



# Customers First Strategy

Homes in Sedgemoor

Reviewed November 2023

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## Customers First Strategy - 2023 – 2026

### Introduction

We launched our 1<sup>st</sup> Customers First strategy in 2021, and this version is very much a continuation of our commitment to providing excellent customer service to our customers.

Since 2021, we have had many successes, including achieving the Servicemark accreditation from the Institute of Customer Services, demonstrating and validating our customer focused approach.

Homes in Sedgemoor (HiS) is an Arms' Length Management Organisation (ALMO), responsible for managing and maintaining approximately 4,000 properties on behalf of Somerset Council.

In return for managing their housing stock, HiS receive an annual management fee. HiS is a not for profit organisation and exists solely to manage the housing stock on behalf of Somerset Council in a proficient manner.

Our Customers First strategy will be applicable to:

- Current, potential and future tenants & residents of all properties and garages managed by HiS
- Shared ownership and leasehold properties within our estates
- Our colleagues within HiS and Somerset Council (SC)
- Board members
- All external contractors
- Our local Councillors and MP's

### Purpose of this Strategy

This Customer First strategy supports delivery of our Corporate Strategy that sets out the long-term vision for Homes in Sedgemoor (HiS) and our primary objectives for the organisation from July 2023 – June 2026. The Customer First Strategy outlines our commitment to providing an excellent service, and to ensure this approach is applicable and relevant to all of our customers, residents, colleagues and external partners.

It has been reviewed in line with our new Corporate Strategy over-arching framework, with our vision "To provide healthy homes and inspire communities in Somerset"

To achieve this, we have 5 new strategic themes that will be our main focus over the next three years:



Our Customers First Strategy has been reviewed to ensure that it remains current and links to all new core themes of the Corporate strategy, in order to achieve a completely customer focused approach across all our service areas.

When shaping and delivering our strategies and policies, customers will be foremost in our minds to enable excellent service and overall customer experience, and our Customers First strategy will provide a common link for all.

### Where are we now?

Since 2021, we have been faced with an ever-changing global operating environment, with on-going challenges such as the cost of living increases, rising interest rates and conflicts across the world such as the war in Ukraine.

Alongside this have been regulatory and legislative changes affecting our sector, following on from the Grenfell Tower fire, and the tragic death of Awabb Ishak due to exposure to damp and mould.

With the introduction of new standards and requirements from the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) - including Tenant Satisfaction

Measures (TSM's), and a review of the Consumer Standards, we are always reviewing our performance and seeking continuous improvement of service delivery.

This includes our approach to answering and dealing with customer complaints, to ensure that we are complying with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code across all areas.

The basis of our Customers First strategy is very much a "back to basics" approach, in that we want to be the best landlord, providing services that are valued by our customers.

Alongside this strategy, we also have our Service Standards that have been reviewed alongside RSH criteria and provide clear expectations across our key service delivery areas.

Our Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and TSM performance data are available via our website, and regularly communicated to all customers within our newsletters.

## Where do we want to be?

To achieve our overall corporate objectives, across the five key themes, we have to ensure that we are providing great services to our customers at all times, across all areas.

1. Healthy homes – we are committed to providing safe, affordable homes that are fit for the future. This also includes our commitment to developing new homes and making best use of our existing stock through regeneration and downsizing.
2. Customer driven – Treating customers fairly and with respect is firmly embedded within our Customers First ethos and our commitment is to ensure that our customers are empowered and able to shape services. We will *listen* to our customers and give them a strong voice so that services are developed in partnership with them.  
We will actively promote and support customer *engagement* and influence in our business to ensure that services are developed in partnership with customers  
We also want to *inspire*, and to support customer and colleague *aspirations* by developing their strengths and abilities to be the very best they can be. By being *person-centred* we see our customers as equal partners in the services we provide and will use our customer insights to ensure appropriate support is available.
3. Enriching partnerships – we are committed to working with SC to support them going forward. We will ensure that resources are used

in the most efficient and effective way, and work with other partners to develop communities.

