



Customer Involvement Strategy

2015 - 2018

Customer Involvement Strategy

1. Introduction

Customer Involvement is an integral part of Southway's business and is at the heart of everything we do. By working with our customers and involving them in decisions that affect their homes and neighbourhoods we believe we can continually improve. The Customer Involvement Strategy sets out our commitment to involving customers in governing, shaping and supporting us to improve our services and to grow. The strategy has been informed by opinion and views given during a consultation period with senior staff, managers, involved and non-involved customer groups and replaces the 2011-2014 strategy.

Customer involvement adds value to the business and has a broader role to play in shaping services and neighbourhoods and challenging Southway to impact positively on the lives of our customers in south Manchester.

Customer involvement will be focussed on building better business intelligence, capturing and acting swiftly on outcomes from customer involvement and will support real customer influence across the business.

Our Customer Involvement Strategy compliments our Futures Strategy which aims to further modernise our operations and transform Southway into an efficient and dynamic landlord. We will use feedback on our services in such a way that our involved customers can see the difference they have made.

We will support our values by:

- Delivering a responsive, flexible, community based service that takes into account the different availability and need of customers to get involved
- Developing a new relationship with our tenants based on mutual respect, self-help and pride in Southway and our communities
- Enabling feedback to achieve excellent levels of customer satisfaction with our core services, whilst still delivering value for money.

Southway staff will spend more of their time working in and with the community and making use of social media to feed in comments on our services.

We will make best use of our resources by:

- ✓ Increasing the use of online services for feedback through our online customer portals, web site and developing our social media offer

- ✓ Channel-shifting (which involves offering customers alternative methods of making contact and accessing services which enhance the customer experience and are more cost effective, for example, moving face to face and telephone contacts to online services) our service improvement groups and tenant inspectors to new ways of working of a task and finish nature, including policy review and assurance that Southway is meeting the regulatory standards
- ✓ Making use of sheltered housing events and activities and armchair auditors to gather feedback for the business
- ✓ Increasing our feedback by supporting local organisations and events with small resources in return for feedback on Southway services
- ✓ Developing the current Fun & Feedback offer to ensure we gain more feedback from our customers and potential customers
- ✓ Channel-shifting our staff equalities group to include our diverse customer base and incorporating in this our Southway Unite group
- ✓ Strengthening our Youth Forum to enable us to make better use of feedback to shape services for our future customers
- ✓ Supporting the independence of recommendations from our Scrutiny Panel
- ✓ Supporting our cross landlord Complaints Panel and incorporating in this, for Southway customers only, a role for governance assurance on lessons learnt from complaints, spot checking files and performance feedback
- ✓ Reviewing the role of the current Consultative Group giving them responsibility for comprehensive performance reviews, the Southway approach to value for money and the Annual Report to tenants
- ✓ Giving Southway residents the opportunity to be involved in the delivery and further development of our Green Spaces Strategy and Management Policy
- ✓ Providing our tenants with the skills and equipment to be involved
- ✓ Feeding back quickly on what we have learnt from consultation and what we will do with the information

2. Aim of the Customer Involvement Strategy

Our Customer Involvement Strategy will help us identify and address the needs, expectations and aspirations of customers.

Each year we invest around £36,000 in Customer Involvement and we are proud of what has already been achieved.

We know we have to continually refresh our involvement offer to customers and modernise services by making use of new technologies and by enabling those with busy lives to give us feedback which we can use to continually reshape our services. We will continue to engage with formal involvement groups, but we want to ensure we capture every single customer's view and ensure they see a difference as a result of their engagement with us.

We acknowledge our diverse customer base and want to provide opportunities that are appropriate to all our customers and their individual needs.

Through our social value agenda we deliver many services in our communities from community events to formal training for work, financial and digital inclusion. We want to build on those activities and ensure we use them as a platform to capture feedback.

Many customers are already involved in existing structures and we value their input. The new strategy aims to ensure the recruitment of additional involved customers who will receive necessary training and support.

Recruitment to any formal groups may be based on interviews and a review of skills. This will be developed over the three years of this strategy. The Consultative Group will oversee the delivery of the action plan to implement this strategy.

