

# Customer Involvement Strategy 2024 – 2029



### Foreword:

#### Cathy Grant, Board Chairperson

Welcome to Argyll Community Housing Association's Customer Involvement Strategy, covering the period 2024-2029. I am delighted to introduce our vision for customer participation and the associated action plan for the next 5 years.

We recognise that keeping our customers informed and listening to their views is essential to the continuous improvement of our housing services. At the heart of our Customer Involvement Strategy is meeting needs and aspirations. With that in mind, we worked with our Tenant Scrutiny Group "Your Voice" to develop the strategy. We listened to you, our tenants and customers and we hope the strategy reflects the feedback we received.

Thank you to all tenants and customers who have contributed their views and ideas to Argyll Community Housing Association.

# Tenant Approved



#### Jane Lindsay, "Your Voice" Group

The "Your Voice" Group worked in partnership with Argyll Community Housing Association to develop this Customer Involvement Strategy. We reviewed participation practices and together we have produced a strategy and action plan which includes a variety of participation opportunities, how customers will be kept informed and resources to support customers to become engaged.

We are delighted to endorse this strategy and hope that more customers will become involved and share their views.



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### Section 1: Welcome

Argyll Community Housing Association (ACHA) believes that it is essential to consider the views of our customers with regard to the services and housing we provide. The Customer Involvement Strategy has been designed to highlight the range of opportunities to become involved at a level which best suits our customers, explains how participation will be supported and resourced, and sets out the actions that will be taken to ensure the continual development of effective customer participation.

The Customer Involvement Strategy will assist towards achieving our vision of **delivering quality housing and more homes, in great places to live and work**. We will do this in line with our overall objectives of:

- Delivering more homes in great places
- Achieving housing quality & affordable warmth
- Enabling ACHA to be a sustainable business
- Realising the ACHA transformation programme
- Delivering effortless customer experience

The Association's Values underpin the Customer Involvement Strategy:

- **Simplify it-** We believe in streaming how we work to achieve effortless customer experiences
- **Own it-** We believe in being accountable for achieving the right outcome for customers and for ACHA
- Share it- We believe that when we work together anything is possible- we can be creative and achieve great things
- **Go for it-** We believe in each other and through trust we are empowered to push boundaries and achieve excellence

#### Section 2: Developing the Strategy

- ACHA took part in the Scottish Government's Next Steps Programme. Outcomes from these sessions were used to develop this strategy.
- ACHA's Tenant Participation Strategy was identified for review and our tenant scrutiny group "Your Voice" agreed tenant participation as an area for scrutiny due to lower satisfaction levels. The Group were independently supported by the Tenant Information Service (TIS) who are experts in housing, community development, and engagement practice.
- We reviewing ACHA's Tenant Participation Strategy, tenant participation and scrutiny activities and current legislation surrounding tenant participation.
- We researched other landlords' Tenant Participation and Customer Involvement Strategies to determine good practice and learn from their objectives and achievements.
- We discussed what ACHA does well and what could be improved to further develop customer involvement.
- The "Your Voice" Group carried out consultation with ACHA tenants to seek their views on different participation opportunities.
- We carried out Tenant and Owner Satisfaction Surveys during the summer of 2023 with 1011 tenants and 105 Factored Owners being interviewed. Their feedback was used to identify gaps, opportunities and barriers to participation.
- We now wish to give all customers and other stakeholders the opportunity to give their views on our plans and the draft Customer Involvement Strategy before it is finalised.

Key achievements through the life of our previous strategy:

- ✓ The "Your Voice" Tenant Scrutiny Group continued to carry out successful service investigations and reviews. To date 81 out of 87 recommendations of their recommendations for service improvements have been approved by ACHA's Board of Management. The "Your Voice" Group won three awards for their dedication and commitment to improving the services delivers to ACHA tenants. These awards are:
  - Most Inspiring Scrutiny Newcomer Award at the Tenant Information Services (TIS) National Excellence Awards 2018.
  - Excellence in Tenant Scrutiny Award at the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Scotland Housing Awards 2023.
  - Excellence in Scrutiny Danny Mullen Award at the Tenant Information Service (TIS) National Excellence Awards 2023.



