

Nehemiah UCHA

Customer Engagement Strategy

February 2016

Customer Engagement Strategy

1. Introduction, Vision and Strategic Aims

We know customer involvement can enhance our business. We know customer involvement makes us more successful, responsive and helps us understand the risks and challenges in our neighbourhood. The opinions of customers are essential to future proofing our service provision, predicting future trends and planning for change.

Through listening, engaging and developing our relationship with customers and acting on customer opinion, Nehemiah will achieve customer satisfaction and a commercial advantage whilst also delivering value and outcomes for customers in the services that we provide.

We will demonstrate this by delivering a strategy which delivers real accountability to customers and enables customers to engage with us in a way which suits their busy lives.

We know customers give us a unique insight into what is happening in our neighbourhoods and can help us design services to maximise their satisfaction, reduce waste and support the delivery of value from the investment we make in our neighbourhoods and services.

The way we recruit and engage customers and thank them for their work will be enthusiastic and the training we provide will enhance their skills, not only for engagement, but also increase their chances in life. We will use this to support them in where they want to take those skills, to enable success in their lives.

We want to hear a reflective and diverse customer voice from across our business which goes beyond traditional methods of engagement, is dynamic and interesting for customers and enables those customers who do not have much time to engage to choose how their views can impact on our services.

We plan to reach more customers using technology, social media, making better use of our web pages for customer feedback and sharing video clips of meetings to maximise the opportunities for customers to get involved.

The customer engagement strategy sets out our commitment to involving customers in governing, shaping and supporting us to improve our services and to grow.

2. Our recent history of engagement

Nehemiah reviewed how we engage customers in 2011. We have a very small number of committed engaged customers. We know we need to improve.

We aim to improve and then excel in customer engagement and in so doing, be at the forefront of best practice.

Nehemiah has developed a sensible and extensive 'menu of engagement' to enable customers to participate at the level they choose, which caters for a variety of personal circumstances.

We aim to:

- provide a variety of ways for customers to engage, in a way and at a level that suits their interests and their available time as volunteers and have an active and properly supported customer engagement structure including a menu of choices of engagement: provide customers with regular high-quality information, in appropriate formats and give customers opportunities to influence how our services are delivered
- satisfy customers with opportunities to influence decision-making and service delivery
- involve customers in a way that achieves continuous improvement and demonstrates value for money
- provide customers with access to high quality training to develop their confidence and skills not only to engage with us, but to equip them with skills for life and work
- enable customers to hold our board and staff to account in delivering services and in delivering this Framework

Nehemiah is proud to work with other landlords on joint projects:

- **Designated Complaints Panel** – 6 small West Midlands housing associations have a joint panel registered with the Housing Ombudsman to deal with complaints in 2012. VFM was achieved through joint training and sharing a group of trained customers from the HAs. To date 2 complaints have been dealt with by the panel delivering successful outcomes for both the customers and housing associations.
- **Customer Scrutiny Panel** – 4 small West Midlands HAs have a joint scrutiny panel. Again joint training and access to a shared group of trained customers has delivered VFM. The panel have so far scrutinised communal services and the repairs service. Actions plans are currently in place to deliver the service improvements identified by customers. The next scrutiny review will focus on developing the digital offer.
- **Tenancy Agreements** - 6 Small HAs including Nehemiah worked jointly to commission a review of non-assured shorthold tenancy agreements sharing the

legal costs, staff resources and best practice to produce bespoke agreements for each HA. Again this delivers VFM.

