



Enhancing Life Opportunities

# A Modern Framework of Customer Engagement

**Customer Engagement Strategy 2017 – 2021**





**The Golding Homes Customer Engagement Strategy has been developed with the input of customers and seeks to put them at the heart of everything we do. It sets out how we intend to engage with and involve our customers to help shape and improve services.**

Customer Engagement is really important to us at Golding Homes. We want our customers to have a real say in how we deliver our services and to have a choice in the extent and nature of their involvement. This is why we have developed a variety of flexible ways in which customers can get involved in reviewing performance and future service delivery.

Golding Homes is not just a landlord; we are about more than just bricks and mortar and by involving our customers in decisions that affect their lives it makes our housing services more effective.



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## Introduction

**Golding Homes is a Kent based Housing Association. Since 2004 we have seen major growth which has brought financial strength and enabled us to deliver better services to our customers. It has also brought new complexities and challenges.**

We are committed to Customer Engagement and ensuring that customers are able to participate fully in the development of our services in a way that suits them.

We believe that our customers have a right to be consulted and involved when the organisation makes decisions about their homes, their communities and the housing services they receive.

Engagement of our customers is vital to the success of the organisation. Our overall aim is to offer a variety of ways in which our customers can become involved in our decision making. We also wish to extend opportunities for wider Customer Engagement by reaching new groups and developing the use of technology so that more customers can engage with us virtually from their own homes.

This document, which has been developed in consultation with customers, explains how our Customer Engagement work promotes accountability, influences the services we provide and improves the neighbourhoods in which we work.

## Golding Homes Corporate Vision and Values

Golding Homes is committed to working in partnership to improve the homes and local environment of all our customers. This will be achieved by providing good quality services, which respond to the needs of customers and offer opportunities that allow customers to make a difference to the services they receive and to the way those services are developed in the future.

### Our Mission

- To provide quality homes and create communities where people choose to live

### Our Vision

- Enhancing Life Opportunities

### Our Values

- Customer Focused
- Performance Driven
- Creative
- Open
- Positive

### Our Strategic Priorities

- Growing the number of homes we provide and diversifying our services
- Investing in our assets and communities
- Enhancing our financial strength
- Delivering excellent customer service
- Developing awareness of our work amongst our people and partners.

## Challenges

- Customer expectations
- Doing more for less
- Performance management
- Financial strength and opportunity
- External influences

Our vision is to create a culture and approach which recognises and values Customer Engagement.

Effective engagement will enable us to reach as many customers as we can at a local level, ensuring they have the opportunity to take an active part in improving the communities where they live.

## Our Vision for Customer Engagement

### Our vision is to ensure:

- Customer Engagement is embedded across the organisation so that it is viewed and practiced by all as an integral part of our culture
- Customers are at the heart of the decision making process
- There are a wide range of flexible involvement opportunities available for customers to enable them to engage with us
- Dedicated resources are provided to support and enable effective involvement by our customers but all staff have a role to play in Customer Engagement
- Barriers to engagement are removed to ensure customers have the opportunity to be involved. Information and methods of engagement are accessible and responsive to the diverse needs and aspirations of our customers
- The effectiveness of customer involvement activities are maximised and reported on
- Our strategy meets the standards and expectations for Customer Engagement outlined in the updated Regulatory Framework for Social Housing (2015) which states landlords should work in close partnership with their customers on a strategic level
- Customer Engagement and participation initiatives demonstrate tangible outcomes and reflect value for money.

### To achieve these aims we will:

- Work in partnership with customers and stakeholders
- Provide clear information to customers about how to get involved and provide support for them to achieve this
- Provide flexible opportunities which are open and accessible for customers to get involved, in ways that suit them and gives them choice about the level of involvement
- Provide training for customers to help raise their awareness and understanding of the business
- Make sure we measure the impact of Customer Engagement.



## Background to the Strategy

Gaining views from customers is vital for us to obtain an understanding of their needs and aspirations and also to continuously enhance and improve our services.

