



Longhurst Group Customer Forum

Annual Review

2020

INTRODUCTION

The Grenfell Tower fire in 2017 led to the publication of the Government's Social Housing Green Paper in August 2018. Longhurst Group consolidated its four member companies in July 2019.

In 2019, in accordance with requirements outlined by the Social Housing Regulator, Longhurst Group, with guidance and advice from TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) and a Task and Finish Steering Group (see Appendix A) set up a Customer Governance Group (Longhurst Group Customer Forum) to represent customers and provide customer assurance to the Group Board.

The Longhurst Group Customer Forum (LGCF) will ensure that agreed service delivery standards to all customers are being achieved and that Longhurst Group meets the expectations and outcomes of:-

- Customer involvement and empowerment standard.
- Tenancy standard.
- Home standard.
- Neighbourhood and community standard.

This meets one of the important Social Housing Green Paper objectives of “empowering residents and ensuring their voices are heard so that landlords are held to account.”

The Government's Social Housing White Paper published in November 2020 clarifies the direction that social housing providers need to take. The formulation of the LGCF became relevant in meeting the requirements of this White Paper.

BACKGROUND

How we created the LGCF

A Task and Finish Steering Group was created in August 2019 (see Appendix A). Its remit was to ensure recruitment to the newly proposed LGCF was successfully completed by December 2019 and to develop and review the draft governance documentation associated with the Forum. (see Appendix B)

Interviews and the appointment of nine candidates to the LGCF were made during the period of September to December 2019 (see Appendix C)

Initial appointments to the LGCF enveloped a broad talent and balanced diversity across Longhurst Group's customer base (General Needs customers, Sheltered Housing, Assisted Living, Leasehold and Shared Ownership.)

An LGCF induction meeting, combined with a meet and greet session for the successful candidates, was held in January 2020 and the first formal and inaugural meeting was held in February 2020.

A further four LGCF meetings were held throughout the year. These fell in line with the reporting procedure relating to the cyclical meetings of the Longhurst Group Board.

Training/current trending topics/presentations were interspersed with LGCF meetings.

LGCF ACHIEVEMENTS

The following colleagues of Longhurst Group were involved in the presentations, regular updates on the Covid-19 pandemic's effects on business, performance trends and updated policy submissions for customer assurance to the LGCF.

Jackie Grannell - TPAS Associate
Sam Wylie - Head of Customer Services
Helen Bird - Customer Engagement Team Manager
Sharon Guest - Executive Director of Housing Services
Eleanor Cleveley - Policy and Projects Coordinator
Rachel Challinor - Director of Governance, Performance and Compliance
Francesca Collins - Governance Coordinator
Kadie Abbott - Customer Engagement Officer
Becky Budge - Customer Engagement Officer
Gary Wooldridge - Business Performance & Intelligence Manager
Sarah Gregory - Property Compliance Manager
Craig Taylor - Director of Housing
Charmaine Simei - Director of Community Investment
Andrena White - Head of Leasehold Services
Mark Rogers - Director of Assets and Property Services
Phil Ison - Head of Repairs, Asset and Property Services
Matthew Rains - Longhurst Group Procurement Team
Zoe Berriman - Longhurst Group Procurement Team

This represents the determination and seriousness of Longhurst Group to fulfil its commitment of customer involvement and meeting the requirements of the Government's Social Housing White Paper.

Training sessions

The interspersed training sessions have consolidated and broadened a basic knowledge across Longhurst Group's customer base, thus helping to provide scrutiny and customer assurance to the Board.

Training topics covered include:

- Improving Lives 2025
- Data Protection
- Code of Conduct
- Social Housing and the role of LGCF, Tpas
- Value for Money, Tpas
- Leasehold Management presentation, Head of Leasehold Services
- Complaints Handling Code, Head of Customer Services
- Overview of the Contractor procurement process

One-off discussion meetings included:

- Customer Engagement and Scrutiny Strategy
- Perception Survey questions
- Client and contractor relationship

Formal meetings

Customer assurance has been given by the LGCF to review policies prior to being presented to the Board for their approval and later to be uploaded and published on the Longhurst Group website. These policies include:

- Fire safety
- Lettings
- Starter tenancy
- Tenancy and management
- Mutual exchanges
- Estate management
- Housing transfer
- Hate crime and anti-social behaviour
- Debt collection
- Leasehold management
- Domestic and commercial heating
- Electrical safety

Additionally, policy status updates were provided at each meeting by the Policy and Strategy Coordinator.

