

Four Housing Customer Engagement Strategy 2014 – 2018

Introduction

This strategy sets out how Four Housing will plan and support customer engagement to make sure that customers' views and priorities underpin our service improvement and development. The strategy is key to delivering our strategic priority of 'customers driving service development and improvement' and will help us deliver our corporate mission 'creating homes, improving lives' and our aim of being 'the provider of choice for our customers and partners'.

In the development of this strategy we have considered:

- current national context;
- what our customers have told us;
- what staff have told us; and
- our business needs.

This has enabled us to identify priorities which have been outlined and developed into an Implementation Plan (appendix 1).

The strategy is also influenced by the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England 2012 which sets out the standards all social landlords are expected to meet. The framework was introduced as part of the Localism Act 2012 which aims to move power from central and local government to communities and individuals. The Regulatory framework requires social landlords to support tenants to shape and scrutinise service delivery and hold their landlord to account for meeting the standards.

Aim of this strategy

The aim is to provide a strategic plan for customer engagement and ensure that effective customer engagement is an essential feature of the way we do business.

It has been set over a four year period and covers the following:

- Engagement activity carried out by Four Housing
- Engagement carried out by consultants or contractors acting on our behalf

The strategy is linked to and supports our Communications Strategy, our Organisational Development Strategy and our equality and diversity plan.

What does Customer Engagement mean to Four Housing?

In this strategy we are using the term customer engagement to describe how we provide opportunities for our customers to give their views, help set priorities and work with us to improve services

Customer engagement is essential to customers and Four Housing because:

- It helps us to understand the services customers want and how they would like to see them delivered
- It enables customers to help shape services and service standards
- It will help us make more robust decisions and use resources wisely on services that will deliver the greatest benefit to our customers now and in the future
- It enables us to meet our legal requirements
- It makes good business sense

Value for money

This strategy is produced at a time when many customers are facing rising prices and lower incomes because of the economic situation and welfare benefit reforms. It has therefore never been more important to make sure that all our engagement activity is delivering, and is seen to deliver, good value for money. To support our Value for Money strategy we will embed a value for money culture in our engagement activities and make sure we fully understand our costs and performance and how they compare with others.