By involving customers at the level they choose, there are many benefits for them and us including:

- Increasing customer satisfaction
- Enhancing accountability
- Ensuring that policies meet the needs of customers
- Continuous improvement in service delivery
- Ensuring that customers are involved in decisions that affect them
- Improving the community and environment
- Promoting sustainability
- Managing customer expectation - having a role in decision making helps customers understand that some changes are gradual and cannot happen straight away

- Taking ownership of the outcomes of the engagement, for example in neighbourhood projects
- Customers having a better understanding of policies.

This strategy covers engagement with all of our customers. We aim to offer a wide range of inclusive opportunities that suit the needs of our customers and results in a broad range of customers being able to influence the services they receive from Golding Homes.

In producing this strategy we have taken into account feedback from customers and staff through a range of consultation methods.

Some of the key aims of the consultation were to establish customer's views on how they prefer information to be made available to them, how they prefer to be communicated with on service delivery and how we might overcome barriers to engagement and encourage further diversity amongst those involved customers.



## Developing Customer Engagement

The updated regulatory framework for Social Housing (2015) requires customers to be at the heart of decisions made about their homes and how services are delivered by their landlords. This approach puts a greater emphasis on the relationship between landlords and their customers at a local level.

This strategy takes into account these requirements, ensuring that our customers are central to influencing and monitoring the range of services they receive from us. We have also consulted with them to identify how they wish to be involved.

The regulatory framework requires that processes to scrutinise the delivery of services involves our customers. By providing a broad range of opportunities and increasing numbers of involved customers this spreads the responsibility that is required in this area and enables customers to have greater flexibility in the scale of their involvement, whilst being able to influence decisions at a significant level. This allows us to take into account a wide range of views, rather than just those of a small group of involved customers.

We deliver a cycle of scrutiny events conducted through a series of customer panels and wider consultation opportunities. The aim is to give customers an opportunity to review performance information in a number of key operational areas and give a critical assessment of them against our objectives.

This approach builds on our Customer Engagement Toolkit, which sets out the range and scope of opportunities for customers to get involved and adds a scrutiny element to the specific panels.

We have a number of flexible scrutiny groups who engage with us using a range of methods appropriate to the service. Customers who have worked with us in dealing with service delivery issues are asked to provide feedback on our services. We seek their feedback on a range of service indicators to help us assess the effectiveness of our work and seek continuous improvement of the service.

The outputs from this process help to review and inform the information which feeds into our Annual Report and identifies customer priorities for service improvement going forward.

