



WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

Customer Experience Strategy

2021-2024



Introduction

This strategy builds on the work of our previous customer strategies. It sets out our vision to provide a positive customer experience for our residents and local communities.

Our previous customer strategies have focused on the conversation we have with our customers and ensuring excellent customer service on an individual transactional basis, such as when a tenant contacts us to report a repair. We know that our customers value the positive, friendly customer service they receive when they contact us, but they get frustrated if the actions carried out afterwards don't happen in the time or manner that was discussed.

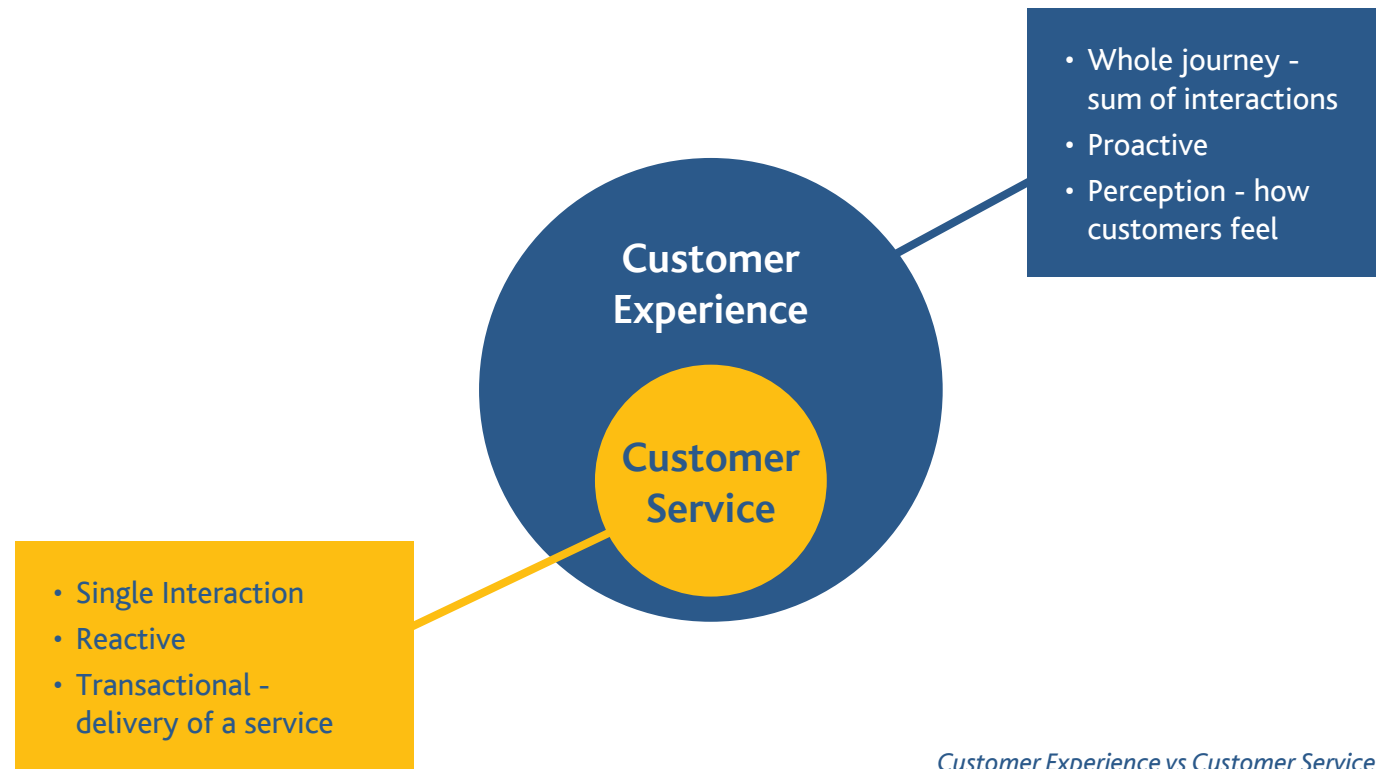
We want to change this. We still want our customers to receive a positive and friendly service when they contact us, but we also want their whole end-to-end journey with us to be a positive experience. This means giving great customer service AND delivering what we say we will, when we say we will.

