

THENUE'S CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** This strategy sets out the ways in which Thenue will listen to and engage with our customers to improve housing services and build stronger communities. It sets out our current and future methods of customer engagement.
- 1.2** Why is this customer engagement strategy necessary? We believe it is essential that we set out how we plan/intend to:
- Meet regulatory requirements of customer engagement
 - Effectively communicate with all our customers
 - Listen to what our customers have to say about our services and communities
 - Ensure that we take account of their different needs and preferences and understand their motivations
 - Provide them with a range of opportunities to participate in the decision making processes that lead to improvements in our customer services and our communities.
 - Help our customers gain a better understanding in how we deliver Value For Money

2. OUR MISSION STATEMENT AND VALUES

- 2.1** The starting point for how we engage with our customers must be our Mission Statement and Values (both revised in 2015).

Our Mission Statement is:

- **Working together to create better homes and stronger communities ...making people happy**

Our Values:

- **passion, connection, excellence, respect**

Clearly we will not make our customers happy, connect with them or achieve excellence in what we do if we do not effectively engage with them. For that engagement to work effectively, it requires mutual trust, respect and partnership between those who use our services, staff and other partners.

2.2 Value For Money

In engaging with our customers and providing opportunities to participate, we must also recognise that our customers expect us to deliver Value For Money in everything we do.

We shouldn't continue to do things in the ways we have always done if we are unable to demonstrate the value in what we do? We need to continually ask what difference has our engagement made to our services and neighbourhoods? Did we get Value For Money from the specific resources we committed to customer engagement?

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3. WHO ARE OUR CUSTOMERS?

- 3.1** Thenue's customers include: tenants, sharing owners, factored owners and housing applicants and also other partner agencies. But how well do we really know our customers? How effective will our customer engagement strategy be, if we have limited knowledge of the needs, preferences and motivations of our customers?

Like most organisations we hold a considerable amount of data on our customers (our customer contact types, customers ethnic origin, age profile etc) but we do not undertake regular analyses of this data. We know some of our customers very well but the majority of our customers we have limited engagement with. We need to get better at recognising our different customers and not only listen to the views of a limited customer group.

Whilst we recognise that most customers have little or no interest in traditional forms of participation such as joining a local resident group, this is not a bad thing in itself. But if our resident groups/focus groups may not be representative of the varied customer profiles that exists, we need to ensure that we take account of a wider range of customer views.

3.2 Customer Profiles

One approach many organisations in the private and public sector now take to combat this concern is to undertake a customer profiling exercise to gain a better understanding of who their customers are. For Thenue this would mean analysing our data on customers to produce a set of customer profiles. These profiles/descriptions of typical customers, allow Thenue to recognise that different

customers have different needs and preferences and then use these profiles to consider how best to:

- Engage with each customer type
- Design our services to their different needs and preferences.

For example:

- Some customers do not have English as a first language
- Some customers prefer and need face to face contact
- Some prefer their service to be provided online; quick and easy at a time that suits them.
- Some customers prefer to complete a quick survey to give their views
- Some prefer to give up their time to participate in meetings and focus groups.
- Some customers always pay their rent on time and have very little need for our service other than to report the odd repair
- Some customers are very vulnerable with a range of complex needs.

Not all our customers are the same. So we need to avoid taking a one-size-fits-all approach to our customer service delivery and start segmenting our customers into smaller groups.

We will not make best use of our limited resources if we assume that all our customers require their interaction with us to be provided in the same way. Having a deeper understanding of who our customers are, will better ensure that we are delivering services in the most efficient and effective ways possible. Equally, when we communicate messages to our customers, it will be more effective if the recipient of the message finds it relevant to them and it is by a method that they prefer. Our customers will also choose the service channels with which they are most comfortable and provides them with the best customer experience. Some customers choose to enquire in-person, make a phone call, or even write a letter. Others may choose to access our services online. We can use our QL housing system to record customer communication preferences by default.

4. WHAT ARE OUR KEY PRINCIPLES OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT?

We have taken account of the National Standards for community engagement (see appendix 1) in developing this strategy. We set out below however, our own principles of engagement with our customers.

