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**Customer Involvement guide**

**“there’s so many ways to get involved !”**

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2. **Hello and welcome to getting involved !**

Welcome to the new guide to getting involved. It doesn’t matter whether…

* You’re a tenant, leaseholder or shared owner
* Living where we have homes as a owner or private tenant
* You’re working full time, part time or unemployed
* You live in one of our towns or rural communities
* You’re young or old
* You’re fit and active or have problems with disability or mobility

Whatever your situation we have a way for you and your family to play an active part in your community and tell us where we need to improve our services. We will provide transport, child care and support to help you volunteer to become involved so don’t worry if these things might be a problem.

We want to hear your views, we want you to influence how we spend money in your neighbourhoods and most of all we want you feel valued as a customer and feel your views matter.

We have an ambition to have 10% of all customers actively involved in giving their views and helping to shape our business. We know this is ambitious  when you consider that this adds up to more than  3,000 households. However, we are up for this challenge if you are. We even have a name for this collective group of involved people. It’s called the “Customer Voice” and we would love you to be part of it

Whatever you choose to become involved in, you will receive a training to enable you to fully participate. This can enhance your skills which you can use for life and work.

This guide will help you decide which way is best for you, and will inspire - to make a difference in your own way.

Details of who to contact to get involved are at the back of this document

1. **Making a difference where you live**

**Neighbourhood Committees**

**What do they do?**

If you’re passionate about improving the way we work in your neighbourhoods then Neighbourhood Committees could be for you. You will receive reports on local issues and the Neighbourhood plans for your area, and get a chance to influence how we spend money improving where you live. We want your views as a customer on how we can improve services locally and what is happening, so we can address local issues and make you proud of where you live. Neighbourhoods Committees might contain residents from a number of Neighbourhoods and can cover an area as large as Hartlepool, or part of Middlesbrough or Stockton.

**How much time does it involve?**

Neighbourhood Committees will meet once every three months, but you may get involved in between, in smaller groups, if you wish, as we work together making changes your local Committee has agreed are best for your Neighbourhood. Meetings will usually last about three hours.

**Where do they meet?**

Meetings will take place in centres in your Neighbourhood

**Who can join the Committees?**

The Neighbourhood Committee will be made up of tenants, residents leaseholders and private tenants from different parts of your Neighbourhood, and may include people from other landlords too who live in your area. They may include local agencies working in your area such as community safety, health, education and the Council. Numbers will be limited to 20 per Committee.

**Neighbourhood Auditors**

**What do they do?**

As a Neighbourhood Auditor you will check that the standards and promises made to you by your landlord, reporting on the quality and standard of services delivered. This might include standards of grass cutting and grounds maintenance, cleaning of flats and communal areas and the general appearance of the estate or area where you live. You can also comment from your armchair, on what you see outside and send in your views. You can choose one or more of these activities to be involved in

**How much time does it involve?**

Working as part of a team with other residents you will carry out your inspections once a month or when the service has just been delivered and can be involved in some or all of the tasks mentioned above. Inspections can last from as little as an hour (inspection of communal areas in flats and grass cutting) to up to two hours (estate walkabout).

**Where do they meet?**

Depending on what you’re doing they could meet in your block, or in different parts of your estate or neighbourhood, or you could send in your comments from your armchair by e mail or by post.

**Who can be an Auditor ?**

Anyone who lives in our home, on our estates or in our Neighbourhoods. We have no limit on the number of customers who can be involved in these activities.

**Tenant and Resident Associations**

**What do they do?**

Residents Associations have been active in some neighbourhoods for many years. They act as a support network for very local issues. They are independent of the landlord, but we support them financially, provide meeting rooms and training to ensure their success.

**How much time does it involve?**

Resident Associations usually meet once a month for two to three hours

**Where do they meet?**

They usually meet at Community centre or local buildings

If you want to know if there is an active Association in your neighbourhood, why not contact us? If you want to set up a local Association, please do contact us.

**Who can be on a Resident Association?**

Anyone can be on one as long as you live in the area the Association represents. We encourage Resident Association members to send a representative to the local Neighbourhood Committee (see above).

**Participatory budgeting**

**What is Participatory budgeting ?**

Every year we will make funding available for investing in our communities. We want to support local people and organisations who want to make a difference for the people living in the community. Small and large grants will be unveiled soon which community groups can bid for, with decisions being made locally by customers on how this funding will be spent. You can volunteer to be part of one of the groups influencing those decisions.

