



Customer Engagement Strategy

2024 – 2027

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1. Introduction

At Westfield Housing Association we want to put you, our customers right at the heart of all the decisions we make about how we manage your homes and services now and into the future. When we say you we mean – tenants, applicants on the housing register, residents in the wider communities in which we work or any person who is affected by Westfield Housing and the services we deliver. This includes anyone who is acting on behalf of any of the above people.

As a small association rooted in the local community, we have always sought to deliver accessible and personalised services that meet individual needs and enable people to live happily and successfully. We have been successful in building a service that is close to our customers and communities and that is valued and well respected. We recognise however that there is relatively little formal engagement with customers and that our understanding of customer views and aspirations is not as strong as we would like. This strategy sets out how we want to build engagement, what our objectives are and how we will achieve them.

2. Our Aims and Objectives

Our organisational mission is ‘to enable people to thrive through the provision of high quality, affordable homes and excellent customer centered housing and community services’, and to do this we have six strategic objectives.

- Deliver excellent, relevant, value for money services that meet local needs.
- Maintain and enhance the quality of our homes.
- Foster strong, cohesive and thriving communities.
- Strong and effective tenant engagement.
- Maintain financial strength.
- Provide new homes that meet our community’s needs.

To achieve these objectives, improve the services we provide and ensure that they meet customer needs, it is essential that we engage effectively with customers to understand these needs and aspirations. This strategy is focused on achieving this aim, and works to six specific objectives:

1. To build and maintain involvement ensuring customers can:
 - Scrutinise our performance and make suggestions for improvement.
 - Influence the Association’s strategic objectives and the organisational priorities set.

- Be involved in decision making on how services are delivered, including the setting of service standards.
 - Agree local offers.
 - Communicate their views easily.
2. To provide a range of opportunities for customers to be involved. These opportunities to be appropriate to the diverse needs of customers and to include the enhanced use of technology.
 3. To communicate effectively with customers, providing accessible, relevant, and timely information on our services, performance, choices, and other matters.
 4. To have a strong understanding of customer views, including obtaining regular, sufficient, and accurate customer feedback on our homes and services. To ensure that feedback, including from complaints, is properly considered and used to improve services.
 5. To work with customers to build their capacity to be involved including providing support and training as identified/agreed.
 6. To ensure compliance with relevant standards and legislation, including meeting the commitments set out in the Social Housing White Paper (The Charter for Social Housing Residents).

Our vision is a collaborative relationship with customers, built on honest, open and trusting relationships, that shapes our services and future direction. Our key aim is to ensure that the customer voice is heard and that the homes and services provided are shaped around customer needs and views.

3. Building Engagement

Building involvement, responsiveness and accountability requires in the first instance, effective engagement of tenants and residents. We recognise that not everyone has the time or inclination to be involved and can be put off by many things including:

- a belief that being involved won't change anything.
- uncertainty about what will be involved, and the level of commitment required.
- a belief that being involved will be boring (e.g. attending lots of meetings) and time consuming.
- individual barriers such as work, childcare/caring responsibilities, finances, lack of transport.
- a lack of knowledge about Westfield.

To help tackle these barriers it is important that in the first instance we have effective relationships with tenants and residents and an understanding of individual needs and desires. Our small size and local presence have enabled us to develop good levels of contact and a personal service that can be responsive to individual needs and circumstances.

This strategy recognises the importance of this and aims to build on existing contacts and relationships to encourage and support greater involvement. Whilst some more formal arrangements are required, we want to build on the informal relationships we have and to use these to build innovative and easy ways to engage with us.

Central to this is ensuring that our day-to-day activities are carried out in a way that continues to include good levels of personal contact and facilitates the building of strong and trusting relationships.

Following on from this our tenant engagement plan for the next 3 years will be shaped by contacts and conversations with customers and will include actions to:

- promote and raise awareness of ways to be engaged and the value of good engagement.
- enable feedback and discuss matters in a range of different and simple ways.
- build contact between staff, tenants and residents through our day-to-day work.
- create more opportunities to work together on things that matter.
- set up ways for tenants to influence decisions and to hold the Association to account, including opportunities for dialogue with the Board.
- build skills and capacity amongst staff and involved tenants.
- ensure effective and timely responses to feedback received.
- make best use of technology to widen engagement opportunities.