- All customers should have the opportunity to comment on and have a say in our decision making processes
- We will ensure tenants get the information they need to influence decisions that are made about their home, and communities.
- We will engage with the full range of customer types to ensure that no group is excluded from engaging with us.
- Ensure that our customer feedback is representative of the range of customer experiences to better understand their different needs and expectations

- We will ensure that customers know how their opinions and views have led to improvements in our services and neighbourhoods
- We will review all complaints received as a tool of ensuring that we are continually improving our services.
- We will be clear where customer engagement is limited by statute, best practice or Value For Money considerations.
- We will, if requested, involve our Tenant Scrutiny Panel (REST) in helping to design our 3 year customer satisfaction survey.
- Gather our customer feedback through a range of traditional and digital methods.
- Increase the involvement of under represented groups such as younger people and minority ethnic groups.
- Continue to encourage involvement and influence in areas of our operation where we have no significant customer engagement
- Monitor and review the Community Engagement action plan on a biannual basis to ensure it continues to be effective.
- Publish our annual Charter Performance report to provide tenants, residents and other service users with up to date information on our performance & also providing a comparison with other similar landlords.

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5. WHAT ARE WE REQUIRED TO DO BY LAW AND BY GOOD PRACTICE

5.1 This customer engagement strategy takes account of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 Section 53.

It sets out the duty on local authority landlords and Housing Associations to prepare a “tenant participation strategy”. Section 53(1) of this Act states that the strategy is about promoting the participation of tenants in the formulation of policy.

Section 54 of this act also notes:

A local authority landlord and a registered social landlord under a Scottish Secure tenancy or a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy must notify the tenant and every registered tenant organisation of—

(a) any proposal to which subsection (2) applies, and

(b) the likely effect of the proposal on the tenant,

and must have regard to any representations made to it, within such reasonable period as is specified in the notice, by the tenant or any such organisation in relation to the proposal.

(2) This subsection applies to a proposal by the landlord concerning—

(a) its policy in relation to housing management, repairs or maintenance, where the proposal, if implemented, is likely significantly to affect the tenant,

(b) the standard of service in relation to housing management, repairs and maintenance which it intends to provide,

(c) its tenant participation strategy under section 53,

We will therefore specifically consult with our tenants on changes to policy and our standards of service where the change is likely to significantly affect tenants.

To ensure that this happens in a consistent and systematic way, Thenue's Executive Team are required to consider whether community/customer consultation is appropriate as part of any report at an Executive Team Meeting.

Thenue consider that this Customer Engagement Strategy sets out our tenant participation strategy and confirms our full commitment to the terms of the Housing Scotland Act 2001.

5.2 The Scottish Social Housing Charter also sets out what social landlords should aim to achieve in performing housing activities for their tenants.

The Charter is used by the Scottish Housing Regulator to assess and report on each social landlord's performance. If a landlord is under-performing against the aims of the Charter the Regulator can issue improvement targets that the landlord must meet.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 introduced the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) which was effective from April 2012. The purpose of the Charter is to help improve the quality and value of the services that social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities.

The Charter sets out standards and objectives in the form of 16 outcomes which social landlords should aim to achieve when performing housing activities. Self assessment by landlords is a key Charter expectation as is submitting an Annual Return on the Charter to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR).

The following outcomes are particularly relevant to our customer engagement activities:

Outcome 2 – Communication

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

- Tenants and other customers (i.e. residents) 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 the landlord provides.

Outcome 3 – Participation

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

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

We will provide information annually in our Tenants Charter report on how we have achieved these objectives.

Our Customer Engagement Strategy therefore focuses on these 2 outcomes of the Charter by considering:

- 1) How we communicate with our customers so that they are well informed about our services and the decisions we take and in turn

- 2) How our customers have the opportunity to influence how we go about improving those services through varying levels of participation in decision making processes.

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6. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES STATEMENT

We recognise the importance of equality of opportunity for all our customers. We support and embrace the spirit of equalities legislation and regulatory frameworks, including the Equality Act 2010 and the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

We will promote participation that is free from prejudice and bias with regard to all protected characteristics under the 2010 Equalities Act, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or belief. We will consider geographic location, accessibility issues, special needs, language differences, learning difficulties or disability. We will address issues of accessibility with regard to information, publicity, venues, transport, caring responsibilities and any other issue, as budgetary constraints allow.

7. METHODS OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

- 7.1** In addition to our formal involvement structures we also have other less formal means of involving our customers and other interested parties in the work we do. We recognise that some customers will be more interested in active participation than others and that a range of methods are necessary - a menu rather than a ladder of participation.

Where an individual tenant or group of tenants wish to be involved more formally in the work we do, we will help and encourage that involvement. We will endeavour to ensure that any focus groups and customer surveys are developed after detailed analyses leading to a better understanding of who our customers are. When tenants express an interest in participating for the first time we will ensure that they are given the relevant information on opportunities available to them and help them work out the best option of involvement.

7.2 Individual customers

At an individual level tenants, sharing owners and owners as well as other customers can contact us directly to raise any issues or concerns they might have. We carry out customer satisfaction surveys and develop action plans, in particular areas such as repairs, anti social behaviour complaints, new homes, major repairs and service standards. We also carry out our large scale customer satisfaction survey every 3 years. We are committed to the involvement of our Tenant Scrutiny Panel (REST) in reviewing the questions we ask in this survey.