# A Modern Framework of Customer Engagement

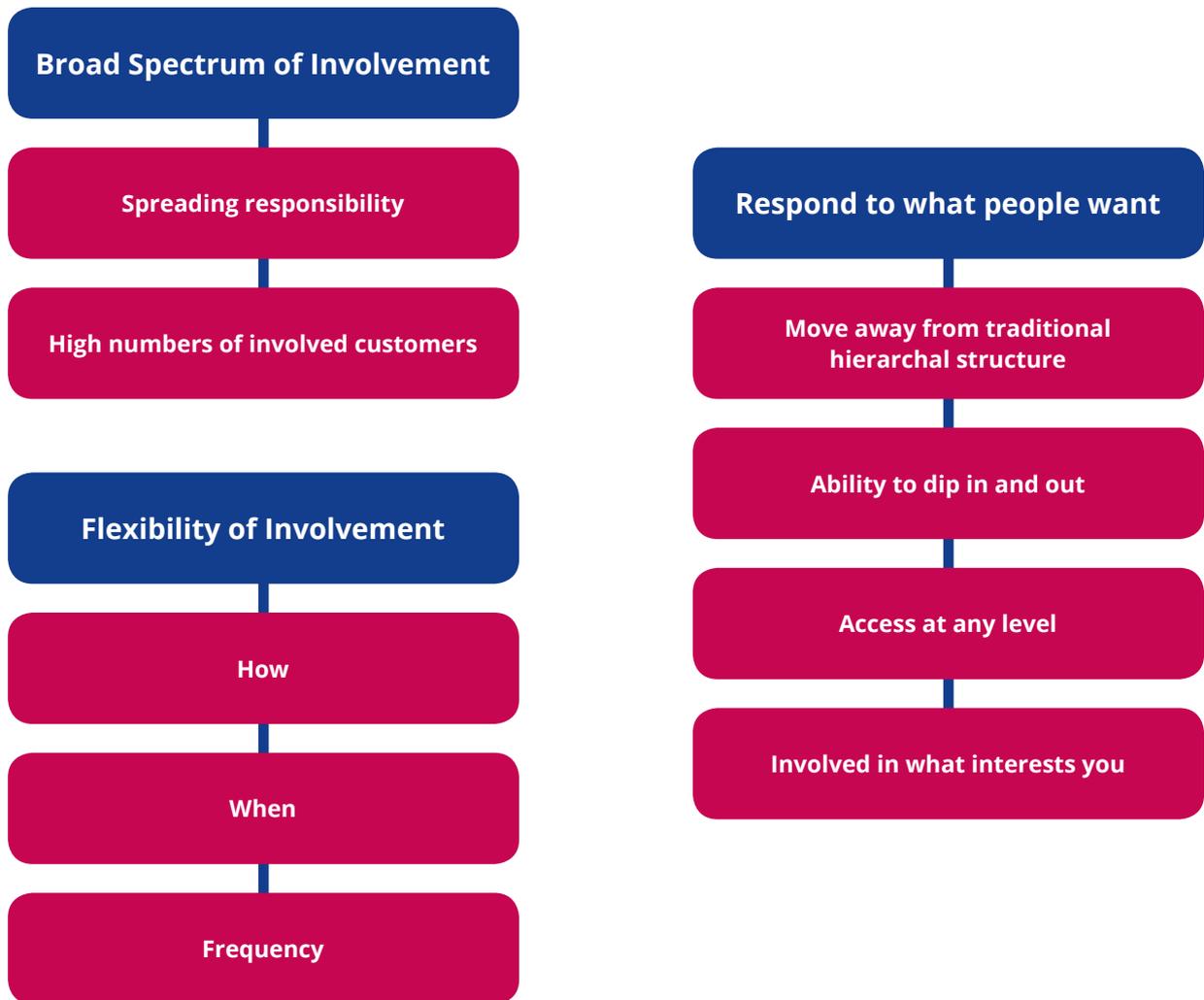
Our Customer Engagement Strategy involves giving customers a range of flexible options and different levels for engaging with us, on both an informal and formal level.

As our housing stock is dispersed across Kent, we need to ensure customers living in rural areas have the same involvement opportunities as those in our more urban communities.

