



Draft Interim Customer Engagement Strategy 2016-18

Putting you at the heart of all we do

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1.0 Background

Blackwood aims to provide opportunities for all our customers to play an active role in the management of their homes and the delivery of services. These opportunities will vary to ensure that customers can participate in a way and at a level that encourages customers to participate both individually and collectively. The “Customer Engagement and Ways You can Get Involved” leaflet covers the areas customers can get involved.

Our Customer Engagement Strategy contributes to this aim through the provision of a framework for effective participation, with a range of approaches to facilitate customer participation and involvement to the degree they wish to become involved.

Our long-standing commitment

Blackwood Homes and Blackwood Care have long involved our customers in all aspects of our organisation. For example:

- we have supported Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs)
- we have held consultation events
- we have made sure tenants and customers have, and do, play a key part on our Governing Body
- we have established regional tenant- led scrutiny panels
- a national scrutiny panel

What we know:

Here’s what our customers say they want from us:

- to act on what they say – listening and responding decisively
- improve how and when we communicate
- be clear, to the point and open in our communication
- deliver our services within a time and to a quality agreed with tenants and customers
- involve tenants and customers in reviewing how we and our contractors perform

The real experts on home and neighbourhood are our customers. That's why their aspirations are now at the heart of all we do. By actively involving them, listening and acting on their ideas, we make better decisions locally and nationally.

An idea whispered can lead to a life-changing innovation. We never forget that.

We will continue to make tenant and customer participation a way of life here – not just a policy.

Our approach:

Our values underpin all that we do. We will:

- have respect and understanding
- be open and honest
- take responsibility
- keep our promises

2.0 What is Tenant Participation?

Tenant Participation is about tenants being involved and influencing decisions about:

- Housing policies, conditions and related services
- Scrutiny of the Annual Return of the Charter
- Presentation and content of our published documents

In promoting participation we will:

- Meet our statutory, regulatory and contractual duties to tenants and residents and to comply with legislation and codes of practice.
- Comply with the relevant Scottish Housing Regulator and Scottish Federation of Housing Association guidance
- Encourage involvement of all customers regardless of age, gender, race, religion, marital status, political or sexual orientation or disability.
- Monitor the effectiveness of our performance and provide feedback to all customers

It's a two-way process, and involves sharing information, ideas and power and aims to improve and housing conditions and services." (*National Strategy for Tenant Participation – Partners in Participation, Scottish Executive 1999*)

What is participation in care and support services?

Participation is about involving people who use our care and support services in how those services are developed and delivered. This is crucial to making sure

- services are high quality
- deliver what you need and want
- put you in control of decisions about your care and support
- you are involved in recruitment
- you are involved in the improvement of your care home

We believe it is important to work with you to find out what's important to you, what your hopes and aims are, and to plan and review your service so we know we are delivering a service that is tailored to you. The agencies that regulate social care services also view participation as extremely important and expect us to encourage and support everyone who uses our services to have their say.

More information on how participation is covered in policies and legislation can be found in Appendix 1 at the end of this document.

We all benefit

It may be stating the obvious, but decisions made with the people those decisions affect are always better decisions. There are countless benefits for everyone when you participate in shaping services. Here are just some ways in which we think we will all get 'better' and achieve 'more' as a result:

Better...

- services and value for money policies and procedures
- communication between staff, board members and you
- understanding of the laws, policies and regulatory bodies that affect the standard of all Blackwood services
- understanding of roles between you and staff

More...

- trust between you and Blackwood
- satisfaction with your home, neighbourhood and other support services
- satisfaction and confidence across Blackwood

Why have an Engagement Strategy?

It's simple: to involve you in shaping our services and in making decisions about your homes, your support and your communities. This interim strategy describes how we will engage you in the 2 years from 2016 to 2018. This strategy will be progressed and owned by appropriate staff and reported back to you and other people involved in Blackwood as part of an assessment / outcome based process.

3.0 Aims of the Strategy

The Customer Engagement Strategy will:

- harness the enormous amount of skills, experience and knowledge held by all of you.
- We will also be working very closely with the customers we support to ensure that our services are helping you to achieve the outcomes that you want.
- increase your satisfaction with all services provided
- make participation easy and accessible to everyone
- promote real opportunities for participation
- provide resources for participation
- make sure the views and priorities are reflected in the services we provide or procure
- develop your capacity to be involved in the development, assessment and reporting on the quality of the services provided
- ensure that outcomes are reviewed and monitored

How will we achieve this?

