involvement along with opportunities to be a board trustee and sit on our management board.

3.4 The following ways residents can get involved are available through our formal structure:-

- Management Board (5 Tenant Trustee places)
- Somer Residents Committee (29 places)
- Area panel
- Homeowners group
- Sustainability Forum
- Working Groups
- Resident association

The following methods allow residents to have a say in an informal way:-

- Consumer panel
- Mystery shopper
- Neighbourhood inspector
- Focus group
- Community project

The Trust will continue to involve residents in the following:-

- Repairs and maintenance decisions
- Setting and monitoring the Trust's service standards

- Reviewing and developing the Trust's policies and strategies
- Developing and reviewing neighbourhood plans
- Building of new homes
- Testing customer satisfaction
- Developing efficient services that provide value for money

#### **4. Why do we involve residents?**

4.1 The Trust prides itself on its resident involvement structure and has involved residents in its service delivery since it became a landlord in 1999. Residents have influenced the Trust's development as a community focussed organisation and their concerns and priorities have made sure we address the needs of the community and the homes our residents live in.

4.2 We do not want to involve residents in our management decisions just because we have to. We recognise that gaining views from residents has been vital for the Trust to obtain an understanding of their needs and aspirations, to continually enhance and improve services. The Trust particularly wants to improve the way residents participate in their community by providing access to activities, environmental improvement projects and opportunities which build confidence and skills.

4.3 By involving residents at the level they choose, there are many benefits for the Trust and its residents including:

- Increasing customer satisfaction
- Ensuring that policies meet the needs of residents
- Continuous improvement in service delivery
- Improving the community/environment which promotes sustainability
- Providing services that continue to give people the things that they want and need with changing circumstances
- Enhancing accountability by having a diverse representation on the board and other resident groups
- Building the capacity of both the individual, the community, the Trust and our partners

4.4 The Trust will continue to work closely with residents and other partners to regularly review the range of opportunities to get involved, to ensure that we are listening to residents and offering the right levels of involvement, that are of benefit to both residents and the organisation.

#### **5. How will we support effective resident involvement?**

5.1 To ensure that support and resources are available for effective involvement, we will:

- Listen to residents at every opportunity and at all levels within the Trust and use what we learn to make improvements
- Make sure the information we receive from residents is acted upon

- Find out how residents would like to get involved and develop these methods
- Continue to offer expenses to residents who travel to meetings using their own cars
- Continue to provide transport to and from venues for involvement activities
- Make sure venues are accessible to all, and meet the needs of all residents, especially those living in our remote communities
- Look at meeting the training and support needs of residents, identifying potential board trustees and providing them with the opportunities to sit on our management board
- Be clear with residents on what they are being asked to be involved with, how their views will be used and the limitations of the process
- Continue to support resident involvement through our Community Investment Team
- Continue to operate the Community Grant Scheme which offers funding for community projects submitted by residents
- Enable residents to have a say through their 'neighbourhood plan'
- Continue to fund resident groups that fulfil a need in the local area

## **6. The future for Somer Community Housing Trust and resident involvement**

- 6.1 The Trust has a wider role than just 'bricks and mortar' and our Community Strategy and Better Places programme will allow us to work in our neighbourhoods to make them better places to live. Resident involvement is key to the social, economic and environmental well-being of the local neighbourhoods we manage. By harnessing the interest and involvement of local people, the Trust can ensure that any investment made reflects the local needs and priorities identified.
- 6.2 The Trust has changed the way it delivers its housing services and engages its residents. 'Better Places' will provide residents with an integrated service delivery and local Neighbourhood Plans that are tailored to the needs and priorities of 15 distinct neighbourhoods and are written in partnership with residents. By 2010, each of the fifteen neighbourhoods will have a Neighbourhood Plan. The plan will be a two year agreement between the Trust and its residents which will set out how the Trust will respond to the priorities identified in each neighbourhood.
- 6.3 A major influence of change to the Trust and Housing Associations across the country is the newly formed Tenant Services Authority (TSA) which was created by the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008. The TSA will have a clear, well-focused set of powers to regulate social housing providers. These will be more extensive than the Housing Corporation's regulatory powers that they have inherited. These powers include: explicit power to set standards for social housing provision, particularly around key areas such as tenancy terms, rents, tenant involvement, viability and contributions to sustainable communities.

