

Customer Engagement Strategy 2019 - 2022





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Introduction

Customer engagement has long been a key driver for Cottsway, underpinning improvement of core services, delivering on co-regulation and helping us demonstrate the value for money of the services we deliver. It also supports the work we do locally to deliver better outcomes for individuals and communities.

This new Customer Engagement Strategy is timely given the recent publication of the housing green paper and feedback from our own customer consultation. It will enable us to become more transparent and accountable, more responsive to our customers' needs and more able to deliver the services that matter most to our customers.

Purpose and scope

The purpose of this strategy is to set out Cottsway's approach to customer engagement, ensuring a shared understanding among stakeholders and a clear, agreed response to national and local priorities. It supports delivery of our Corporate Plan and of our Values, which are:

- We are open and transparent about how we do business
- We are here for the long-term
- We see Cottsway as a partnership between customers and staff
- We will do all we can to provide our customers with opportunities to enhance their lives
- We are part of and value the communities in which we work.

In terms of scope, it provides a framework that will enable us to meet regulatory requirements and the principles set out in the green paper whilst preparing us for the changes that will come with the subsequent white paper. The focus on gathering feedback from all customer engagement will ensure we know what our customers want and their views of the services we provide, enabling us to be an organisation that listens, learns and then responds appropriately and effectively.

Our strategic objectives

The overarching theme is to ensure transparency and accountability across the organisation with the aim of delivering responsive services that do what matters most to our customers. To do this we have developed the following three strategic objectives:

1. Understanding our customers
2. Empowering customers
3. Enabling communities to thrive

These objectives build on the progress made in our previous Community Engagement Strategy whilst also responding to feedback from our customers and the themes set out in the recent housing green paper, A New Deal for Social Housing. These are:

- Ensuring homes are safe and decent
- Effective resolution of complaints
- Empowering residents and strengthening the regulator
- Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
- Expanding supply and supporting home ownership.

Below we set out some of our achievements from the previous strategy, what we plan to deliver over the next three years and how we will monitor and report progress.

Objective 1: Understanding our customers

Knowing who our customers are and their views of Cottsway and our services enables us to better understand their priorities and to respond to their needs. This strategy builds on the previous strategy in that we are focusing on gathering feedback from all our customers rather than relying on the views of a few. We will do this by using satisfaction surveys, complaints, feedback, social media, consultation and scrutiny to shape our services and decisions.

Actions since 2016-2019 strategy:

- Introduced new transactional surveys across four key service areas (ASB, lettings, complaints, repairs);
- Introduced a 'friends & family test' (also known as Net Promotor Scores) in key service areas;
- Established performance information library on Jostle to ensure access to data for all staff;
- Provided service managers with an online dashboard for satisfaction survey results, enabling further analysis and trend monitoring;
- Carried out a Star survey for leaseholders and shared owners in 2018;
- Set targets for, and monitored, levels of customer data collected by staff (data integrity is now a KPI);
- Improved benchmarking with HouseMark;
- Enabled the Development team to use data from Community Insight to develop stock profiles and make better use of local area information;
- Reshaped 25 services in response to customer feedback (not including 2018/19);
- Established an Annual Customer Feedback report to Board.



Future Actions

Over the next three years we will build on the progress we have made so far by:

- Improving the quality and quantity of data we hold on our customers through our new digital portal and manual means of data collection;
- Increasing the customer satisfaction data we collect through a new annual Star survey of leaseholders and shared owners and using the data to improve our offer to this cohort;
- Gathering transactional satisfaction data for new service areas including customer services and new developments to enable improved benchmarking;
- Gathering more qualitative data to contextualise satisfaction data through focus groups, surveys, social media etc.
- Continuing to improve learning from feedback and complaints, closing the feedback loop and publicising outcomes;
- Support NHO's to deliver robust Community Plans by providing them with information, data and customer intelligence in their neighbourhoods.

NB: All data will be managed according to the terms of our Privacy Policy and in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations.

In addition to the actions set out above we need to be in a position to respond to the requirements of the future housing white paper which is likely to include performance indicators that are relevant to customers of social housing, such as*:

Keeping properties in good repair;

- Maintaining the safety of buildings;
- Effective handling of complaints;
- Respectful and helpful engagement with residents;
- Responsible neighbourhood management, including tackling anti-social behaviour.