We have considered where and how we wish to improve engagement and the following are ideas for ways tenants can actively participate. These ideas, some of which have already been progressed, are reflected in our Action Plan but are likely to change and evolve as we build involvement and discuss further with tenants and residents:

Initial Menu of Engagement		
Opportunity	Regularity	Detail
Customer Panel	Bi-monthly	Consider performance in agreed service areas. Review complaints and compliments. Look at selected services and provide recommendations for improvement. Monitor progress on improvements. Review and develop the Customer Offer Consider and approve grant applications to Westfield's Neighbourhood Investment Fund. Review the fund and how it can support tenants and the local community. Develop formal link to the associations Board. Contribute to CHANW tenants' group and attend annual tenants conference.
Residents Group	Quarterly	Consider/discuss any project or service development on the Westfield estate. Project ideas to review and develop from 2024 are an estate play area and a programme of annual events and community activities
Estate Walkabouts	Twice yearly	Resident led neighbourhood walkabouts with Officers from various services, to highlight issues and agree actions for improvement.
Perception Surveys	Annual (TSM survey)	Help conduct tenant surveys.
Transactional surveys	Monthly	Complete survey over the phone, by email or text.
Online Surveys	As and when	Provide feedback online as part of a consultation into new services we are developing or proposed changes to those we already have.
Armchair Consultation	As and when	Provide feedback from home, in person, via email or telephone.
Focus Groups	As and when	Help us develop policies and procedures, implement legislation or respond to government

		proposals by being a member of a focus group.
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Our objective is to provide a range of opportunities that have wide appeal and through our relationships and promotional work encourage and support people to engage.

4. Levels of Involvement

A key objective is to provide a range of involvement opportunities that allow customers to be involved at the level they wish.

Being involved in any activity does involve a level of commitment and the following sets out potential levels and types of engagement, and what this would require from customers.

Level 1

By engaging at this level and by taking an interest in how we perform, customers can provide a platform that influences and enables us to improve. For example, by simply responding to an annual tenant satisfaction survey, customers will give a steer on how to make improvements to the services received.

By committing to Level 1 engagement, we will ask customers to:

- take the time to respond to our tenant service surveys,
- attend occasional tenant meetings,
- Provide up to date contact information (i.e. your email address) and
- follow us via social media platforms such as Facebook.

Level 2

Level 2 involvement requires a slightly greater level of commitment than Level 1 with attendance at occasional meetings e.g. a focus group to look at a particular issue, a project group etc. as well as be involved as per Level 1.

Level 3

Level 3 Participation – Engaging at this level would involve attending regular tenant meetings e.g. the Customer Panel or Residents Group; training sessions, seminars and other event, etc; however, we can tailor opportunities for engagement, dependent on the level of commitment that can be given.

Level 4

Level 4 Participation - By engaging at this level customers will be required to attend

regular quarterly board meetings and other business review meetings, training events, seminars and play a key role influencing policy and the strategic direction of the Association.

All customers are given the opportunity to give feedback through our website, by surveys or specific consultation exercises sent by text, email or letter. Through social media we will give out information about what is on, such as tenants events, walkabouts etc.

We use the following events as an opportunity for customers to give informal feedback and for us to gather customer views on their home, environment and the services received:

- Annual family trip
- Annual Christmas shopping trip
- Over 55's trip
- Christmas carol event
- Community Clean-up Day
- Other social events organised from time to time.

5. Communication and Access to Information

We will ensure there are a range of communication methods to suit all our customers.

Good communication and feedback are the responsibility of all staff and all staff are expected to meet the communication and digital standards which are described below.

To help all customers become digitally included access to IT equipment is offered to help with the learning of essential digital skills. Customers can contact us to access digital support.

Our communication standards are focused on the following Key Principles and actions:

- Staff, Board members and customers should trust and respect each other, and work in partnership to improve housing services and performance.
- When we seek customer views, we will ensure adequate time is allowed for customers to consider any information and give an informed decision. We will normally allow 2 weeks when seeking views.
- We will encourage customers to take part in consultations from external agencies such as the National Housing Federation and the Regulator of Social Housing.

- We will advertise all consultations on our website and in our newsletters and other communications.
- We will make decisions in ways that are, open, clear, accountable and take customers views into account.
- We will provide feedback following all consultations on the website and in our newsletter.
- We will always thank you for providing your feedback to us.

We will use a range of methods to communicate with and provide customers with information.

We will always ask customers what their preferred personal communication method is and use that method to communicate with them.

To communicate with customers and seek information we have the following options:

- Face to face
- By phone
- By post
- By text
- By email
- At meetings and events – digital and face to face
- Tenant Portal
- Social Media
- Walkabouts
- Newsletter
- Local press
- Regular surveys
- Consultations, such as any policy reviews

Digital communication options

Our website – will include:

- Calendar of events – what is on, what’s coming up
- Significant dates for you such as:
 - Up and coming consultations.
 - Estate walkabouts – when they are happening and how to find out more.
 - Local events such as Community Clean Day.

