

Customer Engagement Strategy



2017 - 2020

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this three-year Strategy is to ensure that we have structures and mechanisms in place to facilitate effective customer engagement. This will empower customers, improve services and create robust accountability within a framework of co-regulation¹ and service improvement.
- 1.2 Customer engagement has been, and must continue to be, a dynamic, evolving service which serves the needs and requirements of our customers and the business. Our aim is to establish and implement a Customer Engagement Strategy that puts customers at the heart of shaping our services by creating opportunities for them to support or challenge our performance, and to work with us to achieve our vision.
- 1.3 This overarching Strategy is supported by a detailed Action Plan that sets out timescales for each piece of work.
- 1.4 A customer facing document has also been produced to outline our Customer Involvement Options.

2. Our Customers

- 2.1 By 'customer'² we mean private individuals living in one of our properties or in receipt of a service we provide.
- 2.2 This includes tenants, factored residents, shared owners and Telecare customers. We acknowledge that we also have a role in wider communities and will endeavour to be inclusive wherever appropriate.

¹ Co-regulation - where customers, staff and the Board work together to scrutinise and improve Hanover's performance and **internal** regulatory arrangements (it does not refer to external regulation)

² 'Customer' is used throughout the Strategy except where the context is only applicable to residents

3. Core Values

3.1 Our values are:

- **Quality:** we will ensure that our staff provide the best possible housing and services to our customers and act with integrity at all times
- **Value for money:** we will ensure that our customers pay a fair price for the quality of products and services they receive
- **Trust:** we will be open, honest and transparent in everything we do for our customers
- **Inclusion:** we will where possible give our customers the opportunity to participate in the design, development and delivery of our housing and services
- **Wellbeing:** we will create a safe and secure environment respecting our customers' needs and wishes and promote dignity for all

3.2 We will help our customers to live the lives they want by providing them with modern and safe accommodation and supporting services. We will promote their wellbeing, enabling them to live as healthy, independent and secure lives as possible and will encourage and assist their participation and involvement in their communities.

3.3 Our **strategic priorities** relevant to this document are to:

- Articulate our **purpose/objectives** to be achieved through customer engagement.
- Consider **options and opportunities** for enabling effective customer engagement.
- Recommend approaches/methods for **improving the quantity/quality** of customer engagement.
- Consider and promote **Board member engagement** with customers

Also our Business Plan 2016-19 includes the following relevant Priority Actions

- Provide and deliver a progressive **customer engagement** strategy and plan (reference P8 of the Business Plan);
- **Undertake surveys** for our tenants, Telecare customers and owner occupiers to **assess customer service** and aim to improve service delivery over the plan period (reference H4 of the Business Plan);
- Use **learning from customer complaints** and management of antisocial behaviour to improve our performance (reference H5 of the Business Plan);
- Develop a framework for **volunteering** that supports customer engagement and Hub and Spoke service model (reference SS4 of the Business Plan);
- Establish **factoring** strategic business unit and deliver **improved customer engagement** and financial information with owners (reference P8 of the Business Plan).

Additionally from our ICT Strategy 2016-19 this objective is of relevance:

- **Promote Digital Inclusion** – Involving the provision of WiFi on developments (reference 21).

4. Introduction

- 4.1 Customer engagement is key to all service areas within the business. This three-year Strategy has been developed in partnership with customers, Board Members and staff, and sets out clearly our objectives for involving customers in service improvement, and engaging with them to ensure that the services we deliver are wanted, needed and meet expectations.
- 4.2 Why do we involve our customers?
- To ensure customer priorities shape our services
 - To ensure we are accountable to those who use our services
 - To ensure customers contribute to shaping our services
 - To ensure well trained customers can monitor and scrutinise the performance of our business
 - To ensure customers can scrutinise the services we provide to make sure they are value for money
 - To ensure the services we provide meet the satisfaction of our wider customer base
 - To ensure we comply with the Scottish Government's Housing Charter
- 4.3 We are committed to working in partnership with our customers to influence and monitor how well we deliver our services. We recognise that effective engagement can provide us with more customer focussed and responsive services, greater value for money and increased customer satisfaction. This Strategy is not limited to increasing the numbers of actively involved customers, but also seeks to improve the quality of customer engagement and outcomes.

5. The Benefits of Customer Engagement

- To place our customers at the heart of everything we do
- To increase customer satisfaction
- To give customers more choice about the services they receive
- To enhance quality of life through interaction and companionship, and reduce social isolation
- To assist staff and Board members to carry out their work effectively
- To enable customers to have a positive involvement in our work
- To raise customer expectations thereby enabling us to achieve continuous improvement across all services.

