



# Longhurst Group Customer Forum

Annual Review

2023-2024

## Introduction

As Vice-Chair of the Customer Forum, I present this annual review to the valued customer base, dedicated officers and esteemed board of the Longhurst Group.

The Longhurst Group Customer Forum (LGCF) is an essential component of the business, dedicated to ensuring that the voice of the customer is heard.

The housing sector is seeing a greater emphasis placed by the government and regulatory bodies on making sure that the customers are listened to by their housing provider.

The LGCF are now familiar with the new standards and inspection regime that the RSH has set out to ensure that tenants are protected and improve the service they receive.

We are professional and courteous in our interactions with all parties, while diligently seeking answers to our questions.

We are determined to ensure that the Group are held accountable for their decisions and actions, maintaining transparency and honesty, at all times.

We will challenge any performance that falls below the standards customers expect and ask for an explanation of the steps the Group will take to rectify the situation.

At the heart of the LGCF is a team of dedicated volunteers, each bringing a wide range of skills and experience.

Working together, we can make significant strides in improving the lives of the customers into 2025 and beyond.

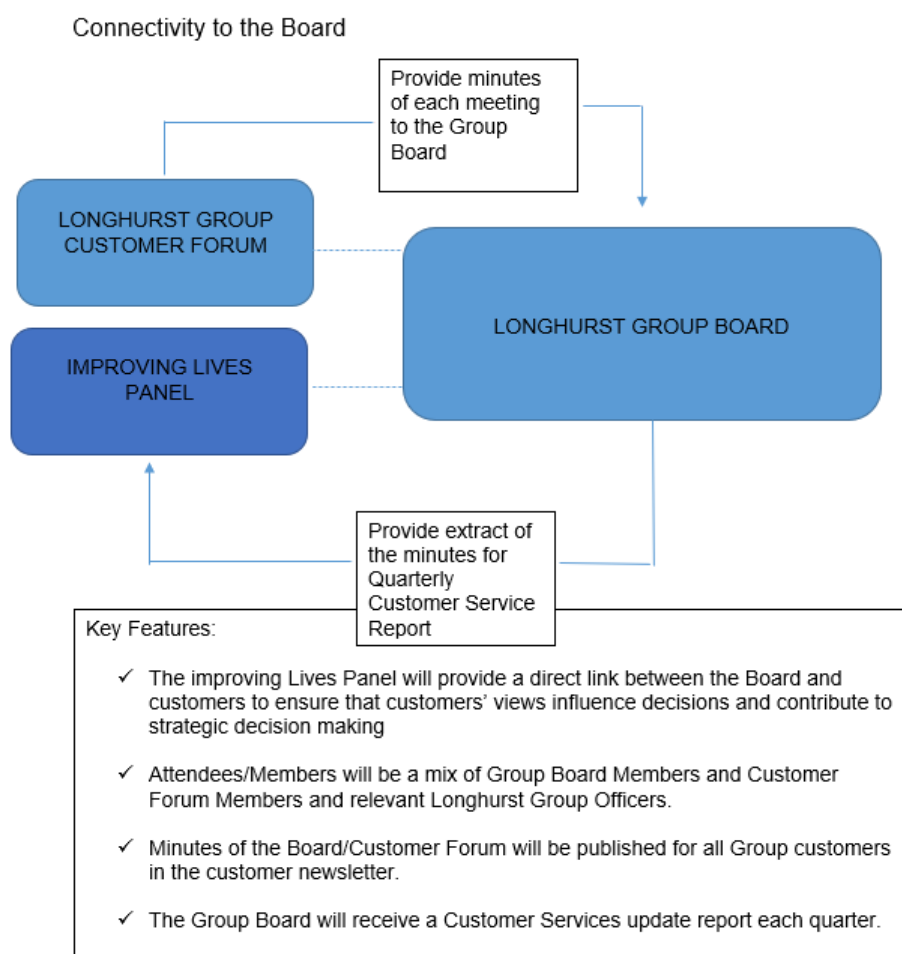
I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all LGCF members for their invaluable contribution and dedicated time.

**Jennifer Anderson, Vice-Chair**

# The Customer Forum

The Longhurst Group Customer Forum support the Group Board by providing customer-based assurance that the consumer standards of the 'Regulatory Regime for Social Housing in England' are being met.

As part of a co-regulatory approach, the Customer Forum ensures the Group is fulfilling its strategic vision.



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## Our achievements as a Forum

The Forum has reflected on its achievements over the last 12 months and revisited its aspirations for 2023 to evaluate the progress made.

We've had a watchful eye on the **repairs service** and, through regular updates and discussions with the Executive Team, we've seen the rollout of an Intensive Recovery Plan and the 5 for 25 initiative.

This included the onboarding of tier 2 contractors to support the existing three main contractors. We've since seen improvements in the number of works in progress, the volume of active repairs and the reduction of active and overdue complaints. We'll continue to monitor the situation, until it meets the expected standard.

Early in the year, the Forum met with the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) Programme Manager to find out how the Group is ensuring that the target of EPC rating of band C by 2030 is achieved, reducing carbon emissions and lowering bills.