7.3 Focus Groups

These groups focus on key issues and are set up as required. These are informal groups and may be used to look at, for example, a housing policy review. These

groups are made up of different participants based on the subject matter under discussion. We will aim to ensure that they are as far as possible, representative of our different customer profiles.

7.4 Area Associations

Thenue's Area Associations have 3 main roles:

- Feedback local community concerns and comments
- Involvement in our decision making structure about policies and services
- Contribute to the wider regeneration of their communities

We have four Area Associations - Calton, Bridgeton & Dalmarnock, Cranhill and Netherholm. We will develop further Area Associations in our other communities, where it can be established there is a community demand for this and that it is the most effective and efficient way to engage with a community

We have formal Minutes of Agreement with each Area Association and these set out the areas of our services where we consult with and involve the Area Associations in decision making. Where there are housing services matters that affect all Thenue areas we would expect these to normally be the focus of our Tenant Scrutiny Panel (REST). We may however, also bring all the Area Associations together to discuss a particular service or policy issue.

These Area Associations receive annual funding from Thenue to carry out their work in the communities (see section 8 below). Their members come from the local communities. Area Association members may also be involved in the REST group and may also be members of Thenue Housing. On an annual basis Area Association members will be invited by Thenue to a joint meeting where we will ask each Area Association to provide us with a report detailing the work they have carried out during the year, the consultation exercises they have conducted and the outcome of their activities. This report will also include a copy of their annual accounts detailing particular how they have allocated funding given to them by Thenue. We believe that this joint meeting is crucial in sharing best practice amongst the Area Associations. We will agree with Area Associations on the format of this meeting.

Thenue's Community Engagement Officer will play a leading role in:

- Acting as liaison between Area Associations and Thenue
- Assisting each group with undertaking a training needs analyses and developing a training programme. Funding for this will come from the Area Association annual funding grant from Thenue.
- Supporting Area Associations in participating in community regeneration activity
- Helping to identify priorities and develop action plans according to community need

7.5 Tenant Scrutiny Panel (REST)

The REST (Resident Empowerment & Scrutiny Team), our Tenant Scrutiny Panel was established in 2013 and works independently of Thenue Housing. It is currently supported by the Tenants Information Service to ensure this degree of independence. It is a constituted group which aims to examine specific areas of our service delivery affecting all Thenue communities. It aims to deliver performance improvement where required and provide feedback and suggestions to our Board of Management and Executive Team. It has a defined remit which will be reviewed in 2017/18. Members of REST do not need to also be members of an Area Association, but cannot be Thenue Board members.

7.6 Other residents groups

We have one Retirement Housing Tenants Association in Calton which is made up of tenants who live in our Retirement housing. The Committee meets on a monthly basis and deals with issues affecting tenants living in Retirement housing. They are responsible for arranging and promoting social activities and to manage the funds raised to help deliver a range of local social and health activities. Thenue provides financial support to this group.

7.7 Community Councils

We will attend local Community Council meetings as required where there is no existing local residents group that we can engage with.

7.8 Tenants Conference/Open Days

Annually we aim to hold a tenants conference or Open Day, which will be advertised widely both in our newsletters and on our website, Facebook and Twitter pages. The event gives customers a chance to hear what we have been doing and participate in informal workshops, information sessions to find out more about the work we do and give us their views on how we are doing.

7.9 Complaints

We are committed to achieving high standards of quality in the delivery of our services.

We take complaints very seriously. We try to provide an excellent service at all times but we know that occasionally things go wrong. We have a complaint procedure to deal with such instances. We need to be more systematic however in how we review and learn from complaints and customer feedback. This will help us to identify areas of service where we need to make changes and improvements.

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8. RESOURCES FOR CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

- 8.1** We have a dedicated annual budget for tenant and resident participation and a considerable part of this is delegated to our Area Associations. They use this money to fund their activities, to develop as organisations and to consult and inform their membership and the wider community on the work they are doing.

8.2 We provide 3 separate grants that Area Associations can access. The main fund for Area Association activity is the Community Regeneration Fund. In addition to these resources, groups have access to

- A dedicated Community Engagement Officer to meet the aims of the Strategy and to support tenants to become involved and to stay involved.
- Support of other staff including attendance at meetings, if necessary.
- Provision of accessible meeting facilities within our local service centres and our London Rd office.
- Guidance and support to groups on constitutional matters and support for meetings and AGMs.

This is in addition to the non-monetary assistance we give to groups in the form of staff time in supporting their development. We also provide meeting space where we can and assist with the production of publicity material.

