

Customer Involvement and Empowerment Strategy

JANUARY 2023



Foreword

We can only provide great services by actively involving our customers. Our new customer involvement and empowerment strategy outlines how we will achieve this as the central part of our commitment to improving our customer offer and to work in partnership with our customers; to help drive performance and service improvements.

We want to be proud of the difference GreenSquareAccord (GSA) makes to people's lives and the communities they live in, and we recognise that how we do things matter just as much as what we do.

We also understand the importance of making it easy and simple for customers to engage and get involved. This strategy launches our new involvement offer by offering customers a flexible range of options; from keeping customers informed about latest news and performance, through to customers being actively involved in their own estate or neighbourhood. While this strategy recognises the new responsibilities placed on social housing providers by the regulator, it intends to go way beyond simply fulfilling regulatory obligations as we want to ensure the decisions we make and the work we do reflect the needs, experiences, and expectations of our customers.

Thank you and I hope you enjoy reading about our plans.



Ross Kuklinski

Director for Homes & Communities

As the chair of the GSA Customer Panel, I welcome this strategy and I'm pleased to see many of the commitments and actions in this strategy are already underway and that it truly embodies the GSA Way core commitment that the customer is everything.

The strategy has been co-developed and shaped with customers and I look forward to working with my fellow Customer Panel members and the teams at GSA to bring it to life and make sure that everyone at GSA lives and breathes it. We aim to achieve this by ensuring the Customer Panel engages with a diverse range of customers, so we fully understand the things they value most about GSA, what we need to do to improve and the impact of the decisions we make.

The Customer Panel will help ensure GSA delivers this Strategy and puts customers at the heart of everything it does. This is the best way to continue to improve the landlord and customer relationship and foster more interest in involvement.



Sarah Mason

Customer Panel Chair

Scope

For the purpose of this strategy, we have defined customer involvement as ‘involving customers in the design, delivery and scrutiny of services as well as how the organisation is governed’. By ‘customers’, we mean someone who receives our landlord service whether they are renters, shared owners, or lease holders.

Whilst our strategy aims to be accessible and inclusive of all customers, it focuses on those for whom GSA is their landlord. Where we provide Care and Support services only, customers are involved in the scrutiny of their care services through a separate, more specialised, engagement approach that is led by our Care and Support team.

This strategy brings together our commitments as a social landlord to ensuring the effective involvement and empowerment of our customers. This includes meeting mandatory regulatory compliance standards and our commitments as an early adopter of the voluntary national social housing sector led Together with Tenants Charter . It also incorporates a new set of guiding principles co-developed with GSA customers which will provide the foundation for more effective and meaningful customer engagement and involvement benefiting both customers and GSA.

Delivering more for our customers and communities

At GSA we believe our customers are everything and there is a fundamental commitment shared by all our teams and people to meet the needs of all our customers. We can only understand these needs and experiences if customers are able to tell us, are heard, and have the opportunity to get involved. The GSA Community Involvement & Investment Team are responsible for developing and coordinating our customer involvement offer and this means working closely with other GSA teams such as:

- ◆ Voice of the Customer to ensure we have access to timely customer data and insight to help us understand and look at ways of improving our performance and the value we bring to you..
- ◆ Customer Panel, created to listen to customers, advise and feedback on GSA initiatives and service.
- ◆ Governance to ensure effective reporting arrangements are in place between our Customer Panel, the Homes & Customer Experience Committee and Board.
- ◆ Communications to ensure that we are sharing with customers our performance data and promoting customer involvement and empowerment opportunities through our website and social media channels.
- ◆ Locality Teams to ensure there are opportunities for our customers to get involved in local meetings and consultations on matters and decisions that affect them.