Vision for Customer Engagement

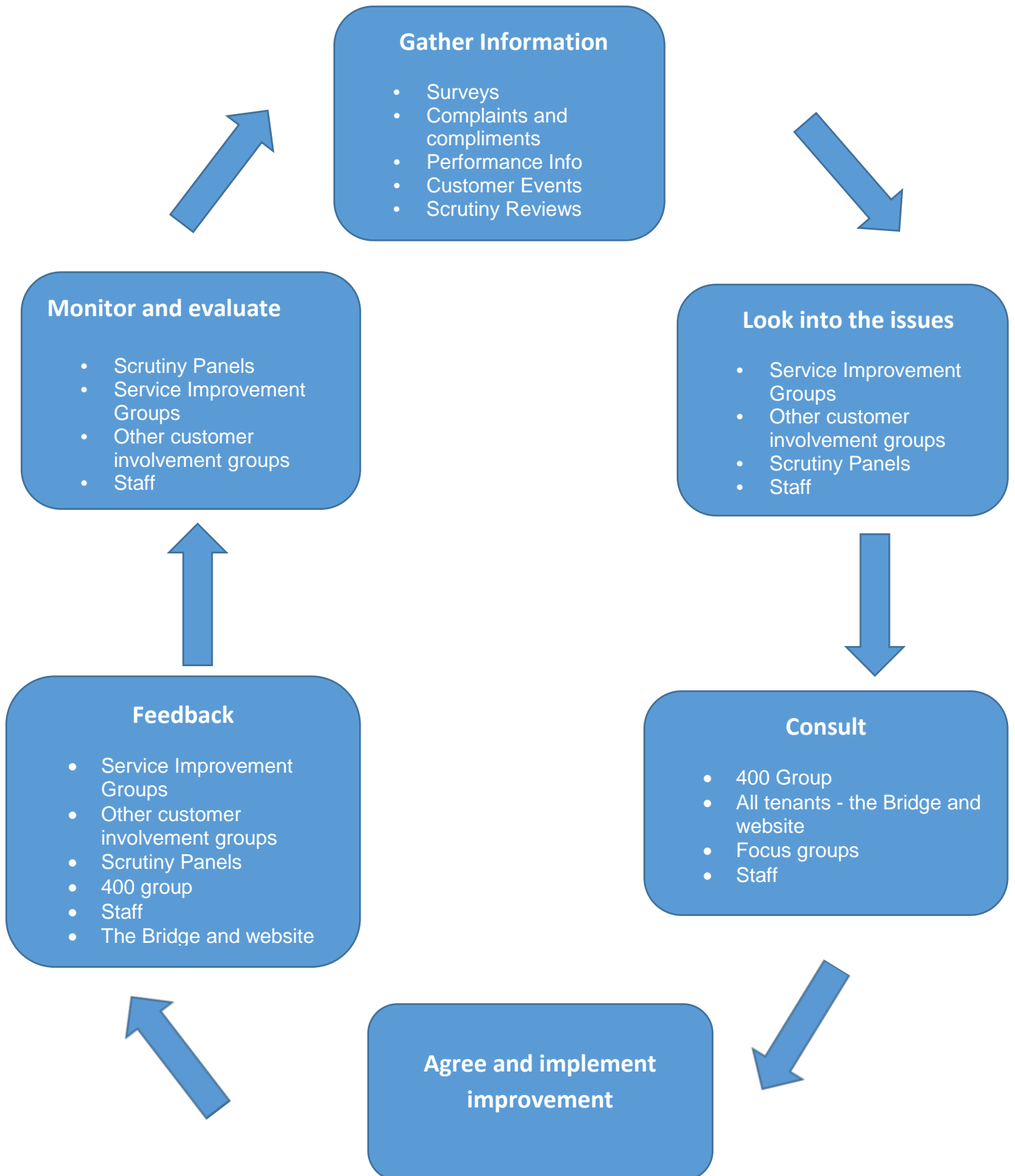
Customers have identified the following vision for customer engagement:

‘Customer engagement gives everyone an opportunity to influence the priorities and services of Four Housing and we can all see the difference this is making.’

We have also agreed the following principles of good engagement:

- Everyone should have the opportunity to get involved and have the support to do this
- Customer engagement should be timely, at a stage when you can influence and shape decisions
- All customer engagement should be based on clear, honest and open communication about what is open to influence and what is not
- Customers should be told how their involvement has made a difference
- Where we haven't been able to act on customers' views, we should let you know why

Customers driving service improvement



Where are we now?

There has been a long history of customer engagement within the business. There are a wide range of involvement opportunities (see appendix 2) and a dedicated customer engagement team whose role is to support and co-ordinate effective customer engagement. There is a database of over 400 customers interested in being involved including around 50 customers who are regularly involved in engagement meetings and activities. In the last STAR survey 73% of customers indicated that they were satisfied, or very satisfied, that Four Housing listens to their views and acts on them. This is higher than the benchmark average of 69%.

The level of customer engagement varies significantly across the organisation. In the Durham area there are a large number of involvement groups that have developed over many years. In the Berwick area, there are fewer groups and a low number of customers taking part.

What has customer engagement achieved?

Some changes that have been made as a result of customer engagement to date have included:

- Shaping the new 5 year corporate plan by taking part in visioning exercises
- Helping select contractors for a range of services including cleaning, landscaping, external decoration and out of hours service
- Influencing the priorities for the asset management strategy
- Developing a leaseholder handbook
- Identifying improvements for the website and helping to choose our new logo as part of the rebranding

How can we improve?

We identified how we need to build on the progress we have made so far and improve customer engagement further in a number of ways:

- We looked at the profile of our involved customers and compared this with the profile of our wider customer base.
- We carried out an impact assessment of all current involvement activities. This highlighted a number of recommendations for improving the effectiveness and value for money of engagement activities
- We used information about satisfaction with our services identified through the last STAR in 2012, a survey of the 400 group carried out in September 2013 and feedback from customer engagement meetings.