4. Thoughtful enterprise – we want to make the most of all opportunities available to us, but will ensure this is approached with awareness of risk, using business intelligence and data information, so that we are embracing a whole systems, good governance approach.
5. Sustainability by design – climate change and the effect it will have on all of our customers is a key driver for our strategies over the next three years. We will ensure we are working to reduce fuel poverty, and embracing new technologies available to support our customers live in sustainable homes.

To achieve our goals, we will provide our customers with a choice of communication channels, and enable all to have the opportunity to access our services and have their voice heard.

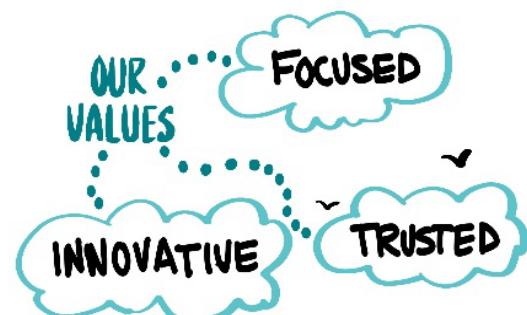
We want to adopt a solution focused approach, ensuring we are realistic and honest with customer expectations, to enable collaboration and compromise when necessary.

Every customer and situation is different, so we will ensure that we listen and engage, and then approach in a focused and flexible way.

## What does Customers First mean for HiS?

Customers First links directly with our organisational values:

1. To ensure a customer **Focused** approach
2. To be **Innovative** and open to new ways of delivering our services
3. To enable our customers and partners to **Trust** that we will always be reliable and fair



Customers First is relevant to all of our colleagues and external partners, and we have demonstrated this by achieving the Servicemark accreditation.

Our ethos of Customers First means that we will always treat everyone with respect, listen and empathise with different situations and viewpoints, and strive to reach a mutually amicable outcome.

HiS will ensure services are accessible to all and make reasonable adjustments where necessary.

Through our tenancy audit and customer insight work, our aim is to have a clear understanding of our customers and their needs and preferences.

We are committed to understanding and respecting the needs of our more vulnerable customers and we will always recognise and respect differences amongst our customers.

With this in mind, we will ensure we engage our customers in shaping our services, to ensure we design and implement from the customer viewpoint and will make use of customer feedback to drive service improvements.

We will adopt a "Right first time" approach and will always aim to deal with queries at first point of contact and reduce failure demand, as per our service standard of resolving 80% of all customer queries at the first point of contact.

## **What are our customers priorities?**

From the work we have already completed, and customer feedback gained we know some of the key priorities are:

- To have an effective repairs and maintenance service
- To feel safe within their home and surrounding neighbourhood
- To be treated with fairness and respect
- To be able to ask HiS for support and help when needed
- To be listened to and be able to put their viewpoints forward

We will use all customer engagement and feedback to adapt and react as these priority areas may change.

## **How will we get there?**

### **a) Culture of organisation**

- Putting our Customers First is everybody's job within the organisation and is relevant for our external and internal customers.
- Our expectation is that all customer enquiries are dealt with promptly, effectively, and with respect.
- Colleagues will take ownership, and if they are unable to answer a customer query directly, they will seek the help of another colleague or partner, and ensure it is followed up and resolved.

- HiS will empower all colleagues to challenge if they feel the Customers First approach is not being followed by peers or external partners, in a constructive and positive way.
- Colleagues will be recognised for outstanding customer service, via our Rewards and Recognition process, and within our internal communications.

### **b) Recruitment and training**

- Our recruitment process ensures we are employing the right calibre of candidate, who share our ethos of Customers First.
- Customers First training will be mandatory and regular for all colleagues and will form a vital part of all new starters induction programme.
- All colleagues will undertake regular refresher training and alongside this, we will also ensure all external contractors undertake induction training and then annual refresher courses.
- As part of the tender process for new contractors, there will be a requirement to embrace the Customers First ethos and ensure all operatives and sub-contractors undertake the HiS training.