Covid-19 pandemic

The Coronavirus pandemic lockdowns have caused great disruption to business and finance. Companies have had to adapt to the inconveniences caused. Since May 2020, all LGCF meetings and training sessions have been held via a Microsoft Teams. This has enabled the Forum to continue its business and become more efficient and cost effective. Using this new technology has been a good learning curve.

In-depth updates on how the Longhurst Group Business Strategy had been adapted to counteract the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and to protect the business during 2020 and the effect upon the Improving Lives 2025 strategy were presented to the LGCF. Changes include:

- Offices closed to the public.
- Colleagues working from home wherever possible.
- Offices made Covid-19 safe for use by essential colleagues.
- Workload increase in care and support sector resulting in redeployment of colleagues into this area rather than being furloughed.
- General housing repairs reduced to essential and safety compliance works.
- Non-essential repairs carried out by appointment only (90 days plus).
- Annual boiler servicing still being carried out.
- Void works and lettings initially placed on hold.
- Planned works limited.
- Continuation of communal cleaning services with increased specification (deep clean) where there has been an outbreak of Covid-19.
- Increase in customer communication regarding rent arrears and offering money advice services.
- Housing Team initially carrying out wellbeing calls to over 65s and later rolled out to remaining Longhurst Group customers.
- New Community Investment initiative launched (Hardship Fund).
- Online wellbeing hub going live providing a virtual one-stop shop for a number of support services.
- Further development around the Longhurst Group Improving Lives Community Investment Offer.

Performance trends

Throughout 2020, a performance monitoring system was developed (Performance Dashboard) with the capability of comparing performance on all aspects of the business between quarters for presentation to LGCF and the Longhurst Group Board. From this information, the LGCF can flag any performance trends and early warnings of possible operational problems and raise concerns to the Group Board.

In conjunction with this, the LGCF has regular accurate and timely updates on customer complaints and their views regarding the services provided by Longhurst Group and the results of comprehensive analysis of customer surveys via the computerised Rant and Rave software package.

All the above has cemented an encouraging rapport of openness between Longhurst Group and the LGCF, enabling customer assurance to be investigated more readily by the LGCF.

Leaseholder, shared ownership and customer charter

The LGCF, especially the Leasehold and Shared Ownership representatives, has been instrumental in promoting better communication and awareness of Leasehold tenancy to all of Longhurst Group's customers via its quarterly magazine (Our Voice) and the creation of a new customer charter to be published in Spring 2021. They also promoted the idea of resourcing pocket-sized sanitising sprays for use by Longhurst Group's partners.

Property repairs contract

Amid growing concerns over contractor performance throughout 2020, regular updates were given to the LGCF by Longhurst Group of its endeavours to resolve the problems. The Coronavirus pandemic had also exacerbated the situation.

Plans are being developed with customer participation for the demobilisation of the property repairs contract and preparation for tender and procurement of a new contract in 2022. An interim contract will be put in place during this phase.

LGCF ASPIRATIONS FOR 2021

Recruitment and appointments

Since the formation of the LGCF, four customers have resigned, leaving a total of five customers representing 12 positions on the Forum. To be quorate at a formal meeting requires five customers to attend. The LGCF sought to recruit new customers to fill all the remaining vacancies in 2021 in order to eliminate/minimise non-quorate meetings in the future and to continue the meeting's function effectively.

Initial appointments to the LGCF enveloped a broad talent and balanced diversity across Longhurst Group's customer base (General Needs customers, Sheltered Housing, Assisted Living, Leasehold and Shared Ownership). To fill all the vacancies will enable the LGCF to expand its customer diversity to include age and the geographical areas of Longhurst Group.

Careful consideration is to be given to the diversity of customer categories and age range. The younger, non-retired age group may have difficulty in attending daytime meetings. Consideration may need to be given to holding some of the formal meetings in the evening in order to attract the young working customers. This'll hopefully be achieved by continuing with video conferencing using Microsoft Teams and its inherent flexibility within the revised Longhurst Group working practices and arrangements adapted to meet the business constraints made by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Appointment of Chair

The LGCF wishes to thank Jackie Grannell (TPAS Associate) for acting as stand-in Chair during 2020 and providing her professional expertise and guidance of how the LGCF links into the Longhurst Group structure. It's intended to interview and appoint a Chair from the LGCF members in 2021.