6.4 The Government is also giving residents a direct route to influence the national housing agenda by creating an independent body called the 'National Tenant Voice', ....*the role of the NTV will be to help tenants collectively to speak for themselves as a distinct group in society and to put their views to government and other bodies on any issue affecting social tenants.* Communities and Local Government 'Citizens of Equal Worth' 2008.

6.5 The Trust is keen to move towards resident led self regulation based on residents' views and priorities. Residents can inspect the Trust's performance, efficiency, service development, and accountability as an organisation. Currently we enable residents to comment on our services through our involvement structure. In the future we wish to improve on this by developing methods like mystery shopping and neighbourhood inspectors so that residents can scrutinise and compare our services. This will strengthen our governance arrangements to ensure that residents and service users receive high quality and value for money services.

## **7. Equality and Diversity**

7.1 The Trust will ensure involvement activities are inclusive and representative. We will give all residents the opportunity to be involved regardless of age, ability and background and will provide the support needed to enable this.

7.2 Residents have told us to be more effective in encouraging wider involvement and, to achieve this, we will research the needs of the communities within the area so that we can tailor our services to meet their diverse needs.

7.3 We will ensure that the decisions we make are based on representative views and reflect residents' expectations.

7.4 We will provide a translation service and make relevant information available on compact disc, in Braille, in large print or in another language for people who ask for it.

## **8. Delivery**

8.1 The Resident Involvement Strategy is supported by an action plan, which sets out in detail the activities, outcomes, outputs and impacts to be achieved in order to deliver on the objectives, which form part of the strategy. These activities are included within the overall planning framework of the Trust to ensure that implementation is supported by appropriate resources and integrated with other strategic and operational priorities.

8.2 The Sustainable Communities Manager (Housing & Support directorate), led by the Director of Customer Services (Housing & Support) is responsible for delivering the Trust's Resident Involvement Strategy. In taking the strategic lead, the Sustainable Communities Manager is assisted by the

Community Investment Manager and a team of seven community investment and resident involvement officers.

8.3 Resident involvement is integral to everyone's working day and the Trust will continue to train and support other staff members to undertake resident engagement activities in relation to their role.

8.4 This strategy is a 'live' document and so is subject to change. Our objectives for delivery are included in Appendix A and will be delivered during the timescale of this strategy which is five years.

## **9. Links to other Trust Operational Strategies**

9.1 Objectives identified within this Strategy will be linked to relevant Trust operational strategies and Group wide strategies, specifically:

- Community Strategy
- Housing Management
- Leasehold Services
- Asset Management
- Repairs and Servicing
- Housing with Support
- New Homes
- Procurement strategy

### **9.2 Community Strategy**

The Community Strategy has a strategic goal to empower communities by putting them at the heart of decision-making at the Trust, supporting communities to help themselves, be inclusive and get involved in issues that affect them and to maximise the reputation of the Trust as a community focused organisation. The Trust has a view that the Community Strategy and the Resident Involvement Strategy are very closely linked, and in the future will look to combine both strategies to avoid confusion and a duplication of objectives.

### **9.3 Equality & Diversity**

**9.3.1** The Trust's Equality and Diversity Strategy has a strategic goal to support residents and the wider community to ensure that they have maximum opportunities to be consulted on and participate in the delivery and development of the Trust's services.

### **9.4 Housing Management Strategy**

The Housing Management Strategy 2009 has a strategic goal to provide a visible framework for the delivery and development of excellent, customer focused, value for money housing management services to its customers.

## **10. Monitoring and review**

- 10.1 It is very important that feedback from resident involvement is used to improve services. Feedback helps us deliver an efficient and effective service.
- 10.2 We will ensure that there is a cohesive approach to resident involvement and that activities are monitored for effectiveness. Information will be analysed to ensure that the needs and priorities of residents are taken into account.
- 10.3 Information from involvement activities will be dealt with in a joined up way with service areas using results to enhance and shape services to residents. Residents will understand that as a result of involving them a certain improvement or change to policy has been made. We will communicate this information to residents through our annual impact assessment document.
- 10.4 Progress of the strategy will be reviewed annually to ensure that involvement is working well. We will review the decisions that have been taken to demonstrate evidence of resident involvement.
- 10.5 We will ensure that delivery of the Strategy is accompanied by a staff training and development programme to support cross-organisational awareness and capacity building and that job descriptions reflect the vision.
- 10.6 We will work alongside residents to monitor the successful delivery of this strategy.

