

Customer Strategy 2020-2025

Introduction

West Kent believes in great customer service and in this next chapter of our customer strategy, *'It's Your Call'*¹ we will build on what has gone before, continuing true to our path of 'putting our residents and customers at the centre of what we do'.² Through evolution not revolution, we will build on what is important, what is right and what works.

Our customer culture is firmly rooted in our values; building genuine mutually respectful relationships. Connecting with others (tenant/resident, colleague, partner) through two-way effective communication, no matter what medium we use (face to face, phone or digitally), working out what matters to the other person, what they need; so, we can converse and transact on a human level.

All customers [especially tenants/residents in our communities] have the right to be heard, to be acknowledged for their contribution and to be supported to achieve. It is not about saying 'yes' to please; it is about tailoring responses appropriate to the person and situation within the guiding principles and policies of the organisation. Doing what is right, not what is easiest.

Our ethos as a compassionate organisation is to empower everyone to be able to take responsibility for their own well-being and decision-making; to help people to help themselves, treating people according to their need not all the same.

Our Vision

Our vision building on the previous two strategies is to *'create a culture of exceptional service through genuine mutual relationships with customers based on respect and compassion'*

'It's Your Call' will deliver a positive customer experience that respects the customer and is tailored to the individual, so they can use our services in the way that best fits their lifestyle. This means, we will:

- ✓ Provide friendly, compassionate customer relationships, giving fast and accurate responses.

¹ 'It's Your Call' to ask for what you need or service you would like and 'It's your call' on the way you [we] respond

² Appendix 1 shows what we have achieved to date

- ✓ Deliver quality modern and flexible services owned and shaped by customers giving them confidence in us
- ✓ Develop mutually beneficial partnerships set out in the tenancy/lease, contracts or policies, so both parties understand and respect their roles.
- ✓ Provide tailored services, including digital services available on a 24/7 basis for those who wish to be fully independent.
- ✓ Provide support to those who need more help.
- ✓ Get it 'Right first time' to reduce avoidable repeat contact
- ✓ Remain true to our core purpose and values, which are: delivering on our promises, compassion, honesty, integrity, self-awareness, learning, flexibility and working hard and having fun.

By 2023 we will deliver a 'right first time' response for at least 90% of our customers.

Achieving our Vision

West Kent welcomes feedback; learning from what is working; from our mistakes; from others. Through reflection and experimentation, we will try new or different ways of working to drive improvements, efficiencies and be responsive to change or requests.

We know from how people use our services that not all customers are the same. Within our largest customer group, our residents, demand ranges from little or no interaction with us, other than paying rent and having annual safety checks, to complex tenancy cases involving a level of vulnerability, mental health or behavioural issues requiring intensive support. We must recognise the individual needs of residents to be able to tailor services accordingly.

So, we will

- ✓ provide attractive, responsive, reliable, convenient digital services, available 24/7 that will pull people towards managing their tenancies online.
- ✓ encourage and support all residents to be more self-sufficient and take up the opportunities presented by digital services
- ✓ recognise some residents will require more support and release time and resource to focus on those who need more help or in times of crisis.

What we will do to achieve our vision, is:

