



Housing Customer Engagement Strategy

1. Introduction

Customer engagement, involvement and participation is the sharing of ideas and information and actively maximising value from the customer voice. It is about enabling customers to influence our housing priorities and provide a critical challenge about the way we shape, deliver and improve services. For the purpose of this strategy, customers are defined as primarily our tenants and leaseholders, but may also extend to prospective tenants or leaseholders, other residents of the city and any other people who have some connection or involvement with the services delivered by Housing Services. Throughout the strategy we refer to customers to mean anyone within this group.

2. Our vision

Stoke-on-Trent City Council's vision is 'Working together to create a strong city we can all be proud of'. We operate on the basis of 'One Council, One Vision, One Team'.

2.1 The vision is supported by the Stronger Together Strategic Plan that sets out the council's overall priorities and objectives. The priorities are to:

- Support vulnerable people in our communities to live their lives well.
- Enable our residents to fulfil their potential.
- Work with our communities to make them healthier, safer and more sustainable
- Be an innovative and commercial council, providing effective leadership to help transform outcomes.
- Help businesses to thrive and make our city more prosperous

2.2 The above priorities and over-arching objectives are translated into an annual Operating Plan, incorporating delivery plans for each team, including for the teams that provide services to over 18,000 tenants, leaseholders and their neighbours served by the Housing and Community Safety Division of the Housing, Development and Growth Directorate.

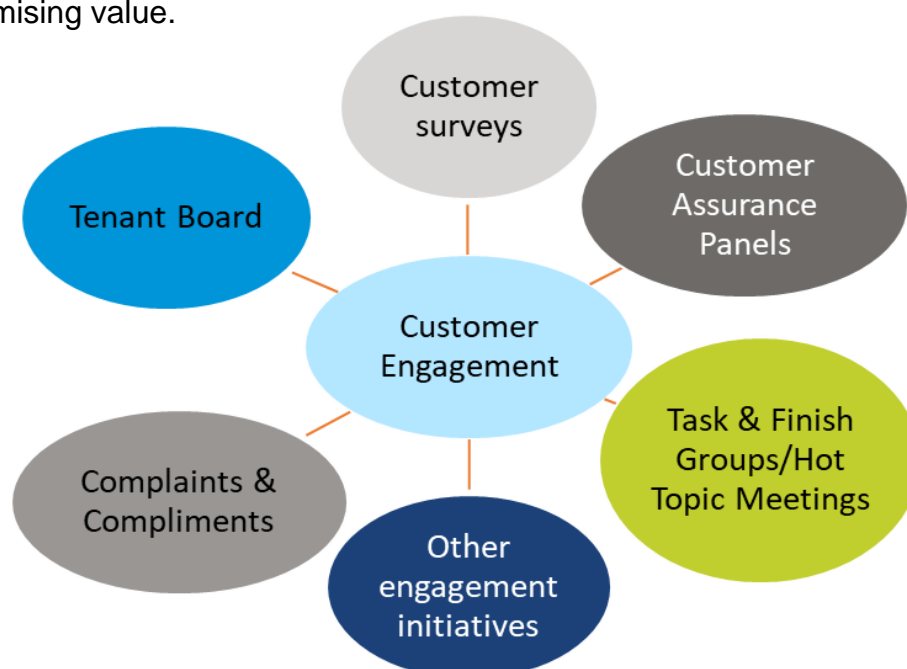
3. Commitment to customer engagement

3.1 We know that customer engagement is the right thing to do and essential to ensure successful relationships with customers, ensuring that they get the best possible service at the most affordable costs.

- 3.2 The commitment to actively listen to and engage with customers in a meaningful and productive way is fundamental to giving them a powerful and influential voice. The principle of involving residents in decision-making by listening to them and taking on new ideas is embedded in the council's Strategic Plan 2020-2024 and supported by the underlying principles of:
- a. **Partnership working:** building and strengthening relationships with all stakeholders so that everyone can play their part to make the vision a reality.
 - b. **Ownership and accountability:** taking accountability for our actions and empowering people to take ownership in their communities.
 - c. **Ambition:** being ambitious and making every contact count to help deliver the best possible outcome for our residents.
 - d. **Respect:** Put respect at the heart of how we work with colleagues and residents and value their contributions.

