



Customer Communication Strategy **2021 - 2024**

Purpose

This document sets out our overall approach to Customer Communication and defines our strategic objectives.

Document Control

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1. Foreword, by Mike Ainsley

Derby's high-performing ALMO

- 1.1. Derby Homes has been working in partnership with Derby City Council for 18 years to deliver the best housing service possible for the city.
- 1.2. Derby Homes Limited was set up as a non-profit making 'Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO)' created by Derby City Council to manage, maintain and improve its council houses and its housing estates. It was in the first wave of ALMOs set up in 2002 and is the longest established ALMO in the country.
- 1.3. As well as building new homes in partnership with Derby City Council, Derby Homes have begun to manage additional services on behalf of the Council. These include the city's Housing Options, Homelessness, Extra Care and Derby Advice services.
- 1.4. Since its inception, the ALMO quickly established itself as a high-performing organization. By originally achieving and then retaining a three-star rating from the Audit Commission, Derby Homes has worked in partnership with the council to secure additional funding for major repairs, build new homes and worked in partnership to deliver a range of other services.
- 1.5. Over the last two decades, we have continued to deliver a high quality service, maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction and performance, winning numerous industry awards, gaining recognition areas such as public finance and health and safety, and being listed in the top ten social landlords in the UK.
- 1.6. Derby Homes enjoys a healthy relationship with the council, with strong partnerships at strategic and operational levels delivering a coordinated plan for Derby and joined up services with many other partners in the city.

National context

- 1.7. Social Housing is high on the government agenda and has been the focus of recent campaigns highlighting its importance. Together, the Council and Derby Homes can be ambitious in our plans for new homes and tackling homelessness. Alongside these new opportunities we also need to be ready for a re-introduction of a greater degree of regulation, with a focus on customers and the quality of the services they receive.



- 1.8. We are also in the middle of a worldwide pandemic that is impacting on the way the whole organisation operates, including staff, customers, local business and partners. Communicating effectively has never been more important.

Position

- 1.9. There have been recent changes to the services that Derby Homes provide and as such it may be beneficial to review who our customers are and what their needs may be.
- 1.10. Our website is in the process of going through a redesign and we have recently implemented a new intranet platform for our staff, followed by a wider move to Office 365. These changes present us with an opportunity to refresh our website content for customers and explore the range of ways we can use the intranet and new technology to share information internally and communicate in new ways.
- 1.11. Many areas of online communication (including features of our website and Housing Management and Maintenance software) now overlap directly between customer services, engagement and complaints. We must be clear about how customers can request services and ensure that customers receive the same high standards no matter how they choose to contact us.
- 1.12. This strategy is companywide. Operationally, the Customer Communications Team sits within Housing Management although it operates and provides support across the whole organization, however excellent communication is everyone's responsibility.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Ainsley". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Chair of Derby Homes

2. Purpose

- 2.1. This document sets out our overall approach to Customer Communication and defines our strategic objectives. This strategy does not exist in isolation. Customer Communication takes place in all areas of the business.
- 2.2. The general purpose of this strategy is to contribute to the successful delivery of the wider work of Derby Homes through effective communication.

3. Strategic Objectives

Our aims are to:

- 3.1. Ensure all our audiences have access to quality, timely information about our services
- 3.2. Expand our online content, services and culture so customers and staff can choose 'digital first' methods of accessing information.
- 3.3. Tailor how we communicate to reach people in effective and efficient ways that facilitate understanding and achieve our intended aims
- 3.4. Develop a range of ways for customers to give us feedback and engage with us, encouraging interaction and demonstrating we have listened and acted.
- 3.5. Celebrate our successes and share how we are achieving our vision, values and objectives to build a culture and reputation of ambition and excellence.
- 3.6. Build on our reputation and brand to increase our local, regional and national recognition and encourage potential business opportunities and partnerships.
- 3.7. Enable teams to be able to deliver their internal messages and to develop the way they communicate with customers.

4. Priority areas

To achieve our strategic objectives, we have identified the following operational priorities:

4.1. Website, social and digital

To ensure our website, customer portals and social channels are customer focused, contain up-to-date information about our services to help people who want to self-serve and prefer online interaction and information.

4.2. Internal communications

Maximise the use of new technology to help teams communicate effectively and efficiently. Ensure teams are given the skills and capacity to use this new software and technology, whilst including teams that do not work at computers.

