

Customer Engagement Strategy

2021-2024

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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 strategy is developed to build on the previous strategy and continue to strengthen the ways residents can engage with Hanover Scotland. Strong customer engagement leads to better decisions. Customers are empowered and services are improved. This creates an environment of robust accountability within a framework of co-regulation¹ and service improvement.
- 1.2 Customer engagement has been, and must continue to be dynamic and serve the needs and requirements of our customers and the business. Our aim is to build on previous Customer Engagement work that puts customers at the heart of shaping our services.
- 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 At Hanover Scotland we have four key values:

- Above and beyond
- Simple solutions for live
- Putting the customer first
- Health, happiness and independence

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 Hanover and their communities.

3.3 Our **strategic priorities** within our Business Plan 2019-22 relevant to this document are:

- Customer Engagement and Scrutiny (Priority Actions P25-P27)
- Tenant and Owner Satisfaction (Priority Actions P28-P31)

Our Business Plan 2019-22 includes the following relevant Priority Actions

- Develop a framework for **volunteering** that supports customer engagement and Hub and Spoke service model (reference P25 of the Business Plan);
- Deliver improved customer engagement and production of **financial information** with owners (reference P26 of the Business Plan);
- **Hanover HEART** customer panel to assess the Communications Strategy and Customer Service Standards (reference P27 of the Business Plan);
- Undertake **annual surveys** for our tenants and owner occupiers to assess customer service and aim to improve service delivery over the plan period (reference P28 of the Business Plan);
- Use **learning from customer complaints** and management of antisocial behaviour to improve our performance (reference P29 of the Business Plan);
- Achieve minimum **tenant satisfaction** rate of 95% and **owner satisfaction** rate of 85% (reference P30 of the Business Plan);
- Develop and implement a **Customer Satisfaction Improvement Plan** (reference P31 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 Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 sets out the statutory objective, functions, duties and powers of the Scottish Housing regulator. In 2019 the Scottish Housing Regulator published the Regulation of Social Housing in Scotland³ in response to their statutory obligations. In addition to satisfying the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter, the framework sets out Standards of Governance and Financial Management that each Registered Social Landlord must evidence that they comply with.
- 6.6 Standard 2 states:

The RSL is open about and accountable for what it does. It understands and takes account of the needs and priorities of its tenants, service users and stakeholders. And its primary focus is the sustainable achievement of these priorities.

³ <https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/for-landlords/regulatory-framework#section-1>

7. Consultation

A draft copy of this strategy was sent to the HEART scrutiny panel and other 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 intend to build on the current opportunities for engagement to make them meaningful and relevant.
- 8.2 The Tenants and Owners satisfaction surveys carried out in 2019 noted levels of satisfaction of 74% and 59% respectively for % satisfied with opportunities to participate in decision making. We want to improve these levels and will monitor satisfaction over the course of this strategy.
- 8.3 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 build on our current opportunities for local engagement and we will empower staff and volunteers to support this.
- 8.4 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. Where required, we will provide training to ensure customers have the knowledge, ability and skills to achieve effective involvement in our business.
- 8.5 We also recognise the need to ensure there are meaningful engagement opportunities for all of our residents, including 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. We will develop our Volunteering service through the development of a strategy (Action 4).

8.7 Covid-19 has had a fundamental impact on how we carry out customer engagement. Due to restrictions, it has not been possible to facilitate the usual meeting based engagement activities. During the pandemic staff have been in contact directly with residents, checking on their welfare and ensuring they have what they need. Engagement has been on an individual basis and we have had to adapt our approach to respond to the situation. Feedback from those residents receiving calls has been positive with 95% saying they found the calls useful. Comments received demonstrate residents appreciated the calls. As part of the strategy going forward, we will continue to offer telephone befriending by staff (Action 11).

8.8 We see digital as a key way of engaging with customers in the future. Although the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift to online services, moving towards providing more digital interaction is the future and future customers will expect this provision. We will embrace the move towards digital and we will develop our digital and online opportunities to engage with our customers. We will set up a digital facility to allow online meetings (Actions 1, 3 & 4).

We recognise that not all residents want to contribute through attendance at meetings. Digital platforms allow customers to contribute in different ways. As well as holding online meetings, we will develop an online platform that supports other ways of allowing customers to engage with us. We will develop ways of participating remotely through a digital platform (Actions 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12 & 13).

We want all residents to be confident in their digital skills. We will support this by developing a training programme to assist residents to improve their skills and access online facilities. We will also set up a digital device lending library to provide equipment to encourage residents to learn and improve their digital skills (Action 8).

8.9 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) Annual Development Meeting / Property Council Meeting

The Annual Development Meeting for tenants and the Property Council Meetings for Factored owners are held annually. These meetings provide an opportunity for residents and staff to share information about development based matters, including making decisions about the development and reviewing financial information. Where meetings are not possible due to restrictions, we will facilitate discussions through feedback forms and one to one meetings if required. We will develop a digital platform to support participation in development based matters remotely (Action 1).