**(Taken from A New Deal for Social Housing, August 2018 p33)*

Reinforcing a culture of data collection and performance monitoring will help position us for the likely implementation of a sector wide suite of key performance indicators that will be defined by the Regulator and probably published as league tables.

Objective 2: Empowering customers

For customers to be empowered they need to know how well we are performing and to be able to access this information easily. This is a key theme of the recent green paper and is likely to be included in the housing white paper due in 2019. They also need access to opportunities to build their own skills and confidence, supporting both their ability to be involved effectively and to build their capacity for digital engagement and employment.

Actions since 2016-2019 strategy:

- Established an online Facebook forum for Cottsway customers;
- Rebranded and relaunched Community Fund, including participation in allocating funding;
- Delivered three employment skills workshops, including one six week course;
- Attended two careers fairs aimed at school leavers and, by working in partnership, delivered one supported careers fair;
- Enabled eight young people to take part in three Growing Ambitions work experience programmes;
- Delivered 4 x 6 week digital skills workshops plus 2 x 1 day workshops;
- Delivered 60 hours of digital home tuition to 10 people;
- Loaned 10 tablets to customers to support digital literacy;
- Delivered 22 monthly pre-tenancy workshops.



Future Actions

Our own research has shown us that our customers have an appetite for more, and better, information on Cottsway including who we are and how well we are performing. To enable improved scrutiny of our performance we will:

- Regularly publish performance information in an accessible format;
- Improve the availability of information on key services and on Cottsway in general;
- Improve opportunities for involvement, both online and local, including contractor selection and monitoring of performance;
- Review our approach to scrutiny and co-regulation, improving its effectiveness and raising its profile among our customers.

Cottsway established the Residents' Scrutiny Panel in 2011 and it went on to produce a significant number of in-depth reports and to win a national award for Excellence in Scrutiny. Following a restructure of the Communities Team the panel were relocated to the Resources Directorate and have been more self-sufficient but less productive. The housing green paper and new Customer Engagement Strategy provide us with an excellent opportunity to review our approach to scrutiny and co-regulation, ensuring our structures meet the needs of Cottsway, our customers and the Regulator.

The new approach is likely to be based on an increased use of performance indicators, benchmarking, complaints feedback, customer satisfaction data, task & finish groups and membership of the internal Customer Insight Group. Working in partnership with the panel we will consider how best we can support them to deliver effective scrutiny of our services, raise their profile with customers and update our approach to scrutiny and co-regulation.

In addition, we will build on the opportunities we offer for training, development and capacity building by:

- Continuing to offer opportunities for work experience, employment support and capacity building, including support to get online;
- Investigate providing access to an improved range of learning opportunities through partnership working i.e. Learning Curve
- Investigate offering volunteering opportunities within the furniture recycling scheme, developing it as a (very) small-scale social enterprise.

Our own research told us that our customers want their voices to be heard through more personal contact with Cottsway staff, giving them opportunities to talk to us and be listened to. We also saw an appetite for more online communication using social media, email or online forums. To meet this need we will:

- Provide more content on our online forum and increase our use of email and social media;
- Ensure NHO's hold regular, publicised meetings in our independent living schemes, including a feedback loop;
- Improve our approach to estate inspections, including a feedback loop;
- Raise awareness of how customers can engage with us and the scrutiny panel.

Objective 3: Enabling communities to thrive

Celebrating thriving communities and tackling the stigma of social housing are key themes of the housing green paper. Whilst our own consultation didn't identify stigma as a specific concern for our customers we can take the opportunity to promote positive stories about Cottsway, our customers and their communities more widely and to ensure our staff consistently treat our customers with respect. Our consultation did however show the importance of strong and engaged communities with our customers' top priority being a sense of neighbourliness, with good neighbours who are friendly and helpful. Safety was also a priority and our customers want neighbourhoods with little or no ASB. Working together with our customers, partners and stakeholders to enable thriving communities is therefore a key strategic objective. Set out below are some of the actions we have taken to date to support our local communities.

Actions since 2016-2019 strategy:

- Developed six Community Plans and supported four Resident Associations;
- Delivered £61,888 grant funding to 48 community-based projects through the Community Fund;
- Accessed £27,757 funding for seven community projects through the Travis Perkins Legacy Fund;
- Delivered 11 community clear-up days;
- Provided educational resources to two schools to support financial capability;
- Established use of Community Insight tool to inform Community Plans;
- Provided training for relevant staff to use Community Insight resulting in mapping of arrears and ASB;
- Completed the three year consultation with customers, as required by the Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard.