Relationship with the Board

At the latest LGCF meeting, Sharon Guest reported upon the Board's eagerness to develop the communication link to the LGCF and requested any

solutions to achieve this aim. Discussion ensued as to the Chair being used as the contact link to the Board or a Board member may attend future LGCF meetings and provide verbal feedback to the other Board members. Consideration was also given to using the minutes of the LGCF, which are presented to the Board to highlight any escalated items for discussion as an item on the Board's agenda.

Customer Engagement

To continue to develop the customer engagement newsletter and encourage reports/presentations to LGCF from the Scrutiny Team, Mystery Shoppers, and Clean and Green Inspectors of their activities and achievements. This would provide a reassurance to the LGCF of customer participation and empowerment. To date there has been little mention of these bodies at the formal meetings.

Appendix A

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Developing and Implementing the Longhurst Customer Committee

Steering Group

Terms of Reference

Purpose of the Steering Group

The Steering Group has been created as a 'Task and Finish' group.

- Its remit is to ensure that the recruitment to the newly proposed Longhurst Customer Committee is successfully complete by December 2019; and to develop and review the draft governance documentation associated with the Longhurst Customer Committee.

Membership

The Steering Group will consist of 5 Longhurst customers, Executive Director of Housing Services and Customer Engagement Manager.

The Group is supported by TPAS.

Activities and Remit

Tenants, customers and staff will co-design the establishment of and recruitment process for the Longhurst Customer Committee. This includes ensuring that the following activities are discussed, agreed and completed:

- To agree the marketing and communication strategy for recruiting to the Longhurst Customer Committee
- To agree the recruitment process to the Longhurst Customer Committee
- To agree the role profile for membership of the Longhurst Customer Committee
- To ensure the recruitment process is open, transparent and accessible to all eligible Longhurst Group tenants and customers
- To review the key governance documentation for the Longhurst Customer Committee specifically the Code of Conduct and the draft Terms of Reference (NB: The Longhurst Customer Committee will formally agree all governance documentation pertinent to their operation at their first meeting)
- To carry out the interviews for the Longhurst Customer Committee
- To recommend the appointments to the Longhurst Customer Committee

Steering Group ToR/DRAFT/160819

Appendix B

Longhurst Group Customer Forum

Terms of Reference

Purpose The Longhurst Group Customer Forum will support the Longhurst Group Board by providing customer based assurance that the consumer standards of the 'Regulatory Regime for Social Housing in England' 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.'

Responsibilities The Longhurst Group Customer Forum will develop and maintain a strong, meaningful and influential relationship with the Longhurst Group Board to ensure that it and the Longhurst Group Board works together effectively.

The Longhurst Group Customer Forum will ensure that agreed service delivery standards to all customers are being achieved and that Longhurst Group meets the expectations and outcomes of the

- Customer involvement and empowerment standard
- Tenancy standard
- Home standard
- Neighbourhood and community standard

It'll do this by:

- Being involved in the decisions about how services are delivered, including the approval of service standards.
- Ensuring that the customer involvement structure delivers on the consultation and review of landlord services.
- Monitoring Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) from Longhurst Group's Performance Management Framework along with other information identified through customer feedback and insight.

- Identifying areas of customer assurance and escalating areas of customer non-assurance with the consumer standards to the Longhurst Group Board.
- In conjunction with colleagues, agree a programme of service improvement reviews that are linked to business objectives and customers' priorities.
- 'Call to scrutiny' service areas members have concerns about which are not subject to an agreed review process.
- Monitor the implementation and outcomes of service reviews and scrutiny reviews.
- Produce an annual review, to be reported to the Longhurst Group Board and to all Longhurst Group customers and staff, detailing the impact of its activities.
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Operating protocols

Longhurst Group Customer Forum will produce formal minutes of each meeting, including items for escalation, which'll be reviewed at Longhurst Group Board meetings.

In addition, the Longhurst Group Customer Forum will follow a documented protocol which'll include:

- A scheme of understanding with the Longhurst Group Board.
- Communication and reporting protocol with the Longhurst Group Board.
- Code of Conduct and confidentiality statement.

Membership

- The Longhurst Group Customer Forum will consist of a maximum of 12 eligible members.
- Individual members will be appointed for a period of three years.
- Members can voluntarily resign at any time during their tenure.
- If a Longhurst Group Customer Forum member ceases to be a Longhurst Group customer they must resign from the Longhurst Group Customer Forum.
- Members will serve no more than two consecutive terms of three years.
- Members can be asked to step down without notice if they are seen to be in breach of the Code of Conduct.