### **c) Actively engage and seek views of customers**

- We will ensure all customers have access to our complaints process and know that they can have their voice heard.
- We will listen and learn from our customer experiences and adopt a true lessons learned approach from any complaints or customer feedback.
- We will ensure we are transparent in how we share information about our performance. Our TSM scores and KPI performance data will be available within our customer newsletters and on our website so that all residents know how we are performing.
- In conjunction with our Customer Influence and Engagement strategy, we will hold regular scrutiny and focus groups, which will run in conjunction with our core customer service improvement groups.

### **d) Understand who our customers are**

- It is the responsibility of all HiS colleagues to make every contact count, and to check and update customer details held within our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.
- We will carry out periodic and regular data profiling reviews to ensure that we hold accurate information and produce an annual "Who lives in our home" report so that we can ensure our services are relevant and appropriate.

- Our colleagues will not make assumptions and will treat everyone as an individual and respect and embrace differences.
- All colleagues will continue to complete mandatory Equality &

Diversity training to ensure all customers have an equal opportunity to access our services, and reasonable adjustments are made as required.

#### **e) Make it easy for customers to access our services and with a choice of preferred contact**

- Our customers will have a choice in how they contact us and access our services, including telephone, email, social media and webchat, in line with our Digital strategy.
- If contacting via telephone, customers can expect their call to be answered by polite and empathetic staff, and as quickly as possible, with at least 80% of calls answered within 2 minutes.
- We will ensure our services are readily accessible to all, and will communicate this through our newsletters, website, social media and other relevant means.
- Our website will be updated on a regular basis, as per our Communications strategy, to ensure key information is valid and current.

#### **f) Review of services**

- Key service areas will be reviewed by our Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee (STAC), and we will conduct customer scrutiny events via customer groups twice a year for service areas identified
- We will utilise all complaints and customer feedback to adopt a continuous improvement approach, and ensure processes and policies are updated as necessary.

#### **g) Involve customers**

- We will offer a variety of customer engagement mechanisms that give all customers the opportunity to have their say and influence decisions that affect their homes, the services they receive and the area in which they live.
- Through our customer engagement channels, we will ensure that our customers and residents are at the heart of our decision-making process, to improve service delivery.
- We will actively seek customers involvement via our service improvement groups, and ad-hoc consultations for policy review,

and will provide training as needed to enable customers and residents to participate.

- All of HiS staff and partners are responsible and accountable and will provide opportunities to challenge performance in a constructive way.

### **h) Service standards**

- Our Service Standards will always be clear and relevant, and available to our customers via our website or on request.
- We will regularly review to ensure fit for purpose and meet customer requirements and will involve customers in this process.
- Our Service Standards will be monitored and managed, so that any failures can be identified, and improvements made.

### **i) Social Value**

- Social value is a measure of how people value any experiences or changes within their lives.
- We will measure the social value of our activities and services, to ensure that we are delivering on what matters to our customers and residents.
- We will ensure our business decisions are taken to deliver a positive outcome for our customers and make a difference within their neighbourhoods.

### **j) Continuous Improvement**

- We will continue to bench-mark and review our services, to ensure we are reacting in a timely way to new developments and innovations.

## **Measures**

In order to monitor and gauge how we are meeting our customer expectations we will use the following -

- Service standards – our Senior Leadership team (SLT) will continually monitor and review how colleagues are performing against our agreed standards
- TSM's – we will carry out a monthly survey of a cross-section of all customers to measure overall perception of HiS as a landlord
- Satisfaction surveys – we will ask for customer feedback across all key service areas on a regular basis
- Key performance indicators (KPI's) – we will monitor our performance against agreed targets that have been set by our

Board and involved customer groups. These will be presented to our Executive Management team and Board on a regular basis and will also be available for customers to review via our newsletters and website.

## Review

STAC will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of this strategy and ensuring it is being adhered to across all service areas.

This Strategy will be reviewed 3 yearly unless there are any material changes in guidance provided by the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman.

## Related documents

All Homes in Sedgemoor Strategy and Policy documents have been developed to align with our Corporate Strategy and are available via our website or on request.