We used this information to identify the following priorities:

Priorities

- We will make sure we involve a wide range of people so that we are getting a good cross section of views and experiences of our services
- We will make sure all engagement activities are having a positive impact and helping to improve services
- We will improve the way we feedback to people about how we have used their views
- We will build a scrutiny approach into most engagement activities
- We will make sure all Four Housing staff understand and support customer engagement

The background to each of the strategic objectives is outlined in more detail below:

Priority 1 - We will make sure we involve a wide range of people so that we are getting a good cross section of views and experiences of our services

The profile of our involved customers showed that customers under the age of 44 are underrepresented when compared with the profile of all our tenants and leaseholders. This underrepresentation is greater amongst those regularly involved, defined here as people taking part in Service Improvement Groups (SIGs) and other ongoing involvement groups. (appendix 3)

We already take a number of steps to encourage involvement of younger customers, for example by offering help with childcare and holding meetings and events at different times. However we know that commitments to work and childcare have an impact on the time younger tenants have to give to engagement activities and that offering a wider range of engagement opportunities is likely to encourage more involvement from this age group.

Increasing and widening involvement in the North of the organisation is a priority. A series of engagement events were held in the summer of 2013 to gain views and encourage more involvement and this has been successful with 35 people being added to the 400 group database. Some of these customers have already gone on to be involved in service improvement groups.

We also need to widen the profile of those involved by doing more to capture the views of the diverse range of customers living in our supported accommodation.

In addition we need to develop ways of engaging with our care and repair customers.

Removing barriers to involvement

We know that some customers may not find it as easy to get involved as others. We are committed to making sure everyone has an equal opportunity to get involved and we will deliver this commitment by making sure we publicise engagement opportunities widely and provide any support required.

We can do this by publishing clear information on the opportunities to get involved and the support available and using a wide range of ways to publicise these. Examples include targeting all new tenants and using existing communications like the rent statements to get key messages out and exploring the use of social media.

We can also increase our understanding of the specific needs of those we are seeking to involve by reviewing the demographic information we currently collect on the 400 group to make sure it is detailed and comprehensive. We can then use this information to develop our involvement methods and the support we offer.

We need to make sure we are offering regular opportunities for customers on the 400 group to give their views and actively monitor the profile of those who take up these opportunities to make sure we are capturing diverse needs and views.

Key action 1: Carry out research of under-represented customers to find out what engagement activities would encourage them to get involved, review and develop engagement methods in light of this and monitor the take up

Key action 2: Develop our engagement with customers in the Berwick area

Key action 3: Develop our engagement with residents, carers and support agencies in our supported housing schemes

Key action 4: Develop ways of capturing the views and experiences of our care and repair customers

Key action 5: Improve information about involvement opportunities, the support available and promote widely

Key action 6: Introduce a process for updating and monitoring the demographic profile of the 400 group database

Key action 7: Introduce regular opportunities for the 400 group to give their views in a range of ways that respond to their different needs and identify additional support and development opportunities to enable involved customers to make the most of their involvement opportunities

Key action 8: Carry out a satisfaction survey with our tenants and leaseholders every two years and use the results to inform further improvements in involvement opportunities

Priority 2 – We will make sure all engagement activities are having a positive impact and helping to improve services

A survey of the 400 group about their views of engagement told us that whilst overall satisfaction with the number of different ways to get involved was high at 85% the number of people who were satisfied that their involvement was having an influence was lower at 73%.

The involvement impact assessment highlighted the good progress that had been made through customer engagement so far but identified that there was a lack of clarity about the purpose of some meetings and duplication in the issues discussed. In addition the service improvement outcomes were not always evident. This meant that the activities could not always be seen to be providing good value for money. The impact assessment also highlighted inconsistency in the approach to regular engagement activities across the business.

