



Report to:	STOCKPORT HOMES MEMBER COMMITTEE	
	11 October 2021	
Report of:	DIRECTOR OF FOUNDATIONS & CUSTOMER SERVICES	
Contact Officer and contact details	Rebecca Sweeton 0161 218 1091 rebecca.sweeton@stockporthomes.org	
Type of Report	Assurance	
Title of Report:	CUSTOMER VOICE & INFLUENCE STRATEGY UPDATE 2020-21	
Purpose of Report:	To provide an update on the progress of the Customer Voice and Influence (CV&I) Strategy at the end of year one of delivery 2020-21.	
Recommendation(s):	That the Member Committee discuss and note the progress made against the delivery of the Customer Voice and Influence Strategy to date.	
Confidentiality	Non-Confidential	
Resource Implications	All actions delivered within the Strategy and the updated actions for 2021-2022 will be delivered within existing budgets and resources.	
Impact on Risk Appetite and Risk Register	SHG has a 'minimal' appetite for Reputation, Key Relationships and Decision Making risks. Having effective mechanisms in place to gather and act on customer voice and insight ensures that decision making is informed and less likely to be challenged.	
	Risk Number	Risk Description
	9	SHG does not adhere to changes to be brought about by the Social
		Risk Mitigation
		Delivery of actions within the Strategy will prepare SHG to undertake an

		Housing White Paper (The Charter for Social Housing Residents) and other significant changes to local and national housing / other policies	assessment against the National Standards for Engagement, which will provide assurance that all regulatory standards are met.
	10	SHG is not adequately prepared for the evolving requirements of the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) when it becomes a large provider (1,000+ units owned by Stockport Homes) and the emergence of periodic inspection	A close working relationship with Governance via the Engagement Partnering model will ensure the requirements of the consumer regulations are met via the Strategy.
	17	SHG's governance structure is not fit for purpose and the Board / Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) are ineffective and do not possess the necessary skills to properly govern, challenge and hold SHG to account whilst it grows and diversifies	The Strategy will deliver more inclusive, flexible opportunities for customers to challenge services, including through Board and Scrutiny membership.
Customer Voice	Successful delivery of the Strategy will strengthen customer voice in service planning and decision making by delivering		

	collaborative relationships through inclusive, modern and insightful engagement and customer insight.
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion implications	The Strategy commits to developing targeted approaches to collaborating with customers that may be harder to reach and to developing strong partnerships to engage with diversity networks within Stockport around key themes including disability, BAME and LGBTQ+ customers. Greater use of digital will ensure customers who are limited by mobility, working hours or other commitments are still able to engage with services and have their voices heard.
Regulatory compliance	<p>The CV&I Strategy and action plan are based on the Tpas National Engagement Standards, which provide a framework for social housing providers to meet regulatory expectations which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulator of Social Housing Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard • NHF Code of Governance • Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code • The Building Safety Bill • NHF's Together with Tenants. <p>The Strategy action plan has been updated for 2021-22 in line with the revised standards published in Spring 2021.</p>
Comments of the Stockport Homes Monitoring Group	<p>The Stockport Homes Monitoring Group provided comments relating to the Customer Voice and Influence Strategy. The comments covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The customers discussed the community connection event, which involved staff door knocking and providing information about building safety. Customers believed this was a very proactive way of speaking to residents about key issues like this. • The customers were pleased that the Housing White Paper will be for all housing providers to follow, especially when it comes to building safety. • The customers highlighted that the Tenant Inspectors as an excellent way of engaging with customers who want to help Stockport Homes improve. They were

also impressed that over 50 customers had expressed interest in becoming a Tenant Inspector.

- The customers highlighted that the report shows that SHG were leading the way in customer engagement and they were happy overall with the objectives.
- The customers stressed the importance of not going fully digital, as there are some customers who don't like the digital route. Getting out and speaking to people was still really important to many customer to ensure SHG continues to understand what is important to them.
- The customers were impressed with the breadth of attempted inclusion.
- The continued development of the 'engagement framework' was considered to be an important objective.