- **Care Provision** - In response to customer feedback and demand Nehemiah is currently working with New Outlook HA to deliver customer centred care provision through onsite care teams at two of its older person schemes. . Working with New Outlook, Nehemiah will be able to improve its offer to our customers and improve health and wellbeing for those living in our older persons' schemes, enabling us to start discussions with health services about future funding opportunities.
- **Bromford Housing Group** - In 2013 Wolverhampton City Council Supporting People team restructured their young parent contract, to contract with one provider. Nehemiah worked closely with Bromford Housing Group to ensure that our young parent accommodation could still be used and our specialist support to BME young parents still had a role. We worked with Bromford on writing the bid and agreed that if successful Nehemiah would subcontract to them and continue to provide services and accommodation. The bid was successful and from December 2013 Nehemiah has continued successfully by sub-contracting to Bromford, to retain a Supporting People income and deliver a much needed specialist service. This gives us future opportunities to work jointly with larger housing associations, when large support contracts are commissioned and a specialist BME input is required.
- **Nehemiah Academy** - Nehemiah Academy and Charitable Aid Foundation was established in 2013. It currently supports employment and training and there are opportunities within the academy to support capacity building of engaged customers and to reward them with access to training and skills. Two customers of Nehemiah have benefited from this scheme and have secured volunteering opportunities within the organisation.
- **Central and Cecil Housing trust** - NUCHA started to cater for the Irish community with the transfer of properties from Central & Cecil Housing Trust in 2014. This brought us additional sheltered schemes to manage and a more diverse community to serve.

3. Strategic Aims in our Involvement Policy

“To create a customer engagement culture, which enhances our business outcomes, which delivers value to customers by maximising opportunities for dynamic feedback and one which we can evidence their views have been enthusiastically acted upon”.

The strategic aims are to:

- a) Support good governance through co-regulation and challenge VFM in our existing ways of working and the services that we provide.
- b) Create a culture which allows more and a broader range of customers to get involved in influencing our work.

- c) Ensure all customers can have a say, by introducing, developing and practicing a broader range of options, whether that be at the strategic level or in the neighbourhoods where people live.
- d) Build the capacity of customers to influence the perception of our services and satisfaction with the services that we provide.
- e) Enable customers to see the value of engagement through feedback and early action, where involvement delivers value for money and is outcome focussed.
- f) Bring together the work on feedback, customer surveys and customer insight to align and maximise the views we hear from customers. We will also act on the areas for improvement that customers highlight and feedback on what we have done as a result of this.
- g) A need to embrace our aspiration and catch up with many other organisations, to engage with customers more digitally. This would mean optimising digital functionality for those customers who want to engage this way – this is focusing on feedback about services and involvement as opposed to how we manage our interaction with customers on a day to day basis.

The emerging themes for the new strategy:

- a) Having a dynamic menu of opportunities that provide a variety of ways for customers to interact and engage with us.
- b) Actively involving tenants and customers in shaping and influencing how services are delivered, monitoring performance and reviewing value for money
- c) Strengthening co-regulation and providing opportunities for customers to hold Nehemiah to account, typically through tenant scrutiny arrangements
- d) Increasing the diversity and numbers of involved tenants and customers and measuring the impact and value for money of involvement active.

3.1 Governance

Regulators and commissioners of services are increasing their scrutiny on governance and so, our Boards are required to operate in a transparent way and be accountable to customers.

Regulatory standards on co-regulation require customer involvement in policy development, performance improvement, scrutiny, complaints, customer care, choice and equalities across all our work.

Our services are now scrutinised by customers. We are proud of their support and the way they challenge us to improve satisfaction.

Customer Involvement will ensure:

- a) Boards and committees receive regular reports on the impact of our customer engagement work, the way customers are engaged and precisely what has been heard and the outcomes achieved as a result of customer engagement

- b) Board Members and committee members who are customers will link with the customer engagement structure, informing Boards of their views of involvement in services and holding the business to account for transparency and acting on customer opinion
- c) Transparency and feedback is encouraged and a quick response at all times and when services are reviewed, enabling commentary through social media and the web
- d) Our regular panels for consultation, for sheltered schemes and on scrutiny and complaints will hold us and the board to account for delivery of the promises in this strategy

3.2 Growth and sustainability

Our operating environment is one of growing housing need for energy efficient homes of the right size and with improved facilities as competition from the private sector increases and homes for life become less aspirational. Vibrant neighbourhoods and communities are equally important as the quality of housing, care, support and the other services we provide.