The strategic aims in the customer involvement strategy are to:

- a) Recruit, listen to and empower customers
- b) Increase the value our customers feel from influencing decision making at Southway
- c) Continue to develop our partnerships with like-minded organisations who can support our involvement activity
- d) Develop a broader range of opportunities for customers who work to influence our services
- e) Support the business and in particular governance at Southway, through meeting requirements for co-regulation
- f) Support community and voluntary organisations in south Manchester
- g) Link the involvement and social investment we do in our neighbourhoods and communities to ensure we maximise customer feedback opportunities
- h) Link our involvement work with our commitment to improving prosperity and wellbeing by building the capacity of customers to influence services during their interaction with our social investment opportunities

3. Main Focus of our Customer Involvement Strategy

Southway will ensure customers feel their volunteering has been meaningful and purposeful and will demonstrate how changes have been made as a result of commentary from customers.

There are three areas in this new strategy where customer involvement will be most active:

- a) Governance, through assurance based co-regulation
- b) Social Investment, through community development
- c) Feedback, through commentary from the wider customer base

a) Governance, through assurance based co-regulation

Southway already includes customers on the Board, supporting good governance and decision making.

The new Homes and Communities Agency Governance and Financial Viability Standard in January 2015 made new requirements on Southway which our involvement strategy can support.

The new standard requires Southway to produce an annual statement of compliance that meets all of the regulatory standards. Many of these standards are consumer facing and subject to co-regulation, where the regulator allows Southway to self-regulate with support from customers.

Our customers are best placed to enable us to make an annual assessment of how we meet the consumer standards. We will do this by asking customers their opinion if they have recently received those services through task and finish groups. Our formal Consultative Group will sign off this work.

The regulatory standard on Tenant Involvement and Empowerment applies as a cross cutting standard to all of Southway's regulated services:

- ✓ Customer Care and choice, complaints, customer involvement, customer access to services and equality
- ✓ Home – decent homes and right first time repairs, consultation on budgets, programmes and spend
- ✓ Neighbourhood and Community – anti social behaviour 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 savings
- ✓ 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 Homes and Communities Agency could enact tools still at its disposal including inspection, external audit, voluntary undertaking or more serious interventions
- ✓ The service of a notice of serious detriment, though this has mainly been on health and safety issues like failure to deliver statutory gas servicing

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

In Response Southway will:

- ✓ Support our Consultative Group to monitor performance improvement, make use of benchmarking information and make comments to staff on the KPIs which will be included in Board reporting
- ✓ Support our Consultative Group to monitor the delivery of our involvement and equalities strategies
- ✓ Support our Consultative Group to influence and support our value for money strategy and the annual VFM statement
- ✓ Train and support our involved customers to tell stories which will be included in Southway Stories and our Annual Report to tenants
- ✓ Involve tenants from a diverse background in the staff working group on equalities and seek opportunities for customers to engage in staff led service reviews as full members of working group meetings

- ✓ Continue to support our Designated Complaints Panel, which works jointly with other local landlords, and their recent development of an advocacy service
- ✓ Continue to support the Scrutiny Panel to deliver at least two reports a year on specific services
- ✓ Build a customer database of tenants who will register their interest in specific services and use them on a task and finish basis to comment on policies and services
- ✓ Support and train our tenant Board members to understand their role and contribute to the overall business direction
- ✓ Investigate alongside our review of governance how customers can support the Board in strategy, policy and performance review

b) Social Investment, through community development

The spending power of customers in communities is reducing and programmes to alleviate disadvantage are being cut in our communities.

Southway does not exist to maximise profits but has a social imperative to improve our customer wellbeing. Whereas a purely profit-focused company can judge its success by looking at its bottom line, Southway as a social business wants to gain a measure of its social impact.

Southway supports 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 digital services and media helping to rebuild their confidence.