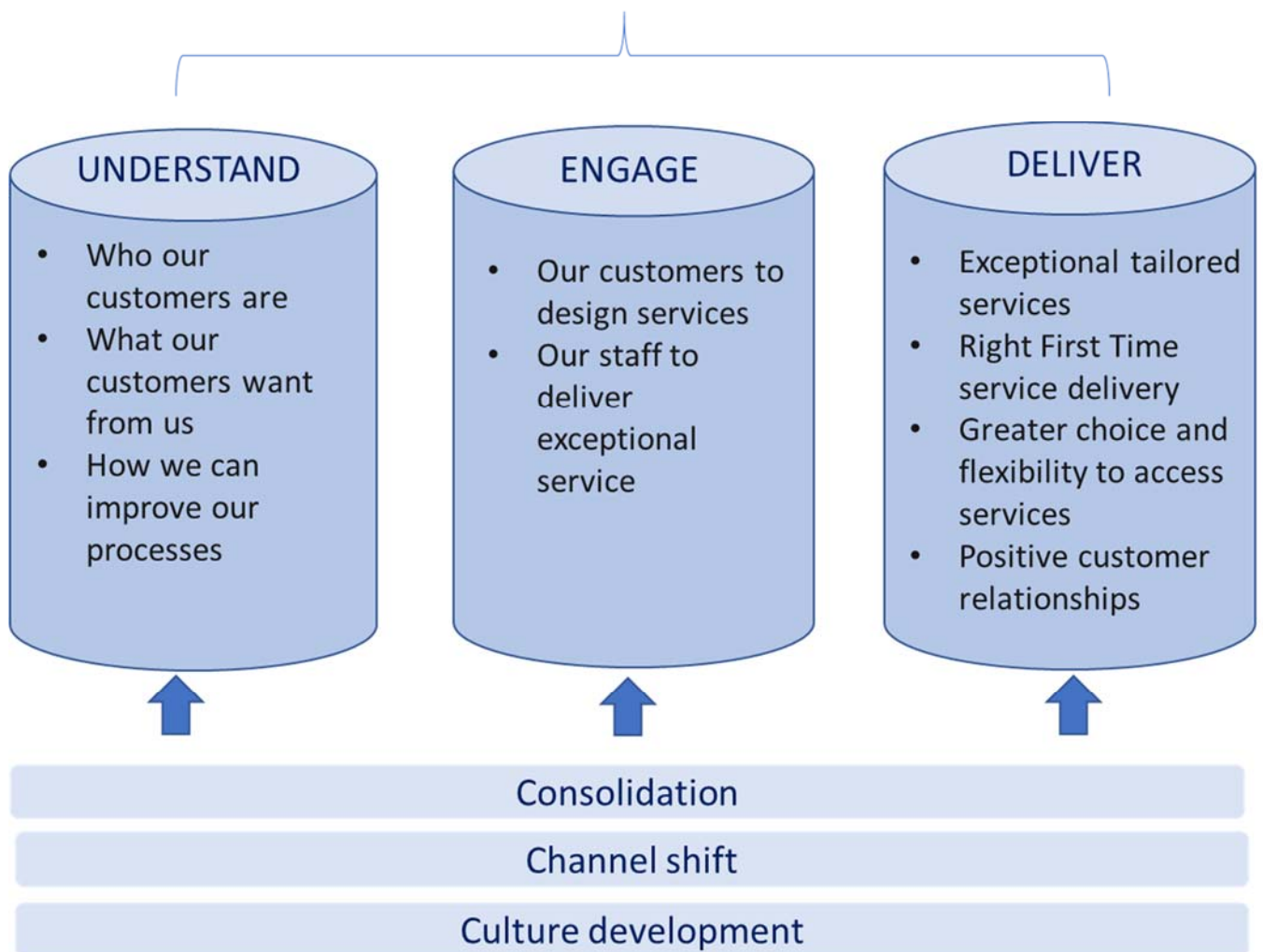
- Understand
 - our customers better and the services they wish to receive
 - our processes better to reduce frustrations and improve our customers journey
- Engage
 - our customers in designing and demanding better services
 - our staff to deliver exceptional service always
- Deliver
 - exceptional services that respond to customer demand

- the same quality of service irrespective of access channel

How we will do this is by focusing on these three strands of activity:

- Consolidation
 - continuing the work to date to improve and create easier, more efficient processes/ systems and consistency of staff responses to deliver exceptional tailored services ('right first time')
- Channel shift (channels are how customers access our services)
 - increasing the quality and availability of digital services for those customers who can and wish to manage their tenancies independently
- Culture development
 - creating a culture of exceptional service through genuine mutual relationships with customers based on respect and compassion'

create a culture of exceptional service through genuine mutual relationships with customers based on respect and compassion



The strategy outlines a direction of travel, it will be dynamic and responsive evolving over the next five years, as we understand more, develop and try new things and respond to our customer's requests. Therefore, focus on the different areas will differ year on year. We will try new things; some may stick, some may not, we will not be frightened to fail, but will be brave to try.

We remain committed to providing exceptional services for customers and so will continue to use the measures below; the five drivers³ of customer's expectations, as this will ensure we will deliver excellence, however we change our relationship with residents. We will monitor and report against these five measures annually.