Funding for care and support services and assistance to improve health and wellbeing is under pressure. Nehemiah are seeing a reduction in Supporting People funding as cuts at local authorities begin to bite hard.

Organisational development is rapid and corporate planning is being developed to be flexible, responsive and fit for purpose to meet changing business needs. Our services are now scrutinised by customers, which continue to challenge us to improve satisfaction.

Our future is bright, even at a time of great economic and social stress and we are proud of our responsible growth, our partnerships and the way our customers have supported us to tackle disadvantage in a positive way. We are proud our values have been influenced by customers and they tell us the way we impact positively or otherwise, in our communities. Customers can support us to learn, grow and sustain our neighbourhoods.

Customer engagement will ensure:

- a) A commercial edge which supports property development growth and where customers can influence future services subject to ongoing charges
- b) Reality checking and customer insight projects will review development and services to new and existing developments to enable service improvements,
- c) Housing officers and customer groups working with other agencies and clubs will reap rewards for our investment in communities where we will support local activities which enables us to work in partnership, hear about growth opportunities, sustain neighbourhoods and to address issues as a “can do” landlord

3.3 Inclusion and social value

Unemployment and financial inclusion are - ongoing problems in our neighbourhoods. Programmes to alleviate disadvantage are being cut in our

communities. The spending power of customers in communities is reducing, causing local businesses and facilities to close. Inequalities are increasing, not only in traditional equality act terms but in the exclusion of other groups in our communities. This is a major concern to our customers.

We have a fresh call to support our customers and communities into training, employment and to support access to low cost finance, maximise benefits and educate customers on best use of energy, use the internet and to rebuild their confidence.

Customer engagement will:

- a) Enable us to hear directly from customers involved and spot early warning signs of individuals and communities being unable to cope, so preventative action can be taken
- b) Enable and target diverse groups of customers to become involved throughout the engagement structure, building trust and offering training and support for those who are under-represented to participate
- c) Ensure any customer commentary includes representatives who can consider the needs of a diverse customer base
- d) Develop training through our Academy where customers will receive information about the operation of the business and promote courses for local delivery to capacity build in customers to get involved, monitor and influence and to understand the route to further education, training and employment.
- e) Where our customers are in dispersed stock, or where other agencies dominate, or where we have management agreements with other landlords which deliver engagement and other services, we will support them to involve our customers and we will build the confidence of our customer to engage with others
- f) If we engage vulnerable customers to share with us their views on our support services, we can use this experience to gradually increase their self-confidence and resilience and reduce the pressure from homelessness and social services, moving customers on to less dependency and releasing resources to help others

4. Strategic Context

4.1 Regulation

The Tenants Services Authority (TSA) revised their Regulatory Standards in March 2012, which are the basic minimum standards expected by the regulator. These became operational from April 2012 when the TSA was merged into the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

The HCA now monitors the delivery of regulatory standards. The HCA is more visible in monitoring the delivery of Economic Standards. There is an expectation of Board self-monitoring on consumer standards. This strategy framework must deliver this regulatory obligation to self-monitor.

One of the consumer standards is the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment (TIE) and expectations of landlord performance have been increased in the new regulatory framework. The TIE is a cross cutting standard for all landlord services. It is likely that the regulator will only step in if there is **“serious detriment”** (examples of which might be risks or actual harm to tenants due to health and safety mismanagement)

This TIE scope is on tenant scrutiny and all other customer structures. Nehemiah is expected to be transparent, open and accountable to customers and to ensure engagement and involvement is active in areas of importance to the business and the customer.

The general definition of co-regulation is one of customers taking the place formerly filled by regulators and audit commission inspectors and holding their landlord to account through a variety of engagement methods supported by timely information and training by the landlord. In effect, this becomes a mutually reliant partnership between landlords and tenant to shape the delivery of consumer standards.

