

## CUSTOMER VOICE AND INFLUENCE STRATEGY

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Stockport Homes Group (SHG) Customer Voice and Influence (CV&I) Strategy 2023-2026 builds upon the previous strategy from 2020 to 2023. It ensures SHG provides excellent opportunities for customers to engage with the organisation at all levels, from being kept informed to opting-in, to co-creating to decision making.
- 1.2. There has been and continues to be a much stronger focus on customer voice in the social housing sector, with providers preparing to demonstrate that they meet the new regulatory standards from April 2024.
- 1.3. This Strategy recognises the challenge of demonstrating transparency and accountability to customers and builds upon the existing Accountability Framework and wider community development activities, whilst continuing to raise the visibility and value of customer voice and engagement across the organisation. Maintaining and continuing to enhance SHG's culture of inclusive engagement, listening to customers and learning and acting on feedback is at the heart of this Strategy's aims.

## 2. CONTEXT

### National Context

- 2.1. From 1 April 2024, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) will have new responsibilities and powers with the serious detriment test removed and a new focus on proactive consumer regulation, including using inspections and the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) to help to monitor how providers are meeting the new Consumer Standards.
- 2.2. The new Consumer Standards reflect the Regulator's revised statutory objectives as set out in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, as amended by the Social Housing Act 2023, and the expectations set out in the Social Housing White Paper in respect of a revised consumer regulation role for the Regulator. There are currently four draft Consumer Standards:
  - The Safety and Quality Standard
  - The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard
  - The Neighbourhood and Community Standard
  - The Tenancy Standard.
- 2.3. Whilst still draft at this stage, the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard will be cross-cutting requiring landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect; ensuring tenants can access services, raise complaints, when necessary, influence decision-making and hold their landlord to account. The draft standard has seven elements:
  - Fairness and respect
  - Diverse needs
  - Engagement with tenants
  - Information about landlord services

- Performance information
  - Complaints
  - Self-referral
- 2.4. For the engagement with tenant's element, the proposed required outcome is that:
- 'Registered providers must take tenants' views into account in their decision making about how landlord services are delivered.'
- Specific expectations within the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard include giving tenants a wide range of meaningful opportunities to influence and scrutinise their landlord's strategies, policies and services including assisting tenant-led activities; providing accessible support that meets the diverse needs of tenants to enable engagement and working with tenants to improve and tailor services.
- 2.5. There are further specific expectations where registered providers are considering a change in landlord for one or more tenants, or a significant change in management arrangements. Should these circumstances arise, the landlord must consult affected tenants on its proposals at a formative stage and take those views into account in reaching a decision.
- 2.6. The TSMs were the first component of regulation to be introduced and require providers to collect, share and publish satisfaction information. The TSM's include 10 performance measures that are measured directly by landlords and 12 satisfaction measures that must be measured through tenant perception surveys. From April 2024 the first set of data will be reported to the Regulator and published. Within the measures, '*TP06 - satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenants views and acts upon them*' is most relevant to SHG's customer voice and engagement approach.
- 2.7. Following the Grenfell fire tragedy in 2017, the introduction of the Building Safety Act has placed several expectations on the management of high-rise buildings including producing a resident engagement strategy for each building within scope. The changes highlight the importance of residents feeling safe in their home and ensuring that their views and concerns are listened to and acted upon. The Building Safety Regulator has greater oversight to ensure that landlords are accountable to residents in an open and transparent way, provide accessible information including named and accountable persons responsible for building safety and a stronger voice for customers.

### **Regional Context**

- 2.8. Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) comprises ten Greater Manchester councils and the Mayor, who work with local services, businesses, communities and other partners to improve the city-region. Collectively, the GMCA has created the 'Greater Manchester Strategy 2021-2023' and accompanying Corporate Plan, which sets out a route to deliver a vision for Greater Manchester as 'a place where everyone can live a good life, growing up, getting on and growing old in a greener, fairer more prosperous city region'. The GM model is a place-based and person-centred approach, developed through joined up partnership working between agencies, the Voluntary,

Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector and integrated public services that take a proactive and preventative approach.

