



# Longhurst Group Customer Forum

## Annual Review

2021

## INTRODUCTION

The Longhurst Group Customer Forum (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 Consumer Standards:

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard.
- Tenancy Standard.
- Home Standard.
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard

The Customer Forum members (see appendix B) are now fully aware of the Social Housing White Paper (November 2020), which is in line with Government legislation.

This report is a review of the work of the Customer Forum covering the period of January to December 2021.

## CUSTOMER FORUM ACHIEVEMENTS 2021

Policy reports were presented to the Customer Forum for them to provide their assurance that customers had been consulted with prior to the policy developments and their recommendations had been considered.

Policies approved:

- Tenancy Management
- Customer Care
- Hoarding
- Service charges
- Aids and Adaptations Policy

In addition to policies the Customer Forum:

- Gained greater understanding of how the White Paper impacts on the Group

- The Scrutiny Team reported on the relet standard. This was presented by a Scrutiny Team.
- Procurement updates including insight into the evaluation process.
- We reached a decision about how we'd recruit and support a new Chair and Vice Chair.
- Fed into the interim contract with Mears, monitoring the repairs and voids situation
- Increased membership - Since the last report, six new members joined, bringing our membership up to 10.
- Updates provided on Customer Engagement activities eg Clean and Green Inspectors project, Mystery Shopping and scrutiny exercise.
- Updates are now provided in a report format to every performance meeting.
- Members of the Customer Engagement Team are present for questions.

## Formal meetings

Our annual meeting with Group Board took place in July 2021 where the following themes were discussed:

Customer Engagement, Repairs, Grounds Maintenance and Improving Lives.

An action plan was developed which'll be monitored throughout 2022.

The topics covered in meetings were:

### **February**

Connecting with the Board  
Covid update  
Performance  
Rant and Rave update  
Repairs procurement report  
Repairs procurement and repairs mobilisation

### **April**

Covid update  
Performance  
Scrutiny project update  
Grass roots engagement update  
Anti-social behaviour management

### **June**

Covid – lessons learnt  
Modern slavery  
Working Smarter Together  
Complaints  
Financial year end info  
Health and safety report  
Customer Engagement impact assessment and next steps  
Consumer standard assurance

### **September**

Covid update  
Performance  
Community investment  
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion work with customers

### **November**

Key health and safety roles and responsibilities  
Emerging health and safety topics  
Customer service update  
Customer satisfaction report  
Repairs procurement and interim repairs service  
Customer Survey results – safe and secure  
Clean and Green Inspectors update

## Roundtable discussion

The aim of the meeting was to have an open and face-to-face discussion on:

- Appointing a Forum Chair and Vice Chair
- Purpose of the Forum
- Code of Conduct
- Role of Engagement Team
- Meetings and meeting frequency
- Opportunity for members to connect outside of Forum meetings
- Greater Customer Connectivity proposals explored

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 2021

### February

New members

Induction to LG, equality and diversity and data protection delivered by Lucy Deacon (Learning and Development Team)

### July

Chairing skills delivered by TPAS

### October

Welcome to the White Paper delivered by TPAS

Members confirm they wish to continue to be subscribed to 'Inside Housing' magazine to keep up-to-date with housing debate, current affairs and housing legislation.

## Covid19 Pandemic

The continuation of the Covid-19 pandemic has had a major impact on many aspects of Longhurst Group business:

- Customer service, where reduced number at work caused longer call waiting times for customers
- The ability to source materials
- Reduced numbers of personnel, impacted on the schedule for repairs and maintenance
- In all cases Longhurst Group informed the Customer Forum that remedial actions were put in place ASAP to help to overcome the issues and these have been continually monitored
- It also let the continuation of Teams meetings rather than face-to-face meetings for the Customer Forum, which have proved very successful
- Plans are in place to have a mixture of face-to-face and Teams meetings in the future.

Longhurst Group changes include Working Smarter Together, embracing a digital first approach; new role types with colleagues working in neighbourhoods more regularly and increased social presence.

There are now three office locations, Boston, Rushden and Beechdale; with Rushden being made Head Office. The Group continuing to maintain and improve services while making these changes.

## Performance Trends

- Performance information is better presented, more in-depth, with an excellent commentary.
- It's now visible to all customers on the website and in Our Voice magazine, providing transparency in data performance.
- The number of satisfaction surveys now includes new customer views, aids and adaptation and anti-social behaviour (ASB).
- Opportunity is given to escalate areas of concern to the Board, however, those areas identified were already highlighted as areas being monitored by them. We're receiving regular updates, for example repairs, voids standard, call handling and complaints handling.

