

Customer Service and Accountabilty Strategy

Every Contact Matters
2024- 2027
Draft Version



Elim
HOUSING

Homes that change
people's lives

Introduction

Our customers are at the heart of our business. We are committed to listening to everyone who lives in an Elim home so that we can meet their needs and requirements now and in the future. We know that our customers' first priority is that we get the basics right. We have a responsibility to provide good quality, well maintained homes that represent value for money. We also need to deliver straightforward services that enable all our customers to easily contact us with confidence that we will listen and act in a timely and effective manner.

Our customers have told us how important it is that we improve our communication so that they can rely on a good quality response that meets their needs and priorities. The action we take to deliver this strategy aims to continuously improve the quality of our customer's experience with Elim.

Following on from the Customer Service and Involvement Strategy which was published in 2020, this strategy takes us to the next stage in the delivery of customer and data informed services. As a smaller housing association, we have the opportunity to involve our residents on a more individual and personal level, and over the life of this strategy the opportunities for our residents to provide feedback and shape the design of our services will increase and improve.

Elim provides a range of services and homes, and the diversity of our customer profile is one of our great strengths. We want to achieve consistently high levels of satisfaction from all our customers, ensuring that everyone can consistently access, influence and receive an excellent housing service.

Since 2020 we have implemented new processes and digital services, but we have further work to do on our systems and communication processes to ensure our customers get a right first time experience with us.

Above all, we want all our customers to have a positive experience at every point of contact with Elim. Every contact is an opportunity to demonstrate an understanding of customer need, to resolve a problem or query, or gather information that will help improve our services. Every contact matters.

The overall purpose of this strategy is to continuously improve our customers' experience and satisfaction with Elim's service. To achieve this, we will focus on the delivery of three main aims.

These are:

- 1. Make better use of data and systems to improve our customer service**
- 2. Provide more opportunities for customers to give their views and influence our services**
- 3. Share a wider range of good quality and accurate performance information**

Vision & Values

Elim's vision is to meet housing need and deliver homes that change people's lives.

In the delivery of this vision we are led by our Elim CARES values, which were created in partnership with our customers, colleagues, Board and other stakeholders in 2019.

These values represent our commitment to how we deliver our services and work together successfully. In the delivery of this Customer Service and Accountability Strategy, we will live these values at all times.



CUSTOMERS FIRST

Customers are at the heart of our services and decision making.



ASPIRATIONAL & ACCOUNTABLE

We are ambitious for our customers, colleagues and stakeholders. We work with integrity, learn from mistakes and do what we say we will.



RESULTS

We work hard and deliver great results for our customers and for Elim.



EVERYONE'S VIEW MATTERS

We listen to understand, improve and build our services.



SUPPORTIVE

We tackle challenges head on and inspire each other to achieve our potential.

We know that Elim can deliver more homes and better customer services when it is reflective of and shaped by an understanding of our customers' different needs.

Using the Elim CARES Values, we have a commitment to ensuring equality and inclusion drives the achievement of our vision, ensuring that we don't leave any of our customers behind in our delivery of homes, supported housing provision and landlord services.

National Context

Elim has a legal and regulatory responsibility to be a responsible, fair and inclusive landlord. Over recent years there has been an increased focus on the expectations of the social housing sector and this is reflected in best practice, new legislation and the updated Regulatory Framework for Social Housing. Importantly, the commitments we set out in this strategy take us beyond our statutory obligations.

Here are some of the key parts of the formal framework that set out our responsibilities as a Landlord. These are in place to ensure that all our customers are provided with good quality, safe homes and the opportunity to share their opinions, to be heard and treated fairly.

Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023

The Social Housing (Regulation) Bill became law on the 20 July 2023. This provides the legal basis for many of the measures set out in the 2020 Social Housing White Paper: The Charter for Social Housing Residents. The Government expects all social housing providers to deliver on the seven commitments, which tenants should be able to expect from their landlord:

1. To be safe in your home
2. To know how your landlord is performing, including on repairs, complaints and safety, and how it spends its money
3. To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly, with access to a strong Ombudsman
4. To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants
5. To have your voice heard by your landlord
6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in, with your landlord keeping your home in good repair
7. The government will ensure social housing can support people to take their first step to ownership



New Consumer Standards, set by the Regulator of Social Housing

Social housing landlords must meet 'consumer standards' set by the Regulator of Social Housing, compliance with these standards helps to ensure that landlords are meeting the charter commitments.