Some decisions have already been made with customers to tackle these issues. These have included removing duplication by reducing the number of different engagement groups and redefining the purpose of other groups. A common approach to involving customers through Service Improvement Groups in both the North and South of the organisation has also been agreed with customers and staff.

Key action 9: Produce clear terms of reference for all engagement groups with jointly agreed aims and objectives

Key action 10: Agree annual work plans for engagement groups linked to expected outcomes

Key action 11: Monitor and review the outcomes from engagement activities every year with all involved customers, implement any improvements and publicise this widely

Priority 3 – We will improve the way we feed back to people about how we have used their views

Customers have told us we need to improve the way we feed back to them about the difference their involvement has made. Being able to see positive outcomes as a result of being involved was seen as an important encouragement for other customers to get involved.

Whilst our survey of the 400 group told us that 75% of people were satisfied with the feedback there were many comments about the need for us to improve how we do this. Lack of feedback is consistently mentioned as a concern by our more regularly involved customers.

The Bridge was seen as one important way to give out feedback but customers felt we should use other methods as well. The feedback needs to clearly state how customer's views have influenced services and decisions.

Key action 12: Develop a consistent approach to providing feedback to all customers through the Bridge and on the website and explore additional ways of doing this including the use of social media

Key action 13: Introduce a process for feeding back after each engagement activity and to all involved customers on an annual basis

Priority 4 – We will build a scrutiny approach into a range of engagement activities

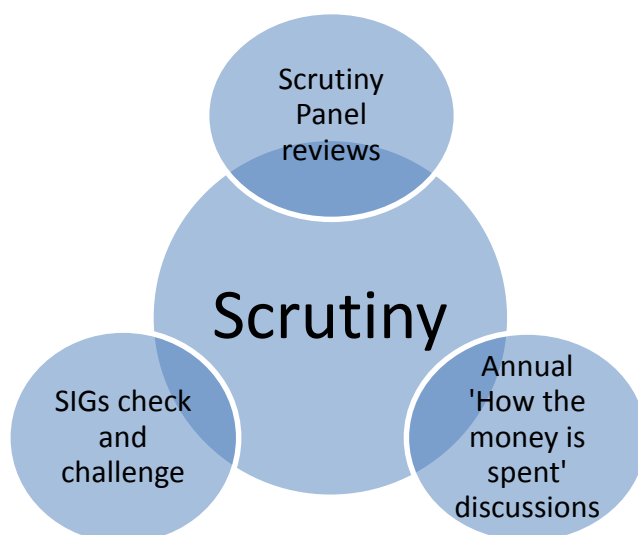
Tenant scrutiny is about tenants holding Four Housing to account for the services we provide. Supporting effective scrutiny by tenants of their landlord's performance is a key part of the regulatory framework. In Four Housing two scrutiny panels were established in 2013 following recommendations from a joint working group of customers, staff and board members.

The two panels, one in the North of the business and one in the South, are made up of tenants, leaseholders and independents. Supported by an independent mentor and a scrutiny contractor, they have developed a framework to refer to when scoping and carrying out their reviews (Appendix 4). The framework is made up of the issues they think tenants would want them to focus on when reviewing services.

It has been agreed that from April 2014 performance information and other customer feedback will be provided to all Service Improvement Groups (SIGs) so that customers can check the evidence about how well the service is doing, hold managers to account for any under-performance and discuss value for money. Any significant issues of concern that SIGs feel warrant some more 'in depth' scrutiny can be referred to the scrutiny panels to consider. Equally, the action plans coming out of the scrutiny panels' reviews will be monitored by the relevant SIGS.

It has also been agreed that there will be opportunities for involved customers to discuss Four Housing's overall finances, spending priorities and value for money on an annual basis as part of the budget cycle.

The aim is to develop this approach further to involve a wide range of customers in scrutinising our services and ensure a coherent relationship between the scrutiny panels and wider customer engagement.