Future Actions

Over the next three years we will focus on engaging more effectively with our communities, identifying and delivering local priorities, advocating on their behalf with community stakeholders and delivering the services our customers want. Our recent consultation showed that the top priority for our customers is a sense of neighbourliness within a local environment that is clean, tidy and well maintained. To deliver these outcomes we will:

- Review our approach to Community Plans, giving them more structure and a higher profile. This will include monitoring of estate services, a focus on building safety (see below), Local Offers and identifying local environmental improvements;
- Enable delivery of environmental improvements through the establishment of a new environmental improvement fund that is accessible to customers and staff, linked to Community Plans and Local Offers;
- Be more visible, working together with partners to promote safer neighbourhoods, better community facilities and a community voice.

The housing green paper also includes a recommendation from the Hackitt report that 'residents should be proactively given information about building safety', including access to fire risk assessments. To achieve this we will:

- Support residents of blocks to engage with us on issues of building safety, proactively giving them information and clearly setting out their, and our, responsibilities.

Some of our customers would also like to see a greater focus on support for people who are lonely and isolated and activities that bring people together. To achieve this we will:

- Continue to support resident associations and community groups;
- Provide opportunities for people to take part in activities that reduce isolation and loneliness;
- Continue to offer funding to individuals, groups and projects that benefit our communities through our Community Fund.

Finally, the need for a clear focus on customer service was noted as a priority in our consultation. To achieve this we plan to build on the success of our corporate rebranding and 'tone of voice' initiatives by:

- Providing all staff with customer service training that will ensure a consistent and respectful approach when engaging with customers.

Value for money

A key driver for all registered providers is the need to demonstrate value for money across all service areas. Cottsway has defined its approach to achieving value for money as:

“Working efficiently and effectively in everything we do, we will maximise the return on our assets and maintain or improve customer satisfaction.”

Customer satisfaction has been identified as a key measure of effectiveness in delivering value for money - as our customers cannot easily take their business elsewhere customer satisfaction enables us to determine if they value the services we provide. In addition, a recent study by the University of Westminster was noted in the green paper as demonstrating a strong correlation between involving customers and delivering value for money (*Success, satisfaction and scrutiny: The business benefits of involving customers 2015*).

Social Value

Social value is the additional benefit or improvement in wellbeing – social, economic or environmental – that our customers and communities can experience as a result of what we do. This can come from services we provide such as clearing graffiti and fly tipping, grants we make from our Community Fund, or the debt advice and support for Cottsway customers which we fund through our contract with West Oxfordshire Citizens Advice.

There are several different methods for recording and evaluating social value. Cottsway have adopted the Value Insight tool from HACT, which attaches a financial value to a wide variety of improvements in wellbeing. The financial values are based on robust social research and are recorded on a project-by-project basis along with costs, which we calculate on a full-cost recovery basis. Cottsway can then see what outcomes and how much social value each project or service achieves. We can also use the tool to plan ahead so that we maximise the impact of future activities.

Not everything we do can be measured fully through Value Insight – our support for the Witney Food Bank or our in-house furniture recycling scheme, for example. Where this is the case, we will use other methods to evaluate the social value of our input. We will report on our highest impact projects through our annual report.



Equality, diversity and inclusion

This strategy will ensure Cottsway has a greater understanding of our customers, their neighbourhoods and priorities, equipping us to respond to issues and achieve social impact in our communities. It will promote community cohesion, build capacity and support our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. The above will enable us to demonstrate that we meet the required outcome of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard to “*demonstrate that Registered Providers understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the equality strands and tenants with additional support needs.*”

Monitoring and reporting

Progress with this strategy will be directly monitored by the Customer Insight Group (CIG) with reports, as required, to the Corporate Leadership Team and Board. Minutes of the CIG meetings are available to all staff on Jostle and we will publish regular updates. We will also measure the social value of our activities and report this to customers and stakeholders.

References and further reading

Cottsway’s customer consultation report 2018

Family Mosaic (2016) *Changing focus: a new model of resident involvement.*

Dame Judith Hackitt, (2017) *Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety.*

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018) *A new deal for social housing.*

National Housing Federation (2018) *Discussion paper: Accountability and transparency in the housing association sector.*

University of Westminster (2015) *Success, satisfaction and scrutiny: The business benefits of involving residents.*



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