- 2.9. Greater Manchester Housing Providers (GMHP) is a partnership of housing providers who support the aims of the GMCA and the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership through the 'GM Tripartite Agreement'. The partnership is working to deliver a range of themes and outcomes including developing new affordable homes, preventing homelessness, zero carbon, services for older people, social value and digital and financial inclusion. The partnership supports delivering partnership projects at scale, sharing good practice and placing resident's voices at the heart of service delivery in Greater Manchester.

### **Local Context**

- 2.10. While Stockport is not considered a deprived borough overall, there are pockets of high deprivation with figures highest in Brinnington and Lancashire Hill (Census 2021). Stockport now has the biggest gap in deprivation between the most (Brinnington) and least deprived (Bramhall) wards in Greater Manchester and is the eighth most polarised borough in England with inequalities in employment, life expectancy and digitisation. Stockport's ageing population is greater than the GM average.
- 2.11. The 2021 census showed Stockport's population increased 4.1% between 2011 and 2021 to 295,000. This increase was below the national and regional averages of 6.6% and 5.2% respectively. Stockport continues to have a greater proportion of over 65s and school age children, compared to national and regional averages. The growth of the 85+ population is greater than the national average, but 65-84 is lower. Stockport has a lower proportion of people aged 15-34 compared to other areas. This is particularly driven by young adults (18-29) leaving Stockport, either for further or higher education or to find work or affordable housing. The minority ethnic population in Stockport is now 12.6% of the population, up from 7.9% in the 2011 census. Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) status was measured for the first time and 2.98% of Stockport residents aged 16 or over were LGB.
- 2.12. Engaging with communities with higher levels of poor health, high unemployment, lower income, and poorer levels of literacy is historically more challenging with formal methods of engagement traditionally presenting a barrier to involvement. Inequalities in digitalisation, particularly in the under 25s, over 75s and people with disabilities, make it imperative that those who are not digital can continue to access information and have their say through non-digital means. The Regulator will be looking to see that providers both understand and are meeting customers' needs with proposed specific expectations on how landlords communicate with customers, to ensure services are accessible including where those services are accessed digitally.
- 2.13. Stockport Homes are a partner in the One Stockport Borough Plan which sets out a vision for the Borough for 2030: continuing to create a place that works for everyone; businesses, residents, community organisations and charities. Stockport Homes' wider community development work, Civil Society and Support Strategy and customer training offer supports the delivery of the Borough Plan through supporting grassroots community activities and groups,

attracting funding, providing skills and training opportunities and empowering tenants and residents to get involved and deliver locally led engagement in their area.

- 2.14. Within the One Stockport Borough Plan, SHG are a 'Team Around the Place' (TAP) partner. TAP is the community capacity strand of Stockport Council's One Neighbourhood model and a mechanism for bringing together key, multi-agency and multi-sector connectors to identify the issues which are important to a community and to develop a multi-agency response to improve health and wellbeing for residents. TAP uses place-based data and qualitative information to identify local priorities and work collaboratively with community partners to ensure access to services, connect VCFSE and community groups, support better community engagement and focus on communities of identity and equality and inclusion priorities.