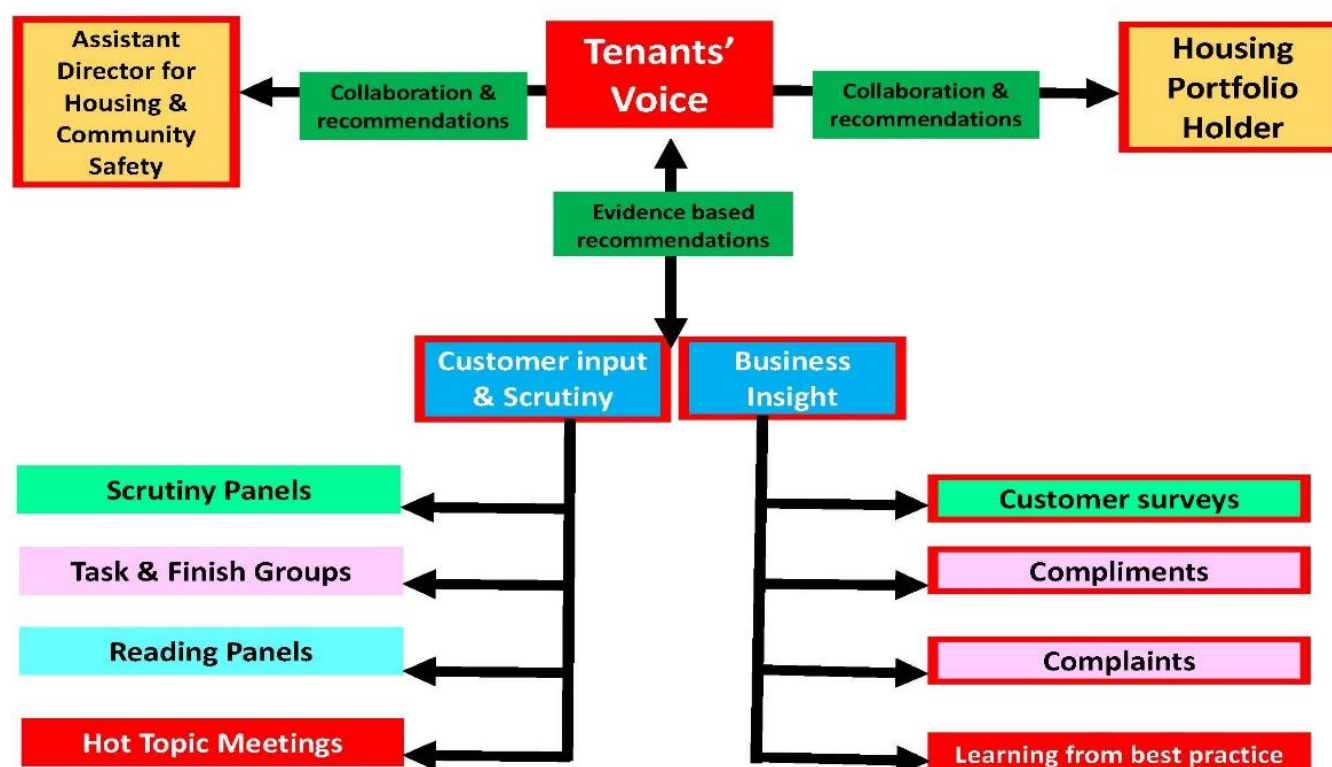
4. Housing Customer Engagement Strategy

- 4.1 Our overriding objectives are to 'rethink and modernise' customer engagement by:
- a. Making participation **easy, accessible, inclusive and fun**
 - b. Making consultation **meaningful, collaborative, timely, efficient and effective**
 - c. Making the **customer voice hold us to account**
- 4.2 We will follow a continuous, systematic loop of engagement, insight gathering and improvement to develop a deeper understanding of our customers' needs, as shown by the methods below. This will help us to prioritise the most important improvement opportunities, based on the value to our customers. We will continue to work in an agile way, adapting to change efficiently and maximising value.