8.3 How is funding of Area Associations calculated?

Thenue provide a flat rate amount (the Community Regeneration Fund) to each Area Association to be able to fund the same amount of activity for the business of the Area Association Committee. Additional funding is based the number of tenants and owners within the specific area, calculated on a pro rata basis. This is reviewed annually. Such funding is conditional on groups being run in line with their constitutions and minute of agreement, providing evidence of consultation with members, also meeting good practice and legislative requirements particularly in relation to membership and equalities. We expect groups to have independently examined accounts and to publish and provide us with such information on an annual basis. when requested.

Where grants remain largely unspent from the previous year, in line with our Value For Money objectives, Area Associations must make the case to Thenue for their annual calculated grant to be paid in full. For example if 50% of budget is still unspent at year end Thenue may deduct 50% from the following year's grant allocation, if the Area Association is unable to identify appropriate plans for retaining the underspend.

8.4 Training and Development

We provide funding for, or provide the training itself, to ensure those involved in our Area Associations, REST group and other relevant groups and Board of Management are aware of new policy, good practice and other areas which may be of interest.

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9. DIGITAL STRATEGY AND NEW FORMS OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

9.1 Digital Strategy

As noted above this Strategy sets out our current methods of engagement but also looks to the future. Theue recently produced a new Digital Strategy which recognises that the environment we operate in is changing.

This Digital Strategy has 2 main aims:

- To maximise our residents access to the internet through supporting and encouraging them to go online, and
- at the same time drive forward our Business Objectives of efficiently delivering more of our services and processes in a digital and online way.

Communication with our customers is changing, as we take advantage of the opportunities that digital brings. Our Customer Engagement strategy recognises the opportunities offered by digital communication and will embrace it by ensuring that we optimise our use of alternatives to the traditional means of engaging with our customers.

Through digital we can:

- encourage greater and more effective tenant engagement through different forms of digital communication such as social media
- begin to engage with our customers who wouldn't normally get involved such as younger people.
- efficiently support our residents groups with communication and help them move to being self sufficient in the business of their meetings

Our residents groups are already looking to the benefits that using email and tablets can bring in the administration and participation at their meetings. The rise of affordable smartphone technology has seen the web become more accessible than ever, especially for people in lower-income demographics. Customers on lower incomes are more likely to access the internet on smartphones. We have developed a social media plan to reach a wider group of customers. We see connecting with our customers through Facebook and Twitter in particular, as a key part of our customer engagement strategy. Our Social Media Plan sets out:

- Realistic goals and objectives for the growth/presence of social media reach.
- Details on how we will delegate responsibility for management of social media streams.

10 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES.

This Customer Engagement Strategy has the following strategic objectives:

No	Strategic Objective
1	Undertake regular customer profiling to ensure we know our customer's service and communication needs, preferences and motivations.
2	Review the priorities of our Area Associations and support them with their objectives
3	Use Digital Technology to develop new ways of engaging with all our customers
4	Review the focus of our Tenant Scrutiny Panel (REST) with the aim of improving Thenue's services and performance.
5	Develop more systematic processes of reviewing customer complaints and feedback

11. ACTION PLAN FOR 2016/19

The attached* Action Plan sets out the specific actions we will implement in the next financial year to achieve our Strategic Objectives.

**Action plan to be prepared once strategy is approved.*

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12. MONITORING AND REVIEW

This Strategy will be a working document subject to continuous review. It is supported by an action plan (to ensure it is meeting evolving objectives and achieving associated targets).

We will involve our customers in the review of this strategy and annual action plan through customer surveys and meetings with community groups. When reviewing the Strategy, we will give due consideration to whether the methods of engagement with our customers are delivering our strategic objectives and leading to improvement in our services and neighbourhoods. We will check this information with our tenants in our tri annual customer satisfaction survey.

13. PROMOTING THIS STRATEGY

We will publicise this strategy in our newsletter and in our website and social media. We will produce a summary leaflet of this strategy which will be available online and in our offices.

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[Appendix 1](#)

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

1. **INVOLVEMENT:** we will identify and involve the people and organisations who have an interest in the focus of the engagement
2. **SUPPORT:** we will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement
3. **PLANNING:** we will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this evidence to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken
4. **METHODS:** we will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose
5. **WORKING TOGETHER:** We will agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently
6. **SHARING INFORMATION:** we will ensure that necessary information is communicated between the participants
7. **WORKING WITH OTHERS:** we will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement
8. **IMPROVEMENT:** we will develop actively the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants
9. **FEEDBACK:** we will feed back the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected
10. **MONITORING AND EVALUATION:** we will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purposes and meets the national standards for community engagement