- ✓ We developed and delivered our 10/10/10 initiative which invests £10,000 per year for 10 years in 10 schools in Argyll and Bute. We work in partnership with Argyll and Bute Council to support young people in particular areas where there are clearly identified needs.
- We worked in partnership with primary schools in Argyll & Bute in relation to naming and opening ceremonies for new build properties.
- We built partnerships with High Schools and the University of Highlands and Islands to provide work experience and apprentice opportunities to local young people.
- ✓ Volunteers from ACHA's subsidiary, Argyll Homes for All helped with improvement work to the grounds of Stramash Outdoor Nursery in Oban (pictured on the front page).
- ✓ We invested money into our communities through our Community Action Fund which is a small fund used to make donations to registered charitable organisations with connections to housing or our Aims & Objectives. Awards of up to £500 were made to local charities.
- We continue to work with our Gypsy/Traveller tenants, seeking their views on key improvements to their sites and their feedback will be used when making funding bids in the future.
- ✓ We delivered conferences to tenants and members from across Argyll & Bute to share their views and ideas on ACHA services and influence our decisions.
- ✓ We continued to promote our Garden in Bloom, Sunflower competition and Good Neighbour Award.
- ✓ We increased the use of social media to engage with our customers.
- ✓ ACHAs Board of Management approved a £40,000 grant assistance fund for tenants experiencing financial hardship between January and March 2022.
- ✓ We sourced and received funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, to help 373 tenants who were struggling with the cost of living crisis by purchasing various items to help those tenants reduce their energy and heating costs such as air fryers and warm bedding.

# **Customer Views**

"Being part of the Your Voice Group is a great way to work with ACHA for the better of tenants. If you get involved, you will make a difference."

Robert Beggs

"ACHA's Community Action Fund has been vital in enabling Route 81 Youth Project the opportunity to provide a varied and young person led programme of events."

Michelle MacDonald, Route 81 Youth Project

"Everyone is allowed to participate with freedom."

Betty Rhodick

During the sessions with the "Your Voice" tenant scrutiny group, through a survey undertaken by the "Your Voice" Group with tenants and through participation in our 2023 satisfaction surveys you told us:

- 97% of tenants are of the opinion that ACHA is either very good or fairly good at keeping them informed about services and decisions.
- 70% of factored owners are of the opinion that ACHA is very good or fairly good at keeping them informed about their service and decisions. Many owners felt that they were not receiving enough communication from the Association in relation to planned and cyclical maintenance.
- Most customers preferred to be kept informed by written communications such as letter, email and newsletters.
- Many of our customers are communicating digitally using apps on their smart phones and live chats on websites. Digital communications such as the website, social media, text messaging and email are most likely preferred by younger customers, with very few customers aged 75 and over preferring to use these types of communication.
- Many customers have poor or no internet connection, with a number of customers choosing not to access the internet.
- 99% of tenants are either very or fairly satisfied with the opportunities provided to them to participate in ACHA's decision making process.

- Tenants were interested in new ways of getting involved through focus groups, becoming community champions, taking part in quality circles and editorial panels.
- ACHA's "Your Voice" Tenant Scrutiny Group would like to be involved in staff training with regards to customer involvement.
- Argyll & Bute is a large geographical area which includes urban, rural and islands communities, therefore, it is not always easy for customers to engage together in person.
- Public transport systems can be poor especially for rural and islands communities.
- The Association should account for the time and costs of travelling across a large geographical area.
- Customers who live in island communities face additional challenges with ferry times which may require overnight accommodation.
- Consideration should be given to holding smaller events in the East and West to reduce travel time for customers rather than holding one large event.
- ACHA should increase customer awareness of the Association's positive work within communities and its achievements.

