

CUSTOMER COMMUNICATION STRATEGY 2021-2024

Report of the Head of Housing Management

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Derby Homes (DH) revised Customer Communication strategy replaces the previous 2016-2019 strategy. It represents a fresh look at our purpose, objectives, areas of focus and the outcomes we want to achieve.
- 1.2 This strategy takes into account our new mission statement and values and considers where the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) is at this particular moment, looking at our history and current position, both nationally and locally, with a timely awareness of the worldwide pandemic and how this may impact on our work.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To approve the new Customer Communication Strategy 2021-2024

3. REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 This strategy had been produced to ensure our customer communication has clear aims, is up to date, includes best practice and focuses on customer needs.

4. MATTER(S) FOR CONSIDERATION

- 4.1 A review of the previous strategy has resulted in a completely refreshed document, which looks at the context of the ALMO's journey and where it is now. It has clear aims and identifies priority areas that will inform annual service plans. It also features a specific section on a 'Customer First' approach.
- 4.2 A lot has changed within the organisation since the last strategy was approved. We have since taken on further services managed on behalf of the council, which means our customer base has altered dramatically.
- 4.3 Our website has also moved to the same platform as the councils, which makes sense given the number of shared services we are delivering. The move came ahead of an overall review of the design of derby.gov.uk, which will also apply to derbyhomes.org. A move to the new design is currently planned for late 2020.
- 4.4 The recent pandemic, changes to working practices and the way we interact with customers is a further development that cannot be ignored. We must explore the benefits of new technology, whilst ensuring we still consider wider accessibility needs.

- 4.5 We have also looked to the private sector for new thinking. Benchmarking outside the public sector to industry leaders in marketing and social strategies is heavily sales oriented and at first glance not directly applicable in our sector, however there are parallels we can learn from. For example, a strong emphasis on personal selling in Nike stores translates to our frontline staff providing “positive customer experiences” through direct contact and our focus on putting the customer first.
- 4.6 Direct marketing can be seen as targeting a particular customer segment with a specific message (rather than sales). Timely, targeted communication could effectively reach people with the information they need to efficiently get information or services from us or to find out about things that affect them. Zara are a good comparator. They focus a lot on customer co-creation (sounds a lot like co-regulation), and have an almost zero advertising policy, instead being driven by brand (customer) experience and being focused on the customer’s needs. This is why we have highlighted the importance of enabling effective methods of engagement and the importance of listening.
- 4.7 Included in the recent consultation undertaken by the Customer Engagement and Community Development Team (from July 2020 – September 2020) were questions and feedback directly relevant to this strategy.
- 4.8 Here is a summary of key findings and interpretations:
- **58%** of respondents would look for information on Derby Homes services on a website first.
 - **Customers love the newsletter** but find it is out of date by the time it arrives.
 - **Customers would like more information on core services** such as maintenance (38%), Service updates (19%), events in their community (20%), Rent (12%) and Repairs (12%).
 - **Targeting groups** such as using emails and online forums would help obtain views from a wider range backgrounds
 - **58%** of people use their email ‘always’ and ‘often’
 - **45%** of people use the website ‘always’ or ‘often’
 - **43%** of people use social media ‘always’ or ‘often’
 - **Customers want feedback** to feel their views are valued and listened to (47%)

4.9 Online first

These results are encouraging and reinforce the need to ensure all of our services have a strong online offer as the default position. This should be true regardless of any anecdotal arguments that there are groups of people without access to the internet or technology. We accept this will always be the case and will continue to ensure accessibility needs for all customers. This should not stop any progress in providing high-quality, digital-first methods of accessing our services.

4.10 Newsletter frequency

A quarterly newsletter will always have content that is historic. The fast paced nature of the pandemic has made this even more so. We aim to put plans in place to make printed communications more responsive, but also to utilise digital methods to rethink how 'newsletter content' could be delivered in ways that suit the needs of individuals more, whether that be immediate, more frequent or even online only.

4.11 Focusing on the basics

People will only be interested in what affects them. The majority of our communication should be about delivering relevant and timely messages on our core services and things that matter to customers. Wider content on other organisational news and personal interest stories are still of value, but we should always put the customer first when thinking of content.

4.12 Being relevant and inclusive

Delivering messages across all available channels might mean we reach everyone, but people may find it repetitive it could will reduce impact. Using new technology will allow us to tailor, personalise and give customers more choice about which information they receive, how they receive it and how often. It will also mean we reach a wider representation of customers who may have previously been excluded where, for example, face-to-face engagement was the sole means of communicating with us.

4.13 Give feedback, always

If we ask someone what they think, we should thank them and tell them what we've done as a result of that, even if we are not basing a decision on their particular opinion. We must enable teams to close any communication loops they have with those they engage with. We should also ensure we regularly inform our wider customer base on consultations and the decisions we have made.

5. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 None.

IMPLICATIONS

6. CONSULTATION IMPLICATIONS

6.1 This strategy relied on information gathered in a large scale customer consultation, carried out by the Customer Engagement and Community Development Team.

7. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 As part of the above consultation, Derby City Council's Equality and Diversity Networks were approached and asked for their input on the strategy. This has been included as part of the consultation results.
- 7.2 Accessibility regulations mean public sector organisations have a legal duty to make sure their websites and mobile applications meet accessibility requirements. Public sector websites must now be accessible and publish an accessibility statement.

8. POLICY REVIEW IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 This is a key policy of Derby Homes and is included in the Key Policy Review Schedule. In accordance with Derby Homes Board Minute 10/51 this policy will be reviewed no later than 3 years from the date of this meeting.

The areas listed below have no implications directly arising from this report:

Financial and Business Plan
Legal and Confidentiality
Council
Personnel
Environmental
Health & Safety
Risk

For more information please contact:

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Background information: None

List of appendices Appendix 1 – Customer Communication Strategy 2021-2024

This report has been approved by the following

Finance Director	David Enticott	9/11/20
Company Solicitor	Taran Lalria	5/11/20
Head of Service	Lorraine Testro	03/11/20