## Appendix A – Resident Involvement action plan

Short term					
Corporate Objectives	RI Objective	Action/impact	Lead	Output	Timescale
1.Improve responsive repairs service 8. Improve Estate Management Service 9. Improve leaseholder services	1. Launch new menu of involvement opportunities through Resident Partnership Agreement 'Have a say'	Improved and better communicated involvement activities will enable more residents to have a say about our services	Community Investment Team	Send out new Partnership agreement in Summer edition of Somer Times – recruit new residents to activities that suit their lifestyles	Sept 2009  Measure outcome and include in impact assessment document
12. Develop Trust's structures and systems in line with Better Places	2. Develop 15 neighbourhood plans through 'Better Places' by obtaining the views of residents on improvement schemes in their area	Develop ways to involve the community in their neighbourhood plan – to encourage .	Housing Services	Encourage residents in the neighbourhood plan area to get involved through activities set out in our 'menu'	Completed by 2011  Include in annual impact assessment
	3. Impact assess all involvement activities and begin to embed across the organisation	We will continue to look at all our involvement activities and evaluate how these methods have helped improve services and created value for money– outcomes will form future involvement activities.	Community Investment Team	Distribute new impact assessment template to all staff working with residents co-ordinate feedback and produce overall impact assessment document	On-going  Include in annual impact assessment
7. Develop the Older Person's service  10. Define the growth strategy for new homes	4. Address barriers to involvement and work with under- represented groups (older people, disabled, BME , younger people) and new communities	We will ask residents how they would like to be involved with us and use this information to develop effective and innovative ways to allow all our residents to comment on services. We will work with people living in our new homes to enable engagement opportunities	Community Investment Team	Send out survey with Autumn 2009 Somer Times asking how residents would like to get involved -	2010  Include in annual impact assessment

Medium term					
	RI Objective	Action	Lead	Output	Timescale
14. Develop new measures of performance  11. Develop the involvement of residents in the governance of the Trust	5. Develop resident led self regulation	Look at current practices like mystery shopping and neighbourhood inspectors and develop ways for residents to challenge our performance.	Community Investment Team	Develop methods for residents to comment on and challenge our performance – present performance information to the SRC and look to develop a resident scrutiny group	2010  Include in annual impact assessment
14. Develop new measures of performance 11. Develop the involvement of residents in the governance of the Trust	6. Communicate how resident involvement has improved services to all residents	Evaluate all involvement activities and provide feed back to residents through a report summarised in Summer Times	Community Investment Team	Produce results of impact assessments in Somer Times annually – take information to SRC for comment	2010  Include in annual impact assessment
	7. Begin tenant audit	Carry out an audit of all our residents so we understand who they are and what their specific needs are	Housing services	Questionnaire to be sent to all residents beginning of 2010	2012 Include in annual impact assessment
14. Develop new measures of performance	8. Carry out Customer Satisfaction survey of all our residents	Find out how satisfied residents are with services, compare information with like sized landlords. Use information to continually improve and develop our services	Housing services	Send out STATUS survey 2010 – compare results with other similar sized landlords – use information to communicate to residents how we are performing	2010
11. Develop the involvement of residents in the governance of the Trust	9. Explore innovative forms of communication and involvement through new technology to encourage harder to reach	We will work with harder to reach groups like younger people and people living in remote locations and find out if they would respond to new technology as a tool for	Community Investment Team	Send survey to residents asking them if they would get involved through methods	2010  Include in annual impact assessment

	residents to have a say	involvement		like text messaging/ emailing or using blogs	
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Long term					
	Objective	Action	Lead	Output	Timescale
	10. Complete tenant audit and use information to target residents to understand their needs and concerns	We will use the information about our tenants to shape and develop our policies and practices so that we can tailor services according to need	Housing Services		2013
14. Develop new measures of performance	11. Use impact assessment information to review what works well for resident involvement and set resident involvement priorities for the future	Staff will regularly provide residents with information on how involving residents has improved services.	Community investment team	We will evaluate the impact of resident involvement and work in partnership with residents to prioritise activities in the future	2012