## Leaseholder, shared ownership and customer charter

The Customer Forum supported the new customer charter and a separate charter for homeowners was published in 2021. They were pivotal in ensuring the inclusion of leasehold customers in receiving the customer magazine 'Our Voice'. This is now available to leasehold customers.

## Property repairs contract

During 2021, Mears started their interim contract. Regular updates were provided about their performance and the plans to procure a new contractor. A member of the Customer Forum was involved with the evaluation process and provided updates on the progress. The second phase of the evaluation process is now being worked on.

The Customer Forum championed the Customer Voice and requested that the new contract should have more than one contractor to work on regional repairs. The Procurement Team has taken this feedback on board.

# CUSTOMER FORUM ASPIRATIONS FOR 2022

## Recruitment and appointments

- To appoint a Chair and Vice Chair
- Recruitment of two additional members bring the total to a 12 member capacity.
- Membership to be inclusive of a broad range of age groups.
- Representing customers and homeowners.

To be quorate at a formal meeting requires five customers to attend. The Customer Forum seek to fill all the remaining vacancies in 2022 in order to eliminate/minimise non-quorate meetings in the future and to continue the meeting's function effectively.

Initial appointments to the Customer Forum enveloped a broad talent and balanced diversity across Longhurst Group's customer base (General Needs customers, Sheltered Housing, Assisted Living, Leasehold, Shared Ownership and Homeowners). 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 to be given to the diversity of customer categories and age range by continuing with video conferencing using Microsoft Teams. It's inherent flexibility within the revised Longhurst Group working practices has helped the business meet the constraints through the Covid-19 pandemic.