In Response Southway will:

- ✓ Allocate a budget to enable us to support local activities during which we will engage our customers attending those events to gather feedback on a planned basis in line with priorities in our Futures Strategy
- ✓ Resource Southway staff to enable them to go out and meet existing (and develop new) community interest groups and use this to enhance the feedback opportunities on our services
- ✓ Maximise the use of our community centres to enable us to engage with new people and gain feedback on our services

- ✓ Support and develop Customer Champions who are willing to spread the word in their local community on Southway's work through a comprehensive training programme which informs them about the non-housing element of our offer to communities
- ✓ Encourage self-help by ensuring that those who receive community and inclusion services from Southway donate time to feedback their views on services from Southway
- ✓ Support customers to set up and run tenant and community groups
- ✓ Continue to support young people through our Youth Forum to gain knowledge, learn new skills and volunteer to help others in their own communities, making use of this Forum to gather feedback on Southway services
- ✓ Provide a dedicated room for our involved tenants to use the internet and carry out their involvement work
- ✓ Facilitate meetings, room bookings and mail outs to customers including encouraging attendance at meetings and events

d) Feedback, through commentary from the wider customer base

Southway carries out a satisfaction (STAR) survey every two years. We also engage in feedback on some of our services from questionnaires and phone calls from our staff. We capture lessons learnt and discuss learning from complaints in our team meetings. The process is effective but needs to be wider reaching to all services and more dynamic to maximise the outcomes as a result of the feedback gained.

We want to be better at listening to our customers to help us understand how and why we need to improve services which will have an impact in our communities.

The results from involvement will capture feedback as a result of engagement on a more regular basis than two yearly customer surveys.

In Response Southway will:

- ✓ Continue to support and develop our group of customers who can reality check our services in their local community as armchair auditors
- ✓ Develop our social media and web based services to enable dynamic feedback from customers to be requested, captured, acted upon and outcomes fed back to those who have taken the trouble to comment

- ✓ Register the interest of customers in specific services and use them on a task and finish basis to complete reality checks, one off consultation on service reviews and online surveys
- ✓ Increase the number of customers who feedback, comment and participate in our events to 10% of our customer base. This equates to 200 new involved customers over each of the three years of the strategy. 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
- ✓ Use distance methods of data and feedback collation through Southway's Digital Access Strategy
- ✓ Capture new customers as they join us by visiting them six weeks after tenancy start to discuss their involvement opportunities
- ✓ Set targets for our neighbourhood and property services staff to identify customers interested in giving their opinion and Customer Involvement staff will visit them to establish what opportunities they might want to get involved in
- ✓ Distribute an eNews letter to all our customers for whom we have an email address and invite them to give feedback

4. Recruitment of Involved Customers

Southway will support the recruitment of new involved customers, giving opportunities to everyone who volunteers the chance to contribute at least once a year to shape our services.

We will increase the number of opportunities for customers to shape and suggest improvements to our services, ensuring a diverse range of comments from up to 10% of our customers over the three year period of our strategy. Involvement will be more dynamic and innovative in picking up comments by supporting partners at their events.

We will increase our resources in the community by targeting neighbourhoods who are least represented through door knocking and supporting our Customer Champions to spread the word on the many forms of involvement and feedback opportunities open to customers at Southway.

We will facilitate those new to involvement by providing learning opportunities to maximise their ability to comment in online arenas and to use this learning for their own personal development and to access training, employment and work experience.

5. Links to our Futures Strategy

Customer involvement supports our strategic priorities in the following ways:

- a) **Asset Management Strategy:** Customers have a particular interest in repair and property improvements. The Consultative Group will support Southway to deliver this strategy. A task and finish group can support staff to review the deliverability of services to the south Manchester private sector.
- b) **Anti-Social Behaviour:** We will support the work of the neighbourhood teams to establish feedback on our work through task and finish groups of customers who have recently experienced this service.
- c) **Allocation of Empty Homes:** We will support the neighbourhood and property services teams by facilitating focus groups on a task and finish basis to comment on services relating to the condition of empty homes and the services provided to new customers.
- d) **Environmental Sustainability Strategy:** Customers are keen to receive support and advice to save money on their utility bills. Energy Doctors can feedback on issues raised in communities and leave forms for completion by our tenants.
- e) **Social Investment Strategy:** Customers are not aware of all the services delivered of a non-housing nature. We will support like-minded local community and voluntary organisations where this means we can deliver greater shared outcomes. Southway staff will support local events in return for opportunities to gather feedback and give information about getting involved.