12. Develop Trust's structures and systems in line with Better Places	12. Better Places planning shows improvement in satisfaction with neighbourhoods	We will evaluate whether the improvements made as a result of Better Places is actually impacting on communities and is helping to make them thrive	Trust	We will look at satisfaction levels at beginning of neighbourhood planning and survey residents regularly to measure satisfaction levels	2014
1.Improve responsive repairs service 8. Improve Estate Management Service 9. Improve leaseholder services	13. Services are of a high quality, meet specific need and are customer focussed	We will increase the number and opportunities for residents involved in the Trust's work and enable them to influence policy and direction	Trust		2014
11. Develop the	14. Review Resident	We will look at all the actions in this	Community	We will carry out a	2014

involvement of residents in the governance of the Trust	Involvement Strategy	strategy in partnership with residents to find out if these actions have enabled effective involvement and as a result customer satisfaction has increased and services have improved.	Investment Team	service review of resident involvement and evaluate the agreed actions in this strategy	
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## Appendix B – Corporate objectives

### Critical Business Goals 2009-2010

Goal	SCHT Resource	Output	Outcome	Lead	Evidence of Impact	Start	Finish	Progress
<b>1. Improve the responsive repairs service</b>	£10k for backfilling posts	1. 2 <sup>nd</sup> planned intervention to check and further re-design the repairs system 2. New Performance Measures used by Board and managers to continually improve the service	Improved customer satisfaction Improved colleague satisfaction Improved system Improved value for money  Tenants satisfied	NB	Benchmark information on demand current performance and cost Embedded measures against service purpose show improved performance including tenant satisfaction Documented Service improvements and costs savings made against clear analysis of customer demand	Sept 09	Jan 10	

<p><b>2. Continued delivery of Transfer Promises</b></p> <p><b>3. Celebration of delivery of Transfer Promises</b></p>	<p>£Need to check this against budget</p> <p>£25,000</p>	<p>Need to check this against programmes. Will include PRCs, Wimpey No fines</p> <p>Programme of events to be agreed by Board in Feb 2009</p>	<p>that promises kept Regulatory Requirements adhered to</p> <p>Communication of the Trust's achievements to date High staff morale</p>	<p>NB</p> <p>AMG</p>	<p>Outcome reports to Board</p> <p>Written evidence of media coverage Staff survey in Dec 09</p>	<p>April 09</p> <p>Jan 09</p>	<p>Dec 09</p> <p>Dec 09</p>	<p>In progress</p>
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<p><b>4. Management Accounts restructured against 4 business units of DLO, affordable rented, older people's services and leasehold services and highlight service charges costs and income</b></p>	<p>Priority for SCHAT Leadership Team Finance Team</p>	<p>New management accounts structure approved by Board</p>	<p>Improved financial transparency across main business areas Improved control of service charges</p>	<p>AMG</p>	<p>Leadership team report improved financial controls at appraisal Board minutes show improved understanding of cost drivers and control activity</p>	<p>Apr 09</p>	<p>Sept 09</p>	
<p><b>5. Development of comprehensive new asset management strategy</b></p>	<p>£450,000 Priority for DCS(P) Property Asset Management team Finance Team</p>	<p>20% Stock Condition Survey, plan for 100% survey over 4 years Stock Financial Performance Model Asset Management Strategy in place giving golden thread from SCS, procurement strategy, option appraisal system</p>	<p>Improved Business Planning  Adherence to DHS,Regulatory Requirements and KLOES  Improved information given to residents via Better Places Framework</p>	<p>NB</p>	<p>Planned Investment programmes established for 5 years and published  Involvement of residents incl leaseholders in process and evidence of satisfaction with outcome  Financial Information used in Business Planning in long and short term  Information being used with Better Places teams  Deliver Decent Homes Standard by 2010  Board approval of properties for disposal  Improved value for money</p>	<p>Mar 09</p>	<p>Mar 10</p>	<p>In progress</p>

Goals	SCHT Resource	Output	Outcome	Lead	Evidence of Impact	Start	Finish	Progress
<b>6. Agree and communicate the Trust's new values, purpose and goals for 2020</b>	£25,000 Priority for Leadership Team Group Communications Team	Values, purpose, 2020 Goals including definition of service excellence agreed by Board  Communication Strategy agreed by Board and delivered	All stakeholders know what SCHT stands for and what it aims to achieve by 2020	AMG	Staff appraisals show staff understand the values, purpose and goals and their part in delivery Resident involvement events show message delivered and feedback obtained Communication with key stakeholders identified in Communication Strategy evidenced in writing and feedback captured	Jan 09	Mar 10	
<b>7. Develop the Older Person's service in line with principles of independence, personalisation and choice</b>	Priority for Housing and Support Directorate Informed by the Asset Management Strategy development Group Communications Team Finance Team HR	Strategy approved by the Board Communication Strategy developed and delivered	All stakeholders know what the Older Person's service is aiming to achieve over the next 5 years Improved partnership working	JE	Staff appraisals show that staff understand the strategy and their part in its delivery Communication to key stakeholders evidenced in writing and feedback captured Key partners have endorsed and included the strategy in their own delivery plans	Jan 09	Mar 10	
<b>8. Improve Estate Management services</b>	£10,000 Priority for Housing and Support Directorate Finance Procurement	Whole Systems working intervention	Improved system Improved performance Improved staff satisfaction Improved resident satisfaction	JE	New system documented New measures show improved performance Resident satisfaction	Apr 09	Sept 09	

