



**Building a truly modern
housing association**

Customer and Community Engagement Strategy

Turning up the volume
on customer voice

2022-2026



Introduction

We have an ambitious new five year Corporate Strategy which builds on the strength of our previous strategy and the many lessons learned. Our refreshed approach to engagement will help meet the needs and aspirations of our diverse customers and communities' as we work to develop an organisation fit for the future.

Our strategy identifies **six themes** that will support us in our journey to become **a truly modern housing association**:



Our Customers



Culture of People and Continuous Improvement



Sustainability, Environmental and Social Value Creation



Economic Value Creation



Digital and Intelligence



Leader, Partner and Influencer

The strategy firmly places our customers at the very heart of all we do and recognises that their collaboration in co-creating, scrutinising and improving our services is essential if we are to tailor, strengthen and improve what we do and offer value for money.

To deliver this we need to hear, understand, learn from and implement the customer voice. It really is our most powerful vehicle for bringing about business-wide change and service improvement in a positive, planned and proactive way.

This strategy will be led by our Customer and Community Engagement team to support teams across the business to implement their strategic and operational priorities. Our focus is on helping teams, through a range of tools and approaches, to gain effective customer insight and involve customers in the development of local and group wide services to embed a customer-centric culture in our journey to become a **truly modern housing association**.



External Environment

As a social landlord the environment in which we operate has changed rapidly in recent years with changes in regulatory and best practice requirements and expectations from investors on how we engage with customers and communities to implement customer feedback and involve customers in the design and development of services.

As an ambitious developer, with plans to build over 2000 new affordable homes per year over the next 5 years, it is imperative that we can demonstrate our Economic, Social and Governance (ESG) credentials to investors to benefit from new funding streams. As part of these requirements we need to demonstrate, and report annually, on our approach to engagement to show how we have acted on what our customers and communities have told us in developing new homes and services.

In November 2020 the Government published **'The Charter for Social Housing Tenants: Social Housing White Paper'** placing a renewed focus on engagement with customers and communities. The White Paper has signalled changes to the way we are regulated and expectations on how we involve customers, implement customer feedback and involve customers in the development of services.

The Charter for Social Housing Tenants demands that these approaches need to be embedded across organisations and that social housing providers must tailor engagement appropriately.

We have adopted the National Housing Federation's **'Together with Tenants'** charter to commit to a series of principles, reflecting in the white paper expectations, for social landlords to embed a culture of continuous improvement in the ways we engage with customers and communities in the development of our services.

We know how important it is to our customers to feel safe in their home. That's why in line with the **Building Safety Bill** we will support better communication with customers to improve the way we listen to their views about building safety, and most importantly how we embed and act on their feedback.





Our Values are part of our DNA

They will inspire and guide us through everything we do.

Our people values are



People Matter



The way we treat each other

We put colleagues and customers at the heart of everything we do. Valuing difference, we are free to challenge each other and are open and honest in our relationships.



Own It



The way we want to work

We say what we'll do and then we do it. We listen, understand and are empowered to make decisions. We look for our own ways to learn and adapt and focus on what we can do.



One Team



The way we deliver our services

We are connected, collaborative and in it together. We want everyone to reach their potential and be the best they can be. We actively support each other to make this happen.



Be Brave



The way we look towards our future

We are curious and courageous. We look for better ways to do things, are comfortable trying them and learn quickly. We are not afraid to stand out from the rest and celebrate our successes.

Our People Values are underpinned by a set of behaviours which outline the actions and ways of working that all our colleagues must all work to demonstrate.

Our Approach

We have a range of approaches and initiatives in place across our localities to support and deliver this strategy.



Our Priorities



Insight and Co-creation

Customer and community data and feedback is a key shaper of business-wide services, and is integral to every theme within this strategy and every business decision we make. We need to know who our customers are, their circumstances and preferences. We want to actively listen and act upon customer feedback and strengthen the role that this insight plays in shaping local service offers and local investment.

It will help us to understand our customers and communities, their circumstances and their preferences. It will also help make sure our services are driven by documented needs and will help to demonstrate and measure performance.

Our insight gathering activities

Complaints feedback

Compliments

Social Media feedback

Survey Findings

Customer Journey Mapping

Colleague feedback and findings

To build our INSIGHT AND CO-CREATION contribution we will:

- Build on the success of our involved customer roles in developing and embedding a group-wide co-creation framework to co-design new and existing services in partnership with customers.
- Be more customer-centric by collaborating with customers and colleagues from across the business as equals, respecting their skills as subject matter experts.
- Identify and pilot project our first co-creation project.
- Share experience, knowledge and reporting with customers.
- Expand our customer consultation toolkit to gather a more diverse and representative range of opinions.
- Develop a group-wide framework to ensure all policies and procedure development utilises appropriate co-creation insight, knowledge and methodologies.
- Report and publicise the impact of all our insight and co-creation activities to show we have acted on the customer voice and the influence it has had on our decision making.



