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CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT POLICY

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Summary

Longhurst Group is committed to encouraging positive and active customer engagement which reinforces our values, business plan objectives and Improving Lives 2025 Strategy. We offer a range of ways in which customers can engage and provide feedback, to meet different customers' needs, preferences and expectations.

Contents

PART ONE	1
About this Policy	1
Summary	2
Contents	2
PART TWO	3
Policy	3
Introduction	3
Intent	3
Principles	3
Scope	4
Policy Details	4
Access to Engagement	4
Customer Engagement Offer	4
Customer Engagement Framework	4
Customer Governance	5
Customer Scrutiny	5
Customer Feedback	5
Customer Insight	5
Service Improvement	6
Community Investment	6
Equality and Diversity	6
Roles and responsibilities	6
Monitoring, Evaluation and Review	6
PART THREE	8
Appendices	8
A. Policy Approval Control	8
B. Policy Development Plan	8

PART TWO

Policy

Introduction

Longhurst Group believes that our customers should have the opportunity to be engaged in services that affect them and the local neighbourhood they live in. This Policy sets out our customer engagement framework and how it will support our Improving Lives 2025 Strategy.

Intent

To ensure that:

- Customers are empowered by making sure their voices are heard
- Customers have a range of opportunities to be engaged with the planning and delivery of our services, scrutiny and performance standards and policy development, in ways that are appropriate to customers and Longhurst Group
- Customers directly influence our Improving Lives agenda
- Customer insight is used to enable us to understand our customers' experiences, behaviours and aspirations, and we will use this to shape our services and provide a richer customer experience

Principles

Legislation and Regulations: The following legislation and regulations underpin our approach to customer engagement:

The Regulator of Social Housing places obligations on registered housing providers. In particular:

- The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard requires us to provide choices, information and communication appropriate to the diverse needs of our customers; and to give customers a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in strategy, policy, service delivery, scrutiny and performance standards.
- Leaseholders are entitled to be consulted under The Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002, Section 151, which introduced new requirements for the statutory consultation of leaseholders. This gives leaseholders the ability to nominate contractors, in appropriate cases, and make observations that the landlord must pay regard to.
- Customer insight data is collected in line with GDPR legislation to enable us to analyse feedback and use it to shape services and our engagement model.

Future regulatory changes will bring about a higher emphasis on consumer regulation, customer empowerment and customer service across the housing sector. It will also expect landlords to resolve issues swiftly and make sure customers' voices are heard.

This Policy seeks to embrace that challenge and provide innovative ways to re-connect with our customers. We have tailored our engagement model by recognising the need to be flexible and making sure engagement is meaningful.

Scope

This Policy covers engagement with all customers of the Longhurst Group, including general needs customers, leaseholders, shared owners, supported housing schemes and residents in our care homes.

Policy Details

Access to Engagement

We recognise that whilst some customers are keen to engage, others prefer a minimal level of engagement. We believe it is business critical that we proactively seek customers' feedback and views, to ensure that there are high levels of satisfaction and to achieve a positive relationship with our customers.

We will ensure that a range of opportunities are available for our customers to engage in and provide feedback to us, in ways that are appropriate to their preferences and lifestyles.

We offer solutions to help customers overcome barriers to engagement. We also offer an increasing number of digital engagement activities, to provide access to customers who prefer this way of engaging with us. Digital engagement is increasing in popularity and will continue to be developed and play a key role moving forward.

Customer Engagement Offer

We have developed our engagement offer using customer feedback and insight. There are a number of ways for customers to be involved with examples offered through our engagement menu. Examples include; task and finish scrutiny projects, clean and green inspectors, housing surgeries, focus groups, editorial panel, reading panel, attending customer regional conferences, joining our complaints panel, mystery shopping and transactional and perception surveys to suit both customer and business needs.

This will be continually reviewed and developed with Longhurst Group colleagues and customers.