<p><b>9. Improve leasehold services</b></p>	<p>£10,000 Priority for Property Directorate Finance Group Communications</p>	<p>Whole Systems Working intervention</p>	<p>Improved vfm Improved service from teams across the Group Improved resident satisfaction Improved vfm</p>	<p>NB</p>	<p>documented  New system documented New measures show improved performance Resident satisfaction documented</p>	<p>Mar 09</p>	<p>Sept 09</p>	
<p><b>10. Define the growth strategy for new homes and implement its delivery</b></p>	<p>Priority for Leadership Team Business Development Team Finance Team Communications Team</p>	<p>Statement of development and growth approved by the Board Communications Strategy</p>	<p>All stakeholders understand the Trust's growth strategy Streamlined decision making processes</p>	<p>AMG</p>	<p>Business Development Team and Trust staff appraisals show there is clarity with Trust Growth strategy and their part in its delivery</p>	<p>Feb 09</p>	<p>June 09</p>	
<p><b>11. Develop the involvement of residents in the governance of the Trust</b></p>	<p>Priority for Leadership Team Group CEO Head of Governance Communications Team</p>	<p>Resident involvement specified within Trust and Group governance documents Revised statement of resident involvement in governance goals within the Resident Involvement Strategy Communications Strategy drawn</p>	<p>Residents are involved in decision making process at all levels within the Trust  Stakeholders understand how residents are involved and how this impacts on the governance of the Trust</p>	<p>AMG</p>	<p>Key stakeholders understand the importance of resident involvement in Governance to the Trust and are able to explain the Trust's governance arrangements and how residents are involved  Governance systems comprehensively</p>	<p>Apr 09</p>	<p>Mar 10</p>	

<p><b>12. Develop the Trust's structures and systems in line with Better Places</b></p>	<p>Priority for Leadership Team Finance Team Head of Governance HR Communications Team</p>	<p>up and agreed with Board and SRC Trust structures reflect principles of neighbourhood management Action plan for review of systems to reflect neighbourhood management Communications strategy</p>	<p>Stakeholders can identify the Better Places approach within the Trust's structures</p>	<p>AMG</p>	<p>identify the involvement of residents</p> <p>Internal structures are aligned with Better Places neighbourhoods</p>	<p>Jan 09</p>	<p>Mar 10</p>	
<p><b>13. The Board, Leadership Team, staff and SRC understand and know how the Trust will respond to the changes required by the introduction of the Tenant Services Authority and the Homes and Communities Agency</b></p>	<p>Priority for Leadership Team Communication Team Head of Governance CEO of Group</p>	<p>Trust statement on what the changes are and how the Trust will respond to them agreed with the Board and the SRC</p>	<p>Stakeholders understand the main changes and how the Trust will respond to them</p>	<p>AMG</p>	<p>Responses are incorporated into work plans at all levels throughout the Trust</p>	<p>Feb 09</p>	<p>Sept 09</p>	
<p><b>14. Develop new measures of performance taking account of regulatory KPIs</b></p>	<p>Priority for Leadership Team IT Finance Communications</p>	<p>New performance measures used by managers and Board</p> <p>New format for presentation of Regulatory KPIs</p>	<p>Performance measures reported to Board are used by Managers</p> <p>Information is geared to service improvement</p>	<p>AMG</p>	<p>Performance Indicators monitor what is</p>	<p>Jan 09</p>	<p>Sept 09</p>	

<p><b>and the measures used by managers to improve performance</b></p>	<p>Team Service Improvement Manager</p>				<p>important to customers as well as regulators</p> <p>Board minutes show that indicators are used to drive service improvement</p>			
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