

Customer Experience Strategy

2021 – 2023

Introduction

Great Places **Vision** is clear – we are committed to creating Great Homes, Great Communities and Great People. Weaved within these key elements is the aspiration and ambition to deliver excellent customer experience through sustainable investment, building successful vibrant communities and providing outstanding customer service and support. This Customer Experience Strategy aligns with our overall corporate vision of ‘providing outstanding customer service and support’ and our 10-year aspiration to improve the quality of our offer to customers. It supports our core values which are:

- We are fair, open and accountable
- We know, respect and care about our customers
- We appreciate the effort of everyone who works here
- We promote partnerships, efficiency and value for money
- We passionately embrace creativity, change and innovation

This is the first Customer Experience Strategy since the merger between Great Places and Equity and builds on both the previous strategy and the “best of both” approach underpinning the partnership. Its foundation is the Service Delivery Frameworks which underpin our two way relationship with our customers. It reflects the merger driver of building ‘brilliant, modern customer services’, setting out how we will improve the experience of our customers going forward over the next three years. It also reflects the business objective to ‘deliver services tailored to the needs of communities and individuals that are accessible in ways that match those needs’.

This strategy is about how services are accessed and delivered - and the overall experience of living in a Great Places home. The strategy covers all services provided within Great Places Housing Group, including Great Places Housing Association, Plumlife and Cube.

Customer Experience definition/vision

A great customer experience is about how a customer feels before, during and after interacting with us. Whether that is about picking up the phone or interacting digitally, whether they are moving in, reporting a repair, choosing investment works or needing support and assistance, customers of Great Places need to feel valued and important. At Great Places we want interactions to be simple, without barriers and consistent across the organisation, where customers feel they are dealing with one organisation, irrespective of where the colleague works.

Our vision for Customer Experience is: Doing the right things, in the right way, at the right time.

Our vision is reflected through our customer principles:

1. Get it right first time
2. Keep our promises and do what we say we will
3. Provide a timely response
4. Keep our customers informed
5. Show listening, empathy and understanding
6. Access our services - at your convenience

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Context

Customer

Our customer base is diverse and evolving. We have customers from a range of age groups, backgrounds and household types, each with their own circumstances, experiences and requirements. Our customers will want to access services in different ways. We need to ensure an outstanding customer experience for all and tailor delivery as needed across our different service areas.

Our contractual relationship with and service offer to different customer groups is also shaped by the tenure of their home. For example Leasehold and shared ownership customers in Plumlife have different expectations and requirements to customers renting a home from Great Places. We will adapt and tailor our service offer, and the work of our contractors, to ensure a great experience for all our customers.

This strategy has been developed incorporating and responding to insight and feedback from customers and colleagues in a range of ways. This includes information from complaints, satisfaction surveys, scrutiny, colleague workshops and discussions and service reviews including the independent review of our complaints process in 2019 and other reviews within the business transformation (BT) framework. It has also reflected thinking and observations from outside the organisation and sector.

The independent review of our complaints process highlighted a number of areas for consideration including complaint ownership, recording and learning, speed of response/process. The outcomes of this review will be implemented, and will lead to changes that ensure the response and resolution for the customer is more efficient, that co-ordination and monitoring improves, and that the voice of the customer is better heard and responded to by informing change.

The Institute of Customer Services business benchmarking reports highlighted the improvements customers would value most from Great Places. These are around communication including listening, speed of service and response, keeping them informed, keeping promises and follow up. These areas have been reflected within the customer service principles for the organisation going forward. In addition, service quality and improving our digital offer were areas that customers told us were important, and these will be taken forward through the actions and aims of this strategy.

Environment

The environment within which we operate is constantly changing and it is important to ensure we are responding to the different needs and expectations of our customers. The impact of COVID has highlighted the need to be agile and innovative, in order to adapt services and delivery models for our customers and stay ahead of the curve. As a result of this pandemic, the needs and aspirations of our customers may have changed. Vulnerabilities may be heightened and issues around isolation, inequality, polarisation and lack of connectivity will need to be considered and understood. There will be a need for empathy, a focus on wellbeing, aligned with honesty and consistent communications - about what matters to our customers. Our service offer will need to highlight the right ethics and values.