### **Stockport Homes Context**

- 2.15. Customer voice and experience is a core element of SHG's Mission of 'One team, Transforming lives' and Aim to 'be accountable to customers'. In 2023, SHG launched its new Business Plan which highlighted the recent shifts in operating environment, customer expectations and regulatory obligations. The Business Plan aims clearly set out that SHG aspires to:
- 'Deliver excellent customer service, driven by customer feedback and experience.'
- 2.16. Robust customer engagement and influence is fundamental to SHG evidencing it is achieving this aim, meeting customer expectations and prepared for significant changes in the regulatory environment. Stockport Homes has an established offer of engagement which is appropriately resourced and enables customers to engage through varied channels from informal to formal, from 'chipping in' to decision-making. Embedding customer voice at all levels of the organisation is fundamental to delivering a culture with customers truly at the heart of decision making with a 'golden thread' of customer voice from everyday interactions with customers, data, insight and engagement opportunities connected to service leads and the Board.
- 2.17. This Strategy seeks to further strengthen the Accountability Framework (Appendix One) through developing and embedding opportunities for customers to hold the organisation to account, driving inclusivity and continuing to build on SHG's community engagement and local networks to reach customers who do not engage through formal routes. Utilising new systems and data through the delivery of SHG's 'Data Strategy' will open up more opportunities for customer influence through greater depth of insight, 'hearing the silence' and more tailored and targeted engagement approaches.
- 2.18. During 2022-23, SHG captured records of participation with 1046 individuals engaged through customer and community engagement. Of those involved, 8% are from an ethnic minority background, 50% are aged under 54 and a third have a disability. This is broadly in line with Stockport Homes' customer base. Having a centralised system to capture and record engagement and using the CX Feedback system for surveying will improve the accuracy of capturing and creating one picture of engagement across the organisation.

### 3. ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

3.1. The previous Customer Voice and Influence Strategy 202-2023 set a renewed focus on developing the customer voice culture across SHG, increasing accountability to customers, and widening engagement opportunities. The Strategy has delivered some key achievements including:

- Achieving 93% in the Tpas Landlord Accreditation of Engagement providing assurance that SHG's engagement approach is robust and in line with the requirements in the National Standards for Engagement.
- Internally developing the customer voice culture and raising the profile and understanding of customer engagement through an engagement partnering approach, aligning skills and expertise within the Customer and Community Engagement Team with service leads across the organisation. This approach has improved forward planning, aligned resources, and avoided duplication. SHG's engagement structure has gained recognition in the sector as good practice featuring at a number of sector events including the Chartered Institute of Housing's (CIH) Housing 2022 Conference and the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA) Chief Officers Conference.
- Creation of a Colleague Customer Voice and Experience Champions group bringing together staff representatives from across the organisation to share and celebrate good practice in customer experience and engagement and to champion customer excellence and 'bring it to life' in their services. This has included an annual week of action focused on customer excellence, experience and engagement including training and information sessions for colleagues.
- Launch of an engagement toolkit and style guide for colleagues supporting consistent delivery of engagement approaches, utilising insight, planning for outcomes and closing the feedback loop.
- A closer partnership with the Rainbow Roofs LGBTQ+ tenants organisation providing an opportunity to hear LGBTQ tenants voices on issues of importance including anti-social behaviour and hate crime. This partnership facilitated a collaboration on a bespoke stigma in social housing training course for colleagues, raising awareness of stigma and how SHG's tenants are impacted using real life examples.
- Revised report covering sheets to amplify customer voice and experience in reports to Board requiring service leads to demonstrate how reports and recommendations are shaped using customer insight and feedback.
- A refreshed menu of involvement with the introduction of new methods of engagement to offer customers more ways to monitor services and hold SHG to account including Customer Inspectors, the Building Safety Residents' Panel, 'Walk and Talk' events and Building Safety pop-ups in high rise blocks.
- A proactive approach to developing residents' engagement in building safety and best practice in communicating with residents about safety in

their home. This has included feedback gathered through two Customer Roadshows and used to inform the Resident Engagement in Building Safety Strategy and accompanying customer friendly booklets. Stockport Homes' approach has been cited as good practice by the Tpas and NFA.

- New community groups established in priority areas at Lancashire Hill and the Mottram Street estate, which facilitate conversations with residents, partners and stakeholders and empower residents to help each other and take action. Community groups have successfully bid for funding to offer warm spaces and school holiday and seasonal activities for residents.
- Introduction of the CX Feedback system, facilitating a centralised approach to consultation and surveying and more accurate capturing of engagement and feedback through surveys.