Governance

The customer voice should be heard at all levels in a transparent and meaningful way, from Board through to day to day conversations. We have a robust governance and engagement structure that offers a choice of roles and panels for all customers to get involved and make their voice heard.

Our customer panels play a pivotal role in representing customer voice at a strategic level. The Customer Experience Panel (CEP) take the lead on a range of topics and meet regularly with senior colleagues and the board. They act as a critical friend by interrogating our performance from a customer perspective and influence decision making at a strategic level. Our Scrutiny Panel conduct in-depth reviews of our services, making recommendations on how we can improve for the benefit of all customers. Both panels are empowered to instruct further customer engagement through our other involvement roles to seek customer feedback in a range of ways.

To build our **GOVERNANCE** contribution we will:

- Training and support for all involved customers to strengthen their capacity and influence.
- Increase the diversity of our Panels to ensure that all customers' views and needs are represented.
- Regularly report on how we are using customer voice to shape services.
- Convene a group-wide steering group to oversee the implementation of customer feedback in all local and operational decision making.



Informing

We serve a diverse range of customers and communities and recognise that one size doesn't fit all. We are working to understand customer preferences around what information customers want and how they want to receive it. This includes making sure our engaged customers have access to the information they need to assess our performance and hold us to account.

Our engagement structure helps us to understand what information is important to our customers and how best it can be shared, as well as being a conduit for sharing and gathering feedback at pace.

To build our INFORMING contribution we will:

- Ensure the information we share is clear, easy to understand and relevant. Our involved customers will play an active role in shaping this offering.
- We will work with teams across the business to capture information needed and to ensure the delivery and flow of quality customer information is maintained and developed.



We will offer a range of communication channels, driven by customer preference including:

Customer Connect magazine

Website

Your portal

Social media

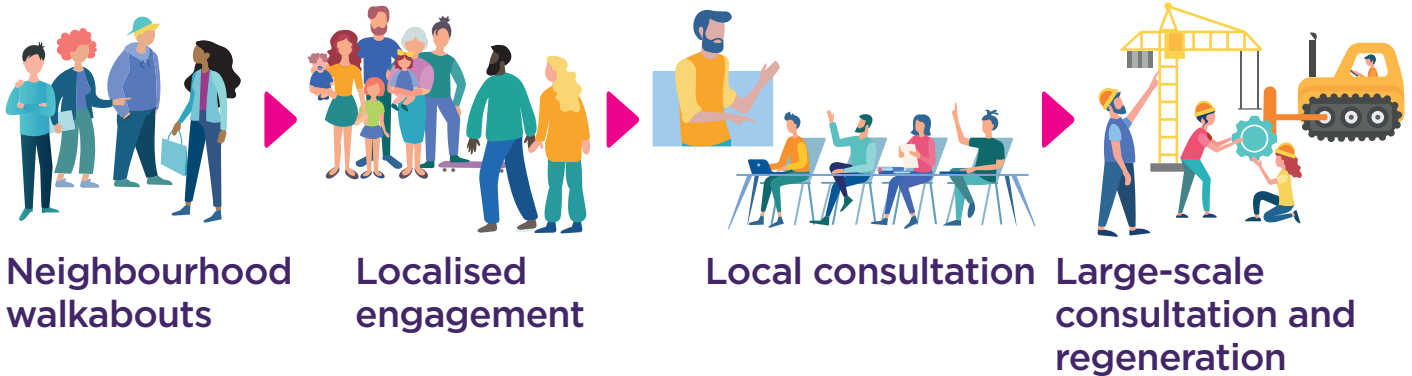
- We will actively monitor customer communication preferences and keep abreast of innovative and emerging information platforms.
- Piggy-back on established national awareness campaigns (such as White Ribbon week and Dementia Awareness week) to encourage more customer and colleague involvement.
- Work with our Customer Experience Teams to publish quarterly 'You Said We Did' for customers to document the impact that customer insight has had on our services.
- Utilise the group website to provide relevant customer and community engagement content, a dedicated section for the Customer Experience Panel and conversation space for instant customer feedback.
- Coordinate customer involvement in the development and delivery of our annual report to customers.

Community



Across all our diverse localities we have a significant community empowerment and engagement role to play. This includes identifying and understanding unique needs and aspirations and using this information to shape, develop and deliver services and investment activities.

The size and scale of our work is driven by the insight needed and can range from local walkabouts through to regeneration and large-scale partner consultations.