Customer Engagement Framework

Our customer engagement framework is based around:

- Customer governance
- Customer scrutiny
- Customer feedback
- Customer insight
- Service improvement
- Community Investment

Customer Governance

The Customer Forum will provide customer-based assurance that the Regulatory Consumer Standards are being met; that value for money is being achieved in service delivery to all Longhurst Group customers; and is in line with Longhurst Group's vision of improving lives.

Customer Scrutiny

Customer scrutiny provides an integral part of the co-regulation structure of Longhurst Group by enabling customers to scrutinise our services. As set out in the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard, all social housing landlords need to make sure customers have an effective and active role in scrutinising performance and holding landlords to account. Our customer engagement offer has incorporated an effective scrutiny framework, which will be developed with customers.

Customer Feedback

Customer feedback will be collected and fed into service delivery, planning of newly refined customer facing services and our Improving Lives vision.

We regularly ask and report on customer feedback on a range of services and at key points of the customer journey. From beginning to end, we will engage and collect feedback from our customers on their views, priorities and experiences. Examples include; our repairs and maintenance service, planned works, complaints handling and their experience as a new tenant. We will also gain feedback from our leaseholders and shared owners.

Customer feedback will be collected using a combination of methods. Digital engagement will continue to be developed and be utilised in the first instance, where we know this is a customers' preference. We will ensure feedback represents our diverse customer profile, and where needed, a targeted approach will be undertaken using customer segmentation.

Customer Insight

We recognise that customer insight is a critical tool that allows us to target resources and services more effectively and better meet customers' needs and aspirations. We gain customer insight through combining customer information with service data.

We firmly recognise the need to continue to build our knowledge and understanding of our customers in terms of need, lifestyle, behaviour and aspiration. Customer insight is critical to ensuring we have the knowledge to make sound business decisions and can therefore focus our resources (time and money) where most needed. Throughout Longhurst Group we gain customer insight through various methods.

Customer insight has an important role to play in developing our engagement framework, which will enable us to move away from a 'one size fits all' engagement model to a more flexible approach.

We will continue to use customer insight to guide decision-making, refine existing services and plan new areas of work.

Service Improvement

We will carry out a perception survey with our Longhurst Group customers every two years. This will feed into our strategy development, policy reviews and our operational improvement plans.

Using our customer engagement framework, we will sponsor customer-led service reviews where there has been a trigger in terms of performance concerns, high complaint levels, poor value for money, low customer satisfaction or where we feel the service no longer meets customers' needs and expectations.

Complaint feedback will be routinely used to aid service improvement across Longhurst Group.

Community Investment

Our Community Investment programme is one of the key delivery vehicles behind our Improving Lives strategy. Whilst the Community Investment team alone will not deliver all aspects of community investment, they are a central point of coordination for the Group.

A strong focus on customer engagement and insight will enable the Group to invest in the areas most important to our customers and strategic stakeholders.

A fuller understanding of the needs and wants of the wider community will enable the Group to understand what is strong in our communities, what is valued and what areas need our support.

Effective customer engagement is an essential ingredient to delivering services that support good health and wellbeing outcomes and the economic resilience of the communities we serve.

Equality and Diversity

All colleagues will comply with our equality and diversity policy in all aspects of their work.

This policy provides an approach to customer engagement that takes into account our diverse customer base. We will provide assistance to customers who wish to become engaged in the work we do and require additional support to do this. We have put measures in place to overcome any barriers to customer engagement.

Roles and responsibilities

Operational responsibility for customer engagement is held by the Head of Customer Services and Customer Engagement Manager.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

An annual impact report will be provided to our Customer Forum and Group Board.

Our Group Board and Customer Forum will monitor customer satisfaction performance in key service areas.

The customer insight working group will also monitor and track progress on our customer engagement activities and satisfaction levels.

This policy will be reviewed three yearly incorporating colleague and customer feedback. In addition, it will be reviewed:

- Following information suggesting that the policy is not effective, or
- Following the introduction of relevant new legislation, regulations or guidance.

PART THREE

Appendices

- A. Policy Approval Control
- B. Policy Development Plan