

Customer Involvement Policy

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INTRODUCTION

Warrington Housing Association is committed to developing and supporting effective customer involvement. By working in partnership with our customers we aim to improve the quality of and satisfaction with our services and believe that customer involvement can maximise our accountability to customers and the communities in which we work.

WHA recognises that customers will want to get involved differently and will be able to commit different length of time. Some customers will just want to be informed, whilst others will wish to be consulted, whilst others will want to be actively involved in the decision making process. This is why we are committed to offering a varied and flexible “menu of involvement “to suit those individual circumstances. Customers can become involved both collectively through customer groups and/or on an individual basis and can choose how, when and at what level they want to be involved.

DEFINITIONS

WHA defines customer involvement as a process that involves:

- Any activity where customers are able to have their voices heard, recorded and are able to contribute and shape our services and how they are delivered by WHA.
- Sharing information and ideas with customers
- Offering customer’s opportunities to challenge and scrutinise our performance and services
- Offering customers, a range of opportunities to get more actively involved in shaping our services, the information we share and increasing our ability to actively listen and learning from feedback
- Reporting back and being accountable to customers

For the purpose of this document “customer” is defined as any customer, leaseholder, or shared owner.

POLICY STATEMENT

Document Ref:	Version	Approved Date:	Approved by:	Expire Date:	Page Numbers
WHA 0438	2	04.04.2024	SMT	03.04.2027	2

WHA is committed to ensuring all customers have the opportunity to be involved to the level they wish both on an informal or formal basis for as long as they wish to. In the guise as members of groups, as individual customer or virtual contributor. We actively encourage you to set the pace of your involvement and will endeavour to support your engagement at the level you feel comfortable with and at a pace that suits you or your group.

Active customer involvement pivotal and vital if we are to ensure a true partnership with those that give time and energy to improving to the efficiency and effectiveness of the services we provide.

The purpose of this policy is set out how we do this and how we will support, enable and develop greater customer involvement.

This policy is linked to our Neighbourhood Strategy and our Volunteer policy.

LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

From April 2024 the new Regulatory consumer standards increased the level of expectation and scrutiny on Housing Providers in respect of engaging and involving their customers. Specifically, the new consumer standard strengthens the regulators powers to ensure that we provide safe, wellmaintained homes and services that meet the diverse needs of our customers. In respect of this policy there is a clear requirement that our approach is effectively informed and scrutinised by our customers.

The Consumer Standard sets out that Registered Providers shall ensure that customers are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- The formulation of housing related polices and strategic priorities
- The making of decisions about how services are delivered and setting service standards and agreeing local offers
- The scrutiny of Landlords performance and making recommendations about how services can be improved.

The Standards also says that Registered Providers will:

- Provide customers with accessible, relevant and timely information about standards, choices, responsibilities,
- Provide information about how customers can communicate with them and provide feedback

Document Ref:	Version	Approved Date:	Approved by:	Expire Date:	Page Numbers
WHA 0438	2	04.04.2024	SMT	03.04.2027	3

- Ensure that customers are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in setting housing policy and procedure, how services are delivered and standards set and how their homes are managed.
- Support the formation and activities of customer panels or groups and respond in a constructive and timely manner to them
- Provide support to customers to build their capacity to be more effectively involved

In 2019 the National Housing Federation introduced the Together with Tenants Charter, the aim of the charter is to ensure that all housing provider creates strong and ever-increasing opportunities for customers to have their say in a variety of ways and be actively heard about the homes and communities they live in.

WHA was one of a 130 housing organisations that asked the federation if we could sign up to the charter as an early adopter and support them with their initial work in shaping their four-point plan, which would include a new charter that sets out in clear terms what ‘customers’ should expect from their landlord as we move forward.

BUSINESS PLAN

WHAs vision has been recently updated to include specific reference to our customers

“To work alongside our customers in make Warrington a great place to live in which the potential of individuals and communities can be realised”

Underpinning our Vision are five Thematic priorities one of which is Customers and specifically:-

To focus on delivering exceptional core services, prioritising the needs of our customers and the communities in which we work.