Voice of the Customer

Our 'Voice of the Customer' (VOC) programme puts customers at the centre of our Corporate Strategy. It brings together the feedback, views and comments we receive from customers and informs the business in a way that enables us to understand what's going well and what actions are needed to improve services. VOC is about:

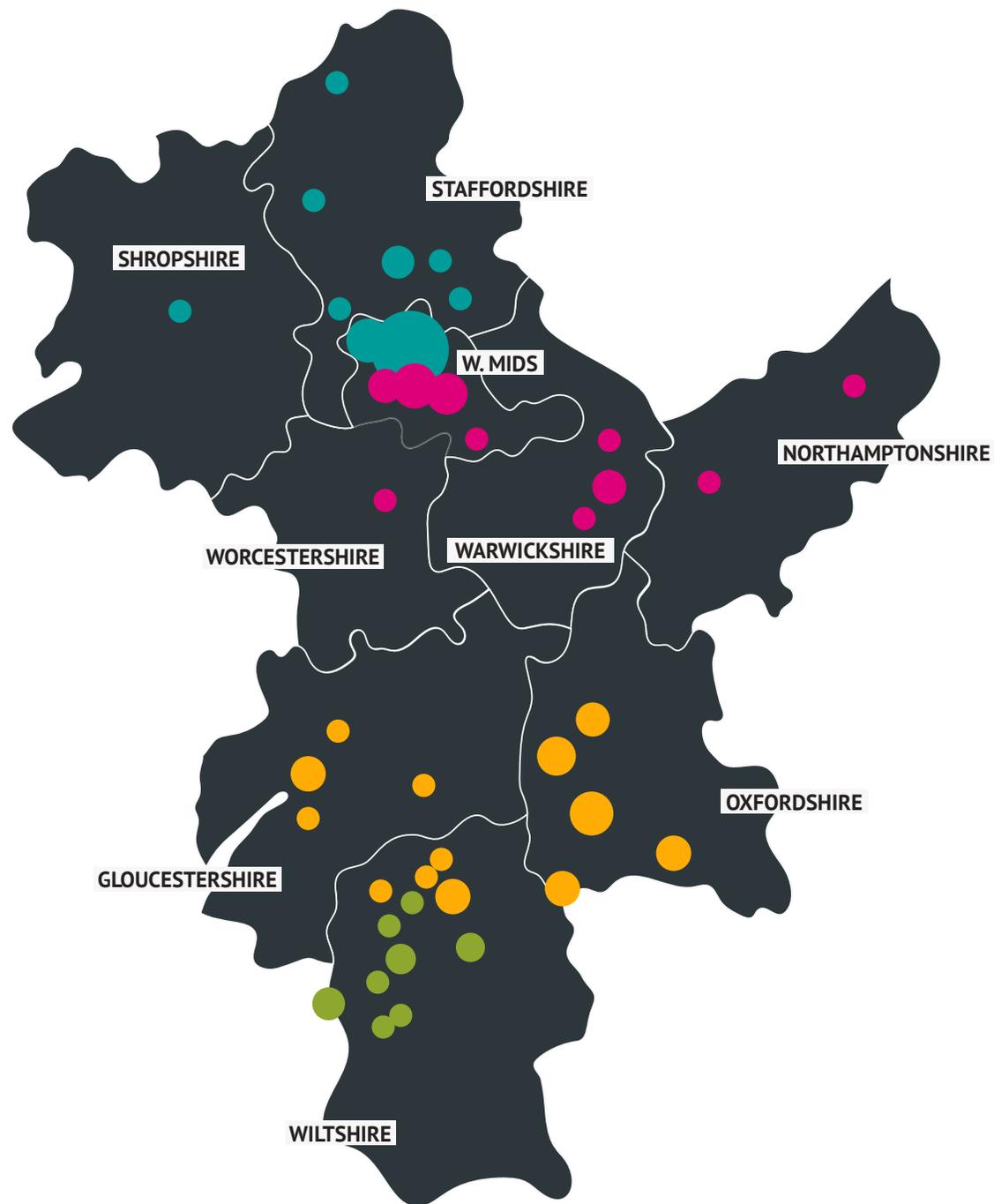
- ◆ Giving our customers a voice and putting you front and centre of everything we do.
- ◆ Listening and learning from each other, as together we begin our journey of improvement to drive change – a change in culture and a change in how we do things.
- ◆ Engaging our customers to build trust and confidence in how we deliver services.
- ◆ Delivering effective customer service.

VOC strengthens and compliments our Customer Involvement and Empowerment offer, by ensuring we have timely and broader customer insight to better understand the needs and views of our customers to help us deliver exceptional services and achieve our goal of building better lives.



Locality Model

In April 2022, we launched our locality model; a new approach to delivering housing and core landlord services with four geographic based localities, providing a framework for us to do this in a focused, collaborative way that meets the needs of our customers.



