

Our Customer's Strategy



INTRODUCTION

Warrington Housing Association has a proud history of providing a broad range of affordable homes and services across Warrington and we are as passionate now as we have ever been about making Warrington a great place to live, in which the potential of individuals and communities can be realised. We currently own and manage over 1,500 homes for families, older people and people with additional support needs, including leasehold and shared ownership properties.

PURPOSE

In line with our organisational vision, this strategy focuses on how we will work to ensure that we are delivering on our ambition to work with our customers to help make Warrington a great place to live, in which the potential of individuals and communities can be realised. This strategy identifies a clear mechanism for how we will measure the success of what we do and also outlines key considerations in terms of risks and regulatory requirements in respect of our neighbourhoods.

Our aim is to provide high quality, responsive, value for money and accessible services, which address the needs and aspirations of the neighbourhoods and communities within which we work.

OUR THEMATIC PILLARS

We have five Thematic Pillars around which our business will prosper – homes, customers, social value, viability and colleagues. These Pillars will be used throughout our organisation to help us articulate who we are and what we want to achieve. They help us shape our strategies and policies based on the priorities set by our Board. Going forward, they will help us demonstrate the links between the things that we do, the priorities that we set and the outcomes we want to achieve.

OUR CUSTOMERS

Our Customers' Strategy is designed to provide the framework for us to deliver on our ambition to prioritise the needs of people and put the creation of sustainable communities at the heart of our work. We will continue to work in partnership with Warrington Borough Council, Warrington & Co, Elected Members, The Gateway, other Registered Providers and local organisations and businesses to develop, co-ordinate and deliver services. As a key stakeholder we will continue to invest in homes, services and the wider community.

We are active members of the Community Housing Partnership (CHP) which represents community-anchor associations operating in the North West of England which aims to utilise our distinctive strengths in working together to support member associations to fulfil

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their individual goals and objectives, through working together, sharing best practice, intelligence & commissioning services.

The specific aims of this strategy are:

- Ensure we effectively manage and maintain our homes and estates
- To proactively work with partner agencies to support our customers to feel safe in their homes.
- To provide accessible and tailored services aiming to meet or exceed the expectations of our customers.
- Ensure our customers have a voice and are integral to shaping the services we deliver.
- Continue to support our customers to sustain their tenancy.
- Work with partners and key stakeholders to reduce the impact of homelessness and meet local housing need.
- To ensure successful integration of our retirement offer, across our independent living offer, LifeTime and WHiA services.
- Contribute to promoting and fostering resilient, cohesive, and inclusive communities.
- Support customers to have greater control over their homes and communities

OBLIGATIONS

WHA are regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH).

In 2023, the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 came into effect. The approach to regulation is proactive and has been strengthened to include the new consumer standards, the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and associated legislation and regulation around building safety.

The consumer standards include:

Safety & Quality

Transparency, Influence and Accountability

Neighbourhood and Community

Tenancy

The cross-cutting themes within the standards are property, anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse. There is a strong focus on data and customer insight and fairness and respect. Spotlight reports have been published from the Housing Ombudsman to support providers with the approach.

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The Regulator expects housing providers to have a clear understanding of their customer base and that we provide services which meet their diverse needs. Customers should be at the heart of decision in shaping services and we can demonstrate transparency, scrutiny and influence are integral to our success.

We have action plans which underpin this Customer Strategy, and which align to how we will meet the requirements of the new regulatory approach.

HOMELESSNESS

We have signed up to the National Housing Federation's (NHF) Commitment to refer anyone at risk of homelessness and agreed a referral pathway with WBC so that we can work with the local authority to try and prevent and reduce homelessness. We continue to work closely with the local authority in identifying suitable development opportunities and homes to reduce the impact of homelessness in the Borough. We work closely with the Council and "Under One Roof" to meet housing need and ensure we meet nominations agreements set out with the local authority.