Southway is committed to developing and promoting volunteering and volunteer networks. We will support self-help by asking those who use our social investment services to agree to spend time in an involvement project. We will consider how the Timebank model which is being rolled out across our communities can support volunteering in community involvement.

- f) **Age Friendly Strategy:** Our tenant population includes higher than average numbers of older people, people reporting that they have a long term limiting illness or disability, and are more likely to be living on low incomes. Our community and customer involvement opportunities can support us to reduce the feeling of loneliness and isolation in our communities.

We also know that people living in our neighbourhoods are more likely to develop long term health conditions at a younger age and have lower life expectancy than the general population. We will visit these people in their homes and support them to participate in online and armchair task and finish groups.

- g) **Digital Access Strategy:** We will link in with our Digital Champion Project, Age Friendly IT and Internet Savvy training courses to provide support to our customers wishing to access our online involvement methods. Offering innovative community and customer involvement opportunities can support us to

reduce the levels of loneliness and isolation in our communities. Providing support for our customers to access online opportunities to influence corporate decision making will also enable them to gain skills to; increase their employment prospects, save money and pursue hobbies.

- h) **Locally based community buildings:** Alongside our community hubs we will support the development of local community facilities and provide training to increase the capacity of our customers for feedback.
- i) **Leaseholders Forum:** Southway will consult with leaseholders on issues such as service charges and improvement works to Southway owned homes.
- j) **Community Agreements:** The Involvement Team will support the Neighbourhood Managers to develop a list of local aspirations and concerns with existing tenant and community groups in each of our three neighbourhood areas. We will support the publication of the agreements, which typically include things like supporting fun days, helping to address parking problems, fly tipping and dog fouling. We will support local Customer Champions to spread the word on these agreements and encourage feedback.
- k) **Neighbourhood Promises** – The Involvement Team will support the Customer Champions to spread the word on local promises made by Southway as a result of complaints and feedback, including providing help and advice with money, green space management, a well maintained home, employment, training and volunteering, safer communities, providing homes for those in need, an age friendly Southway, environment sustainability and monitoring the delivery of all of the above.
- l) **Development & Acquisitions:** Southway will carry out consultation regarding new build and regeneration of existing sites.

6. Investing in Customer Involvement

The Strategy will be delivered in 2015/16 with an increase of £10,000 on existing budgets.

In 2016/17 and 2017/8 the budget will increase to allow for resources required to deliver the strategy. This will include training to empower our customers and budget to enable innovative involvement of communities.

Southway Involvement Offer



A list of our future involvement methods can be found as an appendix to this strategy.

7. Customer Involvement Performance

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

Measures and milestones will be developed with a new emphasis on measurement and recording of outcomes along with numbers of engaged customers across the business.

The Consultative Group will measure progress with the strategy at six monthly intervals and will feedback to Board annually on outcomes and achievements.

8. Key Performance Indicators (KPI)

Progress on delivering this strategy will be reported to Board via the following KPI;

‘Increase the number of newly involved customers to 200 per year and for each year of the strategy (assess quarterly and cumulatively)’.

Each Team within Southway will include reference to customer involvement within their Team Performance Statements.

Appendix

Future Methods of Involvement

Formal Groups

Southway Consultative Group

The Consultative Panel will scrutinise progress on the customer involvement strategy, equalities and value for money at Southway. They will receive reports of performance across all services and comment on these to senior managers and the Board.

Meetings will be held every six weeks.

Southway Tenant Scrutiny Panel

The Scrutiny Panel will review and challenge individual services by thorough scrutiny of those services. This Panel will be managed and supported by the Customer Involvement and Governance Teams.

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

Southway Designated Complaints Panel/Independent Tenants Solution.

Meetings of the Southway Designated Complaints Panel members will spot check files and review the performance of Southway's complaints handling, with particular attention to complaints where satisfaction is low. They will also have involvement with any review of complaints policy. They will meet on a quarterly basis.

Members of this panel will also provide Southway's representatives for Independent Tenant Solutions, a body of tenants that reviews complaints that have passed through Housing Associations internal complaints procedure in line with the expectations of the Localism Act and the Housing Ombudsman.