Embracing digital solutions will enhance the customer experience in a responsive and immediate way, as well as assist organisational efficiency and value for money. However we will also need to respond to those customers for whom a digital solution isn't an option. Working within effective partnerships will be important to ensure access to a breadth of innovation, services, products and support. This ranges from those partners working independently in our communities delivering support services and events, to our contractors who are delivering works and services in our homes and communities.

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Regulation

Other external changes that arise in the future through revised regulation, political change, financial change and demographic shifts will need to be considered in the context of customer experience. Value for money for our customers and Great Places as a business will continue to be a key consideration, as well as doing more to help customers sustain their tenancies, and provide over and above services that will support them in difficult situations. The national context for our customers, set within such things as the White Paper and Together with Tenants activity will need to be reviewed and reflected as further outcomes emerge. We will need to work beyond the regulatory requirements such as (but not limited to) the new Housing Ombudsman's Complaint handling code and the Regulator of Social Housing standards.

Strategy themes – Aims and objectives

The aim of this Customer Experience Strategy is to put the customer central to our thinking and culture. The customer needs to be central to how we design our services, systems and processes, our communications and our learning. Delivery of this strategy will include collaboration with customers in a range of ways, to understand what great service looks like, as outlined in the "learning/co-creation" section. We will monitor delivery against this strategy in line with what our customers tell us and ensure we meet changing needs and expectations.

How we deliver against our aims is outlined within the themes below:

- Culture
- Service Delivery model
- Understanding the customer
- Technology that enables
- Learning/Co-creation
- Communication

Culture – Leadership and colleague engagement

Our People Strategy outlines how we will attract, recruit, empower, engage, develop, value and retain great people. We will embed a customer centric culture across Great Places, as part of delivering against our People Strategy.

Leadership plays a major role, in embedding a customer centric culture, at all levels within the organisation, including board. We will ensure authentic and ethical leadership that aligns with our vision and values and helps clarify the customer focused culture Great Places are working to, in line with the People Strategy.

We will attract and recruit the right people with the right customer service skills, behaviours and attitudes. We will ensure effective customer service induction and will aim for this to happen quickly to ensure consistency and high levels of customer service from the start.

We will support colleagues at all levels to ensure they have the appropriate skills and behaviours through programmes such as Building Greatness and our Academy of Greatness. In line with this approach we will ensure tiers of opportunity to ensure a personalised approach to developing our teams, with the customer in mind. This will range from short induction sessions, to coaching and accredited training. We will ensure there is a clear narrative about customer service, our tone of voice and customer service principles and ensure that this cascades throughout the business. We want our tone of voice to be friendly, trustworthy and valued. We want our colleagues to speak in a way that our customers understand, not using jargon, being honest and showing warmth and personality. We need to ensure we are keeping our

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promises and treating people as individuals, making an emotional connection, seeing the person, listening and showing empathy. We will focus on doing things right first time, doing what we say we will, and keeping people informed.

In line with the People Strategy, we will review and learn from why colleagues leave Great Places looking at leadership, skills, training, support, incentives, rewards and recognition, agility and technology which all play a major part in delivering high levels of customer service.

Part of developing our culture will include consideration of whether we will seek accreditation to drive culture change. This could include further business wide ICS accreditation or service area specific accreditation such as complaints.

Service Delivery model

Great Places owns and manages around 25,000 properties across the North-West and Yorkshire, and as a result receives significant numbers of customer contacts. Telephone continues to be the primary means of contact, followed by email, webchat and use of our customer portal (The Hub only).