We recognise that within each locality there are numerous and diverse communities where we manage different numbers and types of housing, and each will have its own unique characteristics with differing needs and priorities.

Each locality area has a Locality Management Board made up of colleagues from our housing, customer care, estates, assets, surveying, contact centre and repairs teams. These boards meet regularly to share local knowledge and insights impacting the locality such as:

- ◆ Tenancy management
- ◆ Estate management
- ◆ Repairs and maintenance
- ◆ Customer service
- ◆ Community involvement and investment.

The boards are responsible for identifying performance issues in these areas and developing joined-up, local approaches to improve services for customers in the communities they serve.

This way of working also provides the opportunity to maximise local customer involvement with locality teams leading on the planning and hosting of community road-shows and neighbourhood consultations.

Investing in our Communities

Creating places where customers want to live and thrive means investing in services which are broader than purely a landlord service. At GSA, we define community investment as the work we do alongside people and communities to help them thrive.

Our community investment offer includes in-house tenancy sustainment and financial skills services as well as external partnerships with local organisations who provide targeted community support for GSA customers through activities, guidance, and specialist programmes.

Our community investment programme is also delivered through our locality model. Through gathering data and insight from colleagues, partners, and customers, we will develop local community investment action plans identifying our most marginalised neighbourhoods and indicating where there is the greatest need for community investment.

We want our customers to be involved in telling us what is important to them and agreeing the types of activity we focus on. We will gather views through surveys and work with the Customer Panel to run focus groups to gain greater insight into the priorities in each area.



In October 2022 we launched a GSA Community Impact Fund where community organisations can apply for up to £500 to run projects that benefit GSA customers across four key areas:

- ◆ Employment and Skills
- ◆ Financial competency
- ◆ Digital Inclusion
- ◆ Health and Well-being.

Applications will be reviewed by the Community Involvement & Investment team and Locality boards, with funding decisions made by the judging panel, a sub-group of the GSA Customer Panel.

Legal & statutory requirements

GSA is regulated by the- Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) to ensure we are a viable, efficient, and well-governed social housing provider that can deliver homes meeting a range of needs. The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard sets out expectations for providing choices, information and communications that are appropriate to the diverse needs of tenants, a clear approach to complaints and a wide range of opportunities for customers to have influence and be involved.

These expectations underpin all our customer involvement and empowerment practices, and this includes providing evidence of how we continue to seek ways to improve our engagement, in line with the Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper published in November 2020 and the National Housing Federation's (NHF) Together with Tenants Charter, both set out the case for strengthening the relationships between landlords and their residents. This strategy aims to position GSA to ensure we are able to meet the evolving requirements of the regulatory environment.

With this in mind, we will:

- ◆ Record actions taken to meet regulatory standards.
- ◆ Review these with the Customer Panel and include a summary of compliance in the Annual Review for customers.
- ◆ Carry out a review of compliance evidence through our Leadership Team and Strategic Risk and Assurance Register.

Our Guiding Principles

In 2021 we worked with a group of customers to identify what matters most to them in how we work alongside our customers. These principles are:

- ◆ We will work together with customers to find solutions and ways of working that focus on the customer.
- ◆ Seek to involve customers from the get-go when reviewing or designing any activity that is customer facing.
- ◆ Engage, listen and act.
- ◆ Be inclusive, by finding ways to engage with all customers from face to face to digital.
- ◆ Give customers access to more information and for there to be closer links with the Executive team and Board.
- ◆ Build trusted relationships with our customers by being transparent and accountable.
- ◆ Make customer systems easy to use and navigate.

Together with Tenants Charter

This strategy has also been created with the commitments of the Together with Tenants Charter in mind. Together with Tenants is an initiative led by the National Housing Federation, which promotes effective working between customers and landlords.

GSA was an 'early adopter' and we are fully signed up to the Charter, which is based on the following six commitments:

- ◆ **Relationships** – we will treat all customers with respect in all of our interactions and our relationships will be based on openness, honesty and transparency.
- ◆ **Communication** – customers will receive clear, accessible, and timely information on the issues that matter to them, including important information about their homes and local community. We will work to address problems in how the organisation is run and provide updates about performance on key issues.
- ◆ **Voice and influence** – we will seek and value the views of our residents and will use this information to inform decisions. Every individual customer will feel listened to on the issues that matter to them and can speak without fear.
- ◆ **Accountability** – collectively, customers will work in partnership with us to independently scrutinise and hold us to account for the decisions that affect the quality of their homes and services.
- ◆ **Quality** – customers can expect their homes to be good quality, well maintained, safe and well managed.
- ◆ **When things go wrong** – customers will have simple and accessible routes for raising issues, making complaints, and seeking redress. Residents will receive timely advice and support when things go wrong.