We will ensure that all information is.

- Accurate and up to date
- In plain language and jargon free

- Sent out in good time to allow customers time to ask questions and consider the information.
- Made available in alternative formats and languages on request – such as
 - Translations
 - Larger print versions
 - Audio versions

We can offer customers a range of options for printed materials – such as:

- Large print
- Translated into other languages.
- Translated into Braille.
- In a colour of print and paper that is best for you.

6. Customer Feedback

Customer Surveys

Customer surveys are the primary way of obtaining customer feedback and views. A range of surveys (transactional i.e. following receipt of a service, and perception) are used to obtain views on our performance as a landlord. These surveys cover key customer services and include feedback on the standard of the homes provided, the repairs and maintenance service, the anti-social behaviour service, the local neighbourhood, the value for money of the rent, and our overall performance. Surveys are conducted at different frequencies ranging from monthly to annually and a range of different survey methods are used.

Survey results are collated on an ongoing basis and considered each quarter. The purpose of the survey data is to give us a clear understanding of how our homes and services are experienced and to indicate where improvement is required. To aid understanding and provide better context, survey results are benchmarked (compared) with other similar size housing associations.

The volume and quality of feedback has increased significantly over the last 2-3 years and there has been better use of the views received. However, there remain areas where more feedback is required from a broader range of customers, and acting sufficiently on views remains work in progress. Challenges are:

- Ensuring feedback is fully considered and acted on.
- Ensuring that feedback is representative. Consideration of views need to include greater levels of discussion with customers, for example through the Customer Panel and other groups.
- Rationalisation of the collection of survey data, particularly following the introduction of the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (see below).

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

On 21 September 2022 the Regulator of Social Housing published the outcome of its consultation on Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM's). As a result, from 1 April 2023 all registered providers of social housing needed to collect and publish a range of comparable information on areas such as repairs, safety checks and complaints.

The new TSMs will improve customers' ability to scrutinise their landlord's performance, provide their own feedback and views, give landlords insight about where they can improve, and provide a source of intelligence to RSH about whether landlords are meeting regulatory standards. They are part of the regulator's wider programme of work to develop proactive consumer regulation of the social housing sector.

7. Supporting Tenant Engagement

How will we support our customers to engage?

As part of our commitment to support customer engagement, we have become a member of TPAS to ensure both staff and tenants can access appropriate training to assist with the skills to contribute confidently and effectively. We will also provide financial support for any associated costs incurred by customers and by making any meetings/events as accessible as possible. We will also make available staff time and administrative/office facilities to support and encourage customer involvement.

Training Opportunities

Training and support will be provided for all involved customers to strengthen their capacity and influence. A training plan including full induction is available. This is promoted to tenants through our website and tenant newsletters.

How will we fund the commitments we have made?

Our Neighbourhood Investment Fund will allow us to meet the strategic aims and objectives of this Strategy, whilst also ensuring Value for Money. Through this fund, we will support WHA initiatives, other local organisations or projects which will meet one or more of the aims of the Neighbourhood Investment Fund.

Other ways we intend to support local groups and organisations

We understand many groups can struggle to acquire funding to support their projects or the delivery of new programmes. As a result of this, we will be seeking to support groups or organisations with applications for funding, either from our own Neighbourhood Investment Fund or external funding providers.

Our Staffing

We believe that our generic patch approach to housing management, and our contacts and relationships with tenants and residents are an important building block for effective tenant engagement. However, we are mindful to ensure that sufficient time is available to support engagement work. We will review our staff structure and resources to ensure that we have the capacity to support this work effectively.

8. Legislation

Social Housing Regulatory Framework

The Social Housing Regulator sets out the standards for involving and empowering tenants and residents in their regulatory standards for social housing. The framework details two strands to social housing regulation – Economic (how finances are managed) and Consumer (how services are delivered). To avoid a “one size fits all” approach the Regulator places requirements on landlords to develop local offers for the Safety & Quality, Transparency, Influence & Accountability, Neighbourhood & Community and Tenancy Standards.

Local Offers are essentially service promises drawn up and agreed by landlords and customers. These Local Offers can be landlord wide, estate based or neighbourhood wide (working in partnership with other registered providers and agencies in the area).

Transparency, Influence & Accountability is a cross-cutting standard which means that it applies to all areas of service. Basically – landlords should involve residents as widely as possible. To ensure that all customers know how well their landlord is performing the Regulator places a duty on landlords to publish an Annual Report and send a copy to all its tenants by 1st October each year. They also place a duty on landlords to set up effective tenant scrutiny of its services.