Our delivery model has 6 key elements –

- Digital and self service - We want customers to be able to contact us, access services and information at their convenience. We will also engage with those for whom digital access is not a preferred or suitable option and ensure our services are accessible for all customers
- The Hub – providing that central access point for first contact and triage
- Our frontline colleagues and teams, providing services in customer's homes.
- Plumlife and Equity Living whose contacts do not go through the Hub
- Central services that enable frontline delivery
- Partners – that either deliver or enhance our offer for the customers benefit.

Digital

We will continue to invest in digital services in order to improve customer experience and ensure a 24/7 provision including investment in our website and self service options. We will raise awareness of digital options through an effective communications campaign, and promote digital methods to the majority of customers that want to work with us in this way.

We will look to innovative ways to embrace digital technology where this is appropriate. We will review the digital roadmap to ensure it meets the needs of our customer base and different service offers e.g. Independence and wellbeing schemes and repairs and investment teams.

We will explore how we deliver connectivity and digital services through our new developments and homes.

We will explore the extent to which we can support the digital migration of customers through upskilling and access to equipment that allows connectivity.

The Hub

Our customer contact centre will sit at the centre of our organisation providing a range of means of access to our services including telephony and online. We will bring together the two contact centres that were in place for Great Places and Equity, to form one multi functioning team. We will continue to work on a right first time approach – with the aim being that our teams will have the skills and competencies and information at their finger tips to answer most queries at the

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point of contact. However, we will link customers to rest of the business - at the right time, for the right things in the right way - as needed. This needs to be seamless, with the customer receiving a prompt response/service from all parts of the business. We will ensure constant learning and fine tuning. We will review how the Hub and other parts of the business work together via a range of means including back to the floor exercises, knowledge development and relationship building, journey mapping and team/1:1 review.

Our frontline teams

The customer experience begins in a new home, and in line with our Service Delivery Frameworks we need to ensure that customers have a home that suits their needs and circumstances, and that a positive relationship is formed through the lettings experience and continues for the lifetime of the tenancy. Our relationship with customers is “two way”, with mutual expectations and responsibilities on both sides which support sustainability, independence and overall satisfaction.

Every home that a customer “signs up” for will be of a good standard. We will repair, maintain and ensure continued investment in our homes, promoting choice and opportunities for customers to be involved. The quality and affordability of our homes impacts on the customer experience. This will be reflected in our development and investment programmes

Our Neighbourhood, Independence and wellbeing, repairs and investment teams will deliver services in customers homes schemes and communities. Our service offer and approach will be shaped by our Service delivery frameworks.

The service delivery model for Plumlife and Equity Living will reflect the expectations and requirements of our wide ranging leaseholder and shared owner customer groups. As part of our Centre of Excellence ambitions we will develop a contemporary property management service offer, incorporating a customer portal alongside a team of qualified property managers.

Partnerships

We will work with our contractors and suppliers to ensure effective service delivery enabling a great customer experience.

Through partnerships will we seek to do more for our customers and work with appropriate agencies and partners to provide additional services, activities and support. We will monitor activities to ensure effective delivery and value for money.

We will ensure the voice of the customer is central to the services we procure, through the service offer and specification, social value offer, and through effectively managed services and contracts that are high performing and value for money.

Understanding the customer

We need to understand our customers better - Who they are, what are their behaviours, expectations, values and needs and, how do they want to interact with us. We will consider how we capture this intelligence, and then how we use it to refine our processes and ways of delivering services.

We will explore profiling and segmentation of customers to understand the customer and business benefits of this approach. We will need to capture this within our systems, so that we use this information in the way we transact, communicate and do business.

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It is also important that we consider Business to Business customers in striving for high levels of customer service and ensure we meet, and where possible exceed, their expectations to ensure future business, successful relationships and positive reputational outcomes. This includes but is not limited to homes sold by Plumlife on behalf of other Housing organisations, the services delivered through the Distribution Centre and services provided via our development team.

Technology

Integrated systems and an effective Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) support the delivery of a great customer experience. We will look to Aareon to deliver this. Customer information needs to be captured and understood by frontline colleagues. This needs to include historic activity and recent transactions, to ensure that colleagues understand a customer's journey with us, and offer a seamless, right first time experience.