1. INTRODUCTION

The three-year Customer Voice and Influence (CV&I) Strategy 2020-2023 sets out Stockport Homes Group's (SHG) approach to keeping customers at the heart of service planning and decision making. This will be achieved through building inclusive and collaborative relationships with customers, utilising insight and meaningful engagement practices and nurturing the strong 'customer first' culture across the organisation.

This report provides an overview of progress to date and actions for the year ahead to ensure SHG continues to develop and embed its Customer Voice approach and meet its regulatory obligations.

2. OBJECTIVES UPDATE 2020-21

The CV&I Strategy focusses on five objectives to support and develop SHG's engagement approach. The following outlines each of the objectives, the progress made in delivering the actions for each objective and the outcomes achieved.

2.1 Objective One: Amplifying the Customer Voice and Value of Engagement

This objective focusses on strengthening the links between engagement and business planning, deepening the understanding of engagement and customer insight to ensure that customer voice is at the forefront of planning and decision making across SHG's services.

2.1.1 A significant area of focus has been embedding and developing a cross-service Engagement Partners approach to underpin a strong 'customer voice' culture across SHG. This partnering has strengthened relationships between the Customer Engagement and Inclusion (CEI) Team and other services. It has enabled skills and expertise to be shared, so colleagues feel more confident to design, deliver and report on accessible and inclusive engagement.

Demonstrable improvements to consultations have been seen as a result, with better use of customer insight and broadening of participation through targeted approaches. For example, the engagement team supported managers developing the Rent Strategy, Delivery Plan and Asset Management consultations to design effective surveys and advised on methodology which would be inclusive and enable customers to participate such as animations, videos on YouTube and telephone/online surveys.

Feedback to customers via a new infographic template (see below for example) has ensured learning and outcomes from engagement are consistently shared, building confidence in the positive changes engagement brings to services and customers. This approach will be further developed through dedicated "You Said, We Did" and quarterly Customer Voice areas on the website, SHG's social media channels and with staff and involved customers commencing Autumn 2021.



Engagement partner meetings take place at least quarterly, with a meeting template to ensure consistency including standing items such as upcoming Policy and Strategy reviews, procurement activities and feedback from completed consultation activities. This ensures that opportunities for engagement are thoroughly planned to secure meaningful engagement with customers. Each meeting is themed to share information and raise awareness of business needs, including the 'See the Person' campaign¹, collating standard letters, collecting insight to inform Neighbourhood Action Plans, budget planning and the Customer Roadshow.

Procedures have been reviewed and updated to place customer voice at the forefront of information brought to the Board. Through the engagement partnering approach, report authors can access support and advice from the CEI Team at the beginning of the process to enable customer voice and insight to be an integral part of reporting. A new section on the Board cover sheet enables customer voice to be highlighted and summarised on the report cover.

2.1.2 Underpinning the success of the engagement partnering is SHG's commitment to learning and development. A range of learning and networking opportunities have been available including participating in Tpas' National Customer Scrutiny Week 2020, delivery of bespoke training in survey design and implementation, Resident Involvement North West's (RING) bitesize skills share sessions and Tpas² webinars. A forward plan of learning and training will be developed to sustain this over the coming 12 months, including using behavioural insights to increase involvement, effective communications and social value in community engagement.

¹ This campaign aims to challenge perceptions by presenting alternative narratives of who the social housing tenant is and what life in social housing is really like.

² Tpas are a not-for-profit organisation that promote, support and champion tenant involvement and empowerment in social housing across England.

The CEI Team are working closely with the People and Organisational Development team to embed customer voice in staff inductions, training and values conversations so all staff understand meaningful engagement and the benefits it can bring to tenants and the organisation. An approach has been devised which includes:

- Using the Corporate Team Meeting Tool to regularly share customer voice updates and encourage discussion amongst staff at team meetings. The updates commenced in August 2021 and will be bi-monthly.
- A review of the SHG Induction process is underway and will be relaunched in January 2022. The induction will be revised to cover key organisational priorities including the importance of customer voice as part of everybody's role.
- Customer voice themed seasonal updates, which offer an effective method for communicating key developments and activities to a captive audience across all staff.
- Customer voice as a standing agenda item at Colleague Voice meetings, including training for staff representatives to enable them to champion customer voice and insight principles in their own service areas. A training session plan has been developed in collaboration with the Customer Training Officer, with plans to roll this out to Colleague Voice in the Autumn.