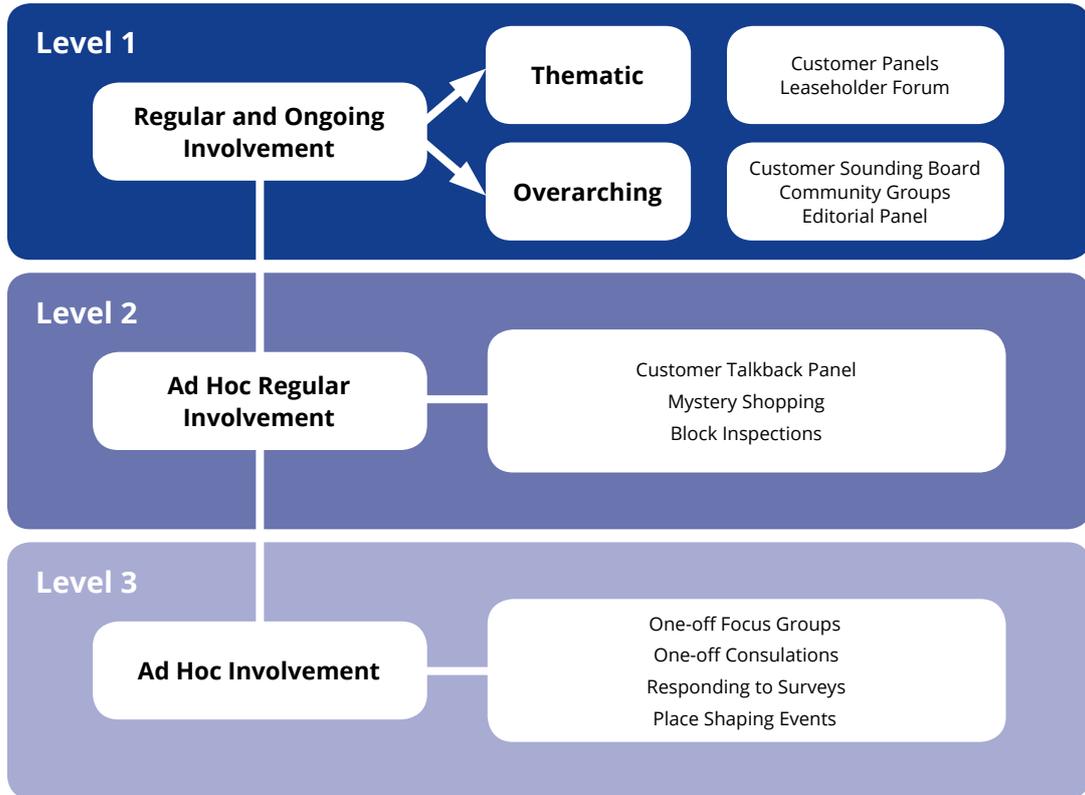
We know that a targeted approach to service users is an effective way of getting customers involved and this should feature prominently in our future Customer Engagement Strategy.

It is important that regardless of whether involvement takes place at local or strategic level, customers should know their views are listened to and will be taken into account when considering any service changes.

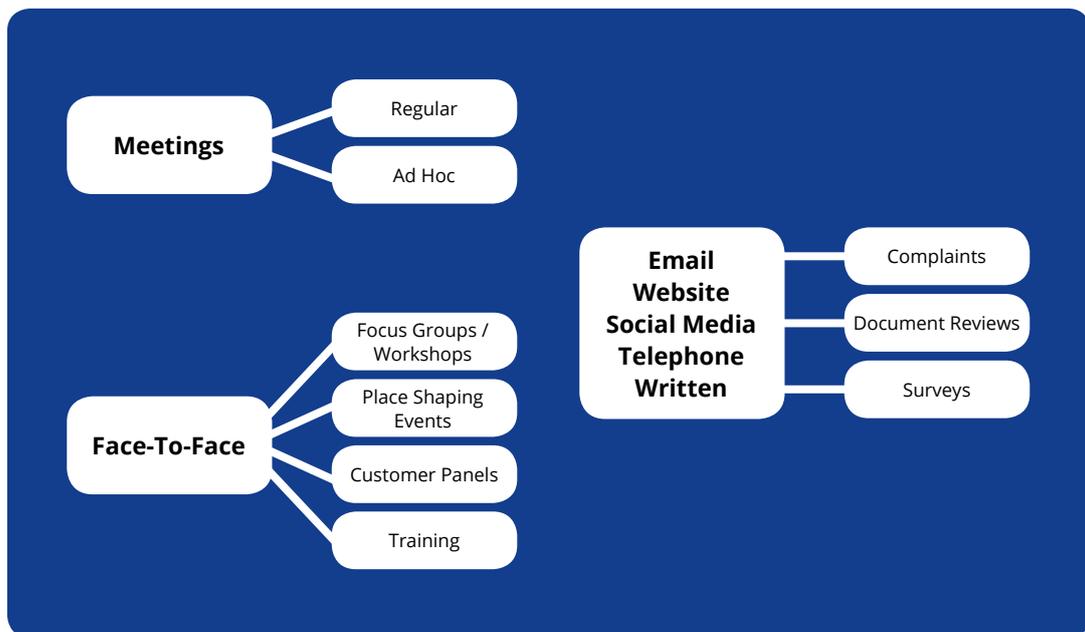
In light of this, our strategy does not contain a hierarchical structure, but focuses on the outputs of an activity to ensure they are linked together to provide a better picture of the views and needs of our customers. For example, a service improvement project may consist of several involvement activities (a survey, focus group or working group) that together provides an overall view of how the service needs to be improved.