As a result of working with our customers on this strategy we have developed a further commitment:

- ◆ **Working in partnership** -- we will work in partnership with our customers to co-create new ways of working that put our customers in the driving seat when reviewing existing services and designing new services and initiatives.

Below is a table bringing together our seven Guiding Principles as defined by our customers, the Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard, our Together with Tenants Charter principles, and the outcomes we expect to achieve for our customers.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES	STANDARD	TOGETHER WITH TENANTS	OUTCOMES FOR OUR CUSTOMERS
We will work together with customers to find solutions and ways of working that focus on the customer.	Involvement and Empowerment of our tenants	Working in Partnership - As a result of working with our Customers on this strategy we have developed a further commitment about working in partnership with our Customers to co-create new ways of working that puts our Customers in the driving seat when reviewing existing services and designing new services and initiatives.	Customers are working in partnership with us to co-create new solutions and ways of working <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an increase in meaningful opportunities for Customers to influence and shape services for the better • Customers feel inspired to work with us to co-create positive change in their communities and be a collective force for building more resilient communities
Seek to involve customers input from the get-go when reviewing or designing any activity that has a customer facing aspect.		Collectively, residents will work in partnership with us to independently scrutinise and hold us to account for the decisions that affect the quality of their homes and services. Quality – Residents can expect their homes to be good quality, well maintained, safe and well managed.	More Customers feel they have a voice and are being listened to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More customer feels listened to on the issues that matter to them and that their views are taken into consideration when we make decisions and they can speak without fear. • Collectively customers are working in partnership with us to independently scrutinise and hold us to account for the decisions that affect their homes and services and the quality of the homes and services they provide
Engage, Listen and Act	Good information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of our tenants	Voice and influence – We will seek and value the views of our residents, and will use this information to inform decisions. Every individual resident will feel listened to on the issues that matter to them and can speak without fear	
Be inclusive, by finding ways to engage with all customers from face to face to digital		Communication – Residents will receive clear, accessible and timely information on the issues that matter to them, including important information about their homes and local community. We will work to address problems in how the organisation is run and information about performance on key issues.	Improved Communications with our Customers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increase in Customers feeling more informed and updated on any issues that affect their tenancy, local services and neighbourhood. • More Customers reporting that they feel confident to engage and communicate with us through online media and other virtual networks
Give customers access to more information and for there to be closer links with the Exec and Board			
Build trusted relationships with our Customers by being transparent and accountable.	More choices	Relationships – we will treat all residents with respect in all of our interactions and our relationships will be based on openness, honesty and transparency.	An Improved Customer Engagement & Involvement Offer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More customers are aware of the engagement & involvement offer and the flexible ways that they can engage with us via the engagement options menu.
Make Customer systems easy to use and navigate.	A clear approach to complaints	When things go wrong – Residents will have simple and accessible routes for raising issues, making complaints and seeking redress. Residents will receive timely advice and support when things go wrong.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers report they feel more valued and as a result are reporting increased satisfaction with the Customer Involvement and Empowerment offer/service.



Delivering our vision

Customer Panel

Developing our new strategy has been a year in the making with a key objective of working smarter to deliver a more customer targeted approach providing value for money and meaningful opportunities for customers to engage with us and get involved. Development started with a review of our legacy Customer Panels and a series of workshops with legacy panel members to explore and co-design the new Customer Panel's Terms of Reference. These workshops also helped members come together to share their collective knowledge and experiences and consider internal and external good practice.

Working with the legacy panels we were able to produce the new Customer Panel's Terms of Reference.

The aims of the Customer Panel are to:

- ◆ Work in partnership with GSA to ensure resident-led scrutiny where the customer voice is heard and used to influence and drive performance and service improvements.
- ◆ Provide assurance to customers that GSA is conducting itself in an open, transparent and accountable way.
- ◆ Provide feedback on key areas of service delivery and customer concerns to the GSA Board and its committees to inform future strategic decision making.