We will:

Behaviours & Principles

- work in partnership to promote the benefits of engagement and make links to encourage community involvement at a local level
- ensure policies are reviewed in good time to allow full consultation with the groups
- ensure you get the information and support needed to make well informed decisions
- promote a positive attitude towards engagement throughout our organisation and ensure its benefits are understood
- provide enough resources for effective participation
- encourage and support informal local groups
- promote and support the Ambassadors' role within each development
- engage with normally under-represented groups
- Maintain our support of local Groups and Registered Tenants Organisations
- give clear, relevant and up-to-date information which is easy to understand and, in your preferred communication format

Actions

- provide many platforms for you to be involved – in person, on the telephone, electronically and through CleverCogs and **bespoken**
- provide many ways for you to be involved - as individuals or as part of a group and at whatever level you choose
- Continue to provide training and support for you to engage with us in more ways
- Continue to strengthen the Regional Panels in North, East and West Scotland
- hold annual conferences or regional events in consultation with you
- train staff on the vision and expected outcomes of the strategy and their vital role in its delivery
- monitor and evaluate how effective participation is within Blackwood and how services have been influenced
- produce and report on action plans at all the levels of tenant and customer participation, which details the work and timescales needed to deliver agreed objectives

Behaviours & Principles

- Continue to strengthen our National Tenants Panel made up of representatives from the Regional Panels
- give feedback to you on how your views were taken into account and influenced services

Actions

- train and support your local group and provide you with the resources to fully enable you to actively influence our services

4.0 How can you get involved?

As individuals

- take part in telephone, postal or email surveys
- join Facebook/ Twitter to keep up to date with our activities
- use our social media site **Bespoken** to engage with other customers (www.bespoken.me)
- discuss issues in person at our regional offices and in your own home
- make comments and feedback through the website
- participate in estate walkabouts with staff
- respond to and contribute articles for our newsletter, *Messenger*
- use our complaints and feedback procedure
- attend consultation events or public meetings
- attend Blackwood conferences or regional events
- become an Ambassador
- join an informal local group
- join a Registered Tenant Organisation
- join a Regional Scrutiny Panel
- apply to become a Member of Blackwood

- join our register of interest (see below)
- take part in service audits
- influence how care services are developed through your review
- shape your care and support service through your person centred plan

What is the register of interest?

We have a register where you can tell us about issues that are of particular interest to you. We will then consult you as part of a panel or by questionnaire – the choice is yours.

Local groups

You may want to form a group to work together in support of your local area and to communicate with us and influence our services. This could be as a Registered Tenants' Organisation (RTO) with specific rights under the Housing Act or as a more informal group. There is more information on Registered Tenants' Organisations later in this strategy.

Local groups can be involved in developing our services by:

- responding to consultations and questionnaires
- attending focus groups
- providing feedback to our staff
- representing the views of their members
- developing action plans

We will support those of you who want to represent your interests and your local area. Support such as staff time, training, access to computers and provision of meeting rooms will also be made available.

Communication

Clear, understandable and relevant: that is how we want our communication to be. We will ask you how you would like to receive information and then record your preferred communication method on our management databases.

Information will be provided in appropriate formats including Braille, large print, audio CD, email and community languages. We will arrange signers and interpreters for meetings on request and make sure that a hearing induction system is available at all meeting venues when necessary. We will also use a card system in

meetings so anyone who has difficulty with speech can indicate when they want to speak or ask a question.

We will provide information through:

- letters
- newsletters
- information leaflets
- participation questionnaire for new customers
- email
- audio CD or tape
- website
- social media sites
- tenants' handbook
- home visits
- drop-in events, meetings and conferences
- CleverCogs
- Skype
- Text messages
- **bespoken**

How and when we will consult

Consultation will take many forms and we may choose one, or a combination of the following:

- our newsletter, *Messenger*
- focus groups
- surveys by post or by phone
- conferences
- Regional or National Panels
- through our register of interest

- home visits
- telephone surveys
- meetings
- through Registered Tenants' Organisations or local groups

Amongst other matters we will consult on changes to our policies when these are due for review particularly on key issues that affects customers such as:

- adaptations
- rent arrears
- allocations
- anti-social behaviour
- estate management
- participation
- maintenance and repairs
- customer service standards/ Scottish Social Housing Charter
- annual rent and service increase

Outside support and training

We will work with outside organisations such as the Tenants Information Service (TIS) and Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) who can support and train our tenants' groups. We are keen to see our tenants take part in regional and national tenant forums – these include those events organised by local authorities, Scottish Government, TIS and TPAS.