Key action 14: Carry out an annual review of the scrutiny panels to identify and carry out any improvements to the scrutiny process

Key action 15: Discuss and agree performance and customer feedback information for service improvement groups to enable them to check and challenge service delivery

Key action 16: Develop the capacity of the SIGS and other engagement groups through tailored training and support, recording members existing skills and encouraging the sharing of these as appropriate

Key action 17: Provide opportunities for involved customers to discuss Four Housing's overall finances, spending priorities and value for money on an annual basis as part of the budget cycle

Priority 5 – We will make sure all Four Housing staff understand and support customer engagement

Customer engagement is not just the responsibility of the customer engagement team – all service areas have a responsibility to ensure that customers have the opportunity to give their views and influence service delivery and decisions.

Front line staff have a key role in promoting engagement opportunities and need to understand the purpose of engagement and the Four Housing approach if they are to do this effectively. Housing staff also attend residents' group meetings and need to make sure they are making the most of these opportunities to gain views on our services and ideas for improvement.

It is also important that staff responsible for carrying out customer engagement activities, for example running focus groups or local consultation events, have the skills required to do so. The customer engagement service provides advice and guidance when it is requested. However during the impact assessment both staff

and customers highlighted the need for clearer guidance and support for staff to make sure all engagement is customer focussed, effective and value for money.

Key action 18: We will develop and deliver customer engagement awareness sessions for all staff

Key action 19: We will produce information and guidance on carrying out customer engagement for staff

Key action 20: We will introduce information about customer engagement to all new staff as part of their induction

Measuring our success

We will develop a plan to implement these key actions over the next four years. This will include the following key performance indicators to help us track our progress:

% of customers under 45 who get involved

% of customers who are satisfied with their involvement opportunities

% of customers satisfied that their views are taken into account

% of the 400 group who are satisfied with the feedback they get about the difference their involvement is making

The number of actively involved customers

The number of policy and procedure changes influenced or driven by customers

Monitoring our progress

Customers on the customer service and involvement SIGs will monitor our progress against the actions. Progress reports will also be given to board every year and published in the Bridge, on the website and given to the 400 Group.

Reviewing this strategy

We will review this strategy after two years, ensuring that it keeps pace with change in the external environment and our customers' priorities and expectations.

Appendices:

- Implementation plan
- Menu of involvement opportunities
- Age profile of those currently involved
- Scrutiny framework

Four Housing Customer Engagement Strategy 2014 -2018

Implementation plan

Priority	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
<p>We will make sure we involve a wide range of people so that we are getting a good cross section of views and experiences of our services</p>	<p>Develop our engagement with customers in the Berwick area</p> <p>Improve information about involvement opportunities, the support available and promote widely</p> <p>Carry out a satisfaction survey and use results to inform further improvements in involvement opportunities</p> <p>Introduce regular opportunities for the 400 group to give their views in a range of ways that respond to different needs</p>	<p>Introduce a process for updating and monitoring the demographic profile of the 400 group database</p> <p>Carry out research of underrepresented customers to find out what engagement activities would encourage them to get involved.</p> <p>Develop ways of capturing the views and experiences of our care and repair customers</p>	<p>Review and develop engagement methods and support to meet the needs of under-represented groups</p> <p>Develop our engagement with residents, carers and support agencies in our supported housing schemes</p> <p>Carry out satisfaction survey and use results to inform further improvements</p> <p>Review engagement strategy</p>	<p>Monitor the take-up of engagement activities by under-represented groups</p> <p>Identify additional support and development opportunities to enable involved customers to make the most of their involvement opportunities</p>
	<p>Produce clear terms of reference for engagement groups with jointly agreed aims and objectives</p>			
<p>We will make sure all activities are having a positive impact and helping to improve services</p>				