Expectations from regulation, all met from this strategy includes:

- a) A partnership between the Board, senior staff and the Scrutiny Panel to review services important to customers and the Board
- b) An opportunity offered for involvement in a Designated Complaints Panel (under the Localism Act 2011, enacted from April 2013).
- c) Review of customer facing policies
- d) Influence strategic priorities through Customer Consultation panels
- e) Influence on how housing related services are delivered, through engagement in policy reviews
- f) Influence in setting and monitoring standards by Customer Consultation panels and reality checkers
- g) Making of recommendations on how performance can be improved
- h) Specifying and monitoring local offers at Customer Consultation panels
- i) The annual report to tenants, reviewed by task and finish group and signed off by the Customer Consultation panel
- j) A project to offer tenants the opportunity to undertake repairs and maintenance themselves, within certain caveats and to share in any savings made (Tenant Cash back), to be considered through a task and finish group and supported by the property teams for links to training in the academy to complete small repairs.
- k) The awareness of information on the right to manage

The TIE applies as a cross cutting standard, requirements for customer involvement in the other standards will be considered by the groups:

- ✓ Customer Care and choice, complaints, access and equality
- ✓ Home – decent homes and right first time repairs, consultation on budgets, programmes and spend
- ✓ Neighbourhood and Community – ASB and estate management and partnership working in neighbourhoods/communal areas

- ✓ Tenancy – fixed term tenure, allocations, mutual exchanges and homelessness
- ✓ Rent – affordable and social rent consultation
- ✓ Value for Money – stakeholder involvement and review of VFM plans and how to spend saving
- ✓ Governance and Financial Viability – consulting on how customers should be involved in reviewing their own involvement in governance and influencing strategic objectives.

The risks to landlords for non-compliance in co-regulation include:

- ✓ The Housing Ombudsman (or Councillors, MPs or Designated Complaints Panel) may become involved in the non-delivery of standards or promises through the complaints process
- ✓ The HCA could enact tools still at its disposal including deep dive inspection, external audit, voluntary undertaking or more serious interventions.
- ✓ The service of a notice of serious detriment on health and safety issues like failure to deliver statutory gas servicing.

4.2 Competition and pressure to merge for small HAs

- ✓ There is a reputational and financial risk to the Boards to not have a fit for purpose and dynamic involvement structure in the competitive environment
- ✓ The accommodation offer and demand for the core product of housing associations in some locations is a business risk. This is partly due to changes in benefit changes (the bedroom tax) but also due to the growth of and lowering of rents (in some cases) in the private sector market and their ability to negotiate with customers for larger accommodation within local housing allowances.
- ✓ The competitive environment is subject to greater challenges for innovation in a commercial setting. Getting client involvement right and being known for engagement excellence will equal or give a commercial edge over similar organisation. In a similar way, the engagement offer must be excellent to gain the trust of any future stock transfers or any management contracts and development opportunities which support Nehemiah to achieve growth.
- ✓ It is essential that customer involvement in the business is targeted to engaging customers to support the focus on these issues. Customers can help the business consider access to our homes products; identify the accommodation offer; identify needs for management of accommodation and how NUCHA encourage customers to stay in their homes and manages any move on.

4.3 Welfare Reform

- ✓ The impact of the benefit cap and bedroom tax in reducing housing benefit being paid to a significant number of customers is already being felt through higher levels of debt and reductions in demand for some of our homes. Further impacts will be felt following the roll out of universal credit in 2016/17. Customers can help us understand the pressures in communities and help us to decide how best to support fellow customers to maximise benefits and pay for and stay in their homes

- ✓ Changes and reductions in Supporting People and Care and the introduction of Personal Independence Payments bring pressure to deliver value for money and reduce services which are not regulatory or legal obligations if income is not achieved.
- ✓ Cuts for Young People and more threats of further cuts to benefit for those under 25 years provide an opportunity for NUCHA to consider its support or this group of customers, many of which will be able to communicate well through social media

4.4 Internal pressure for change

- a) Customer engagement needs to be focussed on work to support business challenges, build better business intelligence on the competition, capture outcomes from customer engagement and to be proud to engage and consulting customers and see their real influence across the business.
- b) The numbers of involved customers are low. There is a need to increase both the amount of regularly involved customers and those that get involved on an adhoc basis.
- c) The current involvement activities are mainly based on excellent partnership work on scrutiny and complaints, a sheltered housing panel, one new VFM panel and one off opportunities to get involved.
- d) There is a need to offer a more varied menu for involvement including commentary on social media.