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

As a small local community-based housing association we benefit from close relationships with our customers and as an early adopter of the NHF's Together with Tenants charter and plan we will continue to work closely with our customers to deliver on our commitments, to ensure customers have voice and we use customer feedback to shape and improve our services. Our dedicated Customer Voice Officer is proactive in seeking the views of a diverse range of customers through a variety of channels which maximise opportunities for our customers to feedback their views and be involved in shaping the services we deliver.

We will encourage engagement of all customers to ensure that they have a voice and influence at every level of decision making across the organisation. We will continue to build our partnerships with key stakeholders to help achieve our objectives.

We will share information with our customers through:

- Sending a copy of our annual report to all customers
- Sending a customer newsletter 3X per year

We will seek customer feedback through:

- Seeking views on satisfaction through our tenant satisfaction survey each year
- Measuring satisfaction with all planned improvement works eg kitchens

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- Using complaints to improve services and ensure we are learning when things go wrong
- We will encourage our customers to be involved in shaping services through: Our Scrutiny Panel (WHASP) which will complete 2 in depth reviews of our services per year and share their findings and recommendations for service improvement.
- Our Customer Consultation – this group will meet quarterly to review performance, seek views on policies or changes/improvements to the service
- Armchair participation – should customers not want to attend a meeting but would like to get involved we will send them information, policies and proposals for them to share their views – this may be through hard copies/emails or a closed on-line group.
- Complaints Group – we will involve customers in our complaints working group which will review complaints and lessons learnt
- Estate/Community events – we will hold walkabouts on estates, skip days and events which will invite feedback from our customers
- Conferences – we are members of the Community Housing Partnership which hosts events for customers across the north west – discussions include best practice, regulatory changes and gives customers to feed in their views Focus groups – we will hold focus groups when we have a specific issue, service change or policy we wish to discuss. Leaseholders attend annual meetings about their service charges.
- Meetings for residents in Older Peoples’ Schemes – where we host these meetings, we will seek views from our customers on the services they receive

We will continue to review best practice and carry out a review of how we involve customers and measure the impact. We will explore opportunities to develop a formal structure as part of our governance framework.

A structure for how we will inform, consult and engage with our customers can be found at appendix A.

OUR COMMUNITIES

WHA understands that the environment has a big part to play in how people feel about their area. We are responsible for the management of homes, communal areas and the wider environment to ensure that neighbourhoods are attractive, well maintained, safe and secure places to live and we have agreed service standards with our customers.

WHA has very few “estates” as a large proportion of the stock is pepper-potted around the town. This can be seen as a huge benefit to our customers who can be integrated into a

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mixed tenure community. However, this means we can have a limited impact on neighbourhoods as we do not own high densely populated areas except in Great Sankey and Grappenhall. We have seen the impact of this on satisfaction and will work towards an approach which can demonstrate what we have done on estates and also on a smaller scale where we have a concentrated number of properties, for example, within a block of flats. However, we are a community anchor organisation and, being the owner of the Gateway, which was recognised as an example of best practice in the recently published Better Social Housing Review. We need to actively promote with our customers the impact we have on communities. We are members of numerous strategic partnerships across the Borough and will continue to work closely with key stakeholders to support our strategic vision.

MEETING OUR CUSTOMER NEEDS

We want to deliver services which meet the needs of our current and future customers. We will therefore develop a greater understanding of the socio-economic and diversity challenges across the neighbourhoods in which we work through increasing our collection of equality, diversity and inclusion data (ED&I); We will use data mapping tools alongside census and local data to understand who is living in our properties and communities and how we can develop our plans to have the greatest impact on individuals, families and communities.

We will continue to build on our customer profile data, proactively develop and deliver services which meet customer needs and ensure we can demonstrate that our customers have equitable service outcomes. All colleagues recognise the need to adapt services to meet the needs of our customers and proactively seek feedback from customers to help us achieve this aim.