- We will provide accessible and tailored services aiming to meet or exceed the expectations of our customers.
- We will ensure that customers are genuinely influencing what we do as a business and that Board are making informed decisions linked to customer insight .By definition, we are ‘rooted in place’ and have significant assets and resources which can be used to influence the health and wellbeing of their local community. We will use this strength to further cement our position as an anchor institution.

Document Ref:	Version	Approved Date:	Approved by:	Expire Date:	Page Numbers
WHA 0438	2	04.04.2024	SMT	03.04.2027	4

We will celebrate success of what we do and openly share learning when things go wrong. In order to deliver on these objectives, it is essential that we provide a wide range of flexible options for customers to become involved and to have a say, as effective customer involvement can ensure that our neighbourhoods and communities are places where people want to live, now and in the future.

INVOLVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

We will ensure that customers have a real opportunities to become involved in the decision making in a way that suits them. To achieve this we are committed to providing a range of opportunities for involvement.

Our “menu of involvement” is listed in appendix one.

COMMUNICATION

WHA are committed to developing and improving the way we communicate with customers and receive feedback that meets our customer’s needs.

We are constantly reviewing the way we communicate and by doing this we will improve our service, our performance and encourage more customers to get involved in a way that suits their needs and interests.

We are regularly updating our data to record customers preferred method of communication and whenever possible we will communicate and seek feedback in this way.

We have increased our focus on utilising technology to innovate improved processes that transform the way we deliver service and offer to you.

Over the last few years we have increased our access and use of digital offerings and will continue to look at virtual ways to increase engagement and access to and for customers.

Our sole focus is to increase engagement with a wider demographic of our customer base to ensure that we are delivering our services where they are needed most and in a way that matches our customer’s needs and in a way that responds to individual needs, expectations and vulnerabilities.

To that’s aim and to ensure that scrutiny panel members can independently operate in an increasing digital environment we have provided all members of our scrutiny panel with next generation tablets and a scrutiny panel email address –

Document Ref:	Version	Approved Date:	Approved by:	Expire Date:	Page Numbers
WHA 0438	2	04.04.2024	SMT	03.04.2027	5

this allows panel members to independently contact and work with each other, access digital information, monitor WHAs progress and where relevant and permitted, mystery test how our colleagues complete and deliver services to you.

INFORMATION

WHA aims to keep customers informed in a timely manner about our services and performance and will ensure that we provide good quality information in a range of ways.

We presently provide a regular newsletter, information downloads, handbooks and our annual report. We are increasing our use of social media and our website to interact with our customer base and will continue seek new ways to bring information to customers in easy to access formats.

All new customers receive information about the opportunities for getting involved. Our newsletter and website hosts a dedicated page that focuses on our scrutiny panel opportunities and other ways to get involved on regular basis.

RESOURCING CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT

WHA is committed to ensuring that we properly resource and support our customer involvement service. To ensure this we have the following:

Committed and trained colleagues with responsibility for promoting, supporting customer involvement at all levels and implementing this and other community focused policies.

Dedicated WHA colleague resource each month to support the delivery of customer engagement activities and established groups such as the scrutiny panel

A separate customer involvement budget is available and used to support and develop involvement at all levels. Examples of where funding is used include offering a grant for established customer groups to help with basic administration costs, our Clean, Green and Safe scheme, regular Community Involvement Days and events. This budget also provides funding for our scrutiny panel, external training plan and IT equipment - the current training available is listed in appendix two.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Document Ref:	Version	Approved Date:	Approved by:	Expire Date:	Page Numbers
WHA 0438	2	04.04.2024	SMT	03.04.2027	6

This Policy also links into our Equality and Diversity Policy. Through the delivery of customer involvement, we embrace and actively work towards delivering the principles set out in our policy

REVIEW AND MONITORING

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years and may be subject to more frequent revising in the case of regulatory or legislative change.

To monitor the effectiveness of our customer involvement service we will regularly monitor its effectiveness through the scrutiny panel review, through an annual report to Board on Customers, through a number of Key Performance indicators linked to Regulatory Standards (TSMs) that are reported to Board and customers

The Head of Housing and Customer Services is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy and related training opportunities, alongside a dedicated Customer Voice officer and well trained dedicated frontline colleagues.