We have engaged TPAS to provide support to the organisation in relation to:

- training for staff, tenants and committee
- expert support for staff and tenants to develop tenant participation
- develop and support for tenant led inspection
- achieve TPAS Accreditation for the organisation

Giving Feedback

Feedback from consultation exercises will be reported in the newsletter, on our website, at local meetings and, where appropriate, to individuals.

Making sure the strategy is working

There is no point in a strategy if we do not know if it is working and how well it is working. That's why we will set out a clear framework for monitoring and evaluation.

Indicators of progress will include:

- number of local groups
- what methods of participation took place
- satisfaction with methods of participation
- surveys and results
- training for staff and customers
- budgets
- level of customer influence

We will regularly review our strategy to ensure we are flexible in the face of changes to housing conditions, environment and health and social care which may affect us. Regular reports on our progress against our action plan will go to our senior management.

Our action plans will be reviewed on a regular basis by staff and customers.

4.1 Registered Tenants' Organisations

Register of Tenants' Organisations

Registered Tenants' Organisations are independent groups, set up by tenants to represent their interests in housing and related services. By registering, tenants' groups gain the right to be properly recognised by their landlord.

We keep a register of tenants' organisations as part of our duties under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. This gives names and contacts of all our Registered Tenants Organisations and will be fully available on our web-site or at any local office. It can also be sent out by post on request.

How to register

Our leaflet, "Registered Tenants' Organisation: Criteria for Registration and Useful Information", tells you all you need to know about setting up a tenants' group with us. It gives information on how to form a group, how to register, how to remove a group from the register and how to appeal any decision.

Both guides will be available on our website, at our local offices or can be posted out on request. Advice and information on how to start a group can be found in the TIS Basic Guide to Starting a Tenants & Residents Association.

4.2 Ambassadors

Who and what are Ambassadors?

We are keen to encourage, train and equip local resident volunteers (Ambassadors) who want to do improve something locally.

What might they do?

Services they might want to help with will be agreed locally and could include:

- welcome and introduce new tenants
- give local community information
- distribute information - help spread the word
- help others use Blackwood technology/social media site
- help people to order their own repairs
- help monitor communal repairs and void repairs and provide progress reports
- help tenants understand the rents and benefit statements
- use their skills to help others (e.g. gardening/handyperson/benefits)
- help build their local community
- help build the organisation's social network
- encourage feedback
- help Blackwood to use local feedback to improve our service
- provide stories for the Customer newsletter, *Messenger*

- do things to engender local pride
- help create communities of interest
- promote the benefits of new media (IT champions – show people how)
- establish circles of support (from people to people like you)
- help plant flowering bulbs and tend to plants

4.3 Regional Panels

Regional Panels - What are they?

Their focus will be on making sure our performance measures up to our promises and measuring performance against our service standards and the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

Each Regional Panel will be represented on the National Panel; but this will take time and need to evolve at a pace that reflects the strengths of each Regional Panel. Each panel will meet regularly with local staff to ensure that a robust working relationship develops.

Membership is open to any customer in the region. Members will be elected by a secret ballot of customers and any Blackwood customer will be entitled to stand for election.

The only exceptions are:

- tenants who have not held a tenancy agreement for at least 6 months
- tenants who have been served a notice for anti-social behaviour during the last 3 years
- tenants who are in breach of their tenancy agreement
- tenants who have been issued with a Notice of Proceedings for rent arrears

Members could also be included in:

- selection panels for recruitment of regional staff
- selection of contractors carrying out services in the area
- scrutiny of our performance in their region
- joint discussions on regional service priorities.

5.0 Training

5.1 For staff

It is vital that each member of our staff understands and lives up to our participation promise. We must all recognise that this will lead to better decision making, improve relations between staff and customers and lead to more satisfied customers. These are prizes well worth working towards, happier customers and happier staff.

That's why regular information updates and training will be provided for staff – helping them to understand and deliver the benefits offered by the Engagement Strategy.