- 4.3 This strategy will play a significant part to delivering high levels of customer satisfaction and supporting sustainable communities and neighbourhoods. We know that measuring the value of stakeholders is challenging as the outcomes are a mixture of quantitative and qualitative benefits. We will measure the success of this strategy by demonstrating that customers:
- a. Have diverse choices in participation methods so that they can have a say in the way that best suits them and we hear from the breadth of our residents to get the deepest insight.
 - b. Have meaningful opportunities to be consulted in the development of key housing strategies and policies and being clear about how and why we make decisions.
 - c. Have their insight and feedback used to inform the way we deliver services.
 - d. Have meaningful opportunities to hold us to account, underpinned by trust and transparency.
 - e. Have the confidence to trust us to provide and maintain safe, secure and energy efficient homes and neighbourhoods that they are proud to be part of.
 - f. Have increased satisfaction levels to 90% being satisfied with their views being taken into account when general landlord satisfaction surveys are carried out.
 - g. Are contacted at least once a year as part of our tenancy audit approach, either in person or by telephone, for routine repairs or health and safety compliance work. This will be an opportunity to inform them about engagement opportunities and get their overall opinion of our service.
- 4.4 This strategy is underpinned by trust and transparency and was developed through:
- a. Independently facilitated discussions with members of the Tenant Board, officers and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Environment.
 - b. Results of the independent Housing Healthcheck completed in mid-2020.
 - c. Results of mystery shopping telephone calls and the council's website conducted by the independent reviewer.
- 4.5 This strategy reflects the Consumer Standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing and more recent external initiatives designed to achieve a robust culture of respect, the need to hear the resident voice and accountability, such as the Government's 'New Deal for Social Housing' and the Social Housing White Paper which is expected to rebalance the relationship between landlords and residents, tackle stigma and ensure that social housing provides a stable base for people.

- 4.6 We also welcome the proposed establishment of a new Building Safety Regulator in the light of the findings of the Grenfell Tragedy Inquiry and National Housing Federation's 'Together with Tenants' Charter. The latter encourages stronger connections between decision-makers and residents and making landlords and elected members more accountable to customers.
- 4.7 Underpinning the successful delivery of this strategy is the commitment to provide professional training and development to our staff to ensure customers receive a high standard of customer service and are treated with care, courtesy and respect.
- 4.8 We will assess the success of the strategy each year in consultation with actively involved customers and also seek to establish and evaluate the reasons why other customers have not become involved.
- 5. Customer engagement structure and menu**
- 5.1 The following sets out the overall formal Housing Customer Engagement structure to help make 'every contact count'.



5.2 Customers will be able to have a say in ways that suit them most, as follows:

Level 1: Occasional surveys and occasional one-off conversations

Main purpose:

- Help to set service standards for key services.
- Routinely give views and opinions to support service improvement and inform development.
- Influence local services on estates and neighbourhoods to make a difference to the locality.

For customers who:

- Have extremely limited time and are focussed on their current transaction with the council.
- Are willing to give feedback on 'real-time' basis, usually via a short survey over the telephone, text or online.
- Can be contacted for one-off routine transactional surveys.
- May take part in one-off events digitally or face-to-face to have a say about their estate or locality.

The council offer:

- No need to join groups – can dip in/out as they wish.
- No training needed.
- Will mostly give views digitally and at occasional virtual meetings.
- The majority of the activities will include:
 - Surveys
 - Complaints
 - Compliments
 - Keeping Customer Experience diaries
 - Attending virtual 'Hot Topic Meetings' and online consultation meetings
 - Taking part in virtual discussions as 'Expert by Experience' to influence policies and procedures
 - Making suggestions for improvement through emails and social media.

We will put in place measures to 'make every contact count' and

- Agree dedicated short surveys for services frequently accessed by customers via the telephone, email and through the Customer Portal.

- Agree service areas that need customer feedback/input and devise short surveys, for example forthcoming policy reviews.
- Introduce targets for frontline staff to carry out engagement activities in their area of work.
- Ensure there is technology and arrangements to capture customer views from one-off and routine engagement and gain meaningful customer insight from a range of data, including complaints, resident's views and performance management arrangements.

Level 2: Frequent surveys and occasional meetings with customers and staff

Main purpose:

- Consider and comment on policies, customer information and service provision from 'customer perspectives'.
- Give views and opinions on proposed initiatives and the provision of local services.
- Support the council to ensure that homes well-maintained and safe.
- Support consultation and participation arrangements at local levels.
- Support the scrutiny body to assess services as required.

For customers who:

- Can devote some time on an irregular basis by working on their own and sometimes in small groups.
- Want to concentrate on bite-sized tasks relating to services that affect them, their locality or council-wide issues.
- Enjoy working with others to discuss issues of common concern.