4.3. Media and press

Local media has changed in recent years and cannot always be relied on as a channel for positive news stories. We will explore a range of options to promote our news at a local and national level, but also be clear on our aims for promotion.

Media enquiries seem to be increasing in frequency, particularly with homeless services. We will work to improve our relationship with the local media to set clear boundaries and expectations. Internally, we will ensure we are dealing with enquiries professionally, but efficiently and fairly.

4.4. Crisis & emergency communications

We will be prepared for adverse situations and for outages of supporting services that directly affect our work and our ability to communicate effectively.

This can include events that are localised to Derby Homes, those that also affect Derby City Council or things that can impact on the whole city and beyond, such as the floods of 2019 or the current pandemic.

Communication between staff, partners and customers will form an integral part of our emergency plan.

4.5.Print

There will always be a need for printed media, however many customers may, for example, expect to be able to opt out of a printed newsletter in favour of a more immediate, paperless way of receiving news and information.

We will explore and prepare for alternative methods of communication. Rather than seeing printed materials as a default option, we will always consider our audience, aims and value for money.

4.6.Marketing and campaigns

Much of our “marketing” is about creating an awareness of changes to our services, to reach a specific demographic with a key message or to draw attention to important information.

Where there is a need for a direct marketing campaign, we will consider capacity, value and whether the work would be best delivered internally or outsourced.

4.7.Service level communication

Positive customer experiences are our most powerful marketing tool. All teams and members of staff have individual responsibility for ensuring their direct communication and interaction with customers and partners adhere to our principles and standards.

We will ensure our methods of communication and existing templates are up to date and fit for purpose.

5. Customer First

- 5.1. We can create valuable, meaningful and impactful outcomes for customers if we put them at the heart of our communication and are clear about what we want to achieve.
- 5.2. Our communications will reinforce the image of Derby Homes we want to convey and reflect our culture and values. Every time we communicate with someone, we are influencing their opinion of us.

5.3.Principles of customer communication

- 5.3.1.Put customer needs first
- 5.3.2.Have clear aims for what we want people to understand, feel or do
- 5.3.3.Be informative, negating the need for follow up contact
- 5.3.4.Be clear, honest and straight-forward
- 5.3.5.Be responsive and timely
- 5.3.6.Be respectful, personable and use Plain English
- 5.3.7.Reflect our brand, strategic objectives and core values
- 5.3.8.Tailor and direct specific messages to target relevant audiences, groups or individuals
- 5.3.9.Consider accessibility to meet customer needs
- 5.3.10.Provide value for money

6. Outcomes

The Customer Communication Strategy will help us to deliver the following beneficial outcomes:

- 6.1. Informed customers, who are aware of both Derby Homes' and their own responsibilities and how they can best access services, information, help and advice if they need it, to ensure their tenancy is successful and sustainable.
- 6.2. Stakeholders and staff who are aware of the services that Derby Homes provide, their roles, our aims and objectives, performance and the benefits the ALMO brings to the city.
- 6.3.Reduced demand on frontline services.
- 6.4. Timely delivery of messages to people when they're needed

7. Monitoring

To ensure we remain focused on achieving the aims of this strategy, we will track and measure our progress by:

- 7.1. Reporting updates to the Operational Board annually, along with any reviews of the aims as they are required.
- 7.2. Recording and acting on qualitative feedback from customers, whether directly relating to services or collected from surveys.
- 7.3. Monitoring related performance figures from our customer survey,

data from DORIS and service specific surveys where relevant.

7.4. Recording and acting on any staff surveys and internal feedback.

8. Value for money

8.1. With a clear focus on the customer, true value will be evident in enabling frictionless access to information and services.

8.2. We will also achieve value through utilising effective and efficient methods of communication or by outsourcing where skills do not exist in-house.

8.3. This may be, for example, using more cost-effective methods of communication, such as direct email broadcasts and social media or simply ensuring our messages and content provide effective, useful information to reduce unnecessary service demands.

9. Ownership and Responsibility

9.1. The Customer Communication Strategy will be reviewed at least every three years to ensure it is meeting the needs of our customers. It will also be reviewed and amended in the interim period as necessary, for example where there are substantial changes to the organisation, services, technology, customers.

9.2. The Head of Housing Management is responsible for the Customer Communication Strategy, including the dissemination and promotion of the strategy, monitoring compliance and coordinating regular review and revision.