An engagement toolkit for staff is being developed to be used in conjunction with engagement partnering and as a reference guide for services to assist in planning and designing engagement. The toolkit is being designed in partnership with engagement colleagues at SMBC to create consistency in the approach to community consultation in the Borough.

- 2.1.3 The stigmatisation of social housing tenants rightly continues to gain attention in the sector with several initiatives developing from the Government's 'A New Deal for Social Housing' Green paper in 2018. These include the tenant-led 'See the Person' campaign and the CIH publication 'It's Not Okay – a guide to tackling stigma in social housing' (September 2020). Both aim to challenge perceptions by presenting alternative narratives of who the social housing tenant is and what life in social housing is really like.

SHG has a strong track record of challenging stigma, including engagement methods that help to ensure accountability to tenants such as the Customer Scrutiny Panel, our Service Expectations which are aligned with the Together with Tenants Charter and Commitments³ and tenant representatives on the Board. The annual Customer STAR awards also recognise and celebrate the successes and achievements of our customers and communities. In addition to committing to the See the Person pledge, SHG will support the national 'Stop the Stigma' week at a future date to be set by Tpas and CIH, and participate in

³ Stockport Homes Group are an early adopter of the Together with Tenants (TwT) Charter and Commitments. TwT is a voluntary initiative developed by the National Housing Federation aimed at driving up and creating consistent standards across social housing providers.

the Stigma in Social Housing in England research study consultation webinar with Durham University academics in September 2021.

- 2.1.4 In February 2021, TPAS launched a revised set of National Standards for Engagement, which reflect the renewed focus on the importance of the residents voice and the changing operating environment of social housing under increased expectations of the Regulator of Social Housing, the Housing Ombudsman, the National Housing Federation's Code of Governance and the proposed Building Safety regime. A gap analysis of engagement at SHG against the new standards has been undertaken, with updated actions incorporated in the Strategy Action Plan in Appendix One. SHG are on track to undertake Tpas' engagement accreditation in Spring 2022 which will give further confidence that all regulatory expectations are met. In addition, an audit of customer engagement will be undertaken by PWC in September 2021 as part of the 2021/2022 internal audit plan approved by the Audit and Risk Committee.

2.2 Objective Two: Modernising Strategic Engagement

This objective focuses on ensuring all customers can be involved in influencing strategic plans and decisions through increasing inclusive engagement opportunities.

- 2.2.1 A review of scrutiny is underway with Customer Scrutiny Panel members and the Independent Mentor. The aim is to upskill panel members to have greater oversight of performance and customer feedback. A recruitment campaign in early 2022 will aim to increase the panel membership, with more flexible options to participate in reviews via 'Armchair Scrutiny', surveys and focus groups. A Forward Plan of activity will be developed to target customers to join the scrutiny activity in a way which suits them.
- 2.2.2 A draft procurement toolkit for staff is in development based on research of best practice in the sector and the findings from Fusion 21's 'Involving Tenants in Procurement' report (Jan 2021). The toolkit will be utilised through engagement partnering in conjunction with the procurement register to identify at the earliest stage more opportunities for customers to be involved in the procurement process. The Business Case Document for Procurement has also been updated to include a prompt to service managers to consider how customers could be more involved in procurement processes at the tendering stage.

The CEI Team are developing a Customer Inspectors' programme to enable customers to regularly monitor and challenge service performance. The programme will focus on the Grounds Maintenance contract initially and be delivered in partnership with the Greenspace Team. Customer Inspectors will have a direct route to the Customer Scrutiny Panel, reporting findings from inspections which could trigger a scrutiny review.

- 2.2.3 SHG are partners in the Greater Manchester Housing Partnership (GMHP) comprising housing associations and ALMOs across the city region. GMHP set up a Tenant Voice working group in 2019 to consider ways to bring the customer voice into the work of GMHP. The group was tasked with co-ordinating a survey of all stakeholders and residents to understand to what extent they agree with the existing GMHP priorities, with information and advice

and improving the safety of homes emerging as the top two priorities across all respondents. A report will be shared with GMHP's Chief Executive Officer's group in September 2021 with further actions to follow to feed the results into the partnership's priorities. GMHP are also exploring options to develop a digital forum for GM tenants in the future.