The Customer Panel has three core functions:

- ◆ To scrutinise – provide independent scrutiny and challenge to GSA’s landlord services, service delivery and performance with the aim of improving customer satisfaction, improving performance and achieving better value for money.
- ◆ To advise – act as a sounding board providing advice and feedback to GSA on a range of matters as required.
- ◆ To co-create – work with GSA colleagues to shape new or improved services following research and consultation.

To encourage balanced discussion and involvement, the Panel, as far as it is possible to do so, will reflect through its membership the customers and communities GSA provides landlord services to. This includes representation from each locality area and membership reviews will aim to encourage a diverse and representative membership which is inclusive of everyone regardless of sex, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, disability, marital status, or family or caring responsibilities.

The Panel will also have the ability to set up locality and thematic customer focus groups, either ongoing or as and when required, to consider customer feedback and any issues customers are unhappy about or want to work with us to improve. Thematic groups might include: complaints, repairs and maintenance, purchasing of new GSA contracts, and communication.

As part of the new panel launch, we ran recruitment campaigns for the Panel Chair and membership, with the new panel in place by November 2022.



Customer Involvement Survey

In August 2022, we launched our new Customer Involvement Survey to understand the best ways of involving customers in the governance and scrutiny of our housing management services. The survey was emailed to all GSA customers with an email address, c15,000 customers and we received 886 responses.

The findings:

- ◆ Customers gave us an average score of 2.67 out of 5 for the information we provide regarding our performance, about our services and the information we provide customers on how to keep their home safe and secure.
- ◆ Customers gave us an average score of 2.49 out of 5 in terms of their understanding of how they can influence the way GSA manage and deliver housing services, including communicating their dissatisfaction and if they think we operate in an open and transparent way.
- ◆ There was a core cohort of over 200 customers who would like to get involved - over 200 wanting to get involved in occasional surveys, 173 willing to participate in online focus groups and 166 people interested in learning more about the Customer Panel.
- ◆ In terms of community investment, most customers want to see more investment in local place-based community projects rather than more generic support type offers.

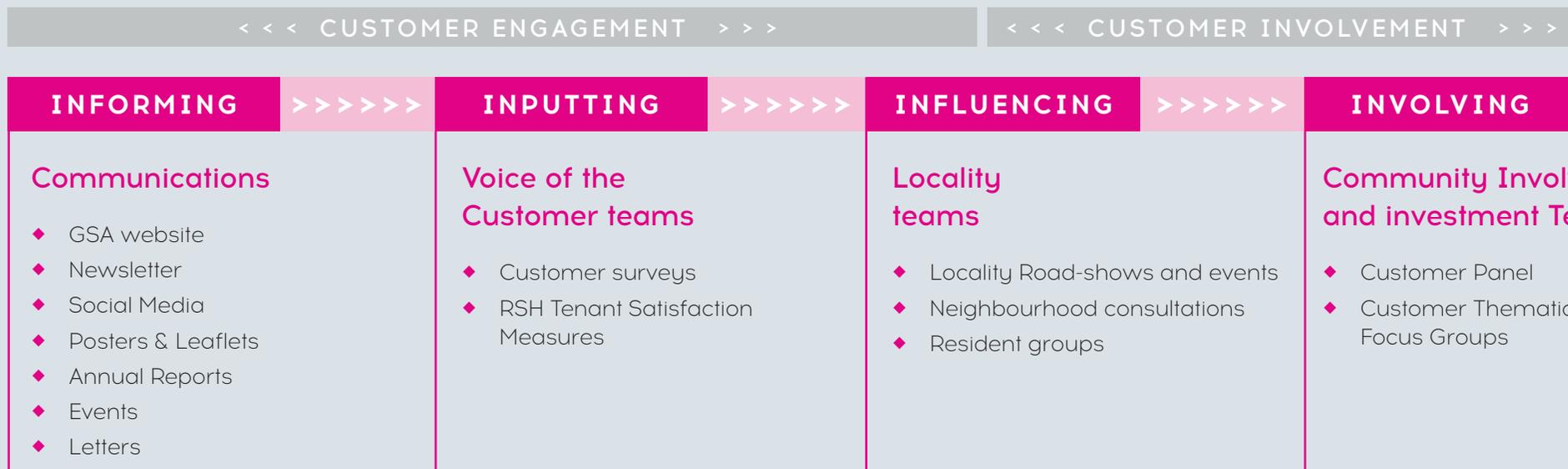
The survey results have informed the development of this strategy and all customers who responded to the survey will receive an update on the findings and our next steps. This update will also detail the work we are doing to improve communications, for example, producing regular performance updates on our website, our plans to invest in a SMS tool to help us to reach and track engagement with more customers and the development of an e-customer newsletter.