# Section 3: Legal Rights to Tenant Participation

**The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001** introduced a legal framework for Tenant Participation. It sets out that tenants have the right to form independent representative associations, access information about housing policies, be consulted on issues that affect them and participate in decisions that affect the services they receive. Tenants must be given adequate time to fully consider proposals. The Act places a legal duty on ACHA to produce a Tenant Participation Strategy which complies with equal opportunities requirements. ACHA must also maintain a register of Residents and Tenants Organisations (RTOs) and consult individual tenants, tenants' groups and RTOs on proposals for housing management, the standards of service and the Tenant Participation Strategy.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter (The Charter) was introduced in 2010 in the Scottish Parliament. The right to adequate housing is a human right in international law. The Charter supports this right by setting the standards and outcomes that social landlords should achieve for their tenants and other customers by delivering good quality homes and services. The Charter has specific standards and outcomes regarding equalities, communication and participation. Click here to view the Scottish Social Housing Charter: https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-housing-charter-november-2022/

Each year ACHA must complete an Annual Return on the Charter to the Scottish Housing Regulator and report on its performance against the Charter annually to tenants.

**Tenant Scrutiny** was introduced by the Charter. There is a requirement for tenants to be actively involved in the Landlord's self-assessment process. The aim is to improve organisational performance and the quality and standard of services that they provide for their tenants. ACHA's Tenant Scrutiny Group is called the "Your Voice".

The **Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015** sets the National Standards for Community Engagement and the values that provide the basis for successful community engagement. To find out more, click here: <a href="https://www.gov.scot/publications/community-empowerment-scotland-act-summary/">https://www.gov.scot/publications/community-empowerment-scotland-act-summary/</a>.

The **Equality Act 2010** re-enforced and promoted equal opportunities in Scottish housing. The Act requires landlords to approach Tenant Participation in a manner that encourages equal opportunities and observes equal opportunity requirements laid out in the Act. To find out more about the Equality Act 2010, click here: <u>https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act-2010/what-equality-act</u>

An **Equalities Impact Assessment** was carried out when developing this strategy to make sure that we do not discriminate against anyone and uphold equal opportunities in the work that we do.

**Including All Customers -** ACHA recognises that while our statutory duty is to provide participation opportunities to social rented tenants, we are committed to ensuring participation opportunities are available to all of our customers.

**ACHA Policies and Strategies -** Customer Involvement is dependent on ACHA's polices, strategies and performance. To view all of ACHA policies and strategies, click here: <u>https://www.acha.co.uk/news-policies/</u>

#### **Section 4: Our Ambition and Principles**

Our **Ambition** is to encourage more customers to engage effectively and help us to challenge, change and improve how we operate and deliver services.

Customer involvement is a two way process which involves the sharing of information, ideas and power. Through our strategy, we aim to meet and exceed the legal requirement expected of social landlords and encourage all customers to participate and influence decisions at a level which best suits them. To help us achieve this we have the following strategy outcomes:

1. Continuously develop ways of improving communication and information sharing to meet the needs of all customers.

- 2. Consult effectively with our customers and take account of their views before making decisions.
- 3. Raise awareness of customer involvement opportunities and create more opportunities to be involved.
- 4. Providing resources, support, and training to assist customers to get involved.
- 5. Monitoring implementation of the Customer Involvement Strategy.

Our Principles are in line with good practice:

- 1. **Customer Choice** We will give customers a variety of involvement opportunities to choose from and at a level that best suits them.
- 2. **Easy Access** We will continually work to ensure that engagement opportunities are easy to access for all customers.
- 3. **Equal Opportunities** We will ensure equal opportunities for everyone to get involved in a way that suits their needs and location.
- 4. **Kept Informed** We will report on the results of all consultations and keep customers informed regarding our services.
- 5. Listen before decisions- We will seek and listen to customers before making decisions.
- 6. **Partnership** We will work to build trust, respect, and partnership with our customers and communities.
- 7. **Resource and Support** Provide adequate resources, support, and training to encourage customer involvement.

#### Section 5: How You Can Get Involved

One of our Strategy Outcomes is to raise awareness of customer involvement opportunities and create more opportunities to be involved. There are many different ways in which customers can become more involved and feel empowered.