- 2.2.4 SHG is committed to celebrating diversity, supporting inclusion and promoting equality within the organisation and communities it serves. Following a targeted recruitment campaign, SHG has recently recruited two new stakeholder Board Members, both of whom are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) professionals bringing a diverse range of skills and expertise to the Board.

SHG has signed up to the Houseproud Pledge, which provides a framework for landlords to work with involved residents to take action and demonstrate their commitment to LGBTQ+ equality and support. SHG have also become a lead partner in the Houseproud Rainbow Roofs LGBTQ+ Customer Forum, bringing together customers from housing associations across the North West, housing professionals, agencies, and local authority representatives. Five SHG tenants are currently involved in the Forum and in planning a virtual pride event in August 2021.

SHG has also partnered with students at Manchester Metropolitan University to undertake a research project with BAME customers with the aim to better understand ethnically diverse communities' experiences of accessing services at SHG. 41 customers participated in the project, giving feedback on their home, their neighbourhood, accessing services and support. The findings have been collated into a report and shared with relevant services areas and will be utilised within future engagement partnering sessions.

2.3 Objective Three: Wider Community Engagement

This objective aims to strengthen engagement in communities and make effective use of all opportunities to hear and act upon the customer voice in neighbourhoods, collaborating with residents to create positive change and share and celebrate successes.

- 2.3.1 At the beginning of 2020 a new approach to managing blocks, known as 'Vision 20-20', was introduced as a pilot at the Lancashire Hill and Mottram Street estates, to provide a more targeted approach to tackling a wide range of customer, tenancy and estate management issues whilst removing duplication between teams for example Rents, the Engagement team, Housing Officers, Repairs and Facilities Management. The joint approach has proven successful in tackling complex cases and maximising increased customer access. Achievements include a reduction in rent arrears for blocks during 2020-21, despite an increase in arrears in other property types and a higher proportion of tenants on Universal Credit in the blocks. Increased access rates were achieved for sprinkler works to properties by teams working collaboratively and a 12% reduction in voids compared to the previous year.
- 2.3.2 During the last 12 months, a positive relationship has been established with 'Forward Stockport', a dedicated safe space for LGBTQ+ residents, family and friends to meet, participate and share with the wider community. SHG has supported Forward through Community Funding for events during LGBTQ+

history month in February 2021 and providing analysis of a welfare survey undertaken during lockdown.

- 2.3.3 SHG have a good working relationship with prominent community organisations across Stockport. A successful project has been delivered at Lancashire Hill to refresh the existing mural with a new artwork installation around the play area. This project was developed from conversations with young people and residents who wanted to do something to improve that space with the new art installation co-designed by local residents. The connections made through this community project are important to create foundations for engaging local residents in future redevelopment works on the estate.

Other strong community relationships include the BAME group at Heaton and Norris Pavilion and the newly established youth hub on the Cherry Tree estate in Romiley. Financial support has been provided at Cherry Tree to continue online cookery, with 50 families joining the cookery session each week using ingredients delivered to their homes. This has now been rolled out to Offerton thanks to links with the Customer Engagement Officer who chairs the Stepping Hill 'Team Around the Place'⁴ team. These connections have enabled the project to link with other groups in the area, including GLO Church and Offerton & Great Moor mutual aid volunteers, who helped pack the food bags and deliver them to families.

- 2.3.4 Since providing hot meals to a number of local agencies during the pandemic, the Engagement Team has worked with Offerton Community Café to redevelop their offer to provide healthy, low cost meals to older residents across the area, and to work with Your Local Panty to provide family meals for the family members. 1st Stop Community Café in Brinnington also helped to provide family meals via Your Local Pantry and supported Brinnington Big Local⁵ to deliver Cooking up a Storm for families.

These partnerships will continue to be nurtured and opportunities to collaborate on service developments and decision making will be developed and explored during the next 12 months as groups start to fully re-open now Covid restrictions have eased.

- 2.3.5 Neighbourhood Action Plans have been redeveloped drawing on customer insight to create plans tailored to addressing issues specific to the neighbourhood. A campaign to reduce rubbish and littering has been implemented by the Neighbourhood Housing Team in response to customers feedback.