We asked questions about how the Group intend to utilise the fund to upgrade existing homes.

In addition to this session, the Vice Chair of the Customer Forum had an opportunity to find out more in relation to the accreditation of ground source and air source heat pumps and any issues with noise levels. The Forum has a keen interest in how this environmental work is progressing and the results of surveys conducted to gain customer feedback.

The Forum commissioned a piece of work for the Scrutiny Team who are reviewing **communication** and responsiveness of the Group and its contractors. This review is now complete and a report with actions and recommendations will be presented to colleagues and Forum members imminently. The results will also be shared widely with customers on The Hub and monitored by the Forum.

**Customer Engagement** was strengthened with the introduction of The Hub - the Group's online customer community - in addition to the existing panels. We've seen more customers get involved and give valuable feedback to help improve services provided by the Group.

During 2023, Forum members met with the co-ordinator for policies. We now meet senior leaders at the beginning of the policy review process to input into the consultation questions and help decide what information will be shared with customers.

The Forum receives performance information, for example repairs numbers, number of empty homes, call handling and complaints handling compared to the target. Forum members met with those responsible for tackling damp and mould and compared the Housing Ombudsman code to the Group's working practices.

The Forum has called for Customer Scrutiny on two occasions in 2023/24.

We use a matrix to decide on the topics we'll select for scrutiny and use this framework to prioritise topics for review.

The Scrutiny Team completed a review into the current Grounds Maintenance service and made recommendations that were included in the procurement exercise for a new improved service.

The second review on communication was recently completed and the results will be shared in June 2024.

The Customer Forum welcomes feedback from all Group customers, whether it be on The Hub, through membership on a panel, by completing text, email and telephone surveys or by joining a panel.

The topics covered in meetings were as follows:

<b>February 2023</b>	Q3 Performance dashboard Introduction from Jenny Brown, Group Board Chair Customer experience update including satisfaction, customer complaints and customer engagement damp and mould update
<b>May 2023</b>	Q4 Performance dashboard Customer experience update including satisfaction, customer complaints and customer engagement

	Scrutiny Team: Grounds maintenance project (final report) Customer Scrutiny Review monitoring – Together with Tenants
<b>August 2022</b>	Q1 Performance dashboard Improving Lives Panel Update 5 For 25 Summary Customer experience update including satisfaction, customer complaints and customer engagement Health & Safety Annual Report Annual Asset Compliance Report
<b>November 2022</b>	Q2 Performance dashboard Customer experience update including satisfaction, customer complaints and customer engagement Estates Services procurement update Housing Regulator - proposed consumer standards Customer Insight Report - Estate Services

Policy reports are presented to Forum members to provide assurance that customers have been consulted prior to the development of the policy and that their recommendations have been considered.

Policies approved during 2023/24:

- Income Management Policy
- Lettings Policy
- Starter Tenancy Policy
- Mutual Exchange Policy
- Transfer Policy

In addition to policies, the Forum provided assurance on customer involvement in the procurement of the new grounds maintenance provision.

- Members attended spotlight sessions on the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM), the disrepair process and the stock condition programme.
- Training was provided on the consumer standards and the New Tenant Satisfaction measures

Opportunity is given to escalate areas of concern to the Board which we haven't had to do.

## Continuous improvement

Members were introduced to a new training portal to complete annual and ad-hoc training relevant to the role.

Members confirmed they wish to continue the subscription to 'Inside Housing' magazine to keep up-to-date with housing debates, current affairs and legislation.

## Our aspirations for 2024

### Repairs service

For the Group to be able to complete all elements of routine repairs in the stated timescales, to the satisfaction of customers.

To deliver annual gas servicing in a way that suits both the customer and for the Group to improve access and customer satisfaction.

### Communication

An improvement in the way the Group communicates with all customers and with each other to improve the customer experience.

Training for staff and contractors to work in line with the expected standards of customer care.

### Grounds maintenance

Improved and enhanced service with new contractors in place. Improved customer satisfaction.

### Equality and diversity

To meet the needs of disabled customers and gain a better understanding of the needs of customers.

### Sustainability

Further steps to construct the whole Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) framework. To receive progress reports on the implementation of the ESG reporting software for measuring the sustainability and ethical impact of the Group's operations.

Providing evidence of their commitment to reducing risks and complying with future environmental legislation.

### Customer Engagement

A focus on leasehold engagement and to apply for TPAS accreditation. The Forum believes this will motivate and acknowledge the engagement work that the Group do.

## Membership of the Customer Forum

The Forum is looking for three new members to bring us to our full complement of 12 members.

- We would like to recruit from a diverse range of groups, so we are representing as many customers as possible.
- We have enabled current members to access meetings and information by providing used laptops. We could extend this, where possible, to ensure customers can get involved regardless of their personal situation.



## Appendix A

### Longhurst Group Customer Forum - Terms of Reference

**Purpose** The Longhurst Group Customer Forum will support the Longhurst Group Board by providing customer-based assurance that the consumer standards of the 'Regulatory Regime for Social Housing in England' are being met; and that service delivery is in line with the Group's strategic vision.