Quorum At least five or more members must be present at a meeting for it to be quorate.

Meetings The Longhurst Group Customer Forum will meet at least six times per year to mirror the Longhurst Group Board's meeting cycle. There's a requirement for members to be fully prepared for all meetings.

Attendance Longhurst Group will monitor attendance at the Longhurst Group Customer Forum through the meeting minutes.

Failure of a Longhurst Group Customer Forum member to attend three consecutive meetings, without providing a reasonable reason, will be investigated by the Longhurst Group Customer Forum Chair in conjunction with Longhurst Group colleagues. Failure to attend might result in the member being asked to step down from their role.

Chair and Deputy Chair The appointment of the Chair will be made following application and interview.

The appointment of the Deputy Chair will be made following application and interview.

Both appointments can be for upto a period of three years with succession planning identified after two years of tenure.

Support and Servicing The Longhurst Group Customer Forum will be supported by the Executive Director of Housing Services.

The Longhurst Group Customer Forum will also be supported by the appropriate level of staffing and other resources to ensure it can operate effectively.

Applications and Appointments

All Longhurst Group customers, leaseholders and shared owners are eligible to apply for vacancies (subject to eligibility as detailed in the person specification.)

Applicants will be interviewed for vacancies.

Review of effectiveness

The Longhurst Group Customer Forum will, on an annual basis, review its effectiveness by reviewing the key achievements and impact of its work and reporting these to the Longhurst Group Board and Longhurst Group customers.

Training and Development

Longhurst Group Customer Forum members will be required to attend training to ensure their skills and knowledge enables them to effectively carry out their role.

New appointees will be required to complete induction training.

Annual Appraisal

Longhurst Group Customer Forum members will be required to participate in an annual appraisal.

Equality and Diversity

Longhurst Group Customer Forum encourages fair and equal treatment for all, regardless of race, colour, ethnic or national origin, religion, gender, physical or mental disability, appearance, political affiliation, sexuality, age or class.

Longhurst Group Customer Forum will identify obstacles that may prevent customers from contributing to its work, and find the means to remove those obstacles.

Longhurst Group Customer Forum will annually review membership with the aim of creating a body that's representative of the diverse communities in which Longhurst Group operates.

Longhurst Group Customer Forum members will abide by Longhurst Group's policies on equality and diversity and attend equality and diversity training as part of their induction training; followed by annual update training.

Confidentiality

Members of the Longhurst Group Customer Forum will have access to information which'll be of a sensitive or confidential nature. Any information shared as part of the Forum's meetings that is of a confidential nature must not be disclosed to anyone outside of the meeting.

Longhurst Group Customer Forum members will be required to sign the Code of Conduct and confidentiality statements as part of their appointment.

**Review of
Terms of
Reference**

Longhurst Group and the Longhurst Group Customer Forum will review these Terms of Reference after one year of operation to ensure they're fit for purpose; and annually thereafter.

Appendix C

INTRODUCING LONGHURST GROUP'S NEW CUSTOMER FORUM

As a new way of working at Longhurst Group, we've introduced a Customer Forum that will have regular contact with our Group Board to check we are taking the right approach, track our performance and influence our decision making.

This Forum will help to give our customers a voice, ensuring they are part of meetings and the decision-making process. It will provide opportunities for customers to learn new skills, gain qualifications and ultimately help us to improve our services for everyone.

Sharon Guest, Executive Director of Housing Services, said: "I'm delighted with how the Customer Forum has developed and the opportunity it gives us to work positively together with our customers. We recognise that things are changing within Longhurst Group and it is important we engage with customers about how these changes affect them, as well as listening to their feedback. We want to know what customers want, now and in the future, so the Customer Forum is a great way of doing this and making sure they are involved."



MARJORIE HOWARD

Marjorie has spent her working life dealing with customer service issues for a range of people, handling a breadth of problems.

With more than 30 years of experience providing conflict resolutions, Marjorie understands the importance of effective listening.

Marjorie's work as a trade union rep has given her the ability to present issues clearly and without bias. Her degree in English and computer expertise means she has excellent communication skills.

She has also trained staff in professional organisations to enable them to deliver excellent customer service. She is looking forward to working on the Customer Forum to improve the service provided by the Group for the benefit of customers and colleagues.