2.4 Objective Four: Information, Insight and Digital Engagement

- 2.4.1 SHG is working towards developing modern digital methods for engagement to widen opportunities for involvement as part of the digital transformation journey.

During the last 12 months, a number of digital engagement platforms have been investigated to ensure alignment with existing digital transformation work at SHG. Initial discussions have been held with SMBC about the potential to

⁴ Team Around the Place brings together multiple agencies working in an area to achieve more positive outcomes by working collaboratively with local people.

⁵ Brinnington Big Local is a funding scheme where 150 local areas were gifted £1m each to use to create lasting change in their area.

jointly procure an engagement platform that could be used by both organisations for consultation activities.

Customers have been consulted on the new SHG websites, with the feedback influencing the tendering process for a new website provider. Further work to involve customers in the website re-design and SHG's digital journey is being shaped for Autumn 2021. The website has been updated to include a menu of involvement options, a learning from complaints feedback section, service expectations and will include a dedicated "You Said, We Did" section.

A flexible approach is being developed to engage customers in reviewing key information and communications to ensure the content is clear, jargon free and understandable. For example, feedback from consultation into the timings of the heating in high-rise blocks indicated customers found the information confusing. A Frequently Asked Questions guide has since been designed and customers in the blocks who responded to the survey will be able to sense check the information and influence its content. The CEI team will also draw on wider community links, such as customers using the Your Local Pantry stores in the blocks and the community group at Lancashire Hill to gather feedback on the information. Working in this way will empower customers directly affected by the service provision and increase trust amongst customers that their views are valued, listened to and acted upon.

2.5 Objective Five: Accountability and Building Safety

This objective focuses on SHG meeting the new building safety regulatory requirements and enabling customers to consistently see how their involvement leads to positive change, building trust and respect and confidence in the safety of their building and Stockport Homes as their landlord.

- 2.5.1 Consultation is underway to inform the Building Safety Resident Engagement Strategy via the annual customer roadshow. The roadshow survey was developed through consultation with a pilot group of 50 customers, who had previously expressed an interest in building safety through the consultation undertaken during the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government pilot project in 2020. The pilot customer group tested the survey and gave feedback on how clear and easy it was to follow and understand. The feedback from the pilot group shaped the final survey used during the roadshow, with over 100 staff from across the organisation volunteering to door knock or telephone customers living in the high-rise blocks to complete the survey throughout August and September 2021.

Customers were also invited to a series of 'Connecting Communities' events across three locations that are part of the Building Safety Pilot project. The events offered customers the opportunity to meet the Building Safety Team face to face and speak to the Fire Service about any concerns they had, giving them a further opportunity to have their voice heard. Feedback captured from the roadshow survey and community events will inform how residents want to be kept informed and how they want to be involved in building safety for their block and shape the Resident Engagement Strategy for Building Safety, which will be launched in early 2022. As at start of September 2021, staff had door knocked just under 1,000 properties, with a total of 296 surveys completed. The next phase of telephone engagement is well underway, with the aim to achieve

an overall total of 400 completed surveys which would represent a response rate of around 40%.

- 2.5.2 SHG has a comprehensive customer feedback procedure with complaints, including those determined by the Housing Ombudsman, documented, widely communicated and consistently publicised to all stakeholders. Half year customer feedback reports are available to customers via the website and a year-end report is submitted to the Customer Scrutiny Panel. Complaints reporting has been enhanced, with a new procedure to extract and share learning from complaints quarterly with staff and customers implemented from Summer 2021. Longer term patterns will also be analysed to identify trends which require action.

3. CONCLUSION

The CV&I Strategy has made clear progress during the first 12 months, particularly in developing methods to create a strong customer voice culture and keep customers informed. Customers identified 'being kept informed' as a key priority during the consultation undertaken to develop the Strategy in the Summer of 2020.

Key areas of focus for year two are digital engagement in line with SHG's digital transformation ambitions, engagement in building safety and continuing to develop the engagement framework to deliver robust scrutiny and opportunities for customers to be engaged, monitor performance and hold the organisation to account.

4. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Member Committee discuss and note the progress made against the delivery of the Customer Voice and Influence Strategy to date.