The five key measures are:

1. Delivery –our service will deliver the outcomes we promise, and we will effectively deal with any problems that may arise.
2. Timeliness – we will respond promptly to the initial customer contact and deal with the heart of the issue without passing it on between staff.
3. Professionalism – staff are competent, treat customers fairly and have the right training and support to provide a 'right first time' service.
4. Information – the information given to customers is accurate and comprehensive and keeps them informed about progress.
5. Staff attitude – staff are friendly, polite and compassionate to customers

What we will do 2020-2025

1. Understand

We will understand our customers better, so we better appreciate who they are and what they need, to assist in getting it 'right first time' and tailoring services appropriately. We will walk with them through their journey for all our services, recognising barriers, frustrations and what works best, so we can better shape services to provide a positive customer experience;

- Consolidating our knowledge of customers through holding enough accurate and up to date information on customers and making better use of that information to:

³ MORI survey 2004 identified these as the common drivers of satisfaction in the UK
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- Understand if we hold the right, enough or too much data, so we only collect what we need to know
 - Recognise the diversity of those who live in our homes and communities enabling us to tailor services to their needs effectively
 - Identify how different people access/use services to effectively target services to support them to be self-sufficient and inform the way we engage with customers
 - Complete customer journey mapping for all aspects of customers relationship with us from pre-tenancy through to the point when they leave, so we can see our services through their eyes. Using this to understand how to improve the experience of our customers, through streamlining processes, changing service delivery and communication
 - Appreciate how customers value [or not] our services and our approach, so we can recognise what works or change what does not
- Understanding how customers engage with digital services, such as the website, tenant portal, Live-Chat to improve the channels we use for service delivery, by:
- Improving the use of analytic data on all digital services to guide service focus
 - Mapping business processes, increasing efficiency for users and building a road map for future improvements
 - Continually looking outside to what is on the market and working
 - Recognising the barriers of both customers and staff to effectively use the technology available, to support successful engagement to change
- Use the understanding of what customers and others believe makes great service to support staff learning, development and service delivery that meets our vision to *'create a culture of exceptional service through genuine mutual relationships with customers based on respect and compassion'* by:
- Understanding how customers describe their everyday experience of living in a West Kent home and working with us to test the authenticity of our brand
 - Understanding how customers use and experience our services so we can identify what makes or would make West Kent a great landlord
 - Finding out how to support a real sense of opportunity and purpose by developing our tenancy sustainment activity
 - Researching how other service providers (not just within the housing sector) provide added value to their customers

2. Engage

We will use a wide range of communication and engagement methodologies to build genuine respectful relationships, connecting with customers (tenant/resident, colleague,

partner) through conversation. We aim to be digital first by 2026, however, we will not move to digital only.

- We will develop our resident involvement and customer strategies to ensure services are shaped by residents, by hearing and acknowledging their contribution. We will empower people to take responsibility for their own well-being and decision-making; to help people to help themselves, through:
 - Evolving our resident involvement strategy to give a real voice to residents in the shaping of existing and future services and to provide opportunities for monitoring of services by residents
 - Developing our resident involvement strategy to widen the range of resident voices/views in the conversation, by offering different channels for working with us and for giving feedback
 - Developing our methodologies for increasing the level of scrutiny of services by residents, from publishing information and waiting passively for views to involvement on reviews and co-producing with staff policy and service
 - Reviewing how we gather information from customers on whether they feel heard, respected and involved as well as how well they believe we provide services
 - Providing staff with tools and skills to engage in conversations with others that ensure all parties are heard and information/feedback can be gathered and used to develop and improve service delivery

- We will use our knowledge of customers and the way they wish to interact with us to offer the right activities using the right channels. Through our Digital Plan we will make digital the channel of choice for most customers to engage and transact with us, by:
 - Improving our digital offer to customers, providing digital services that are attractive, responsive, reliable, easy to use and available 24/7
 - Increasing the transactions that can be completed through digital services, such as the tenant portal
 - Providing improved information on the web-site to inform customers; supporting self-service
 - Encouraging customers to use more efficient channels of communication, such as Live-Chat, through effective resourcing of digital channels to make them channel of first choice
 - Encouraging the use of digital services by ensuring help and resources are available for customers requiring skills development
 - Maintaining excellent partnership working with the software providers to develop our systems further to ensure they stay up to date and can meet changing needs
 - Maintaining a blend of communication channels to support customers that find digital contact challenging or where the situation requires a personal approach

- Keeping our digital plan up to date and relevant, amending as new services come on line.
 - Streamlining and improving processes to increase efficiency and reduce transaction costs
- We will continue to develop the culture⁴ with all staff embedding the concept of ‘it’s your place’ so staff value and recognise the importance of engagement and listening to customers so we can tailor service. Continue to work with the wider staff organisation to achieve adult to adult relationships⁵ so we can build independence and ‘genuine mutual relationships’, where customers [residents] can voice views and concerns on an equal footing. Continue to develop the culture of ownership and independence with residents, started with Your Home Your Responsibility. We will:
- Implement values behaviours within our recruitment and performance management activities to help staff focus on ‘how we do things’ not just ‘what we do’
 - Evolve our induction and It’s Your Call learning to support staff to live our values, ensuring customers are always treated with respect building their trust in us
 - Hear the voice of the customer in internal change projects. All staff will be responsible for gathering information and views to feed into change and improvement work
 - Continue to encourage a change of customer mindset to support the wider culture change of independence and empowerment through adult conversations

3. Deliver

We will learn from listening and understanding customers through effective engagement to deliver services that are needed and valued and provide customers with a positive experience. We will deliver all services to same quality irrespective of the channel used. Service will be compassionate, fast and accurate, reducing repeat contact by getting it right first time. We will tailor services to the customers needs providing support to those who need more help.