## 4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1. A wide range of customer insight and consultation has been used to shape this Strategy. This includes feedback and learning from the Tpas Landlord Accreditation of Engagement<sup>1</sup> which included a survey of staff, focus groups with involved customers and interviews with non-involved customers. The findings and recommendations from the Accreditation have informed this Strategy.
- 4.2. Two customer focus groups facilitated more in-depth discussions about engagement and opportunities to be involved along with a wider consultation shared online and through targeted email and text invitations to customers with 170 responses. Feedback showed that most customers want to be kept informed and have opportunities to occasionally contribute via surveys and service reviews. Involved customers requested more opportunities to collectively meet, stronger links between formal methods of engagement and action trackers enabling customers to more effectively see the difference their involvement makes on a longer-term basis.
- 4.3. Consultation with the Board via a customer voice webinar highlighted that the Board would like to hear more from customers directly and through a greater variety of methods other than reports. Utilising data to 'show the workings out' and illustrate how services are using insight to inform decisions was also a focus along with more information on how informal engagement in day-to-day interactions and through face-to-face engagement in communities enables SHG to hear the voices of those who don't otherwise get involved.
- 4.4. Consultation with service leads through engagement partnering and the colleague Customer Voice and Experience Champions showed that the business partnering approach is valued and supporting better engagement, consultation and feedback to customers. Service leads asked for further

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<sup>1</sup> The Tpas Landlord Accreditation of Engagement offers an independent check and challenge of a providers approach to engagement against the national standards. The standards are based on current regulatory requirements.

training for colleagues to further develop understanding of customer engagement methods.

- 4.5. The learning from these consultation activities has informed the actions in this Strategy.

## 5. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Measures and the expected outcomes for each objective are included in the Action Plan at Appendix Two. Delivery of the objectives and actions in this Strategy will continue to develop SHG's customer voice journey and satisfy the expected regulatory requirements for engagement with tenants.

### 5.1. OBJECTIVE ONE: OPPORTUNITIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Stockport Homes have an established and varied menu of engagement which offers customers opportunities to get involved at all levels, from Tenant Board Members to filling in a survey at home or taking part in a community activity. Continuing to evolve the framework will create more opportunities for customers to get involved and share their feedback in a way that is responsive to preferences. This includes developing routes for customers to hold the organisation to account on compliance with the regulatory standards and risk.

Objective One Actions:

- Launch and embed the Customer Assurance Panel developing transparency principles with the Panel that include monitoring performance against key compliance risk and tracking outcomes from engagement. Aim to ensure the Panel is broadly representative of SHG's customer profile.
- Review the approach to involving customers in complaints to give customers regular oversight of customer feedback, complaints responses and tracking how learning from complaints is improving services.
- Develop the Customer Inspectors programme, recruiting new inspectors and ensuring learning from inspections feeds into the wider engagement framework.
- Develop approach to targeted engagement with Leaseholders and Shared Owners based on good practice.
- Complete a review of the Tpas contractor standards for repairs and develop and implement the action plan.
- Offer a range of ways for customers to talk to SHG about the safety of their building, bringing issues to attention, and assurance they are heard and actioned. Share feedback, learning and outcomes from building safety activities consistently and in a variety of ways that meets different needs and communication preferences.

### 5.2. OBJECTIVE TWO: ACCESS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Providing accessible support that meets the diverse needs of tenants to enable engagement is a focus for the Regulator. Holding robust information about tenant's communication preferences and needs will be key to SHG effectively targeting and supporting tenants to engage. Community partnerships, organisations and networks are integral to reaching customers who may otherwise not engage or face barriers to involvement, particularly customers with disabilities, from ethnic minority backgrounds, LGBTQ+ tenants and younger people.

Community work is integral to SHG knowing its neighbourhoods, hearing from those who do not otherwise engage and supporting and collaborating with residents to create positive change. Often the relationships formed through face-to-face community work are the first stepping-stone to further involvement providing a pathway to other opportunities.