To build our **COMMUNITY** contribution we will:

- Sign-up to the Centre for Excellence in Community Investment (CECI) Board Charter.
 - Continue to refine and develop our approaches to community engagement and innovate and pilot new ways of working. We will work closely with partners to support and influence community investment as we work to:
- | IMPROVE |
|------------------------------|
| Tenancy sustainability |
| Digital inclusion |
| Community cohesion |
| Environmental Sustainability |
| Health and wellbeing |
| Increase community safety |
- Innovate in our work with local customers to co-create services and explore new ways to collaborate and empower communities in decisions on planned improvements, regeneration and development.

- Review our local statutory and voluntary stakeholders, strengthen our relationships and collaboration approach and agree how we will manage our relationships going forward to maximise community benefits and empowerment and community-owned outcomes.
- Develop an assets-based, community development approach that builds on existing community strengths, experiences and relationships to drive community ownership.
- Use local insight and data to ensure our activities have maximum customer and community impact.
- Develop our network of local Community Champions empowering local communities to take ownership of identifying local priorities and building local service offers.
- Use our Community Chest and Wellbeing Fund to support a range of projects that bring community-wide benefits.
- Look to access community project funding from a range of sources, independently or as part of a wider partnership.
- Celebrate the many contributions that people make to their local communities through our Community Heroes Award programme and annual awards.

Health & Wellbeing

Housing has a huge influence on health and wellbeing and there is much we can deliver to support this priority. Through our work and our partnership networks, we can understand customer and community needs and engage appropriately to connect them to the resources and information they need to increase health and wellbeing and to thrive.

Our work includes:

Our Gardening and environmental projects

Tackling loneliness and social isolation

Supporting healthy eating and access to healthier food

Access to sports and exercise

Supporting nation initiatives such as Dementia Awareness Week

Proactively supporting initiatives through Platform Community Chest and Wellbeing Fund

To build our HEALTH AND WELLBEING contribution we will:

- Continue to raise awareness of Platform Community Chest and the Wellbeing Fund.
- Further develop the 'Platform Growing Communities' programme to enhance wellbeing through gardening projects and environmental activities.
- Collaborate with sports and leisure providers in key areas to increase access to services and facilities promoting better customer health and wellbeing.
- Embed the use of HACT's Community Insight tool to design and deliver responsive health and wellbeing projects within our localities.
- Work with partners to deliver on key community issues such as social isolation and healthy eating.
- Collaborate with our Specialist Housing teams to identify programmes that encourage wellbeing and connect customers to relevant initiatives and activities.
- Support the development and implementation of group strategies (such as our Dementia Friendly Strategy) linked to customer and community health and wellbeing.



Digital Connectivity

Whilst face-to-face engagement will always be appropriate, customers are increasingly demonstrating a willingness and preference for virtual contact. Combined with the removal of traditional barriers such as transport, mobility and other commitments, virtual engagement provides customers with more choice and allows us to gather a more diverse range of service-shaping experiences, views and opinions.

We recognise that the availability of digital equipment, skills and abilities remain a barrier for some customers and in turn impacts their ability to access an increasingly wide range of services such as health, banking and leisure, as well as our own.

Our work to tackle this includes:

Face-to-face and virtual digital help centres and surgeries

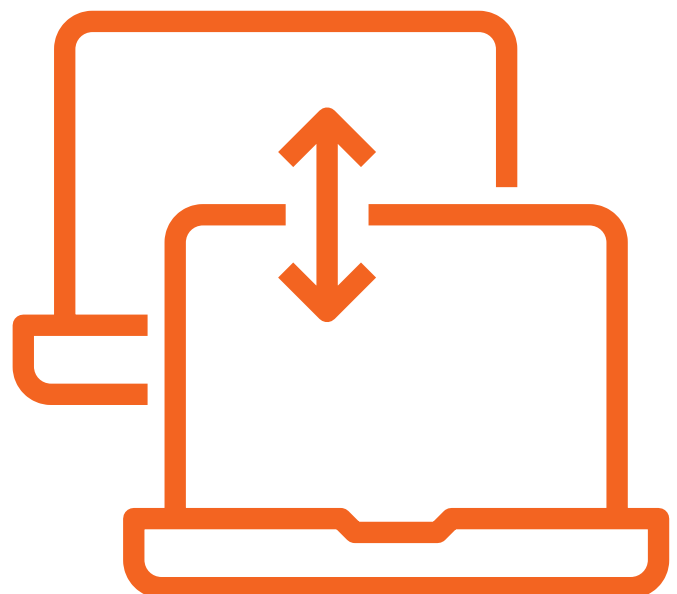
Partnership digital skills projects

Low-cost equipment and internet access funded through Platform Community Chest and Wellbeing Fund