6. The National Agenda

- 6.1 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced a requirement for Registered Social Landlords to prepare a Tenant Participation Strategy, which had to set out meaningful, achievable and measureable targets, and be drawn up in consultation with tenants. The Act also introduced the Registered Tenants' Organisation as a key vehicle for tenant participation.
- 6.2 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 created two new fundamental changes in social housing in Scotland. These are the Scottish Social Housing Charter and the Scottish Housing Regulator.
- 6.3 The [Scottish Social Housing Charter](#) came into force in April 2012. Two of the Charter's specific outcome requirements are around customer engagement:

6.3.1 **Participation**

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

This outcome describes what landlords should achieve by meeting their statutory duties on tenant participation. It covers how social landlords gather and take account of the views and priorities of their tenants; how they shape their services to reflect these views; and how they help tenants and other customers to become more capable of involvement.

6.3.2 **Communication**

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

Tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

This outcome covers all aspects of landlords' communication with tenants and other customers. It is not just about how clearly and effectively a landlord gives information to those who want it. It also covers making it easy for tenants and other customers to make complaints and provide feedback on services, using that information to improve services and performance, and letting people know what they have done in response to complaints and feedback. It does not require landlords to provide legally protected, personal or commercial information.

- 6.4 The Scottish Housing Regulator ensures that every Social Landlord is meeting the requirements of the Charter. They do this by means of a return on the Charter every year (called the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC)). If a landlord is failing to meet the standards of the Charter the regulator has a number of special powers to ensure that service improvements take place within the organisation.
- 6.5 The Charter currently requires Landlords to involve residents in decision making activities, however during 2016 the Charter is being reviewed in consultation with all stakeholders and interested parties.
- 6.6 It is expected the new charter will place more emphasis on Customer Scrutiny. Scrutiny is the process whereby customers critically analyse our performance and make recommendations around where services should be improved. It may also involve customers being represented at Board (or equivalent) levels in the governance of the organisation. Any increased level of customer involvement, such as scrutiny, needs to be well planned and carefully considered to ensure that it delivers positive outcomes for customers, the Board and staff.

7. Consultation

In the formulation of this Strategy a large number of customers, Board Members and staff have been consulted and their views have been taken into account. Consultation took place across developments and at focus group and RTO meetings. A Board session was organised and feedback received from board members. A draft strategy was sent to interested customers and their views have been incorporated into this strategy.

8. Our Vision for Customer Engagement

- 8.1 We intend to further develop the excellent customer engagement already taking place within our housing developments. We also intend to implement some new ways of engaging with our customers over the next 3 years. This will include further support for tenants' conferences and a review of the consultation on rent setting.
- 8.2 We aim to have a consistent and dedicated approach to involving our customers and giving them a real voice in service development and scrutiny. Our aim is to provide opportunities for more local engagement and we will empower staff and volunteers to support this.
- 8.3 This Strategy recognises that there are fundamental changes in housing policy towards co-regulation and better value for money, which requires social landlords to listen and fully engage with their customers as a matter of priority. With this in mind we aim to build upon our menu of involvement opportunities and develop innovative ways of engaging our customers. We will develop structured training to ensure customers have the knowledge, ability and skills to achieve effective involvement in our business.

- 8.4 We also recognise the need to ensure meaningful engagement for frailer and older customers, both at a formal and informal level. It is now nationally recognised that there are substantive issues of social isolation and loneliness amongst older people, and we will aim to improve and create ways of engagement to mitigate these issues.
- 8.5 We will grow our partnerships with external agencies to allow wider communication and engagement with our customers and will develop our use of social media.
- 8.6 The following is a list of the current resident engagement opportunities which will be developed over the period of the Strategy. We will provide an annual update on these and future, planned opportunities:
- (a) Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs)
RTOs are formal tenant groups that are usually development based and represent each member's housing and related interests.
 - (b) Grapevine Newsletter Editorial Group
The Grapevine is our residents' newsletter. A group of customers and staff form the editorial panel for the Grapevine.
 - (c) Tenants' Focus Groups
Tenants' focus group meetings take place twice a year in the three geographical locations of Scotland (North, East and West). These are an opportunity for Registered Tenants' Organisations and any interested tenants to come together to discuss housing and support services.
 - (d) Social Media
We will use all forms of Social media available. Currently we use Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. However social media is changing at such a rapid rate that over the lifetime of the Strategy if any new form of media become available we will consider its use.

Currently the residents have their own Facebook site, Hanover Blether. The blether was the idea of a resident and residents and staff work together to make this a place where people can discuss problems, joys or just the weather. Over the period of the strategy staff will work with residents to ensure more people have the capacity to use social media.

(e) Social Committees

A number of developments have social committees. These are set-up and run by residents to organise social events and outings for their developments.

(f) Volunteering

Volunteering aims to make a positive difference to our customers' lives as well as the wider community. It is expected that it will help combat isolation and social exclusion, issues that disproportionately affect older people.