Training will include:

- living our values
- legal duties for tenant participation under the Housing Act
- working well with groups
- the importance and benefits of participation
- how participation works in practice
- ways you can be involved
- good practice models

We have now produced a guide for staff on participation to be used during induction and on-going training.

5.2 For customers

Training, resources and support are available to all customers and local groups to give them the knowledge, tools and confidence to actively influence how and what Blackwood does. This training is a combination of in-house and external training and includes such topics as:

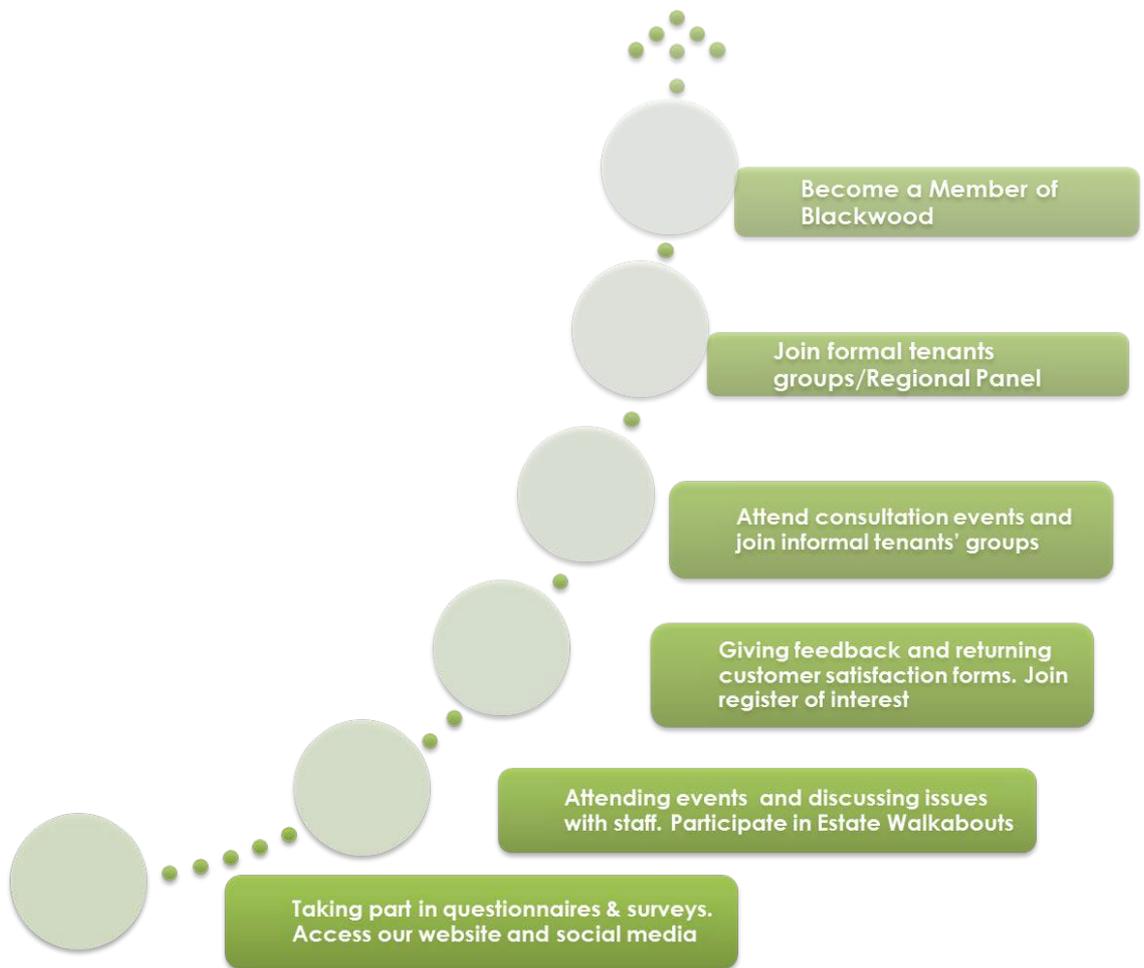
- how to develop committee skills
- an introduction to participation
- how to run effective meetings
- how to record meetings
- how to produce a great newsletter

We will arrange for you to view new developments, meet with other customers and we will encourage and pay for customers and members of local groups to attend

tenants' and other conferences to increase their knowledge and understanding of customer participation and wider housing and care issues.