Digital4Everyone programme - training, help-centres, specialist training, better broadband in rural and digitally isolated areas

To build our DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY contribution we will:

- Continue to deliver a range of virtual engagement roles, activities and projects.
- Work with internal and external stakeholders to identify digitally excluded customers and those with equipment or broadband needs to direct them into free local training and funding.
- Develop and publish a directory of free learning opportunities including face to face, and online courses, plus an online drop in live chat help centre for customers who need immediate support.
- Support customers who are digitally excluded.
- Explore new and innovative engagement approaches including smart technology.
- Carry out a customer digital access survey to inform our approach to digital delivery and communications.
- Develop and pilot accessibility-enhancing communal spaces for customers.
- Continue to develop and deliver our Digital4Everyone programme.
- Engage customers in the exploration and implementation of smart technology.



Regeneration

Our Regeneration Strategy sets out our ambitions for **'lasting and sustainable economic, physical, social and environmental improvements'** taking a holistic approach that places people at the heart of physical improvements and community investment.

It also details our intention to deliver a Community Empowerment Model that aims to ensure that communities are empowered in the decision making process.

We have a strong record of working with communities to involve them in neighbourhood regeneration, taking a holistic approach that looks beyond physical improvements and understands the current and future needs of our communities. Through community engagement and co-creation we will work with communities on local decisions to deliver real and meaningful regeneration projects that make a difference to our customers' lives.

We will:

- Support our Asset Management, Development and Regeneration teams in the development and use of local insight and community engagement to understand community needs and aspirations as part of planned investment.
- Support the development of the 'Platform Standard' through customer insight and co-creation.



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Capturing and understanding the customer voice is central to putting customers at the heart of everything we do so it is essential that it represents the diversity of our customers, their characteristics and their needs.

Through Customer and Community Engagement we will support the delivery of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy to encourage diverse representation in opportunities for customers to co-create and influence the services we provide.

We will continue to support and promote our 'Diversity Champion' role for customers as a focussed role to empower customers who have an interest or cause they want to champion, either based on themes aligned to the nine protected characteristics or other aspects of exclusion or inequality as a role that gives detailed focussed to individual areas of diversity.

Going forward we will work more closely with our Diversity Champions and key stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the barriers to engagement for underrepresented customers, within our broader engagement offering. This understanding will set the direction for changes or adaptations needed to make our engagement roles and activities more inclusive and accessible to all.

Across our diverse communities we want to gain a better understanding of who our customers are. Knowing who our customers are will provide more reliable data to drive services that meet customers' needs and expectations. We recognise that there may be barriers preventing underrepresented groups from getting involved and having their voice heard, disempowering them from influencing the services we provide.

We will be led by a range of data sources and national statistics to direct us to the right organisations and community groups for us to learn from in adapting our approaches to the needs of local communities.





Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

In addition to the steps we want to take to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in our engagement activities, and wider services, we have a role to play across the sector in tackling stigma and challenging the sometimes negative stereotypes that exist around social housing.

We will work with customers and partner housing organisations to support the work that is being done around this and develop Platform principles to ensure that our services, and the way we operate, tackle these negative stereotypes.



We will:

- Review diversity of involved customers to understand gaps in representation.
- Work in conjunction with customer Diversity Champions and key stakeholders to assess our customer involvement framework for accessibility and inclusivity.
- Remove barriers to engagement with to underrepresented customer groups to increase representation through customer and community engagement activities.
- Explore new and innovative approaches to engagement to appeal to a wider, more representative range of customers.
- Develop approach to understanding the diversity of local communities to inform more inclusive approaches to community engagement through local insight and collaboration with stakeholders.
- Work in collaboration with the EDI team to support local and external campaigns to increase involvement of colleagues and customers.
- Work in collaboration with internal and external stakeholders to develop new customer and community engagement programmes and initiatives aimed at underrepresented groups.
- Develop and deliver a bespoke engagement framework for younger people across Platform Communities.
- Support the sector-wide initiative into tackling stigma and negative stereotypes around social housing, implementing best practice and learning across Platform.



Our Delivery

Each of our priority deliverables will be developed, detailed and progressed through annual plans.

These plans will be evidence-based and will capture the actions needed to contribute to our work to become a truly modern housing association.

Our Checks and Balances

We will deliver our vision by achieving a range of goals against each of these key areas set out in our accompanying 3-year roadmap.

- We will show how the customer voice has influenced decision making and our commitment to acting on what our customers tell us.
- A group-wide Customer Voice steering group will be developed to oversee the delivery of this strategy.
- Progress and performance against this strategy will be reported quarterly to Board and the Customer Experience Panel.

