

# Onward Scrutiny Board Annual Review 2024

The Onward Scrutiny Board was established in 2021 with the merger of the three regional Boards that had been operating in Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Cheshire East, and Merseyside since 2018.

The Board consists of Onward customers who volunteer their time to review and scrutinise Onward's performance as a social housing provider.

In this first annual review, we explain the role of the Board, who is involved and the range of functions and responsibilities that we embrace. The review also provides us with an opportunity to look back on what we have been working on in the past financial year and to outline our ideas for how we will continue in 2024/25.

## OUR ROLE

We have a responsibility to hold Onward to account in terms of the services that they provide. We achieve this by checking Onward's performance against published targets and benchmarks. We also devise challenge questions that we present to Onward's Heads of Service at our scheduled quarterly meetings in Accrington, Didsbury and Liverpool.

We also analyse Onward's overall performance looking at quarterly service data covering areas such as rent collection, the time taken to relet empty homes, the number of complaints made about services and the time taken to carry out repairs.

Given the range of activities we undertake, we also hold fortnightly catch up meetings online to ensure that we can manage our workloads effectively. Additional meetings may also be held from time to time to review our performance or any project specific tasks that we are working on. All meetings of the Board are supported by Onward's Customer Involvement Team.

Our work as the Board provides assurance to Onward's customers that the organisation is meeting current performance standards as set out in housing legislation and by the Regulator of Social Housing.

## OUR MEMBERS

Our Board members are skilled in reviewing and analysing data; they leave no stone unturned when it comes to understanding how Onward are performing and asking the right questions.

We keep a check on performance, make recommendations for improvements, and help Onward to shape future services right across the business.

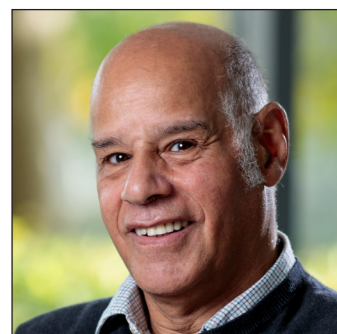
We report into the Customer Committee on outcomes, recommendations, and actions from scrutiny activities.

## GREATER MANCHESTER



### Edith

Edith lives in Salford and thoroughly enjoys her role on the Board and the many opportunities it offers. Working in administration, mainly in property development Edith re-trained in her 40's, culminating in running her own clinic in complementary and alternative medicine for over 30 years. This work led to her involvement in the Regulatory Body for therapies, setting National Occupational Standards, funded by the Department of Health. Edith also volunteers within the NHS as a PPV (Public and Patient Voice).



### Michael

Michael lives in Handforth, Cheshire, and has been involved in many areas over the years. His job roles have included an Immigration Advisor as well as being a local parish Councillor. His previous social housing experience includes being involved in the Free Range Housing Co-operative, and later representing his estate as Vice Chair of the Stock Transfer Steering Group. He has been an involved customer for many years and a member of the Board since August 2018.



### Maxine

Maxine has lived in Timperley, Cheshire for the last 20 years. Maxine became a member of the Board in 2022 as she enjoys being part of a team of residents who have a voice for all of Onward's customers. Working for a Fire & Security company for over 15 years, Maxine brings knowledge of fire safety and subcontractor outsourcing to meetings, this helps to understand things from a business and customer perspective.



### Johnny

Johnny has been a social housing tenant for nearly 13 years, eight of which have been with Onward. Johnny is passionate about equality, diversity, and inclusion, particularly ensuring that disabled customers have a voice. Johnny believes customers should be at the heart of what every housing association does. Johnny also worked as a manager in the social housing sector (since 2010) and has led customer facing teams at three Manchester based landlords including customer services, complaints, repairs contact centres, and repairs planning.

## MERSEYSIDE



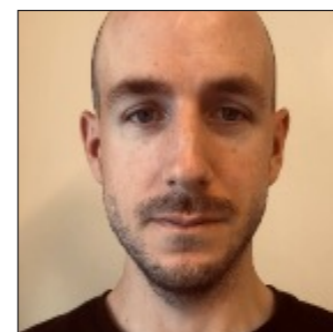
### Margaret

Margaret started Merseyside Partially Sighted and Macular Society in 1993 and is a Trustee on the Board of Bradbury Fields, Liverpool Society for the Blind and Partially Sighted People. Margaret also runs a History Group for blind and partially sighted people, contributes to the Talking Newspaper and visits schools to talk to children about history and her disability and how Nicola her guide dog helps (Nicola gets all the attention). Margaret lives St Michaels and was a carer for her husband who had Multiple Sclerosis for 32 years.



### Michael

Michael has been a tenant in Liverpool for 30 years, during which time he has been a member and actively involved in two housing co-operatives. Michael retired recently from a role as a Mental Health Support Worker. He has also had roles in lecturing, training, and advisory work. He is interested in making the most effective use of limited resources and ensuring the delivery of quality services to recognised standards. His other interests include, cooking, gardening, reading, political activism and social justice.



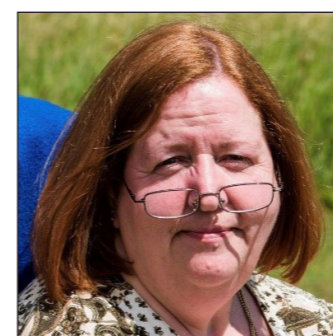
### Lawrence

Lawrence is from the Liverpool area and has been a member of the Board since the beginning of 2024. He joined the Board to advocate for fellow customers like himself and ensures feedback drives Onward's decisions. He aims to help shape strategies that improve satisfaction and overall value for customers.