	<p>Agree annual work plans for engagement groups linked to expected outcomes</p> <p>Monitor and review the outcomes from engagement activities every year with all involved customers, implement any improvements and publicise this widely</p>	<p>Agree annual work plans for engagement groups linked to expected outcomes</p> <p>Monitor and review the outcomes from engagement activities every year with all involved customers, implement any improvements and publicise this widely</p>	<p>Agree annual work plans for engagement groups linked to expected outcomes</p> <p>Monitor and review the outcomes from engagement activities every year with all involved customers, implement any improvements and publicise this widely</p>	<p>Agree annual work plans for engagement groups linked to expected outcomes</p> <p>Monitor and review the outcomes from engagement activities every year with all involved customers, implement any improvements and publicise this widely</p>
	<p>We will improve the way we feed back to people about how we have used their views</p> <p>Develop a consistent approach to providing feedback to all customers through the Bridge and on the website</p> <p>Introduce a process for feeding back after each engagement activity and to all involved customers on an annual basis</p>	<p>Explore additional ways of giving feedback including the use of social media</p>		
	<p>Carry out an annual review of the scrutiny panels to identify and implement any improvements to the scrutiny process</p> <p>Discuss and agree performance and customer</p>	<p>Carry out an annual review of the scrutiny panels to identify and implement any improvements to the scrutiny process</p> <p>Develop the capacity of the SIGS and other</p>	<p>Carry out an annual review of the scrutiny panels to identify and implement any improvements to the scrutiny process</p>	<p>Carry out an annual review of the scrutiny panels to identify and implement any improvements to the scrutiny process</p>
	<p>We will build a scrutiny approach into a range of engagement activities</p>			

<p>We will make sure all Four Housing staff understand and support customer engagement</p>	<p>feedback information for service improvement groups to enable them to check and challenge service delivery</p> <p>Provide opportunities for involved customers to discuss Four Housing's overall finances, spending priorities and value for money on an annual basis as part of the budget cycle</p>	<p>engagement groups through tailored training and support, recording members existing skills and encouraging the sharing of these as appropriate</p> <p>Provide opportunities for involved customers to discuss Four Housing's overall finances, spending priorities and value for money on an annual basis as part of the budget cycle</p>	<p>Provide opportunities for involved customers to discuss Four Housing's overall finances, spending priorities and value for money on an annual basis as part of the budget cycle</p>	<p>Provide opportunities for involved customers to discuss Four Housing's overall finances, spending priorities and value for money on an annual basis as part of the budget cycle</p>
	<p>Develop and deliver customer engagement awareness sessions for all staff</p> <p>Introduce information about customer engagement given to all new staff as part of their induction</p>	<p>We will produce information and guidance on carrying out customer engagement for staff</p> <p>Further develop induction information to staff in line with the objectives of the Organisational Development Strategy</p>		

Survey / Questionnaires

- We sometimes carry out surveys to find out your views. The surveys are a series of questions that can be asked face-to-face, by phone, by post, by email or on our website

Events / Drop ins

- We hold a range of customer events and drop-ins

Service Improvement Groups

- A group of tenants and leaseholders that meet every 3 months with staff to discuss how well services are doing and how they might be improved. There are service improvement groups covering a range of housing services including repairs, investment, anti-social behaviour and customer service and involvement.

Focus Groups

- One off meetings with staff to discuss a particular area of the housing service.

Estate Inspections

- Estate inspections are an opportunity to join staff, partners and other tenants on a tour of your estate and help identify issues that need attention. There is an advertised inspection in your area at least once a year.

Local Tenant and Residents Groups

- A tenants and residents group is a group of people in an area who get together to discuss neighbourhood issues and ideas for improvements.

Mystery Shopper

- You can help us test the quality of the housing service by phoning for information or visiting a local office and recording how you are treated.

Editorial Group

- This group looks at what information is included in our newsletter 'The Bridge' and helps identify improvements for future issues.

One Voice

- A group of tenants and residents who meet twice a year to discuss issues on their estates and monitor the performance of our Estate Inspection procedure.

Readers Panel

- You can help Four Housing make sure our written information is understandable from the comfort of your own home.

Age profile – Involved Customers

Age	All Tenants	400 Group	Regularly involved
18-24	6%	3%	1%
25- 44	29%	19%	10%
45-64	31%	41%	44%
65+	28%	32%	42%