Our systems should not distract colleagues from the customer, but enhance the experience. Mobile applications and access to systems and data remotely in our customer's homes and communities will be part of system design and roll out.

We will explore how to make best use of digital analytics to understand how customers use our website, and social media platforms. We need to understand how they behave on our website - pages visits, search requests, bounce rates - in order to understand how to make best use of our online provision. We need to understand our online audience - the demographic utilising the website and also the device they are using, to improve how we engage with customers. Similarly, understanding what catches customer's attention through the different social media channels will help us to understand the best platforms to use.

We need to gather the right data in the right way at the right time, and use it to develop our way of doing business and inform change. We need to review our 'as is' position and ensure we have an effective system in place for gathering, interpreting and using data across the business. It needs to be accurate within our systems

Learning from experience/Co-creation

There are a number of ways we will gather feedback from our customers – we will learn from what this tells us.

Complaints: We will implement the findings of the review to ensure a new complaints model is in place. Our Customer Feedback policy will ensure that the voice of the customer is better heard - and responded to by informing change in our service delivery. We will measure success through customer feedback and satisfaction data.

Insight/scrutiny: We will continue to develop a robust team of volunteers that is diverse and reflective of our customer base. We will ensure that we support skills and knowledge development, and involve the right customer in the right reviews that play to their strengths and interests. Continued scrutiny across all service areas will allow learning and change that is responsive to what customers tell us.

Satisfaction: We will refine our methods of gathering and learning from satisfaction data and ensuring that we respond to what our customers are telling us. We will communicate with customers our learnings and changes in practices as a result of feedback. We will ensure we have an effective process across the business, monitoring the right things.

Benchmarking: We will ensure continued benchmarking and strive to be best in sector, and out of sector. We will look to external leading organisations to understand what we could do to enhance our services. We will monitor our services through a balance of performance and quality measures. We will benchmark our services through both sector benchmarking groups and externally through ICS benchmarking and networks.

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Journey mapping: We will conduct customer journey mapping to understand what the end-to-end customer journey looks like for different service areas, starting at initial contact and ending with the response that is delivered. This will inform the design of new processes and ways of delivering services.

Engagement and feedback: The Customer Voice strategy will be refreshed to ensure that we engage with customers in a range of ways that reflects the demographic make up of our customer base. This will include new and innovative ways to engage with the many, not the few, including our harder to reach customers. Feedback from engagement activity will inform learning, change and co design/co production – building on the current model.

Customer access/ contact, engagement, feedback and complaints sit within one team within the Customer Services directorate. This will ensure a more holistic way of seeing and understanding feedback. This activity needs to be complimented by knowledge capture within the hub/contact centre and other frontline services, and the wider learning gained in other ways as highlighted within this strategy.

Involving customers in the design of services is important in getting services right. This is done through BT methodology in terms of upfront surveys about satisfaction and what is important. We will ensure this continues and is embedded across the business and ensure that the method and timeliness of involvement is right. Colleagues and customer are important in the development of our systems and this will need to be a consideration as part of future technological developments.

Reporting on feedback and learning, including recommendations for change and outcomes of change will take place going forward. This will include reporting to leadership and various forums within the business.

Communication

Effective communication is a critical part of the customer experience – with customers and between colleagues.

For Great Places to deliver consistently outstanding services, every team and department must work as ONE at all times, no service can be delivered in isolation. We will create a customer service culture across Great Places by engaging all our colleagues in the customer service principles and celebrating each others' success and good practice. We will embed a consistent tone of voice so that the colleague experience is similar no matter which area of the business customers have contact with.

Our communication with customers will also be a critical part of our success. We will commission a new website and deliver service news and information campaigns on matters such as good financial management, Universal Credit and digital channel shift. For customers who are not digitally enabled, we will provide more print-based communication including regular newsletters. We will listen to what customers tell us they want to know about, and ensure we provide information that is relevant.