**How much time does it involve?**

We are still working on the detail for this as our new Neighbourhood boundaries are being agreed, so watch this space. There will be work to be done leading up to these meetings, but please get in touch if this is an area that interests you

**Where will the groups meet?**

As mentioned above the detail will be published soon but they will meet at venues where we have homes in neighbourhoods

**Who can be part of these groups ?**

We will be looking for a representative groups of customers and residents from across all our neighbourhoods in which we have properties, and details will be released shortly.

**Community Investment**

We are very keen to support investment in our neighbourhoods, not only in the core towns where we have large numbers of properties but also if you live in one of our rural areas – we call this Community Investment:

Every year, we will target areas within our neighbourhoods which we know you would like to see us invest in. This might be large open spaces that have fallen into misuse or “health and wellbeing” projects we wish to introduce into our communities.

We also wish to engage and invest more fully in areas where we have properties in small numbers outside the 3 main areas of operation within Thirteen with annual consultation and community development events bespoke to that community. Not all neighbourhoods and estates will be big enough for a local neighbourhood plan. This is particularly true where there are areas where our homes are small in number (10-30 homes).

There are some excellent projects which we have worked with to piggy back on their activities, whilst also gathering feedback and views from our customers. These include;

* projects with schools for gardening and cross generational activities
* over 40s men’s sports club to alleviate loneliness
* breakfast clubs
* cookery classes
* Singing lessons
* basic computer courses
* healthy eating and budgeting classes

We also support ideas for activities such as the sponsorship of other meetings like Zumba class’ coffee gatherings (after class) to gather opinions from local people and consultation at school gates to gather local opinion.

**What else on Community Investment ?**

In some areas, there may be a large housing provider which we work with where we can put you in touch with their team of local volunteer customers so you can make a difference locally.

In some areas, like Gateshead, parts of Durham and York, our involvement service is delivered by a local Housing Association or Company. If you want to know how to get involved in these areas, just call us and we will out you in touch with the local service. We also welcome your involvement in our Thirteen involvement groups, so please do get in touch and we can give you more information on how to get involved

**How do I get involved in Community Investment activities ?**

Just get in touch and we will put you in touch with your local customer involvement officer. We are keen to work with local people to set up our annual visits to your area to gather views, ideas and feedback to improve our services in your area.

1. **Improving our services**

**(Please note you can only be on one of the Panels marked with an \*, but ……you can volunteer for any number of other involvement activities as well as being on one of these Panels)**

**Thirteen Customer Council \***

**What is the Thirteen Customer Council?**

The Thirteen Customer Council is a panel of customers who provide critical challenge to the key decisions of the landlord and the Thirteen Boards. They do this by commenting and influencing performance, business plan objectives, value for money and service standards and make sure we keep our promises. The Customer Council will also check we are meeting the regulatory standards across all our business areas

**How much time does it involve?**

The Customer Council will meets up to 12 times a year including 4 quarterly meetings to consider more formal performance information  produced by the Thirteen partner Landlords. Meetings will probably last for a full day. This volunteering involves a lot of reading and analysis of documents, and the collection of your views and ideas on our work.

**Where do they meet?**

The Customer Council will meets at one of our offices or community rooms.

**Who can be part of the Customer Council ?**

Any customer can apply to be on the Customer Council, which is made up of approximately 15 customers from our landlords and our care and support provider. Only customers of Thirteen (tenants and leaseholders/shared owners) can sit on this panel.

**Customer Scrutiny Panel \***

**What is the Scrutiny panel?**

We have Scrutiny Panel which looks in great detail at how we deliver specific services. They focus on one area and spend up to four months speaking to staff and customers and researching the way we do things now and how we could improve our service in the future. They produce a report which goes to the Boards who endorse whether their recommendations can be acted upon.

**How much time does it involve?**

Scrutiny has the greatest time commitment of all the involvement options and can be about 3-4 days a month over the four month that each Scrutiny project takes. There is also some reading to do outside of this time, which you can do at home.

**Where do they meet?**

They meet at various locations across the towns we operate in, depending on the activity being undertaken. It might include fact finding visits to other landlords. -

**Who can be on the Scrutiny panel ?**

Any customer can apply to be on the Scrutiny Panel, which is made up of approximately 15 customers from our landlords and our care and support provider. 2 customers who might be leaseholders/shared owners/owners who are service users and live in our communities can also be members of this panel

**Independent Complaints Panel \***

**What is the Complaints panel?**

The Complaints Panel is a group of customers who decide independently whether our approach has been the correct one in resolving that complaint. They do this at the end of the internal complaints process. The panel can offer an alternative option to the Housing Ombudsman for customers still not satisfied with the outcome of their dispute, having reached the end of the internal complaints process. They speak to the customer making the complaint as well as the staff who respond to the complaint and give advice to us on how we should deal with similar complaints in the future, as well as what action we should take to put things right in the individual case they have reviewed.