Ways to get involved – our new Customer Offer

In this section we explain the ways in which we will work in partnership with customers to ensure your views are at the heart of our business. We recognise not all customers are the same and people may want to engage in different ways depending on their level of interest and capacity to get involved, and some people may not want to engage at all. We offer a menu of engagement options that customers can choose from to suit them.

Our menu is based around our four building blocks of engagement which begins with keeping customers regularly informed and updated on our services and performance.

The second building block includes online surveys which allow customers to engage at their own convenience and provide their views and feedback on the services they receive. For those customers who are interested and wanting to influence what happens in their local area the third block includes opportunities to attend online and face to face local meetings and consultations. The fourth block of engagement represents the maximum level of involvement, our Customer Panel. This is geared towards those customers who want to get involved at a strategic level in the scrutiny of GSA services and act as a customer voice representative to help drive performance and increase customer satisfaction.



Informing – find out about how GSA is performing and how to get involved through a range of communication channels.

The GSA website is regularly updated with news stories and GSA performance information (covering key areas of repairs, customer contact centre and customer satisfaction). Regular communications about what is happening are sent out on social media and in online newsletters. We advertise our local offers and events through online channels as well as posters and leaflets and we produce an online Annual Report.

Inputting - Not much time, become one of our on-the-go customers and take part in quick surveys sent to you online

Customer Surveys – generally these will be sent out electronically to customers by our Voice of the Customer team. Surveys may focus on general satisfaction and feedback in relation to repairs and other services you receive from us. Once we have gathered your feedback, the team turn this into insight and share it across the business to enable service improvement. We may also call you to follow up on a survey or ask for your views. From 2023, the team will also be contacting customers annually to invite them to take part in the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) survey, the results will be shared with the Regulator for Social Housing and published on our website from 2024.

Influencing – If you are interested in meeting GSA staff, want to learn more about local issues or opportunities and share your views you can join neighbourhood consultations or local road-shows that we host in your area.

Locality Road-shows & Events – our locality teams will take the lead on hosting ad-hoc events in their areas. These will provide customers the opportunity to meet staff in their locality, share views and to meet other customers.

Neighbourhood Consultations – similarly, our locality teams are responsible for arranging neighbourhood consultations where customers can discuss issues or opportunities in their local area.

Involving - if you have more time, our 'at home' option means you can join online customer focus groups on specialist topics that you are interested in. Or, if you have more time and have a passion for championing customer-led scrutiny then you can apply to become a member of our panel.