Being involved gives customers the chance to be active in shaping ACHA services, meet new people, and gain useful skills. Customers can choose to get involved in a way which best suits their lifestyle as shown in the table below:

#### Become a Member of ACHA

Membership of ACHA is open to anyone over the age of 18. The '£1 for life' membership entitles you to vote at ACHA's Annual General Meeting including the right to vote on the elections to the Board of Management (you may also put yourself forward to be elected onto ACHA's Board).

#### **Consultation Events**

Consultation events can be held in person or online to seek views. They can be large scale events for all customers or more localised events for people in a specific community, for example where new houses or planned improvement works are being proposed or customer conferences.

#### Estate Walkabouts

Estate Walkabouts are jointly carried out by tenants, owners, members of our "Getting Involved" groups and ACHA officers to identify areas for improvement within their neighbourhoods and communities.

#### Feedb@ck Forum

Our Feedb@ck Forum is collection of individual tenants who have expressed an interest in being involved in housing service consultations from the comfort of their own home.

#### **Focus Groups**

Focus Groups are usually, time limited groups made up of tenants, officers, and service providers coming together to address specific policy or service issues.

#### **Registered Tenant Organisations (RTO)**

Registered Tenant Organisation (RTO) is an independent organisations who has applied to become registered with a landlord and meets certain conditions which have been set down in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. RTOs have come together to represent the tenants housing interests and or communities for all residents. They are supported with an annual grant and offered development support. ACHA currently have one RTO called Dalintober and Millknowe Tenants & Residents Association.

#### **Tenants & Residents Associations (TRA)**

TRA members work together to improve housing and environmental standards in their neighbourhood and increase a sense of community. We encourage TRA's to apply to become Registered Tenant Organisations.

#### **Social Media**

Provide your views on ACHA's Facebook page providing your views on recent performance, news or proposals.

#### **Surveys and Questionnaires**

Surveys and questionnaires are used to seek views on our services, policies, or proposals.

#### "Your Voice" - Scrutiny Group

The "Your Voice" Group have a key role in evaluating ACHA's services, assessing performance and working with us to achieve change. The group have undertaken many scrutiny projects including reviewing ACHA letting standard, estate management and the repairs and maintenance service.

Contact **0800 028 2755** or email <u>communications@acha.co.uk</u> if you would like to get involved or find out more.

### Section 6: What We Will Do

We aim to ensure the continued development of customer involvement and participation. We plan to do this in partnership with our customers under the following Strategy Outcomes and Key Objectives:

# Outcome 1- Continuously develop ways of improving communication and information sharing to meet the needs of all customers

#### Key Objectives:

- Contact customers using their preferred method of communication.
- Further develop use of digital techniques to increase range of ways customers can receive information and respond to consultation.
- Ensure that good quality, accessible information is developed in a range of formats to meet customers' needs.
- Provide time for customers to review information and respond to any proposals.
- Provide opportunities for customers to speak to our staff to give their views and provide assistance where required.
- Provide effective feedback to customers on consultation outcomes, agreed actions and our progress.

# Outcome 2- Consult effectively with our customers and take account of their views before making decisions

#### Key Objectives:

- Encourage customers to engage and get involved with ACHA in a way that best suits them.
- Listen to our customers, taking account of their views, and acting upon feedback.
- Show customers how we make decisions and how their involvement influences what we do.

#### **Outcome 3- Raise awareness of customer involvement opportunities**

#### Key Objectives:

• Increase the number of tenants and other customers who actively participate from across all communities we serve.

- Provide a range of ways for customers to easily get involved.
- Support and develop our tenant scrutiny group.
- Work with our customers to improve their communities and local services.

#### Section 7: Resources and Support

We recognise that to fully support customer involvement it is vital that adequate resources are made available, to do this we have developed the following Strategy Outcome and Key Objectives:

# Outcome 4- Providing resources, support, and training to assist customers to get involved

#### **Key Objectives:**

- Provide funding and resources required to deliver the Customer Involvement Strategy.
- Provide funding and support to the development of current and new registered tenants' groups.
- Seek potential funding streams in order to develop customer involvement activities.
- Provide training and support to ensure customers have the skills, knowledge, and confidence to participate.
- Ensure that customer participation is a key part of all staff's role, and that staff are trained and supported to ensure that customer participation is an integral part of service delivery and policy development.