Objective Two Actions:

- Map organisations in Stockport that support and connect with customers in the community such as ethnic minority, LGBTQ+ and disability organisations and networks and action plan to make best use of partnership working to reach a wider range of customers with diverse needs.
- Connect customers in high-rise accommodation to the work of the Building Safety Residents Panel more effectively, sharing feedback, learning and outcomes in a consistent way and tailored to individual requirements.
- Offer opportunities for face-to-face engagement and be visible in SHG's communities through the annual Roadshow, a programme of 'connecting communities' events and supporting partner and stakeholder activities.
- Explore options to further develop digital and more sophisticated targeted engagement and communication through CX Feedback and other digital methods.

### 5.3. OBJECTIVE THREE: VISIBLE CUSTOMER VOICE AND ENGAGEMENT

To truly have customer voice at the heart of service delivery, engagement must be visible, part of everyone's role at SHG and supported by on-going activity and internal communications at all levels of the organisation.

Objective Three Actions:

- Develop the role of the Customer Voice and Experience Champions and share learning and outcomes from the group.
- Develop ways other than reports to share customer voice and engagement more consistently, using videos, quotes, storytelling and case studies to increase awareness and 'bring it to life' for colleagues and the Board.
- Raise awareness of stigma in social housing and roll out the e-learning training module for colleagues.

- Deliver and review the impact of the Customer Excellence Training programme alongside bitesize or e-learning training in customer voice and engagement for colleagues.
- Promote the Menu of Involvement to raise awareness of engagement opportunities and create a register of interest and pool of scrutiny customers to support task and finish scrutiny reviews and targeted engagement that enables and supports more customers to be involved.
- Create opportunities for involved customers to meet and share learning and ideas.

#### 5.4. OBJECTIVE FOUR: INSIGHT AND IMPACT

Every touchpoint with a customer is recognised as some form of engagement and captured as data which is used to drive change. Stockport Homes focuses on the difference customer voice and engagement makes and tracks and evidences the outcomes of engagement and shares these with customers.

Objective Four Actions:

- Utilise data and customer insight in engagement partnering to inform decision making and evidence how Stockport Homes listens and learns from customer feedback.
- Use data and insight to 'know the silence' and develop informal and targeted engagement methods that are responsive to customers' needs to address gaps in involvement and ensure engagement is representative of SHG's customer base.
- Develop a quarterly Customer Voice Report to be shared with the Customer Assurance Panel and the Board which collates, analyses and sets actions using customers feedback gathered through formal engagement methods and informal and formal feedback.
- Develop an impact report or continual improvement log validated through data and accurate record keeping using a 360-degree approach to review the impact and outcomes from engagement that captures examples of engagement, listening, learning and acting on feedback and the difference it makes.

## 6. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

- 6.1. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken on this Strategy which identified a number of actions that have been included. This included reviewing organisations in Stockport that support people from ethnic minority backgrounds, the LGBTQ+ community and people living with disabilities to forward plan partnership working which is an action in Objective Two. Actions around ensuring engagement is representative of SHG's customer base are included in Objective One and Four.

## 7. LINKS TO OTHER STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

- 7.1. This Strategy links to several other SHG Strategies and Policies, including:
- Civil Society and Support Strategy

- Customer Access Strategy
- Customer Expenses Policy
- Customer Feedback Policy
- Data Strategy
- Digital Transformation Strategy
- Equality and Diversity Strategy
- Social Investment Strategy
- Marketing and Communications Strategy
- Value for Money Strategy
- Age Friendly Strategy

## **8. ACTION PLAN**

- 8.1. All actions within this Strategy have been developed into an action plan attached at Appendix Two. Targets for each outcome will be identified and reported.

## **9. OWNERSHIP, MONITORING AND REVIEW**

- 9.1. The Head of Customer Access is the owner of this Strategy and responsible for the implementation and ongoing monitoring of progress against objectives and outcomes.
- 9.2. The Strategy will be monitored by the Customer Voice and Experience Champions and the new Customer Assurance Panel, once implemented. An annual impact assessment will be reported to the Customer Focus Committee and customers, highlighting outcomes and achievements.