## Levels of Involvement



## Forms of Customer Involvement





## Value for Money

Under the revised regulatory framework there is an increased emphasis for housing providers to demonstrate value for money across all their activities.

It is important that we ensure we offer a value for money service for Customer Engagement. To achieve this we will:

- Compare the cost of Customer Engagement against other organisations
- Work in partnership with other organisations to reduce the cost of initiatives where possible
- Review and monitor the way customers are able to become involved in developing the service
- Assess the impact of the involvement activities.

## Customer Engagement Support

We provide a dedicated team and resources to support customers who wish to become involved, but we also understand that Customer Engagement is an integral part of the job for staff throughout the organisation. Where appropriate staff will have specific Customer Engagement objectives and every new member of staff will receive information on the significance of Customer Engagement as part of their induction training.

A dedicated budget to support Customer Engagement is held by the Head of Community Development to enable activities and consultation to be undertaken and to ensure the delivery of existing initiatives. This budget includes funding to support customers with expenses and training.

The Community Development Team is responsible for supporting and monitoring the delivery of Customer Engagement. The team offer support and guidance on how best to involve customers and will co-ordinate opportunities for them to be consulted and involved.

## Role of Service Teams

Service Teams are responsible for carrying out consultation in relation to their service areas. This includes consultation on service reviews, performance and improvement projects.

All teams provide feedback to customers on the results and action taken as a direct result of the consultation that has taken place.

During our consultation with customers we were told that feedback on involvement is important. In order to achieve this we will report on customer involvement activities and its impact through our website, the customer newsletter Home Matters and where appropriate using the “you said we did” format.



## Supporting People to ‘Get Involved’

To support our Customer Engagement activities we offer financial assistance and funding to help and encourage individuals to get involved, including:

- Reimbursement of reasonable out of pocket expenses for attending meetings. This includes car mileage allowance, taxi fares for those unable to take public transport and care costs
- Being flexible about times of meetings
- Providing information in alternative formats and languages
- Holding meetings in places that are easy to get to and accessible for wheelchair users and people with mobility problems.

## Incentives

We will provide incentives to promote involvement opportunities in some areas, such as mystery shopping, in the form of high street shopping vouchers. This is to recognise and encourage more customers to participate and for them to be acknowledged for their contributions in terms of the commitment and responsibility.



## Training for Customers

We are committed to providing training for all customers who want to be involved and have a dedicated training budget. We will deliver training in a range of forms which may include any of the following:

- Conferences and Events
- Skills for Life
- Workshops
- Community Development
- External Training and/or training facilitated by staff.

## Customer Involvement Database

In order to assist with the evaluation process and capture information about the number of involved customers, a working database is used to record, monitor and manage activities and their outcomes.

A number of mechanisms are in place to capture and assess the effectiveness of customer consultation, engagement and scrutiny. An Annual Report on scrutiny is presented to Golding Homes' Board alongside individual testimonies from members of the Customer Sounding Board and Customer Panels.

## Evaluating Impact, Reviewing Progress and Ongoing Development

We are committed to ensuring that customers who are involved in the organisation are able to see what has been achieved and believe that they are making a real difference.

We will make sure that there is a cohesive approach to Customer Engagement and those activities are monitored for effectiveness.

Information from involvement activities will be dealt and shared with service areas so that they can use the results to enhance and shape their services to customers.

To ensure that customer involvement activities are making a difference to our services the evaluation of impact is critical.