# Section 8: Monitoring Our Success

The Customer Involvement Strategy is a working document subject to ongoing monitoring and review to ensure key objectives and targets are met. We have developed the following Strategy Outcome:

**Outcome 5- Monitoring implementation of the Customer Involvement Strategy** We will review the Customer Involvement Strategy Action Plan implementation by establishing a joint staff and customer review group to meet twice per year, by reporting Strategy progress to ACHA's Board and customers annually and we will carry out a full Strategy review in 2029.

# Note: Timescales within action plan will be added following full consultation with our customers

# Appendix 1: Action Plan

Key Objectives:	evelop ways of improving communication and information Actions we will take:	Lead Officer:	Timescales:
Contact customers using their preferred method of	Develop programme to update customer communication preferences.	Customer Service Centre/Factoring Officer	
communication.	Send information to customers using their preferred communication methods.	All ACHA Group staff	
Further develop use of digital techniques to	Develop text messaging to inform and increase communication to customers	IT Manager	
increase range of ways customers can receive information and respond to	Promote and further develop Customer Portal for customers to receive and respond to information and manage service user accounts.	Community Development Manager	
consultation.	Develop live chat facilities for customers to respond to consultation	IT Manager/ Customer Service Centre	
Ensure that good quality, accessible information is developed in a range of	In consultation with customers ensure we are inclusive of all by providing information in other languages and accessible formats including digital and paper formats.	All ACHA Group staff	
formats to meet customers' needs.	Ensure that when engaging with customers any meetings are accessible, convenient and secure for everyone, including people with mobility issues.	All ACHA Group staff	
	Work in partnership with factored owners to improve communication and ensure that they are being kept informed about ACHA services.	Factoring Officer	
Provide time for customers to review information and respond to any proposals.	Ensure where possible that customers are given at least 28 days to respond to consultations.	All ACHA Group staff	
Provide opportunities for customers to speak to our staff to give their views and	Ensure that customer are aware that their feedback can be provided in a variety of ways and assistance can be provided by ACHA staff.	All ACHA Group staff	

provide assistance where required.			
Provide effective feedback	Develop six monthly performance report to include "You	Community Development	
to customers on	said", "We are listening" action which should be included in	Manager	
consultation outcomes,	newsletters.		
agreed actions and our	Include "getting involved" good news articles in all	Community Development	
progress.	newsletters.	Manager	

progress.	newsletters.	Manager	
Outcome 2 - Consult effective	ly with our customers and take account of their views bef	ore making decisions	
Key Objectives:	Actions we will take:	Lead Officer:	Timescales:
Encourage customers to engage and get involved with ACHA in a way that best	Create campaign to promote all participation and scrutiny opportunities, agreed by tenants including new opportunities to participate.	Community Development Manager	
suits them.	Consideration to be given to offering incentives for participation when completing surveys or consultations.	Community Development Manager	
Listen to our customers, taking account of their	Carry out satisfaction surveys, report on feedback received and actions.	Community Development Manager	
views, and acting upon feedback.	Report on Complaints, Suggestions, and Compliments Feedback and action taken.	Corporate Services	
	Consult on changes to and the development of policies and service delivery.	All ACHA Group staff	
Show customers how we make decisions and how their involvement influences	Develop Business Plan consultation opportunities regarding tenant and other customer's needs, priorities and rental impacts.	Board/Senior Management Team	
what we do.	Work with our customers to produce and publish an annual performance report in line with the Scottish Social Housing Charter called "ACHA's Landlord Report".	ACHA Communications Group	