We are passionate about delivering excellent services in a friendly, solution-focused way. We want our customers to feel valued, respected and listened to and to have their say in the decisions we make. We want our services to be easy to access and easy to use and it to be easy for customers to contact us how and when they want to.

We want to know how our customers feel about us and where we can improve, so that we can make West Kent an organisation our residents are proud to have as their landlord and our staff are proud to work for.

We want to improve our internal customer experience to our colleagues, to help support the experience we can give our external customers.

Our values run through the heart of everything that we do and underpin this strategy. They set our culture as an organisation and drive our staff to give customers a great customer experience.



Customer Experience vs Customer Service

National context

The resident experience remains a high priority nationally. The Government's Charter for Social Housing Residents published in November 2020, set out the importance of listening to residents; providing opportunities for residents to give feedback; ensuring resident satisfaction and dealing with complaints promptly and fairly.

The Housing Ombudsman Service introduced a new complaint-handling code of practice in September 2020, setting out how landlords should manage complaints; introducing new

sanctions where complaint-handling is poor and strengthening the relationship between the Ombudsman and the Regulator for Social Housing.

Responding to the Coronavirus pandemic has meant that we have had to change how we deliver some of our services and how we operate internally. It has provided us with the opportunity to think differently and embrace new ways of working, particularly around the use of digital technology, and we want to carry that learning forward into the future.

What we know about our residents

- Our biggest age band is 45-54
- 45% are aged 55+
- 14% are aged 75+
- 48% of those aged 75+ live in one of our designated older persons Emerald or KEHFA homes
- 88% of residents have a mobile phone number
- 70% of residents have an email address
- We do not know the ethnicity of 27% of our residents
- Of those we do know 95% are white
- Around 10% of or residents consider themselves to be disabled

Resident data as at July 2021



Who are our customers?

We recognise that as a provider of both affordable housing and community services, we serve a variety of different people within Kent, with whom we have different types of relationship.

We use the term 'tenant' to refer to people who rent a home from us and with whom we have a tenancy agreement.

We use the term 'resident' to refer to everyone that lives in one of our homes, this includes tenants, shared owners and leaseholders.

We use the term 'customer' to refer to everyone that lives in one of our homes and/or receives a service from us, this includes residents, clients of our community services and our internal colleagues.

The term 'customer' is used throughout in this strategy, except where there is a need to refer to a specific customer group, i.e. surveys about what we are like as a landlord would only be applicable to our residents.

Vision

Our vision is that:

- our customers have a positive experience regardless of who they are, where they live or how and when they choose to interact with us
- our customers and staff feel proud to be part of the West Kent community
- the customer voice is at the heart of our decision-making
- our internal colleagues are treated as customers which ensures they can deliver an excellent external customer experience



Objectives

The objectives of the strategy are:

Objective one:

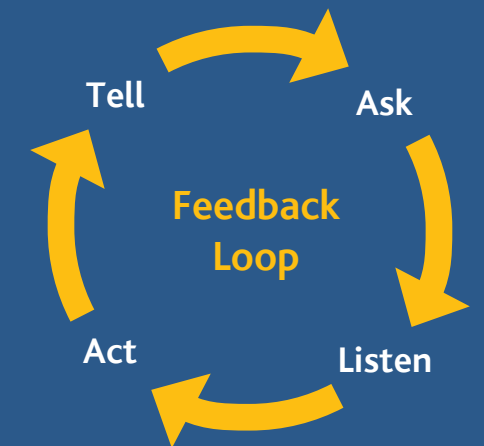
We will listen to what customers tell us is important to them and use it to shape our services

To achieve this, we will:

- ask residents on an annual basis how they feel about us as a landlord
- ask customers who have used our services to tell us about their experience
- provide opportunities for customers to give us feedback or suggestions, without being asked
- act on what we are told by customers and feed back to them what we have done
- give residents the opportunity to co-create services with us and influence our decision-making, priority-setting and the performance management of our services as set out in our Resident Engagement Strategy

Listening to customers' views is important to us. We value feedback from our customers in all forms, whether positive or negative. We want to know what really matters to our customers and give them a say in what services we deliver, how we deliver them and how we manage performance. We want to create a direct link between customer feedback and the business priorities that we set each year.

We know that it can be frustrating to give feedback and not see any changes as a result or not get a response to understand how your feedback has been used. As well as asking customers for their views, we will make sure that we listen to what we are being told, act on what we are told (or explain why we are not able to) and tell people what we have done as a result. We call this the feedback loop.