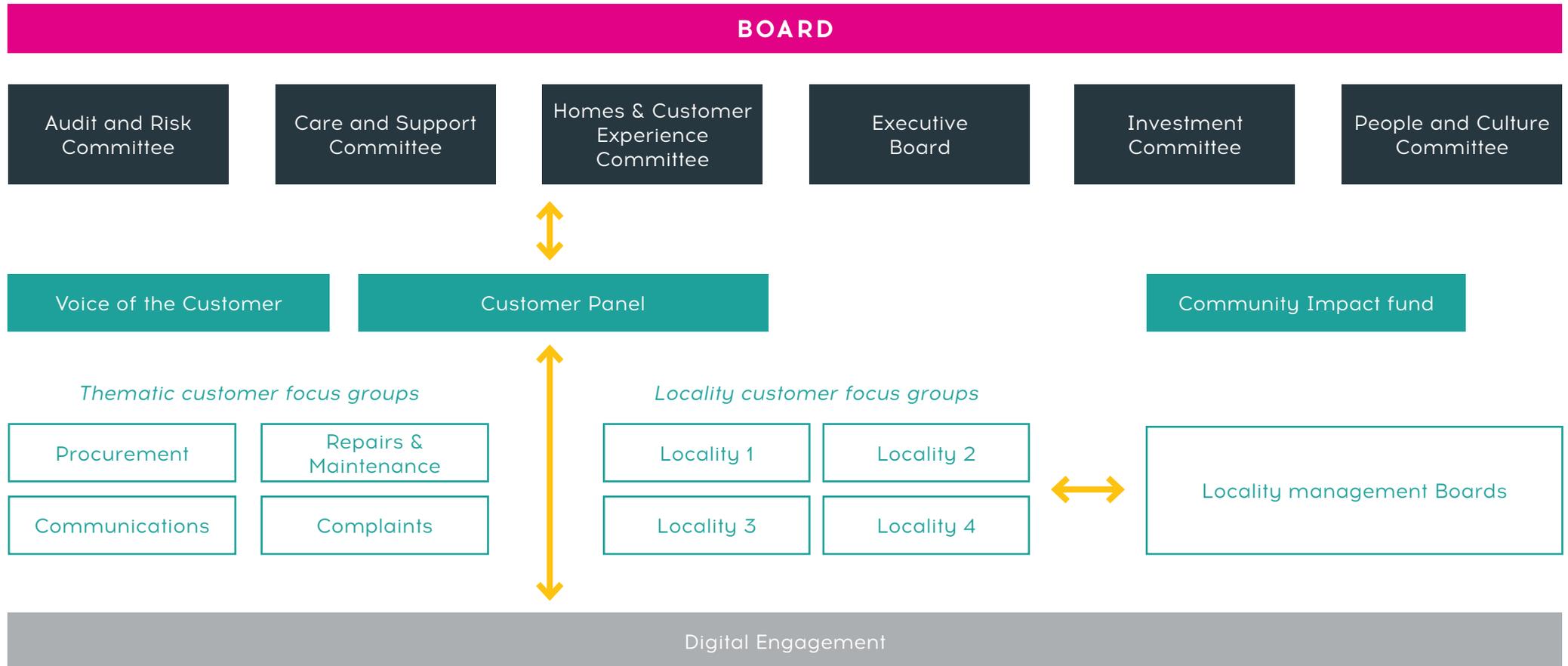
Customer Locality and Focus Groups – these will be facilitated by the Community Involvement & Investment team, and feed directly into the Customer Panel. Locality groups will take place every six months, bringing together customers from each of the four geographic localities to discuss issues/themes and gather views. The Customer Panel will identify where Focus Groups are needed to hear from more customers in relation to specific topics or service areas. These could, for example, focus on repairs, communication, procurement etc. (and may or may not be locality based).

Customer Panel – led by a chairperson (a GSA customer) the Panel is a group of up to 16 customers from across GSA’s four localities.

The Panel works in partnership with GSA to ensure resident-led scrutiny where the customer’s voice is heard and used to influence and drive performance and service improvements. The Panel meets every month, reports into GSA’s Communities and Customer Experience Committee and provides assurance that GSA is conducting itself in an open, transparent and accountable way.



Governance arrangements



Measuring progress

The Customer Involvement & Empowerment Strategy will be reviewed annually by our Customer Panel.

We will measure our progress in delivering this strategy in the following ways:

- ◆ All customer involvement activity will be tracked in terms of both outputs (the number of customers who are engaged with or involved for example) and outcomes (what has changed or happened because of each activity). The Customer Involvement & Investment team will maintain a database with this monitoring information.
- ◆ The Customer Panel will agree an annual Programme of Works and report on their progress against each element. This will be shared internally at GSA with the Communities and Customer Experience Committee and with customers in a dedicated section on the GSA website.
- ◆ The GSA Annual Report will include a customer involvement update to explain to all customers what has been achieved and plans for the upcoming year.
- ◆ The Community Involvement and Investment team will track progress of delivery against the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard, the Together with Tenants Charter and the identified GSA customer outcomes.
- ◆ We will carry out an annual Customer Involvement Survey and look to improve the baseline data generated from the initial survey in 2022.

- ◆ The Community Involvement & Investment team will report on the following overarching outcomes:
 - More customers are aware of GSA's customer involvement offer and the ways that they can engage
 - Customers feel listened to, and their views are taken into consideration when we make decisions
 - Customers feel they are given meaningful opportunities to influence and shape services for the better.

Customers will be kept informed about our customer involvement work in a number of ways including: a dedicated customer involvement section of the GSA website, a customer involvement update in the GSA Annual Report and a new quarterly online customer newsletter.