They review our performance on complaints and make sure we learn lessons from the complaints we receive. In the future, we hope they will become advocates for tenants to get their complaints resolved before they reach the end of the complaints process

**How much time does it involve?**

The Complaints panel meet every three months, however in between meetings up to three members of the Panel will work on individual cases to resolve complaints .This usually takes up to 4 days for each complaint.

**Where do they meet?**

They will sometimes meet at our offices or venues suitable to the person making the complaint

**Who can be on the Complaints panel?**

Any customer can apply to be on the Complaints Panel, which is made up of a approximately 15 customers from our landlords and our care and support provider. 2 customers who might be leaseholders/shared owners/owners who are service users and live in our communities can also be members of this panel

**Customer Service Investigators**

**What is a Customer Service Investigator?**

Customer Service Investigators (or CSIs) are customers who have received training to run focus groups, carry out mystery shopping or phone surveys to gather the views of other customers. They find out from a customer perspective what you really think of our services. They pull together what they have found and present this to managers in a short report, making recommendations for improved services.

**How much time does it involve ?**

Each CSI project lasts between 6-8 weeks and usually involves a meeting one day a week while carrying out the research. You can volunteer for as many or as little of our annual CSI projects as you wish.

**Where do they meet ?**

They meet at our offices or out in the community carrying out focus groups in local centres. Phone surveys are carried out from our Customer Service Centres.

**Who can be a CSI?**

Anyone customer can volunteer. CSIs work in groups of 5.

**“Task and Finish” strategy and policy review groups**

**What are the strategy and policy review groups ?**

Customers work with a manager or staff to develop/review strategies/policies across the Thirteen group. This involves training on the local issues and national standards already set for the service, you giving your opinion on what you think is good and needs improving about the service and then reviewing the policy which the manager goes off to write and present back to you for your comments.

Other customers will be invited to comment on services through social media and if you join a group, you will be involved in reviewing and including the views gathered from social media in shaping the policy. You play a central role in helping shape the future direction of the service and the way - our services are delivered

**How much time does it involve?**

Your involvement will be from approximately 4 days over a two month period. You can volunteer for as many strategy or policy groups as you wish. With over 100 strategies/policies across our business there’s always an opportunity to get involved.

**Where do they meet?**

Meetings are usually held in our offices or community rooms.

**Who can be on a strategy and policy review group?**

You will be asked to volunteer for subjects of interest to you. You must have recent experience of the service you are commenting on. Usually 5-6 customers are involved in any one policy group and you can volunteer to be on as many or as little as you have the time for.

1. **Specialist groups**

**Thirteen Ability**

**What is Thirteen Ability?**

This group provides advice and guidance to us on how we need change our services for people with all forms of mobility and disability, for example, in suggesting improvements for customers with physical disabilities across any service area.

**How much time does it involve?**

Thirteen Ability meets once every three months with meetings lasting half a day,group works with other landlords across the North East through Ability North East.

**Where do they meet?**

Meetings are usually held in our offices, or community rooms

**Who can be on Thirteen Ability ?**

The group consists of approximately 20 customers all who have a mobility or disability

**Ownership panel (for leaseholders and shared owners too)**

**What is the Ownership panel?**

The Ownership panel is a group of customers who have bought a home from us, or are leaseholders or shared owners. They meet to discuss issues about the services they receive from us. The panel are supported by officers from the Accommodation Team who are responsible for home ownership mattersand will discuss mainly issues which are specific and relevant to our owners, leaseholders and shared owners, such as service charges and leases.

We also welcome feedback on other services that leaseholders receive similar to tenants, like repairs, or grounds maintenance, and leaseholders can get involved in this through “Task and Finish” policy review groups, so if you want to comment on other services, see how you can get involved in that above.

**How much time does it involve?**

The Ownership panel meets 3 times a year with meetings lasting 2-3 hours.

**Where do they meet?**

Meetings are usually held in our offices or community rooms

**Who can be on the Ownership panel?**

About 15 people who are owners who have bought their home from Thirteen or any leaseholder or shared owner of the landlords that make up the Thirteen group.