Objective two:

We will provide **opportunities and support** for our customers to **thrive and achieve**

To achieve this, we will:

- target support for the people that need it most
- provide direct support to residents who need help to maintain their tenancies
- support our neighbourhoods and the communities that live in them to be safe
- recognise individual needs to tailor services and responses
- re-develop our service offer for our older residents

We know that the majority of our residents do not want or need anything additional from us beyond our core landlord services. We also know that some of our residents, or people living in our local communities, may need additional support to help them during a time of crisis or to help them manage their tenancy and their home.

We will provide short-term targeted support to those customers that need it, including to our residents who may be struggling to manage their tenancy, keep their home warm and well-maintained or are experiencing financial hardship.

We will ensure that residents' homes are safe and secure. We will continue to safeguard our most vulnerable residents and support people who are affected by antisocial behaviour or domestic abuse.

Wherever possible, we will tailor our services and our communication with customers to take account of individual needs and disabilities.

Those aged 55 and over account for about 45% of our resident population. We know that nationally, and in Kent in particular, we have an ageing population and demand for our services and homes to support older people will continue to grow. We will review our current offer for older residents to ensure that it is fit for purpose



Objective three:

We will **enable and encourage** digitally capable customers to **transact and engage with us online**

To achieve this, we will:

- provide digital services that are easy to use, fast, reliable and inspire confidence
- provide customers with choice about how they engage with us, either digitally or through other means
- support customers to be digitally included
- use digital services to free up staff time to target support where it is most needed

Digital technology is now part of most people's lives, with people carrying out more of their daily activities online. For those customers that are digitally capable we will provide online services that are fast, easy to use and that customers can have confidence in. Customers will be able to manage their tenancies, undertake online transactions 24/7 and engage with us through our portal.

We want digital to be the channel of choice for our customers. However, recognise that not everyone can or wants to use online services. For those customers that can't get online but would like to, we will work with them to identify their barriers to getting online and support them to become more digitally included. For those vulnerable customers who are not able to go online or those that choose not to use digital services, we will still provide traditional ways in which people can engage with us, although these may look different in the future to what we have now.

Enabling customers to transact with us online will free up our staff time to be able to engage with those vulnerable customers who require more support.



Objective four:

We will be a 'customer first' organisation, putting them at the heart of what we do

To achieve this, we will:

- design services for the benefit of our customers, not for ourselves
- develop service models which reflect that we have different relationships with different types of customers
- use sound customer insight, including data, feedback and customer profiles, to inform our decision-making
- be a diverse, inclusive and self-aware organisation – continually alert for unconscious bias
- empower our staff with the skills and knowledge to take ownership of our services and deliver an excellent customer experience

We will ensure that when making changes to our services, we design them based around what would provide the best experience for our customers, not what is easiest for us to manage or administer. We will involve customers in this process so they can co-design our services with us. Sometimes we have to deliver services in a particular way due to regulatory or legal requirements and our ability to adapt them is limited; where that is the case, we will be open and transparent about this.

We recognise that we have a variety of different customer types, with whom we have different relationships and often different legal obligations towards them. We want to recognise these differences through the services that we offer our customers, creating different service models to reflect the expectations and responsibilities of both parties.

To be able to create excellent services that meet the needs of our customers, we need to understand who those customers are and what they feel about our services. We will improve the data we hold about our customers, particularly our residents and use it to inform our decision-making. We will look at designing customer profiles that reflect the different customer types that we have.

In order to deliver a great customer experience, our staff need to have the right skills, knowledge and attitude. We will equip our staff with the right learning and development to ensure that they put our customers first and have the confidence and ability to take responsibility for our services and put things right when they go wrong.