Appendix 1

Our menu of involvement includes:

Document Ref:	Version	Approved Date:	Approved by:	Expire Date:	Page Numbers
WHA 0438	2	04.04.2024	SMT	03.04.2027	7

Scrutiny Panel (WHASP)

A group of WHA customers who meet regularly with WHA colleagues and look at performance and look more closely at specific areas linked to customer experience and impact. Their work is closely aligned to regulatory and legislative requirements or sector good practice.

The panel is independent, and they make recommendations for improvement to the senior management team and the Board of Management. The group meet in a variety of ways which include virtually and face to face.

Approved by the Customer

A task and finish group of customers who look at specific task or one-off issue. The customers are brought together from a variety of WHA settings and often use involvement in these groups as a way to 'test out' their interest in working alongside WHA.

Many customers have moved from this group into being permanent Scrutiny Panel members.

Customer Groups

WHA actively encourages the formation of customer groups on our estates and we support these groups by providing funding through small grants to help with administration costs and also providing staff time. WHA are also happy for elected customer groups to play a greater part in the way their estate is run by allowing them greater control and responsibility for management performance at the local level, the standard of service delivery and control of expenditure in relation to local estate budgets.

Independent Living Service meetings

We currently operate 6 specialist older person's retirement schemes managed by our independent living service.

Each scheme completes a monthly meeting with customers living within those schemes and as a collective group meeting on a bi-annual basis or more frequently if customer desire. We also meet on a timely basis with customers in other settings (such as our general needs blocks) and use these events to discuss regular items of interest or to consult on a specific issue or interest. All meetings will

Document Ref:	Version	Approved Date:	Approved by:	Expire Date:	Page Numbers
WHA 0438	2	04.04.2024	SMT	03.04.2027	8

have an agenda and minutes. All meetings can be delivered virtually or face to face where relevant.

Green Inspectors

A group of customers who volunteer to inspect landscaping in their locality and speak to other customers and give us feedback about their local area. Green Inspectors can help inform our decisions to fund additional landscaping and improvement works in the area. Here customers can apply to our Clean, Green and Safe scheme for additional funding for estate improvements.

Satisfaction surveys

On a regular basis we consult and engage with customers through formal Tenant Satisfaction Surveys, these ask our customers what they thought of our service, suggested improvements etc. These surveys help us to collect information about the effectiveness and efficiency of the services we are providing and help us benchmark our performance with real time results. The results of key surveys are reported in our newsletters and on our website with any learning opportunities.

Mystery testers

A group of customers who have been trained to observe and record their experiences of services provided by WHA. All feedback is analysed and used to improve services.

Block champions

Volunteers who have agreed to be the voice for customers in their block.

Community Engagement Days

On larger developments where there are no formal customer groups or customer meetings are not well attended or popular, we will consider other ways of consulting local customers such as community engagement days. On community

Document Ref:	Version	Approved Date:	Approved by:	Expire Date:	Page Numbers
WHA 0438	2	04.04.2024	SMT	03.04.2027	9

engagement colleagues of all levels spend time talking to customers about where they live, the service we provide and suggested improvements. Members of EMT are committed to attending these days and this provides vital feedback and shapes how we deliver services as we move forward.

Feedback following these events is shared in a variety of ways including a 'you said, we did feedback document' or on our website and newsletter if appropriate.

Estate walkabouts

Colleagues from WHA regularly carry out estate walkabouts. The purpose of the walkabout is to get on the spot feedback from customers about their home and neighbourhood.

Suggestions, comments, complaints and compliments

We are always asking for suggestions for making improvements and actively encourage customers to complain if they are not happy with our service or feel there is a different way, we can do things. All feedback is good feedback and we will use all information shared to help shape a better service.

Customer Conference

Annually, we work with our North West Housing Association partners to host a Customer Conference. This conference is an opportunity for involved customers from across 21 housing associations, to share experiences, hear about best practice and work constructively with their landlords to seek to improve services.

Document Ref:	Version	Approved Date:	Approved by:	Expire Date:	Page Numbers
WHA 0438	2	04.04.2024	SMT	03.04.2027	10

Document Ref:	Version	Approved Date:	Approved by:	Expire Date:	Page Numbers
WHA 0438	2	04.04.2024	SMT	03.04.2027	11

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