4.5 Dispersed Stock

The dispersed nature of much of NUCHA homes is a challenge for customer involvement. Opportunities will need to be offered to customers in dispersed stock areas allowing them to engage in involvement activities, but also enabling those customers to give their views locally at least once a year.

5. Driving us forward

In this strategy we seek:

- ✓ A very different menu of involvement offering short term involvement, , opportunities to simply comment and feedback through social media and web consultation as well as structured neighbourhood and formal group activities.
- ✓ To engage with 10% of our customers and to be constantly recruiting and supporting customers to engage. We recognise that this is an ambitious aim but the use of social media and other practices such as virtual panels will engage many more people
- ✓ To make better use of our community centres in sheltered schemes which are underutilised. This strategy will enable customer engagement in usage to meet local need
- ✓ To promote self-help. The opportunity to offer training and support through “life, work and volunteering skills” to involved customers, by capacity building will tie in with the inclusion agenda and projects for financial inclusion, digital inclusion and

- pathways to work and access to the academy. Self-help will require a returned commitment from customers to engage in an involvement or neighbourhood project
- ✓ To continue to engage with those already involved. Many customers are already involved in existing structures. We do not wish to lose this commitment. Our new strategy will build on this and offer opportunities to customers who are not currently involved.

6. Value for Money

Customers are an important stakeholder and will be consulted in our production of an annual value for money statement. Customers will also support us to review policies, suggest service improvements and will hold us to account by scrutinising services

Economy

The total cost of the service amounts to approximately £67,672.00 and includes staffing and the day to day costs of delivering the framework. This is a substantial and important investment. The strategy in 2015/16 is delivered within existing budgets.

Efficiency

Productivity, in terms of what we invest into Customer Involvement and the benefits partners receive back for the business, is addressed in this fresh strategy by a more flexible, dynamic customer involvement framework which holds staff to account and is more transparent to Nehemiah.

Effectiveness

Qualitative and quantitative measurements of the service can be collected which show outcomes and progress in delivery. Key Performance Indicators are found later in this report.

Our customer engagement officer works with a number of other small landlord customer involvement services to network and benchmark productivity and to share what works and good practice including joint compliant and scrutiny panels.

There is no regulatory requirement to collect satisfaction data but boards will wish to understand the impact of this new service.

Qualitative results will capture feedback as a result of engagement on a more regular basis than 3 yearly STAR customer surveys. This will be developed by the Customer involvement Officer.

Customer involvement will become more inclusive and offer more opportunities for a new and diverse customer challenge, with a Nehemiah customer group helping us to monitor the delivery of equality in customer involvement and the customer engagement strategy itself.

The Board will however have the opportunity to review the budgets for customer engagement as part of the regular business processes having regard for the delivery requirements of this strategy and other priorities.

7. Consultation on this strategy

Customers will be consulted using a variety of methods including on the website, social media, the Under One Roof newsletter, at the sheltered housing panel meeting and by letter. Staff will also be given the opportunity to give their views and comments on the strategy.

8. Risk Management

It is important to consider our risks and how we will mitigate these.

Risk	Mitigating factors
Failure to deliver the regulatory code for tenant involvement and empowerment	The operations Committee will review this quarterly, reporting to Boards on any concerns
Failure to engage enough customers to influence the development of policies	This is a priority target for the customer engagement officer at performance review and targets will also be set for neighbourhood, property and support staff to engage new customers
Failure to capacity build new and existing customer groups to make a real impact on service outcomes	Training and capacity building will be completed with newly involved and existing involved customers
Failure to listen to views of customers and engage on business critical issues, to enable a commercial advantage	<p>The review of policies will be scrutinised at Board.</p> <p>The operations committee and Board can commission scrutiny and the new customer groups to assist with business critical challenges.</p> <p>EMT, Boards, Audit and Finance Committee will hold managers to account for delivery of recommendations from customers</p>