**Responsibilities** The Forum will develop and maintain a strong and influential relationship with the Group Board to ensure that they work together effectively.

The Forum will contribute to the assurance of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard and aspects of other consumer standards as deemed appropriate.

It will do this by:

- Ensuring that the customer involvement structure delivers on the consultation and review of landlord services
- Monitoring Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) from the Group's Performance Management Framework along with other information identified through customer feedback and insight.
- Identifying areas of customer assurance and escalating areas of customer non-assurance with the consumer standards to the Group Board.
- Agree a programme of scrutiny reviews that are linked to service performance and customers' priorities using the defined matrix.
- Monitor the implementation and outcomes of service, scrutiny and policy reviews
- Produce an annual review, to be reported to the Group Board and to all Longhurst Group customers and staff, detailing the impact of its activities.
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**Operating protocols** The Forum will produce formal minutes of each meeting, including items for escalation, which will be reviewed by the Group Board.

In addition, the Forum will follow a documented protocol which will include

- A scheme of understanding with the Group Board
- Communication and reporting protocol with the Group Board

- Code of Conduct and Confidentiality statement

#### Membership

- The Forum will consist of a maximum of 12 eligible members.
- Individual members will be appointed for a period of three years.
- Members can voluntarily resign at any time during their tenure.
- If a Forum member ceases to be a Group customer, they must resign from the Forum.
- Members will serve no more than two consecutive terms of three years.
- Members can be asked to step down without notice if they are seen to be in breach of the Code of Conduct

#### Quorum

At least five or more members must be present at a meeting for it to be quorate (considered valid).

#### Meetings

The Forum will meet monthly; to include four performance meetings, three spotlight sessions and two training sessions and any other meetings that are deemed necessary.  
All members are expected to be fully prepared for all meetings.

#### Attendance

Longhurst Group will monitor attendance at the Forum through the meeting minutes.

Failure of a Forum member to attend three consecutive meetings, without providing a reasonable reason, will be investigated by the Forum Chair, in conjunction with the Customer Engagement and Experience Manager. Failure to attend might result in the member being asked to step down from their role.

#### Chair and Vice Chair

The appointment of the Chair and Vice Chair will be made following expressions of interest and through a voting process by the members of the Forum only.  
Both appointments can be for up to a period of three years with succession planning identified after two years of tenure.

#### Support and Servicing

The Forum will be supported by the Director of Housing and Customer Service.

The Forum will also be supported by the required level of staff and other resources to ensure it can operate effectively.

<b>Applications and Appointments</b>	<p>All Group customers are eligible to apply for vacancies (Subject to eligibility as detailed in the person specification).</p> <p>Applicants will be interviewed for vacancies by the Chair, Vice Chair and Customer Engagement and Experience Manager.</p>
<b>Review of effectiveness</b>	<p>The Forum will, on an annual basis, review its effectiveness by reviewing the key achievements and impact of its work and reporting these to the Group Board and Group customers.</p>
<b>Training and Development</b>	<p>Forum members will be required to complete training to ensure their skills and knowledge enables them to effectively carry out their role. Equality and diversity and GDPR training must be completed annually.</p> <p>New appointees will be required to complete induction training.</p>
<b>Annual Appraisal</b>	<p>Forum members will be required to participate in a reflection meeting with the Forum Chair and the Customer Engagement and Experience Manager. Once completed, feedback will be discussed with Vice Chair and a training programme will be developed.</p>
<b>Equality and Diversity</b>	<p>The Customer Forum encourages fair and equal treatment for all, regardless of race, colour, ethnic or national origin, religion, gender, physical or mental disability, appearance, political affiliation, sexuality, age or class.</p> <p>The Forum will identify obstacles that may prevent customers from contributing to its work, and find the means to remove those obstacles.</p> <p>The Forum will annually review membership with the aim of creating a body that is representative of the diverse communities in which the Group operates.</p> <p>Forum members will abide by the Group’s policies on equality and diversity and complete equality and diversity training as part of their induction training; followed by annual update training.</p>
<b>Confidentiality</b>	<p>Members of the Forum will have access to information, which will be of a sensitive or confidential nature. Any information shared as part of the Forum’s meetings that is of a confidential nature must not be disclosed to anyone outside of the meeting.</p>

Forum members will be required to sign the Code of Conduct and confidentiality statements as part of their appointment.

**Review of  
Terms of Ref-  
erence**

The Group, the Forum Chair and Vice Chair will initially review these Terms of Reference after one year of operation to ensure they are fit for purpose and annually thereafter.

## Appendix B

### The Customer Forum membership 2023/24

Member	Region	Tenure
Jennifer Anderson	South	Tenant
John Cole	East	Freeholder
Marie Linford	East	Tenant
Angela Ryan	West	Tenant
Sinead Safford	South	Tenant
Fiona Murphy	South	Tenant
Gina Lawless	South	Tenant
Jane Bills	West	Tenant
Terry White	East	Shared owner
Valerie Bunting	East	Lease holder
Francis Hudson	East	Tenant
Tina Claridge	East	Tenant
Malcolm Fielder	East	Tenant
Bev Martin	South	Leaseholder