### Joe

Joe has worked for a range of housing providers in Liverpool and London. He specialised in working with ownership co-operatives including the famous Weller Streets Co-operative in Liverpool and has also worked with tenant management co-operatives and as a housing officer in general needs housing. Joe lives in a flat in a converted Georgian terrace in the Canning area of Liverpool and is interested in cooking, politics, football, and science fiction. He also loves cats!



### Kathy

Kathy has lived in the Liverpool area in one of our accessible properties since 2002 and has seen her property change several associations. Kathy joined the Board several years ago and has enjoyed its entirety. The challenges the Board discuss make the services Onward deliver better for all customers. Kathy works as a Student Services Administrator at a local college, whilst also doing voluntary work for the college's Student's Union, Unison (where she is the Branch Health and Safety Officer), and with Support Dogs. She also has experience of access audits and disability issues, of which she brings her knowledge to the Board.

## LANCASHIRE



### Ira

Ira has lived in Clitheroe for 60 years. Prior to becoming an Onward customer, Ira was a Ribble Valley Homes Board member for many years, and the Treasurer for the local community centre. When she left her Board position, Ira decided to put her skills to use and join the Onward Scrutiny Board. For 20 years, Ira worked as a checkout supervisor for Booths travelling to work on her pink Italian scooter. On a Saturday Ira loves a flutter on the horses!



### Gareth

Gareth lives in the Ribble Valley and has been a member of the Board for just over a year. His background is in the arts, education and local Government. Gareth enjoys campaigning and lobbying on behalf of those who seek a voice and representation where they otherwise may not be heard. His outside interests are writing about the history of politics through time, museums, old houses, town halls, churches, and art galleries.

### Suzanne

Suzanne lives in Lancashire and has experience in criminal justice and education sectors, which she feels brings transferable skills to the Board.

## OUR WORK

We carry out scrutiny activities to explore areas of underperformance or concern. The purpose of a specific project review is to work in collaboration with Onward to improve service delivery. We look at defined areas of service to provide Onward's customers with greater accountability and transparency around different services, and receive updates on Onward's implementation of our wide-ranging recommendations to ensure that these are being progressed.

In 2023/24, our first major review was a deep dive into Onward's repairs service, with a particular focus on communication. Our published review and recommendations were sent to the Customer Committee of Onward's Board and have been incorporated into Onward's own inhouse review of the repairs service.

In 2023, Onward's Governance Review strengthened our relationship with Onward's Board through the establishment of the Customer Committee. We meet on a quarterly basis when our reports and recommendations are submitted to the Committee.

The creation of the Committee has enabled us to collaborate with Onward in a more effective and transparent manner. We feel that this has helped to improve communication and understanding between ourselves as customers and Onward's Executive Team.

We send two representatives to the Committee meetings, as well as two observers. All official minutes and background papers to do with the Committee are sent to our Board members by Onward's Governance Team.

In the past year, we have raised performance concerns with Onward covering a range of services and functions including the following:

- Relet times for properties
- Repair response times
- Rent collection levels/rent arrears levels and queries concerning rent and service charge increases.

In addition, we have taken a more proactive approach in raising performance concerns with Onward in terms of service delivery, accountability, transparency and value for money. This has covered areas such as grounds maintenance, window cleaning services, energy procurement contracts for sheltered housing schemes and the provision of practical help and support for customers through the work of Onward's Customer Accounts and Money Advice Team.

### In a wider context

We have worked with Onward's Board members to review the organisation's performance in relation to the new regulatory consumer standards ([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)) and, crucially, how we will work with Onward to improve customer influence on strategy and service provision

We have been supported by Onward to benefit from a range of training programmes that can be accessed free in person or online, working with organisations such as Tpas ([tpas.org.uk](https://www.tpas.org.uk)) and Four Million Homes ([fourmillionhomes.org](https://www.fourmillionhomes.org)). We have attended conferences in London, Manchester, Coventry and Loughborough to discuss housing legislation, best practice initiatives and how other social housing companies promote customer engagement strategies.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

We hope that this Annual Review has helped to inform you about what we have been aiming to achieve in the past year and where we plan to go in 2024/25. We have found ourselves in an ever-changing regulatory landscape. The experience has not been free of frustration and misunderstanding from time to time!

Nevertheless, we feel that our work has had value and helped to bring about some improvements in Onward's services. Through our consistent commitment to the scrutiny process, we now believe that we are making gradual positive progress in our work and partnership efforts with Onward.

In this current year, we are embarking upon our second major scrutiny review. As part of this, we will be taking a detailed look at service charges, communication and value for money, continuing with our focus on transparency and positive interactions with the Customer Committee and Customer Involvement Team.

We currently have vacancies for six more Board members, so if you are interested in joining, please get in touch by emailing [customerengagement@onward.co.uk](mailto:customerengagement@onward.co.uk) or calling **0300 555 0600**.



If you need any help understanding this document, please give us a call on **0300 555 0600**, send us a message on WhatsApp to **07793 795882**, or send an email to **customerservices@onward.co.uk**.

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