The council offer:

- No need to join groups – can dip in/out as they wish in relation to individual tasks.
- Can join ad-hoc groups.
- May need some training to carry out tasks.
- Contribution might be informal but sometimes in a formal setting
- Can give views through:
 - Estate based, local involvement body that comes together to discuss issues when they arise or be consulted about issues such as planned maintenance projects and estate services (i.e. a local subset of an organisation wide list of interested residents).
 - Carrying out estate inspections.

- Attending sheltered/supported housing meetings.
- Acting as proof-readers.
- Joining the Editorial Panel/Keep It Simple & Straight-forward Group for mass mailings.
- Joining one-off Task and Finish Groups.

We will enable active participation in easy ways and enable customers to have a say in structured ways through:

- Developing departmental and team plans to capture services requiring resident consultation, covering scheme/estate matters, local geographical issues and council-wide services.
- Being clear about reasons for consultation and providing residents with clear and transparent information about consultation methods and what will happen to their outputs.
- Agreeing how residents will be supported to enable their active engagement.
- Capturing consultation/task outputs and demonstrating the difference made by customer views.
- Making engagement easy to access virtually through email or on-line methods.
- Adapting methods of engagement to customer needs if virtual methods are not available.
- Making content accessible and fun to the greatest extent possible.

Level 3: Be part of a virtual meeting (approximately 6 times a year) and have conversations with other customers, staff and elected members to question and bring ideas

Main purpose:

- Hold the council to account by assessing service delivery and performance.
- Work with other residents who fulfil mystery shopper and other roles to inspect landlord services.
- Influence service improvement and development.
- Comment on policies and strategies.
- Introduce good practice.

For customers who:

- Have an interest in council's overall services and performance.

- Can put aside their personal views and be the voice of reason from different angles.
- Want to sign up to a greater time commitment and work with other residents in more formal setting face-to-face and online.
- Enjoy getting into more detail about specific subjects and have an eye for detail.

The council offer:

- Have to join a formal group with defined minimum time commitments.
- Required to attend relevant training, depending on areas of interest, skills and knowledge and tasks/roles undertaken.
- Will perform tasks such as deep-dive service reviews, assess performance, interact with elected members, and publicise engagement work.
- Will facilitate involvement where customers do not have access to IT or internet, for example through the provision of loaned equipment.

We will enhance partnership working by magnifying the customer voice by:

- Setting up a body of residents who will be a link between the council and customers and act as a 'collective voice' for customers and service users.
- Ensuring that the resident body is supported to deliver scrutiny and assurance to the governing body and senior executives and influence council's strategic direction.
- Recruiting, training and retaining members.

6. Operational responsibility for delivering the Housing Customer Engagement Strategy

- 6.1 The Assistant Director - Housing and Community Safety has the overall responsibility for operational implementation of this strategy. He will work closely with and report to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Environment as part of routine governance arrangements.
- 6.2 The Strategic Manager, Housing Management will be responsible for delivering the operational activity related to day-to-day customer engagement. They will be supported by an Operational Lead for Customer Engagement who will have a dedicated team to deliver all aspects of customer engagement work relating to the council's landlord function, including providing support to and servicing the Tenants' Voice function.
- 6.3 The Enabling and Projects Team will be responsible ensuring effective governance through the roll-out of the strategy, providing input to the Tenants'

Voice and Customer Assurance Panels, to ensure effective co-regulation and independent tenant-led scrutiny. The Enabling and Projects Team will also be responsible for monitoring the impact of the strategy, including its impact on people with different protected characteristics. The Enabling and Projects Team will work closely with the Strategic Manager, Housing Management to ensure efficient and effective co-ordination of scrutiny projects through the provision of customer intelligence to direct the priorities of the Customer Assurance Panels.

- 6.4 Each Housing Operational Lead across the Housing, Development and Growth Directorate will be responsible for ensuring 'customer conversations' to demonstrate that customer engagement is embedded and is everyone's responsibility.
- 6.5 All housing staff are required to participate in contributing to the success of this strategy and are expected to:
- Demonstrate their contribution to delivering this strategy through departmental, team and personal objectives.
 - Understand the impact of their behaviour, approach and delivery touchpoints by assessing whether they are adding value to or diminishing the overall customer experience.
 - Actively seek diverse opinions in a timely manner to influence arrangements for service delivery.

7. Strategic review

- 7.1 On adoption, this Housing Customer Engagement Strategy will be reviewed at least every three years or when regulation, legislation or good practice changes.