REG CHALLINOR

Reg is an experienced communicator, having spent 13 years working with Coca-Cola and associated companies. His work in sales and management means Reg is comfortable talking on both a one-to-one basis and in larger groups.

For most of his life, Reg has been involved in ballroom dancing. This started as a hobby, then evolved to working with members of the public as a dance teacher and dance studio owner.

He has worked with most of the top dancers around the world and has given interviews both on television and radio.

Reg is pleased to be joining the Customer Forum, as he believes its creation brings the Board of Directors and the Group's customers closer together.



MERVYN COWDELL

Mervyn is a retired social worker who was the manager of a Children's Social Care Team. He now lives in the Peterborough area.

He continues to serve as an independent member of the Adoption and Fostering panels and is Chairman of a local community association and Treasurer of an amateur musical drama group.

Having served on Longhurst Group's Scrutiny Team, Mervyn is committed to helping us realise our vision to improve people's lives. He is keen to ensure the Board is helped to meet the expectations and outcomes of the Tenancy and Home standards.

He also wants to help the Customer Forum ensure agreed service delivery standards are met.



MALCOLM FIELDER

Malcolm is a retired hospital administrator who has also worked in commercial and voluntary organisations.

The grandfather of four enjoys volunteering for charity, giving debt advice and welfare benefits support. He likes working with people, especially when he can make a difference by being supportive in situations where he has experience himself.

Malcolm is looking forward to being part of the Customer Forum and helping to improve lives for customers right across Longhurst Group's regions.



DAVID CHOWN

David has been a Longhurst Group customer for 10 years, having retired from full-time work in management services and human resources around four years ago.

His voluntary work with us has included roles as a Resident Inspector, a Tenant Representative on the Customer Link Committee, a Customer Complaint Advisor and a member of the Scrutiny Team.

He believes that customer participation via the Forum will open an essential communication channel between the landlord and customer, providing a reciprocal understanding of the aims of Longhurst Group and the requirements of customers.

He wants to help ensure value for money services, a better community environment and to improve people's lives.



ROBIN OLIVER

A customer of Longhurst Group for 26 years, Robin has raised his own family as well as fostered children during his time living in social housing.

After seven years serving in the Armed Forces, he also supports veterans in need as a caseworker for SSAFA – The Armed Forces Charity – as well as volunteering in the charity sector. He also gained a BSc degree in Computer Science at the University of Lincoln.

Robin has been an active member of Customer Panels for eight years and a Scrutiny Team member for three years. He enjoys making sure the customer voice is heard and he is looking forward to his new role on the Longhurst Group Customer Forum.



ARIF OTUN

Arif is a qualified social worker who has worked in the field for 14 years. Her work has provided her with experience of working with older people and in services for people with learning disabilities and mental health issues.

She likes to adopt a person-centred approach to all her work and enjoys empowering people to challenge any barriers that are in their way to be able to participate fully in society.

Arif's experience has also seen her work with people from various different backgrounds, enabling them to live in the community by supporting them to achieve greater levels of independence and staying safe in their own home.

She is looking forward to applying her principles to her work with the Customer Forum.



MARGARET CARTWRIGHT

Margaret is now retired from work, but remains an active Working Union Member, as she has been since 1976.

She is a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother who, during her full working life, has preferred to be a team player, working with the public.

She has learned a variety of skills, through jobs ranging from sewing machinist, shop assistant, barmaid, cleaner and waitress, to community care assistant.

During this time, she and her husband have also fostered a number of children.

Margaret's mantra is to treat everyone as she would like to be treated herself.



LORRAINE GIBBINS

Lorraine has experience working in local communities as well as with local authorities and other organisations.

Her working life has focused on helping people live better lives. She has been a strong voice for the most vulnerable in her community.

Currently a part-time welfare officer with the Royal Air Force Association, she assists retired RAF service personnel with a range of needs. Previously, Lorraine has been a Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinator, which involved working closely with the local authority and Humberside Police.

As a Longhurst Group customer, Lorraine plans to bring a positive attitude, new ideas and lots of energy to her new role to help improve the everyday lives of our customers.

RESIGNATIONS

Lorraine Gibbins	July 2020
Malcolm Fielder	September 2020
Marjorie Howard	November 2020
Margaret Cartwright	December 2020

The LGCF thanks those who've resigned for their invaluable input whilst in post, especially in promoting increased awareness of leaseholder and shared ownership issues.