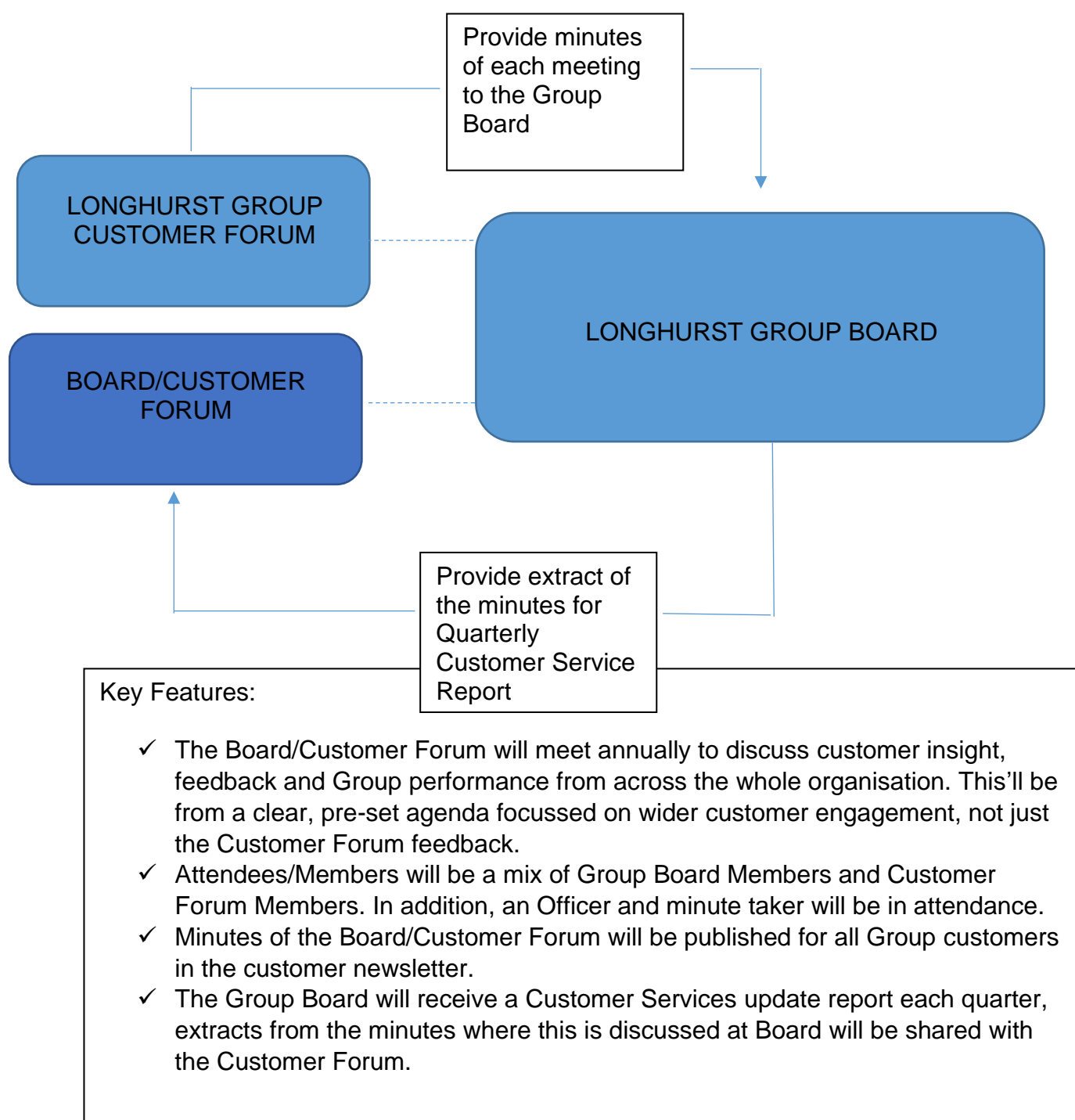
## Appointment of Chairperson

In 2021 a member was appointed as Chair, however resigned due to personal reasons.

Following stage one recruitment we were unable to fill positions of Chair and Vice Chair due to the personal situations and commitments of the Forum members. This situation has now changed and a process is in place to appoint a new Chair/Vice Chair in April 2022.

## Relationship with the Board

### Connectivity to the Board



There's an aspiration to work more closely with Group Board and this is something the Board have also raised.



Currently the Customer Forum meet the Board at an annual meeting. The Customer Forum have the opportunity to escalate any items arising at each of their meetings.

There's an aspiration to develop a regular two-way dialogue between the Customer Forum and the Board.

We believe the feedback loop between the Customer Forum and the Board needs to be tighter to improve connectivity.

## Customer Engagement

We're looking for more customers to get involved and help improve services provided by Longhurst Group. Some of these improvements include:

- The development of a new Scrutiny Team
- To develop a customer webinar/workshop to raise awareness of what we do and what involvement opportunities are available
- Web based portal for involvement, consultation and customer voice
- Interactive customer spotlight sessions
- The Customer Forum welcome feedback from other engagement groups to keep them up-to-date with ongoing developments and outcomes.

## Sustainability

The Customer Forum envisage Longhurst Group will create a framework for sustainability giving a broad understanding of how to tackle economic, social and environmental challenges that will be pivotal in the future of the business and its customers.

## Appendix A

### 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 they and the Longhurst Group Board work together effectively.

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

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard
- Tenancy Standard
- Home Standard
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard

It will 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 staff agree a programme of service improvement reviews that are linked to business objectives and customers' priorities
- 'Call to scrutiny' service areas they 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 will be reviewed at Longhurst Group Board.

In addition, Longhurst Group Customer Forum will follow a documented protocol which will 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 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

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### **Quorum**

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

<b>Meetings</b>	<p>The Longhurst Group Customer Forum will meet at least 6 times per year to mirror the Longhurst Group Board's meeting cycle. There is a requirement for members to be fully prepared for all meetings.</p>
<b>Attendance</b>	<p>Longhurst Group will monitor attendance at the Longhurst Group Customer Forum through the meeting minutes.</p> <p>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 staff. Failure to attend might result in the member being asked to step down from their role.</p>
<b>Chair and Deputy Chair</b>	<p>The appointment of the Chair will be made following application and interview.</p> <p>The appointment of the Deputy Chair will be made following application and interview.</p> <p>Both appointments can be for up to a period of three years with succession planning identified after two years of tenure.</p>
<b>Support and Servicing</b>	<p>The Longhurst Group Customer Forum will be supported by the Executive Director of Housing Services.</p> <p>The Longhurst Group Customer Forum will also be supported by the appropriate level of staff and other resources to ensure it can operate effectively.</p>

**Applications and Appointments**

All Longhurst Group tenants, 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 encourage 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 is 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 will 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 are fit for purpose; and annually thereafter.

## Appendix B

### The Customer Forum membership 2021

<b>Member</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Tenure</b>
<b>Jennifer Anderson</b>	South	Assured Tenant
<b>Natalie Bunyan</b>	South	Assured Tenant
<b>Reg Challinor</b>	South	Shared Owner
<b>John Cole</b>	East	Home Owner
<b>Mervyn Cowdell</b>	South	Shared Owner
<b>Marie Linford</b>	East	Assured Tenant
<b>Robin Oliver</b>	East	Assured Tenant
<b>Arit Otu</b>	West	Assured Tenant
<b>Angela Ryan</b>	West	Assured Tenant
<b>Sinead Safford</b>	South	Assured Tenant