6.0 The Participation Map

This map shows the variety of ways you can engage with the organisation:



7.0 Our Commitment to Equal Opportunities

We support equal opportunities in participation in line with all relevant legislation. This means we will never discriminate against anyone on the grounds of their:

- gender
- ethnicity
- impairment
- marital status
- age
- race
- language
- responsibility for dependants
- sexual orientation
- employment status
- religious or political belief
- HIV or Aids status
- geographic location

Scottish Government spells out tenants' rights

The Scottish Government Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 places certain duties and responsibilities on landlords. This includes the right for tenants to be involved in decisions that directly affect them.

Tenants have the right to:

- form independent associations to represent their area and to apply for registration from their landlord
- ask for information about policies regarding housing and related services
- be consulted on issues that affect their homes and local area
- participate in decisions that affect the services they receive
- have enough time to consider draft proposals and put forward their views.

About the Scottish Social Housing Charter

Scotland's Scottish Social Housing Charter sets the outcomes and standards all social landlords should achieve for their customers. It makes clear what people should expect from a social landlord (Housing Associations are described as social landlords). Our strategy takes full account of the requirements it sets out and will clearly identify the outcomes our tenants and customers will receive from the organisation.

This will include how tenants and customers can:

- get involved in monitoring, assessing and reporting on the quality of the services we provide
- make sure their views and priorities are reflected in the services provided
- take part in reviewing involvement opportunities and ensure they are working well

Strategy Delivery & Evaluation

Blackwood will evaluate the strategy in 2016 and this work will inform the drafting of a new strategy for the period 2017-20. The new strategy will be developed jointly with tenants and other customers to reflect the broad range of Blackwood's customer base.

Appendix 1

Legislation, policy and regulation

Our participation strategy meets a number of important legal and regulatory requirements. These are:

- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001
- The Scottish Government's national guidelines on tenant participation
- National Care Standards
- The Regulation of Care (Requirements as to Care Services) (Scotland) Regulations 2002
- Scottish Social Services Council Codes of Practice for Social Care Employers and Social Care Workers

Our engagement strategy must also meet the requirements of the legislation surrounding equal opportunities. Good practice in participation removes barriers to effective participation arising from ethnicity, geographic location, special needs, language difficulties, learning difficulties, age, sexual orientation, or disability.

We will also draw on national initiatives on participation and engagement, and the Charter for Involvement.

More detailed information is outlined below.

Principles of Customer Engagement

Our strategy is consistent with the Scottish Government's national guidelines on customer participation. This states that landlords and tenants share the following key principles for customer participation to be effective:

- customer participation requires a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between customers, elected and committee/board members, and staff at all levels, working together towards a common goal of better conditions and services
- customer participation practice should be seen as a continuous process where information, ideas and power are shared, common understandings of problems are strived for and a consensus on solutions is worked out
- good customer participation allows all parties to contribute to the agenda. All participants require to have all the information needed to consider issues properly; that information requires to be clear, timely and accessible and to take account of equal opportunities concerns

- processes of decision-making should be open, clear, and accountable
- adequate time should be given to tenant representatives to consider the issues properly. Tenants should have the opportunity to work out a common view in advance of meeting landlord's representatives
- good tenant participation requires the landlord to recognise the independence of tenants' organisations
- good working relationships evolve gradually and are flexible to adapt to local circumstances
- tenants' organisations require adequate resources for organisation, training and support
- tenant participation in rural areas must be tailored to suit the particular circumstances and needs of tenants in such communities

Principles of Participation in Social Care Services

The key principles of participation within social care services are:

- Providers of social care services should deliver services in a way that promotes and respects the independence of people who use services, and supports and recognises their choices about the way the service is provided to them.
- Each person who uses social care services should be consulted about their support needs and how they want those needs to be met. This should be recorded in a written plan and reviewed regularly. The outcomes of reviews should inform how individual and local services are planned, developed and delivered.
- Services should promote the independence of people who use services and assist them to understand and exercise their rights.
- People who use services should be supported to control their lives and make informed choices about the services they receive.
- Providers of social care services should help people who use services and their carers to make complaints, comments and to raise concerns. These should be taken seriously and responded to as ways in which individuals can contribute to and influence how the service is run.
- Social care services should support people to realise their potential and make the most of their life. People who use services should be supported to make full use of all the resources available to them and to achieve all they can.