Key Objectives:	Actions we will take:	Lead Officer:	Timescales:
Increase the number of tenants and other customers who actively	Increase Factored Owners participation and consider new involvement opportunities such as a Factored Owners Forum	Factoring Officer	
participate from across all communities we serve.	Increasing young people's awareness of housing and involvement opportunities by working in partnership with schools and partners.	Community Development Manager	
	Consider further Sheltered Housing participation opportunities and promote existing involvement opportunities within complexes. Identify local community events where ACHA could interact with traditionally 'hard to reach' customers Identify local community groups or events where ACHA can promote customer involvement with the Association Consider holding conferences in the East and West to increase participation.	Sheltered Housing Manager/Community Development Manager Community Development Manager Community Development Manager Manager	
Provide a range of ways for customers to easily get involved.	Identify ways to increase ACHA membership. Explore further new involvement opportunities identified through consultation to ensure no duplication or overlaps with current groups and to consider way to maximise impacts whilst being fully inclusive. Focus Groups, Community Champions, Mystery Shopping, Quality Circles and Editorial Panel	Corporate Services Community Development Manager	
Support and develop our tenant scrutiny group	Raise awareness of participation advantages and successes. Continue to support the development and work of the "Your Voice" group to review services, recommend improvements and agree implementation timescales.	Community Development Manager Community Development Manager	

Work with our customers to improve their communities	Continue supporting the 10/10/10 initiative and ensure it is promoted to all schools across Argyll & Bute.	Corporate Services
and local services.	Continue to promote the Community Action Fund.	Corporate Services
	Continue to host annual Garden in Bloom, Sunflower and Good Neighbour Award competitions Consider allowing ACHA Group staff time to carry out voluntary work within communities. This could be group projects working with charities or schools to improve communities.	Community Development Manager/Housing Teams Board/Senior Management Team
	communities.	

Outcome 4 - Providing resour	ces, support, and training to assist customers to get invo	lved	
Key Objectives:	Actions we will take:	Lead Officer:	Timescales:
Provide funding and resources required to deliver the Customer Involvement Strategy	Keep under review the level of funding and resources required to deliver the Customer Involvement Strategy in partnership with customers and reflective of the strategic business plan, current legislation and regulation requirements.	Community Development Manager	
	Consider barriers to customer involvement and ensure that budgets are used make it easier for all customers to participate.	Community Development Manager	
Provide funding and support to the development of current and new registered	Support communities and TRA's to apply for RTO grant funding and prepare up to date guidance for setting up RTOs.	Community Development Manager	
tenants' groups.	Use funding to promote RTO's to increase awareness of local concerns and encourage joint working between tenants and owners.	Community Development Manager	
	Support RTO's to apply for external funding where appropriate to improve their communities. Maintain RTO register.	Community Development Manager Community Development Manager	

Provide training and support to ensure customers have the skills, knowledge, and confidence to participate.Provision of customer training and support, including delivery of in -house and independent opportunities.Community Development ManagerEnsure that customer participation is a key part of all staff's role, and that staff are trained and supported toDevelop a customer involvement training programme for staff with "Your Voice" Tenant Scrutiny Group.Community Development Manager	
participation is a key part of all staff's role, and that staffstaff with "Your Voice" Tenant Scrutiny Group.Manager	
ensure that customer participation is an integral part of service delivery and policy development.	

Key Objectives:	Actions we will take:	Lead Officer:	Timescales:
Review the Customer	Establish a joint staff & customer review group to meet	Community Development	
Involvement Strategy Action	twice per year.	Manager/ Factoring Officer	
Plan Implementation			
-	Report Customer Involvement Strategy progress to	Community Development	
	ACHA's Board and customers annually.	Manager	
	Full Review of Customer Involvement Strategy to be	Community Development	
	carried out in 2029.	Manager	

# Appendix 2: Useful Contact Details

Argyll Community Housing Association Ltd Phone: 0800 028 2755 Email: <u>communications@acha.co.uk</u>

Tenant Priorities Team, Scottish Government Phone: 0131 244 5568 Email: tpadminsupport@gov.scot

Tenants Information Service (TIS) Phone: 0141 248 1242 Email: <u>info@tis.org.uk</u>

Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) Scotland Phone: 0141 552 3633 Email: enguiries@tpasscotland.org.uk

Scottish Housing Regulator Phone: 0141 242 5642 Email: <u>shr@shr.gov.scot</u>

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Phone: 0800 377 7330 Complete Online Form: <u>www.spso.org.uk</u>