- We will review all systems to ensure they are fit for the future, as part of continued efforts to improve, processes and policies to support effective service delivery through any channel, in any location, so we can excel at delivery, using our knowledge of who customers are and their use of services to tailor delivery. We will:

⁴ Culture summary appendix 4

⁵ As defined within the People Strategy

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- Seek to improve our collection and use of information, through investing in our systems and improving connectivity and collaboration between all parts of the organisation, to reduce further the need to pass people around the organisation
 - Reduce the need for repeat customer contact by improving communication at first point of contact, through reviewing timescales for responses and flexible use of resources to meet customer demand
 - Seek to increase the flexibility of service offered, especially for repairs by improving appointment accuracy and introducing more appointment opportunities
 - Provide self-help information, videos and links on our web-site to equip customers to help themselves. Ensuring key information, like fire and other health and safety assessments are easily available to residents
 - Through our Tenancy Sustainment Strategy, we will offer a range of services to support residents to thrive in their homes and access services if they need more help
 - Keep key contact points, such as complaints procedures, repairs standards, anti-social behaviour and rent account management under review to respond to feedback from customers, improving ease of access and responsiveness
 - Use performance data including the five key measures of delivery above to review and address service failure, pinch points and barriers to improve delivery
- Services will be delivered to a consistent and efficient level irrespective of channel. Through the delivery of our digital plan we will have digital services that will 'pull' people towards using them as they are attractive, responsive, reliable and available 24/7. We will equip staff to be fully mobile, so there are no barriers to effective delivery of services at any point of contact, through the:
- Development of digital services to enable staff and customers to manage tenancies and service needs 24/7
 - Continuing rolling out mobile working so a full range of services can be provided in residents homes or other locations
 - Completion of the roll-out of wi-fi to all our communal rooms to support residents
 - Consideration of how we can further support residents to be connected through looking at how to access affordable broadband and equipment can be achieved
- Delivering services from a strong sense of belonging and owning our values and core purpose; staff will truly believe they have ownership of the services they provide and therefore wish to welcome the customer and do the best for them. Continue to work with staff to achieve a problem-solving mentality, by:

- Updating the People Strategy to support the evolution of our culture and to ensure we have the right staff, skills and performance culture to deliver exceptional service
- Implementing the Management standard to ensure staff feel valued, supported and motivated to deliver exceptional service
- Evolving our It's Your Call training to ensure the language and mind-set of service supports staff to deliver exceptional service, recognising the diversity of customers and need to tailor to the individual
- Using the focus on delivery through projects to encourage collaboration across the organisation to eradicate silo working achieving a more comprehensive whole service delivery
- Listening to customers feedback to support change and improvement, ensuring we always advise them of how we heard and responded

Implementation

Appendix 2 shows the high-level five-year programme of activity. To deliver the expected outcomes of this strategy we will follow the tried and trusted process of plan, do, review. Each year we will develop a detailed action plan to deliver across all three themes and focusing on consolidation, channel shift and culture, that will build on the work completed in previous years. This will be reviewed throughout the year and adjusted to take account of barriers, new opportunities, outcomes and feedback.

A report to Board will be considered annually and at least twice a year the Communities and Housing Committee will consider progress and any major service or policy changes required to achieve the ambition. These reports will include metrics (detailed in Appendix 3) to measure the overall 'right first time' ambition and performance against the five key measures.

Learnings from the engage and delivery activity will build our understanding that will be used to direct future engagement and delivery, so a loop of continuous learning will be established.

Resourcing the Strategy

To deliver this strategy we will need to match resource with service provision/demand as this will change throughout the lifetime of the strategy. We will need to maintain and develop the ICT infrastructure and invest in training and supporting staff to make the change from our current practises. We will keep under review the staffing requirements needed to deliver exceptional services, recognising the pace of change to self-management by customers may be slower than previously thought. We will shape the annual action plan based on resources available.