(b) Development Walkabouts

In conjunction with staff, development walkabouts will be scheduled twice a year. 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 are reported to the Housing Officer. 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 (Action 2).

(c) Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs)

RTOs are formal tenant groups that are usually development based and represent each member's housing and related interests (Action 3).

(d) 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. We will continue to support residents run social groups and support this with volunteers (Action 4).

(e) 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. We will review the remit and format of the Tenants' Focus Groups and develop ways of participating in the Focus Groups remotely (Action 5).

(f) HEART Scrutiny Panel & Virtual Panel

The HEART Scrutiny Panel work in partnership with staff to consider how services are delivered and make recommendations for change or improvement. These recommendations feed into the Chief Officers and Board team. The HEART panel meet with the Board annually to review panel outcomes and monitor progress of recommendations.

HEART panel members receive training and support. Membership of the panel is time limited to ensure a periodic rotation of members. Meetings take place at accessible venues and, to maximise customer involvement, modern conference technologies can be used where necessary.

The Virtual Panel is a group who are unable to attend Customer Panel meetings but want to be involved in the process. Virtual Panel members are asked to review documents and provide input to Scrutiny activities.

We will review the format and remit of the HEART Scrutiny Panel and Virtual Panel (Action 6).

(g) Grapevine Newsletter Editorial Group

The Grapevine is our residents' newsletter. A group of customers and staff form the editorial panel for the Grapevine. We will review the remit of the group and develop ways of participating in the group remotely (Action 7).

(h) E-views

E-Views will be a dedicated digital platform that enables us to engage with customers digitally and take their 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 specific topics as well as a chance for customers to ask questions of their own. We will use this platform to allow customers to review and give feedback on documents. As this is an internet site it will be accessible 24 hours a day seven days a week.

We will develop a digital platform to host E-Views (Action 9)

(i) 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. We will develop our use of social media and range of social media platforms (Action 10).

(j) Volunteering

Volunteering makes a positive difference to our customers' lives as well as the wider community. It combats isolation and social exclusion, issues that disproportionately affect older people.

We will develop a Volunteering Strategy to build on current volunteering opportunities that meet the needs of residents (Action 11)

(k) Tenant Conference

Every second year, Hanover tenants have the opportunity to come together for the Tenants' Conference. Tenants hear about the work of Hanover and can participate in workshops. The conference usually takes place in a location in central Scotland. We will continue to hold a Tenant conference every two years. Where a meeting is not possible due to restrictions, we will facilitate an online conference (Action 12).

(l) National Owners Panel

The National Owners Panel was created to allow a forum for Factored owners to come together to share experiences and give feedback on the services provided to them by Hanover.

The National Owners Panel meets annually in the Spring with a follow up Regional Owners Panel meeting in the Autumn. We will hold an annual National Owners Panel meeting and Regional Owners Panel. Recommendations for improvements from the National and Regional Owners Panels will be reported annually to the Board.

Where a meeting is not possible due to restrictions, we will facilitate an online meeting (Action 13).

8.10 To ensure customer engagement is incorporated into all aspects of Hanover Scotland we will engage tenants in the following key activities:

Activity	Means of engagement
Decisions about communal areas in Developments eg. carpets / lounge furniture / decoration / gardens	Annual Development meetings Development Walkabouts
Making choices for individual kitchen and bathroom installation	Directly with each tenant
Setting specifications for planned maintenance eg. kitchen / bathroom / heating systems	HEART scrutiny panel Tenant Focus Groups E-Views
Annual rent setting consultation	Annual Development meetings Tenant Focus Groups Rent survey E-Views
Annual tenant satisfaction survey	Postal survey E-Views
Preparation and reporting of performance information	HEART scrutiny panel Tenant Focus Groups E-Views
Review of Business Plan priorities	HEART scrutiny panel Tenant Focus Groups E-Views
Policy updates / changes	HEART scrutiny panel Tenant Focus Groups E-Views

We will develop and communicate an annual Timetable of Engagement to set out all opportunities to engage with Hanover each year (Action 14).

8.11 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 (Action 14).
- 9.3 A survey of a sample of staff involved at the frontline with customers will be undertaken to assess the impact customer engagement activities are having (Action 14).

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 maintained where all engagement activities are captured and meaningful outcomes are developed and monitored through the system.

11. Costs

The approximate costs of Customer Engagement in the first year of the programme (2021-24) are:

- **Total Activity budget requirement (inc VAT) - £15,000**
the primary elements of which are:
 - Customer engagement operations - £10,000 (covering travel expenses, subsistence, events and all other associated costs).
 - Customer engagement accreditation - £5000
 - 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**

⁴ 80% of the Administrative Assistant (Customer Engagement)'s time and 20% of the Performance Manager's time.