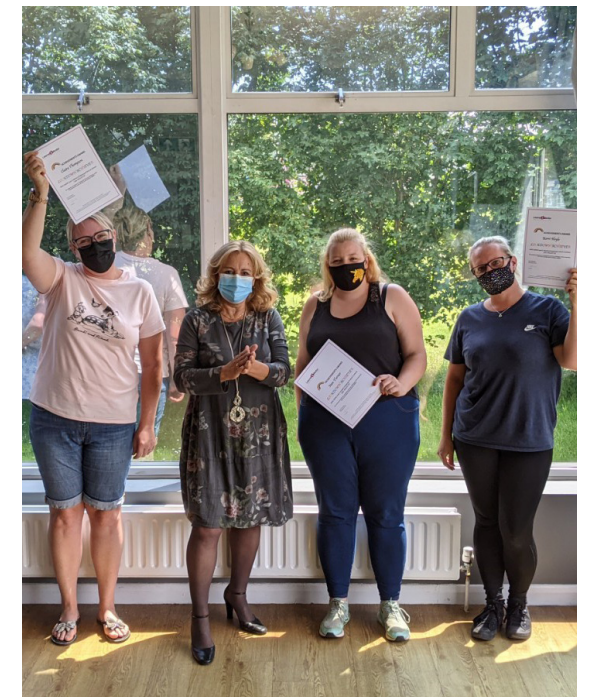
We are committed to equality, diversity and inclusion. We believe that no customer, or staff member, should feel discriminated against because of a protected characteristic. We believe our services should be inclusive and accessible and meet the needs of our diverse communities. We will ensure that when we design and deliver services we check for any unintentional discrimination and unconscious bias in the way we work.

Enablers

We need to have the right resources, processes and systems in place to enable us to meet the objectives of this strategy.

These are:

- Reliable customer facing systems that enhance the customer experience
- Reliable internal systems that support service delivery and enhance the customer experience
- A variety of formal and informal channels to capture feedback and then tell people what we've done as a result
- Accurate up-to-date customer data to help us understand who our customers are and inform service design
- A modern, dynamic website where customers can access the information they need to, including our performance information
- Strong scrutiny and resident engagement arrangements to involve residents in service design and performance management
- Tools to enable us to challenge ourselves on equality, diversity and inclusion to support a positive customer experience for all
- Learning and development opportunities for staff to develop the right skills to support a positive internal and external customer experience culture
- Complimentary West Kent strategies



Measures

We will use the following to determine the success of this strategy:

Customer feedback surveys

- Positive feedback in customer perception and transactional surveys about our services, opportunities for engagement and influencing our decision-making and how residents see us as a landlord
- Upper quartile satisfaction with us as landlord by 2025
- Net promoter score above 0 (demonstrating that our residents would recommend us as a landlord)
- Customer effort score – benchmark in 2021 through STAR survey and set target in 2022

Where relevant, satisfaction data will be analysed by protected characteristics to make sure there is good access to all services for all customers

Complaints and compliments

- Identify improvements resulting from learning from complaints
- Increase in compliments
- 75% customer satisfaction with complaint-handling
- Our complaints demonstrate no inconsistencies or bias based on geographical or personal characteristics or tenure type

Our plans and policies

- Demonstrable link between our priority-setting and customer feedback
- All policies, strategies and significant service changes to undergo an equality impact assessment

Staff feedback surveys

- 90% of staff are proud to work for West Kent
- Positive internal customer feedback across the organisation

Digital

- % of registered users actively using the customer portal – establish baseline in 2021 and set target for 2022

Links to other strategies

This strategy links closely with and supports the following West Kent strategies:

Strategic Plan

The strategy supports our objectives within the Strategic Plan in the following way:

Excellent Services: this strategy supports our ambitions to achieve upper quartile customer satisfaction, to provide residents with easy to use digital services and to use customer insight to drive how we develop our services.

Successful Communities: this strategy supports our ambitions to have a 98% success rate for starter tenancies, to expand our tenancy sustainment activities and to provide wellbeing and crisis support for those that need it.

Best in Kent: This strategy supports our ambitions to use customer data, customer insight and feedback to inform our decision-making and our priorities.

Resident Engagement Strategy

The strategy supports our ambitions to increase the volume and quality of resident feedback we receive; to listen and learn from feedback; to put residents at the heart of our decision-making and to prove to residents that their voice counts.

Community Investment Strategy

The strategy supports our vision to improve the lives of individuals and communities in Kent through promoting wellbeing and preventing crisis and providing support for tenants to sustain their tenancies and access support services.

People Strategy

The strategy supports our focus on employing the right people with the right skills to deliver excellent services to our customers. It also supports our ambitions to have in place the right culture, with the mindset and behaviours that support West Kent's values.

West Kent Housing Association

101 London Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1AX

visit westkent.org
or call 01732 749400

 @west_kent  WestKentHA
 @westkenthousingassociation