We will also look to tie together our digital communication channels across SMS and email to ensure there is sensible oversight of our communication and consistency of messages and style. These will be integrated with our CRM to give us feedback on what communication customers engage with and allow us to learn and improve.

Key Milestones

We have identified the following key milestones to ensuring the successful delivery of this strategy. These milestones will be scrutinised each year, alongside an annual action plan and progress reported to Board.

Year one: January 2021 – December 2021

- Roll out communications regarding Customer Service Culture including brand and tone of voice (TOV).

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- Develop a customer communication plan to ensure Great Places presents as one coherent organisation
- Launch the Customer Service induction module
- Recommence roll out of customer service training across the organisation
- Review training and skills in the Hub to ensure relevant skills and behaviours
- Commence work to deliver an integrated contact centre
- Explore analytics, profiling and segmentation options to better understand customers and their behaviours
- Develop customer scrutiny approach to ensure areas of focus that enhance the customer experience
- Launch new complaints model
- Launch repairs scheduling system
- Commence website development
- Review digital roadmap to ensure driven by customer need and enhances customer experience
- Deliver digital campaigns to drive digital take up by our customers
- Commence build of Aareon system and ensure alignment with this strategy
- Complete Data management review
- Develop accessibility to webchat for former Equity customers
- Continue to monitor the impact of Covid on delivery of services and actions within this strategy

Year two: January 2022 – December 2022

- Continue the roll out of customer service training across the organisation
- Deliver Aareon roll out including accessibility to portal for former Equity customers
- Continue to deliver digital roadmap and consider and develop new digital innovations
- Explore the extent to which we will support digital migration through upskilling and access to equipment for customers that allows connectivity
- Deliver Contact Centre integration
- Enable customers to effectively diagnose and schedule repairs by online access to repairs scheduling system
- Review activity, performance and outcomes delivered by contractors and via partnerships to ensure effective
- Explore how we deliver connectivity and digital services through our new homes and developments
- Review Investment plan to ensure customer focused
- Build on ICS benchmarking and consider relevant external benchmarking and innovation to improve the GP offer
- Review systems and processes between Hub and the rest of the business to ensure seamless service delivery and right first time linked to other reviews taking place
- Roll out website analytics and learning
- Commence profiling and segmentation activity to build better understanding of customers and their behaviours
- Ensure clear real-time visibility, awareness and ownership of customer feedback to inform change
- Monitor rollout of outcomes from BT and service reviews to capture how they improve the customer experience, including repairs and Centre of Excellence
- Develop service standards to clarify our offer and set expectations – reflect on Aareon delivery

Year 3: January 2023 – December 2023

- Review contact centre software and whether fit for purpose
- Review training to ensure Building Greatness and other development reflects commitment to customer experience
- Continue profiling and segmentation activity

Links to other strategies

This strategy links to many other strategies and frameworks within Great Places – including but not limited to:

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- Customer Voice Strategy
- Community Investment Strategy
- Development Strategy
- Great People Strategy
- IT Strategy and digital roadmap
- Repairs Strategy
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Independence and Wellbeing Strategy
- Service delivery frameworks

Corporate implications

Environmental implications

We are working towards a more digital way to delivering our services which should result in reducing printed documents and media. Delivering our services in a more agile way will result in reduced emissions.

Risks

- Lack of capacity to deliver this strategy alongside the demands of integration, BT Reviews and Business as usual. We will mitigate through review of priorities and resources
- Inability to upskill colleagues and/or retain and attract colleagues. We will seek to put the right training and support in place and review what is important to colleagues. Managing our external reputation is important to attracting the right people
- Pace of change and not being agile and joined up in our approach puts this strategy at risk.
- Lack of response and learning from feedback could result in dissatisfied and disillusioned customers. Effective monitoring, reporting and review will seek to ensure that learning is being implemented and communicated
- Ineffective and silo technology and systems could lead to outdated offer, lack of efficiency and frustration. The roll out of Aareon plus infrastructure review will seek to ensure the right infrastructure is in place.
- Lack of investment in new technology and new ways of working may result in not meeting the needs of our diverse customer base. We will review to ensure that investment is made that suits customer and business needs
- Additional externally driven priorities may alter the pace and direction for delivery of this strategy. We will consider changes as they arise and ensure we are flexible in our response.