Members of the Panel will also provide an advocacy service for customers to manage the complaint at the earlier part of the complaint process.

Southway members of this Panel will have a role for governance assurance on lessons learnt from Southway complaints, randomly checking files and performance feedback.

Leaseholder Forum

The Leaseholder Forum will be managed and facilitated by the Residents Services Team with any required support available from the Customer Involvement Team.

Meetings of the Forum will take place once a quarter and will be held in the evening.

Influencing Groups

Environment Service Improvement Group (SIG)

The Environment SIG will involve tenants and stakeholders to discuss green spaces, gardening projects, the growing of fruit and vegetables, tree planting and environmental events.

Meetings will be held every two months.

Youth Forum

The Youth Forum will continue to involve young people living in the Southway area to volunteer in the community and increase their skills. The group will be developed to ensure there is more emphasis on providing feedback about Southway services. The Forum meets once a month in the evening at the Westcroft Community Centre.

Task and Finish Groups, Regulatory Standards Review Groups and Armchair Auditors

Any customer wishing to give feedback on services will be able to volunteer to express interest and skills which will be kept on an electronic database. The target will be to have at least 10% of customers engaged and available on this database. Staff in Neighbourhood Services, Property Services and the Involvement Team will be required to suggest residents suitable from their day to day activities.

Managers will commission the Involvement Team to support their activities annually. This will be planned to enable Southway to maximise customer input.

Volunteers may also be asked to join staff led panels, give their opinions on policy, feedback through reality checking or social media/surveys, all on a one-off basis.

For those volunteering to reality check as mystery customers or researches, training will be given through the Customer Involvement Team to develop capacity.

The frequency of these will vary. For example customers volunteering to monitor grounds maintenance will do so on a monthly basis. Reviewing policy as part of a task and finish group will require a customer to commit to approximately three days over a period of a number of weeks for the project to be completed.

Feedback Groups

Social Media and Web Based Feedback

Connect complete surveys for individual managers relating to regular telephone feedback on their services.

The Customer Involvement Team will be the conduit for individual feedback from customers, operating on the request of Heads of Service and managers across the business.

The Involvement Team will support the managers by requesting one off feedback on their services using our involvement page on the website and a Facebook page set up specifically for the Customer Involvement Team, which carries articles of interest to our customers and opportunities for feedback.

This involvement will take place as and when required and will include the use of short questionnaires and regular status updates.

Southway Community Champions

Volunteers will be trained in Southway's services of a housing and non-housing nature.

These customers will work in their own communities to gather feedback on Southway services in the community, attending existing community events and speaking to neighbours about our services and how they can self-help. Southway will support these volunteers by visiting them to gather their feedback and on occasions, speaking to them with their neighbours to resolve specific issues.

An initial training session will be available to the Champions followed by quarterly updates and access to involvement staff when required.

Feedback from Partners and Tenant and Community Groups

The Customer Involvement Team will have access to a budget to enhance their own work and that of Community Champions by making small donations towards community events where Southway will receive access to those participating for feedback. For example, Southway may pay for refreshments after an exercise class so those attending will stay behind and provide feedback to Southway in a planned way.

This type of involvement will take place at least quarterly in the community.

Fun and Feedback Events

These events will be held once a year in each of the three neighbourhood areas and will showcase and promote Southway services. Customers will have an opportunity to meet their local Neighbourhood Team.

Attendees will be encouraged to provide feedback in exchange for an opportunity to take part in fun activities and seek any required advice or information.

Events will be advertised on social media and the website in such a way to give easy access to involvement in the local area.

In facilitating partners to join these events, Southway will also seek opportunities to attend partner events for feedback.

Tenant and Resident Associations / Community Groups

Tenant and Resident/Community Groups will be set up, developed and supported by the Customer Involvement Team with assistance from the neighbourhood teams.

These groups will be expected to meet qualifying criteria to receive regular financial support in the way of grants. Groups which do not meet criteria will still be supported and encouraged to function for the benefit of the area it covers.

These groups will meet at least four times a year and hold two annual community meetings.