We will be encouraging customers to volunteer in their developments and local communities, and will also be working with staff to help provide customer focused volunteering opportunities. The Volunteer Coordinator, will discuss with interested customers their particular volunteering requirements, and where requested, will assist with arranging volunteers within developments from local communities and voluntary organisations. They will also build up a comprehensive database of the full range of social activities that customers participate in at our developments and ensure that this information is widely available.

(g) Customer Panel & Virtual Panel

A joint customer and staff panel will provide the opportunity for customers to work in partnership with staff to consider how services are delivered and make recommendations for change or improvement. These recommendations would feed into the Chief Officers and Board team. Following a selection process training and support will be offered for any customer who would like to be part of the panel. Membership of the panel will be time limited to ensure a periodic rotation of members.

Meetings would take place at accessible venues and, to maximise customer involvement, modern conference technologies could be used where necessary.

The Virtual Panel will be an advisory group to the Customer Panel for those who are unable to attend Customer Panel meetings. This is where any findings, documentation and information could be sent to a person for their comments.

(h) 20/20 Vision

The 20/20Vision group will review documents going out to our customers to ensure that they are easy to read and understand. A 20/20 Vision stamp of approval will go onto all documents approved by the group. Group members will be able to participate from their homes making this an opportunity open to most customers.

(i) E-views

E-Views will be a dedicated feedback service to enable us to take customers views into account when shaping our services. The site will be updated regularly and we will ask for feedback on certain topics. There will also be regular online polls and surveys on the topics raised as well as a chance for customers to ask questions of their own. As this is an internet site it will be accessible 24 hours a day seven days a week.

(j) Development Walkabouts

In conjunction with staff development 'walkabouts' will be scheduled twice a year and customer volunteers will look around their development, giving their views on any communal repairs which have been undertaken, reporting any new repairs, looking at the landscaping standard and making recommendations for any improvements. Support and training will be offered for participant customers.

Findings will be reported to the Housing Officer on a special report card. The Housing Officer will feedback the outcomes

of the report card to the customers at each participating development, along with any planned or completed work.

- 8.7 All methods of engagement are either local, regional or national and the customer facing document will make a clear distinction about what form of engagement is available as this may influence a person's decision on choice. This will be colour coded within the document.

9. Staff Engagement, Involvement and Training

- 9.1 To ensure that there is a consistent culture of engagement it is essential that all staff engage well with customers.
- 9.2 To achieve this we will ensure that we consult and engage with staff and that adequate training is provided. Our aim is to provide a consistently high level of quality engagement and communication, which in turn will increase customer satisfaction.
- 9.3 Ongoing training around the importance of engaged customers will form part of the action plan (see the Action Plan). Staff and customers will work together through the strategy to ensure that the needs and aspirations of customers are at the heart of business decisions.
- 9.4 An annual survey of a sample of staff involved at the frontline with customers will be undertaken to assess the impact customer engagement activities are having.

10. Monitoring

- 10.1 The operation and outcomes of this Strategy are monitored and evaluated. We will put in place a measurable and realistic action plan which will be reviewed and updated annually over the 3 year period and will detail how we will implement this Customer Engagement Strategy (see appendix 1). We will monitor the items identified in the action plan to ensure that they are consistent with

our Strategic Priorities and reasons set out for involving our customers. We will also:

- Continuously strive to improve services
- Make the best use of resources
- Work effectively and efficiently to achieve the required results
- Assess the impact of our Customer Engagement opportunities
- Assess that Customer Engagement activities are Value for Money.

10.2 A database will be developed where all engagement activities are captured and meaningful outcomes are developed and monitored through the system. Social return on investment (SROI)³ will also be assessed which will include monitoring any reduction in social isolation achieved through the introduction of this strategy.

11. Costs

The approximate costs of Customer Engagement in the first year of the programme (2017-18) are:

- **Total Activity budget requirement (inc VAT) - £17,000, the primary elements of which are:**
 - Initial staff and customer training - £6,000. This will be undertaken by TIS (The Tenant Information Service).
 - Customer engagement operations - £8,500 (covering travel expenses, subsistence, events and all other associated costs).
 - The budget requirements for the second and third years of the strategy are envisaged to be of a similar level though this will be closely monitored
- **Direct staff costs: £ 30,000⁴**

³ SROI is a method for measuring 'extra-financial' value (that is environmental and social value not currently reflected in conventional financial accounts) relative to resources invested. We will look to utilise the Housing Associations Charitable Trust or HACT (<http://hact.org.uk/social-value-services>) tools which provide a low costs means of assessing SROI.

⁴ 100% of the Administrative Assistant (Customer Engagement)'s time and 20% of the Performance Manager's time.