VALUE ADDED SERVICES

In addition to managing and maintain our homes we provide additional services to contribute to the quality of life of our customers

- o Financial Inclusion – all our Housing Officers will be trained in benefits advice and assisting our customers to maximise their income with a financial inclusion champion allocated within the team.
- o Lifetime – our award-winning Lifetime project, which provides a wide range of clubs to help Warrington residents aged 50 and over to stay active, connected and happy in later life
- o Warrington Gateway – A Community Hub, acting as a bridge between the local community, public sector and voluntary organisation providing assistance, advice

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and guidance to cater for community needs. We will continue to work closely with agencies within the Gateway and promote their services to our customers. We will build on any opportunities to work in partnership in our communities.

- o Warrington Home Improvement Agency - We also deliver adaptation and home improvement services across the public and private sector through our own Home Improvement agency.

MEASURING SUCCESS

This strategy has been approved by our Board and will be implemented through WHA's Business Plan customer pillar; measures of success include:

- o Improved customer satisfaction (TSM)
- o Well managed complaints process with learning embedded into service improvement plans
- o Delivering our objectives
- o Building on our strong foundations for effective customer feedback and engagement so our customers feel their views are taken into account
- o Customer feedback from our Scrutiny Panel
- o Stakeholder surveys and analysis.
Increased involvement from customers

This strategy will be reviewed every 3 years, or sooner if required by statutory, regulatory or best practice.

Appendix A

Information, Consultation & Engagement Structure

Scrutiny Panel (WHASP) – WHASP stands for Warrington Housing Association Scrutiny Panel. The Panel carries out 2 in-depth service reviews per year. They tell us what we could do better and make recommendations on how they think we can improve the service to our customers.

Customer Consultation Group – this group is open to all customers who want to get involved with shaping services. The Group will meet at least 4 times per year and will be an opportunity for us to get feedback on services, policies, areas we plan to change or improve.

Community Champions – we will support any individual or group who are active on their estate, in their community or in their block or scheme. Community champions can feed

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in any concerns of customers including fly tipping, fire risks, hazards, nuisance, cleanliness of communal areas or grounds maintenance.

Complaints Panel – this group includes both customers and colleagues who will meet each quarter to review a selection of complaints. They will give their views on the outcomes of the complaint and the quality and timeliness of our responses.

Independent Living Schemes Focus Groups – we have a number of schemes for over 55s where we have a host of social events and opportunities to share mutual interests. We hold focus groups at each scheme 4 times per year which enables the residents to give their feedback on concerns and changes or improvements to their homes.

Armchair consultation – not all our customers want to attend a meeting, and some may wish to share their views on changes to policies, processes or changes from the comfort of their home. We will operate a closed group on a social media platform alongside, email options and hard copy options to ensure we are inclusive and allow all our customers the opportunity to feed in their views.

Focus /Events – we will hold ad hoc focus groups or events on specific issues or where we want to bring numerous agencies together for the benefit of our customers. The groups will be demand led and may be because of a planned works in an area or a significant service change.

Estate Walkabouts – we will hold a programme of estate walkabouts which will be published on our website, on social media and in our newsletter. All customers on the estate will be notified in advance and will allow customers to join Officers and partners to walk around their local area and pick up issues or concerns which may impact them.

Estate events/skip days – these may be held as separate events for example during anti-social behaviour awareness week or because there has been a number of complaints about the same issue.

Tenant Satisfaction Surveys – we will carry out a survey of every customer each year to enable them to feed back their views. We will follow up any complaints, comments or suggestions that arise from their feedback.

Complaints – we value complaints as that is where we can see where things are going wrong. However, it is important we learn from complaints, so we look for trends in complaints and whether there is a pattern or if something was a one off failure.

Annual report – We will publish an annual report for customers every year.

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Tenants Newsletter – We will publish a tenant newsletter 3 times per year.

Website – We will provide information about our services on our website which includes a translation service.

Social media – We will publish information, news and events on our social media platforms.

Rent and service charge information – we will send all customers changes to their rent and/or service charge annually.

Community Housing Partnership Customer Panel – this is an opportunity for WHA customers to attend a group of customers from other community housing associations to share experiences

Community Housing Partnership Conference – each year the CHP holds a conference sharing best practice and new developments across the Sector – our customers are invited to attend the conference and represent WHA.

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