The Regulators role is to set the standards and take action if a landlord fails to meet them. However, their role is one of a “backstop regulator” and they will only become involved if they are made aware that a landlord is failing in its duties.

The key focus of the Regulatory standards is about landlords and tenants working together to set, monitor and scrutinise performance against national standards and local offers.

Together with Tenants

The National Housing Federation (NHF), working with the sector, has introduced a Together with Tenants Plan built around the need for greater responsiveness and accountability. The plan is based around four key actions and six new commitments. The commitments set out in the charter are:

1. **Relationships:** Housing associations will treat all residents with respect in all of their interactions. Relationships between residents and housing associations will be based on openness, honesty and transparency.
2. **Communication:** Residents will receive clear, accessible and timely information from their housing association on the issues that matter to them, including important information about their homes and local community, how the organisation is working to address problems, how the organisation is run, and information about performance on key issues.
3. **Voice and influence:** Housing associations will seek and value the views of residents and will use this information to inform decisions. Every individual resident will feel listened to by their housing association on the issues that matter to them and can speak without fear.
4. **Accountability:** Collectively, residents will work in partnership with their housing association to independently scrutinise and hold their housing association to account for the decisions that affect the quality of their homes and services.
5. **Quality:** Residents can expect their homes to be good quality, well maintained, safe and well managed.
6. **When things go wrong:** Residents will have simple and accessible routes for raising issues, making complaints and seeking redress. Residents will receive timely advice and support when things go wrong.

Together with the Customer Panel we have given a commitment to formally adopt the Charter by the end of 2024.

Social Housing White Paper

The government published the Social Housing White Paper in November 2020, which aims to deliver the improvement in transparency and accountability promised in the 2018 green paper.

The paper sets out a Charter for Social Housing Residents, which echoes many of the commitments housing associations are making in the Together with Tenants charter, particularly on tenant voice, relationships, accountability, quality, and complaints.

Building Safety Act

This Act makes ground-breaking reforms to give residents more rights, powers, and protections – so homes across the country are safer.

It overhauls existing regulations, creating lasting change and makes clear how residential buildings should be constructed, maintained and made safe.

The Act creates three new bodies to provide effective oversight of the new regime: the Building Safety Regulator, the National Regulator of Construction Products and the New Homes Ombudsman.

Together these changes mean owners will manage their buildings better, and the home-building industry has the clear, framework it needs to deliver more, and better, high-quality homes.

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.

As a landlord, we will ensure homes are safe by meeting all the correct regulations and standards. Although we do not own any high-rise buildings, residents living in flats with communal/shared entrances are required to support us in meeting their obligations by:

- Living safely in their flat and not doing anything that puts other residents at risk, for example, not making alterations to the flat entrance fire door without permission.
- Knowing what to do in the event of a fire in their property or another part of the building.
- Contacting us if residents' living circumstances change meaning a resident may not be able to self-evacuate in the event of a fire.
- Checking smoke detectors in their home are working at least once a month.
- Being respectful of neighbours and keeping the space outside the flat clear.
- Safely disposing of rubbish and contacting the local authority if help is needed to dispose of bulky items.
- Reporting any issues to us, particularly if a resident feels it is a fire safety concern.

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 (the Act) empowered the Housing Ombudsman to issue a code of practice about the procedures landlords should have in place for considering complaints.

It also placed a duty on the Ombudsman to monitor compliance with a code of practice that it has issued.

The Complaint Handling Code became statutory on 1st April 2024, meaning landlords are obliged by law to follow its requirements.

The Code aims to achieve best practice in complaint handling and ultimately provide a better service to residents.

9. Roles & Responsibilities

An Action Plan has been developed to support the delivery of this strategy. The Action Plan will be monitored by the Operations Manager.

The Housing Services Officers will be responsible for co-ordinating the delivery of the Action Plan.

10. Measuring Outcomes and our Performance

Throughout the term of this strategy we will continue to record information about our activities on our internal systems. This will allow us to produce a variety of different reports which will identify initiatives which produce high levels of involvement, areas of good practice and measurable outcomes.

We have developed a three-year Tenant Engagement Strategy Action Plan 2024 – 2027 to deliver this strategy. We intend to regularly report progress against the Action Plan by way of:

- Our Website
- Tenant Meetings
- Staff Team Meetings
- Board Meetings
- In our Annual Report

Questions and Feedback

Westfield Housing Association welcomes any questions or feedback customers may wish to submit to us in respect of this strategy. Also, if you are interested in becoming involved, please contact us:

In writing or in person: Westfield Housing Association
 The Minto Centre
 Nilsson Drive
 Workington, CA14 5BD

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Document Control

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