Failure to involve a diverse range of customers	The engagement of BME customers, middle aged and young voices will be enhanced by the new strategy which does allow commentary on social media, bespoke task and finish groups to tackle inequality and encourages inclusion.
Failure to engage all customers in some format.	Customers will be drawn to their interest group. A database will be monitored to ensure each customer is able to engage in at least one customer involvement activity a year, should they wish to volunteer to participate

9. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Targets

It is important to monitor and review the effectiveness of the key involvement activities to ensure they are effective, achieving required outcomes and providing value for money.

10. Review of this strategy

The strategy will be subject to update reports every quarter to Operations Committee and the Customer consultation group which will confirm progress and hold staff to account for outcomes.

The Strategy will begin to be reviewed in 3 years (2018/19), in consultation with customers, stakeholders and Board, with the intention of shaping an agreeing a new strategy from 2018/19.

11. Links to NUCHA training academy

The academy will be the training offer to involved customers who wish to gather information on services or may require skills to support the task they have volunteered for.

The delivery of this part of the academy will be managed and supported by the customer engagement officer. Training will be delivered to all customers who need the skills and be based on business need or needs identified during skills audits for involved customers.

Opportunities will also be sought to link the involvement training in the academy to the recruitment of apprentices, work experience placements and Interns in the academy

12. Summary of our menu for involvement:

Customer Consultation Panel

Volunteers will commit to working in the spirit of partnership with NUCHA to drive service accountability and improvements in VFM, compliance on consumer standards, general sounding board, Equality Assessments and performance review.

Quarterly (and as and when required)

Sheltered Housing Panel

- The panel will continue to review service provision within all schemes. The panel is a useful source of information for NUCHA.

Quarterly

Scrutiny Panel

We will continue the existing shared arrangement for a scrutiny panel with 4 other small landlords.

Meetings or activities related to scrutiny will require a commitment of 3-4 days a month.

Designated Complaints Panel (DCP)

We will continue with the existing shared arrangement for a complaints panel with 6 other small landlords

A designated panel member will be expected to commit to 4 days for each complaint heard and dependant on how this role develops, to review lessons learnt and to advocate for customers to manage the complaint at the earlier part of the complaint

Customer database/virtual group

Any customer wishing to volunteer to be involved in service development, neighbourhoods and property services will be able to volunteer will be encouraged to express interest and skills which will be kept on an electronic database.

Recruitment campaigns for new customers to get involved will be the responsibility of the customer - engagement officer, neighbourhood and property team but will be led by customer involvement. The target will be to have at least 10% of customers engaged and available on this database.

Staff in neighbourhoods, property and involvement will be required to suggest residents for the virtual panel.

Managers will commission customer involvement to take volunteers from this Panel who have recently experienced a service to be investigated. From this, the volunteers may also be asked, for example: to join staff led Panels, [comment directly on matters](#)

| [or complete survey forms](#) and give a customer perspective, for example to get involved in procurement.

Opportunities will be advertised on social media. This pool of customers will include all those who are available to be called upon for the menu for involvement offer below:

- ✓ Reality checkers
- ✓ Policy readers
- ✓ Plain English champions of our communication to customers
- ✓ One off task and finish groups
- ✓ On line commenters on social media, website or by direct e mailing
- ✓ Annual report

Volunteers with recent experience of the service will be targeted for commentary on policies.

Estate Walkabouts

Customers wishing to volunteer to be involved in local neighbourhood and property auditing will be able to volunteer and express interest and skills through the customer voice.

Business Managers and Boards will commission the audits, including estate inspections; armchair auditing and visits to view the condition of estates.

Neighbourhood Tenant and Resident Associations (TARA's)

Where there is interest from customers, TARAs will be managed in the neighbourhood with support from housing associations and community partners.

TARAs will be expected to meet qualifying criteria for financial support and will be expected to be able to run the group themselves with occasional support.

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