Financial implications and VFM

In all areas of our service delivery we need to consider why we are doing what we are doing, the cost and the outcome/benefit and ensure it provides value for money. We will continue to ensure our services are efficient and effective – and measure this through feedback and performance. We will continue to assess opportunities to enhance our services to customers and continue to assess delivery in line with regulatory standards (RSH).

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Monitoring and review

This Strategy and its delivery will be monitored and managed by regular reporting to Heads of Service meetings, SMTs, Executive Directors and Operational Directors meetings, as well as updates to board. CAST will continue to review progress and feed into reporting with learning and recommendations. Consideration will be given as to whether a more hands on operational group is required, to pick up key actions. Our overarching performance measures that support delivery are the Critical success factors (CSFs), in particular our customer satisfaction and Digital CSFs – see below

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR	2019/20 YEAR END	2020-21 TARGET	STRETCH TARGET
Overall Satisfaction (Great Communities)	7.53 / 10	7.30	8.00
Digital Customer Contacts* (Great Communities)	N/A (New Measure)	40%	45%
Colleague Engagement** (Great People)	78%	70%	80%

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Equality Impact Assessment

1. Is this a key strategic document, major policy or procedure or service change? Examples may include: Homeless Strategy/ Customer Involvement Strategy	YES		NO	
	X			
2. What impact will your document or service delivery change have on the public or staff, giving particular regard to potential impacts on minority groups? Issues to consider include race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, carers and other socio-economic factors	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	DON'T KNOW
		X		
3. Please explain your answer: Provide a narrative explaining why you gave the impact rating above.	The Customer Experience strategy affects Great Places customers. It is important to ensure that our approach to delivering services minimises any potential barriers and is tailored to reach our wider customer base.			

1. If, for question 2 you have answered LOW, there is no need to continue to an Equality Impact Assessment.
2. If, for question 2 you have answered DON'T KNOW, please discuss with a member of the EIA Group who can confirm whether an EIA is required.
3. If you have answered YES to question 1, and you have identified MEDIUM or HIGH impact in 2, you should move on to an Equality Impact Assessment and complete the section below:

If you have completed a full Equality Impact Assessment please provide the following:

What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment? (Q10 from the full EIA form)

Our approach to delivering services needs to reach customers within different equality strands. The delivery model aims to provide customers with a range of ways to access our services and provide feedback about our services, including different ways to access the Hub - with other teams in the business providing additional services and support as needed. Our digital offer should support customers to interact with us at their own convenience and in their own home, and reduce the barriers for customers who may have struggled to previously access services

As a result of these conclusions what actions (if any) will be included in your business actions and wider review processes? (Q11 from the full EIA form)

Investigating and implementing the use of technology and digital options is a key objective in the strategy which should seek to reduce some of the barriers associated with accessing services. Considering profiling and segmentation will assist us to gain a better understanding of our customers and how they want to do business with us. Continuing to build on our customer centric culture within Great Places will seek to ensure understanding of the need to support and facilitate wider reach and accessibility for our diverse customer base.

Co-creation and co-design of services with customers will seek to ensure services reflect our customers needs.

Training will be delivered to colleagues to develop their skills and awareness so they can better support the needs of our diverse customer groups. We will monitor delivery of the strategy to ensure feedback and learning is reflected – including scrutiny from our customer insight group. Individual EIAs will be carried out on any new and revised policies supporting the implementation of this strategy.

If you require any help please contact a member of the EIA group:

EIA@greatplaces.org.uk

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Policy Approval Date:	
Equality Impact Assessment Date:	
Safeguarding impact	
Policy Review Date:	
Lead Team:	
Level of Authorisation Required:	