### We will review all involvement activities for:

- **Effectiveness** – has the activity achieved the objectives set?
- **Popularity** – were customers attracted by the activity? Were there specific groups of customers that engaged or did not engage in the opportunity?
- **Access and diversity** – was it easy to get to? Did it reach the people it needed to reach? Did we get a good cross section of the people getting involved?
- **Value for money** – does the output, such as suggested improvements, savings or re-prioritised spending, justify the input, including funding, customer's time, staffing and other resources?



## Valuing Diversity

At the heart of this strategy is our commitment to providing a fair and equitable service and ensuring that customers are treated equally without discrimination. We will make sure that in delivering our services we continue to be inclusive and representative. We want all our customers to have the opportunity to be involved, regardless of age, disability, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, marital status or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity status.

We aim to be effective in encouraging wider involvement and to achieve this we will continue to develop our customer profile information, so that we know and understand the needs of our customers. This will enable us to tailor our services and ways in which we communicate to meet their specific needs.

We will employ different methods of consultation to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to participate in a way that they feel is suitable for them.

We will make sure that information is available in a variety of formats, including different languages, audio CD, large print, newsletter, leaflets, on our website and available at service access points. This will help all our customers have access to current information.

## Data Protection

Golding Homes will operate this policy in accordance with our Data Protection Policy.

## Implementing the Strategy

Progress of the strategy and action plan will be monitored; any outcomes and successes will be reported in the customer newsletter and in our Annual Report.

## What we want to achieve between 2017 – 2021

Our aims are to:

- Ensure engagement is embedded across Golding Homes and is accessible to all our customers
- Empower customers to have a real influence over the services they receive
- Develop our communication and feedback to customers
- Achieve value for money through the delivery of this strategy.



## Action Plan

### Ensure engagement is embedded across Golding Homes and is accessible by:

- Ensuring all staff know about this strategy and the achievements it delivers
- Increasing the level of profiling information and preferences in how customers wish to engage with us and develop appropriate methods to increase engagement
- Use the extensive amount of information collected through surveys, complaints and routine contact with customers to identify trends to support service improvement and new initiatives
- Support teams in carrying out mystery shopping and other engagement to help deliver improvements and efficiencies.

### Empower customers to have a real influence over the services that they receive:

- Ensure that Customer Engagement drives improvement in services
- Work with Heads of Service to identify joint engagement initiatives

- Support customers through training to enable them to actively engage more.

### Develop communication and feedback to customers

- Review how we analyse and report back to customers about outcomes or actions following completed engagement
- Further develop electronic channels and social media
- Develop more effective methods of communicating with a diverse range of customers.

### Achieve value for money through the delivery of this strategy

- Review and develop methods of engagement that are cost effective and based on the preferences of customers
- Discuss and support customers with cost effective methods of engagement, such as online, electronic engagement and virtual groups
- Share resources with other landlords to deliver joint training.

## Opportunities to get Involved

Group	Remit	Time Commitment
Customer Sounding Board	Meet quarterly to make decisions on Community Chest Fund applications.	2-3 hours per meeting
Mystery Shopping	Mystery shoppers help us to measure our performance against service standards. They help provide a true picture of services from a customer's point of view.	5-7 hours per shop
Focus Groups	Small informal discussions open to all customers and leaseholders. They are usually about a specific subject and help Golding Homes to find out what they think about a service or how they would view proposals for change.	Time as and when held, 2-3 hours
Service Panels	Meet periodically to review performance across key areas of the business.	2-3 hours per meeting
Block Inspections	Customers can attend along with the Neighbourhood Advisor.	1-2 hours per inspection
Editorial Panel	Our customer newsletter is produced and distributed three times a year. It provides updates about services, performance and the local area. Customers and leaseholders can be involved as part of the Editorial Panel.	1-2 hours every 4 months
Surveys	Face-to-face or online surveys are an opportunity for customers to give their views about our service and performance and to influence future planning and service delivery.	10 minutes maximum
Customer Talkback Panel	This is a group of customers who have signed up to give us their views and comments on the services they receive using online, postal and telephone surveys. They provide a snapshot of customer's views with the aim of improving and shaping the services we provide.	5 minutes as and when required