**Young Voices**

**What is Young Voices?**

Young Voices represents our commitment to involve young people between the ages of 10-24 years old We are working closely with “Know your Money” (KYM) in Middlesbrough to recruit young people (existing or future customers) across Hartlepool and Stockton to give us their views and advice on how we should run our services and work in our neighbourhoods

**How much time does it involve?**

Any young person wishing to get involved can give as much time as they wish and will be supported and mentored by staff from KYM and our involvement team into whichever area of involvement they are interested in. Young tenants and citizens over 16 years of age can also get involved in any of the other involvement areas listed in this document

**Where do they meet?**

KYM currently operates from a centre in Middlesbrough, but we are developing links with youth providers across Hartlepool and Stockton to extend our services and work to compliment, but not duplicate services by other providers. Any young person wishing to get involved will be advised where to meet locally.

**Who can be part of Young Voices ?**

Any young person aged between 16 and 24 can link up with KYM, and you don’t have to be a customer or related to a customer to do so. If you are below 16, our neighbourhood involvement work with organisations who support young people, why not contact us to see how you can get involved?

1. **Training and conferences**

In order to support and encourage customers to get involved, we offer tailor-made free training for all our involved customers, to help you gather the knowledge and skills needed for each form of involvement you have chosen. We will pay your expenses to attend.

A member of the Customer Involvement team will support you on a one-to-one basis to identify what training you are interested in, and any other support needs you may have.

We are keen to encourage all customers to develop skills and knowledge which will improve their chances of employment and access to other training and to increase their confidence to play a more active role in their community. Getting involved is a great way to do this.

We pay for and support our customers to attend seminars and conferences, in and out of the area, which are relevant to their involvement and we will consider funding customers on longer courses where this is appropriate to their personal development and to getting involved.

1. **Is it free to get involved ?**

Our involved customers will not to be out-of-pocket through being involved. We pay for all transport, childcare, stationary and food/drink. Just call us and we can discuss how this works with you

For some of the more time intensive forms of involvement such as Customer Council and Scrutiny we can provide access to - resources such as laptops, and meeting space. Just call us for more information on this.

**Digital involvement**

We understand that coming to meetings is not possible or preferable for everyone, but that doesn’t stop you from getting involved. If you’re working full or part-time or have a busy family life, we know it’s not easy to find time to commit on a regular basis.

So we are developing - a number of ways you can give us your views at the touch of a phone keypad or computer.

**Online surveys**

We are increasingly looking for customers to fill in short surveys from the comfort of your own home, many of which will enable you to enter into a prize draw. If you’re happy to spend 5-15 minutes once in a while telling us what you think in this way we’d love to hear from you.

It might be a survey of what it’s like to live on your estate, whether you think anti-social behaviour has increased or what you think of a recent repair you had done. If this sounds up your street e mail us on at the address below, with the heading “online surveys”.

**Facebook and Twitter**

Whilst we already have our own Facebook and Twitter pages which customers are using to give us feedback on our services, and which we are using to promote events and information, we will be looking at developing our social media approach more fully in 2015. Any comments or ideas are welcome through the usual channels.

Our new approach to gathering comments from customers on “strategies and policies”, means we will be regularly asking customers’ views seeing you what you think we should change now or achieve in the years to come and how we should do that.

**Videos and Podcasts**

We want to engage as many people as possible in what we do, and sometimes watching and hearing from involved customers is a quicker and more inspiring way to get you to pick up that phone or send us an e mail asking for more information.

Watch out for more visual information on our websites and Facebook about all our involvement options, and if you want to make a video yourself with some friends or neighbours about where you live, we can always support - you . Why not get in touch?

**QR codes**

You will see over the coming years more use of “QR codes” (Quick Response Codes) of which there is an example at the end of the document. These images can be scanned using your mobile phone (smartphones only) and send you straight to our websites or areas of our websites where you can give us your views on our services relating to that code.

1. **Contact details**

Getting involved couldn’t be easier, all you have to do is ring one our Customer Involvement team on 01642 256 170, or e mail us at resident.involvement@thirteengroup.co.uk. or visit one of our landlord websites and go to the “getting involved” section.

We will make an arrangement for one of our staff to chat to you over the phone or visit you in your home to tell you more about the exciting new ways to get involved.

Once you get involved we will add you to our list of involved customers, and depending on what you choose to do, we will send you regular updates about events and opportunities. Dont forget to visit our event page of our websites which is regularly updated with this information and hear what our involved customers have been doing.

Don’t worry if you’ve never done anything like this before, everyone has a first time. There are lots of friendly customers and staff who were in the same position as you are now, and who will –support you and make you feel at home.

**Welcome to the new and exciting world of Customer Involvement !!!**