A new set of four proposed consumer standards will be in place from April 2024. These will be:

- **The Safety and Quality Standard.** This standard requires social housing landlords to provide safe and good quality homes and landlord services to tenants.
- **The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.** This standard requires social housing landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so that tenants can access services, raise complaints when necessary, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account
- **The Neighbourhood and Community Standard.** This requires social housing landlords to engage with other relevant parties so that tenants can live in safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods and feel safe in their homes
- **The Tenancy Standard.** This sets requirements for the fair allocation and letting homes and for how those tenancies are managed and ended by social housing landlords

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

In April 2023, the Regulator of Social Housing introduced a set of tenant satisfaction measures that let tenants know how well their social housing landlord is performing.

All social housing providers are now obliged to collect data on the same 22 measures, and to report these results to their customers annually, so that there is increased transparency about our performance.

Elim will publish their first set of annual results in April 2024. The report will include the outcome of 12 customer perception or satisfaction measures, and 10 landlord management information measures, which will cover the performance of our repairs and safety service and other areas, including our handling of complaints and responsible neighbourhood management.

The Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code

The Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code sets out requirements for member landlords that will allow them to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. The purpose of the Code is to enable landlords to resolve complaints raised by their residents quickly and to use the data and learning from complaints to drive service improvements.

Internal Context

This strategy has been developed using our learning from the delivery of the previous strategy, alongside the feedback we have received from our customers in the past year. This has come through quarterly satisfaction surveys and other forms of customer feedback, including complaints and more in-depth feedback presented to our leadership team and the Board.

We have also asked our customers to feedback on early drafts of this strategy and will make changes as a result of their contribution.

Elim's Customers

Elim provides homes and housing services to over 800 households across 11 local authority areas in England and Wales. Our customers include individuals and families in social rented or shared ownership homes, people with experience of homelessness who are living in our supported housing and Gypsies and Travellers living on specially developed sites that Elim have built or manage on behalf of another Local Authority. Each year we also work with over 150 hospital inpatients in housing need, helping them to find appropriate accommodation on discharge.

Based on the information we have collected over the last two years, our customers have told us that they can still feel frustrated when they access our services. Some feedback tells us that our customers' do not always receive a consistent level of service and the quality of our communication can vary, so customers are not always confident in our ability to resolve their queries or complete repair so that it is right first time.

Overall satisfaction with our service is currently 70%, within the third quartile against national Housemark data, and we want to improve this within the life of this strategy. Our customers are more satisfied that Elim is easy to deal with (78%) and that we treat our customers fairly and with respect (82%), but we would like to see improvement in this area.

The lowest levels of satisfaction are with our handling of complaints and ASB. Our approach to both these areas of service will be reviewed in the first year of this strategy. We cannot always achieve a satisfactory outcome to issues raised by our customers, but we are actively reviewing our approach to communication in these areas so that we can ensure customers have the right expectations of our services, and trust that we will do what we say we will.

Communication and Related Strategies

The successful delivery of this strategy will require a clear link with Elim's communications plan which will support the delivery of Elim's customer service commitments.

In addition, our People & Culture Strategy and the Asset Management Strategy will also directly support the delivery of our customer service commitments and will be aligned to the same aims. The Asset Management Strategy is particularly important as it sets out our commitments to deliver safe, well-maintained homes are that affordable for our customers to heat and live in.

The overall direction of this strategy is set by Elim's Corporate Plan, and our commitments under the three aims of this customer strategy are fully aligned with our People, Property and Performance objectives.

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Strategy Aim One:

Make Better use of Data to Improve our Customer Service

What This Means	How we Will do This
<p>We will always focus on getting the basics right.</p> <p>This includes the effective delivery of all services, including repairs and maintenance, communal cleaning and gardening services and timely and efficient communication with your housing officers and other Elim colleagues.</p> <p>We will use customer feedback, including complaints, satisfaction survey data and comments on service as a key driver for action and improvement.</p> <p>We will improve our systems, so that information is reliable and better able to monitor our service delivery.</p>	<p>Improved contract management, using performance indicators to assess the quality of service delivery and drive improvement for internal Elim processes and external services delivered by our contractors.</p> <p>We will monitor and track customer feedback and satisfaction data, alongside available real-time service data to shape and improve service delivery from Elim and its contractors.</p> <p>Updated service standards which focus on timely communication and first time resolution wherever possible. We will review our written communication and letter templates for key housing management processes so that they are clear and easy to understand.</p> <p>We will improve our digital platforms, including the website and portal to increase the accessibility of our online services.</p>
<p>We will improve the quality of the household information we collect and will use this data to better understand and respond to our customers' individual needs and requirements.</p> <p>Some of this information will be shared with our maintenance or property teams so that we can be more proactive and flexible in our delivery of housing and maintenance services, including our approach to property adaptations.</p>	<p>We will request and safely store an appropriate range of customer information which is relevant to our services.</p> <p>We may ask for information in relation to any potential vulnerabilities or specific needs that your household may have. This may include information about the language your household uses, or physical needs that change the way you access or use your home.</p> <p>We may sometimes ask for information about protected characteristics to inform our understanding of customer need and to ensure we are always offering equality of access to our housing and services.</p>
<p>We will collect and share information between our internal teams to improve our understanding and response to the challenges, priorities and positive opportunities in communal areas and local neighbourhoods.</p>	<p>Our housing and maintenance teams will work closely together to record information relating to the quality of communal areas, overall property condition and anti-social behaviour.</p>

What Impact will this Have on Elim's Customers?

Data informed services and improved contract performance will enable the development and consistent improvement in the quality of our customer offer. Communication and customer service will be consistent, effective and tailored to meet individual household need.

Our customers will have confidence that Elim fully understands the condition of our homes and neighbourhoods, how services are performing and the impact this has on Elim customers.

Strategy Aim Two:

Provide More Opportunities for Customers to Give Their Views and Influence our Services

What This Means	How we Will do This
<p>We will provide an increased range of opportunities for customer involvement in operational service delivery and strategic decision making.</p> <p>Alongside this, we will work with our customers to encourage and support the take-up of these involvement and influence opportunities.</p> <p>We will make sure our whole housing service is visible and easily accessible, so there are more opportunities for residents to raise issues directly with Elim colleagues.</p>	<p>We know that a 'one size fits all' approach will not work for our customers, and so we will ensure there are different options for customers to get involved in a way that works for them.</p> <p>We will proactively work to identify and remove any barriers in the way of customers trying to access and influence Elim's services. This may involve holding meetings in more accessible locations, providing translator services or covering travel or childcare costs.</p>
<p>We will formally introduce customer scrutiny, involvement and influence within our Governance structure.</p>	<p>We will do more work to introduce and embed formal customer scrutiny of Elim's services and performance.</p> <p>We will create opportunities for customers to take up membership on Elim's Board and / or Board Committees. We will provide training and development to facilitate take-up and the success of these opportunities.</p>
<p>We will improve the way in which we record and report on the way in which our customers' voice and feedback has influenced our services and decision making.</p>	<p>We will continue to progress and demonstrate the impact of Elim's work and commitment as a signatory of the NHF Together with Tenant's Charter.</p> <p>We will develop our customer feedback processes, including 'You Said We Did' information, to promote the outcome of engagement and to demonstrate Elim's accountability in our response to customer feedback.</p>

What Impact will This Have on Elim's Customers?

Customer feedback will improve service delivery over the life of the strategy. Customers will be encouraged and facilitated to hold Elim to account and will have increased opportunities to shape and steer the direction of Elim's housing service, leading to an increased level of trust that services represent value for money and genuinely respond to customer need.

On the last page of this document we have set out a number of ways in which customers can get involved at Elim.

Strategy Aim Three:

Share a Wider Range of Good Quality Performance Information

What This Means	How we Will do This
<p>We will publish and increase customer access to a greater range and volume of relevant and accessible landlord service information.</p> <p>This will include service standards and policy and procedure information.</p>	<p>We will make better use of digital platforms, including the website, social media and customer portal, to increase the accessibility of our online information. Although most of our communication will be produced for digital circulation we will make a range of communication formats available and check what will work best for our customers.</p>
<p>We will publish and increase customer access to a greater range and volume of relevant and accessible performance information.</p> <p>This will include our Tenant Satisfaction Measures information.</p>	<p>We will move towards the publication of accurate and timely performance data, for example, sharing our quarterly customer survey results within the same quarter we receive them.</p> <p>We will improve our reporting of complaints handling, and demonstrate our learning and action taken in response to complaints received.</p> <p>We will review the accessibility of our Annual Report which includes our financial statements. We will tailor this so that it is more relevant and informative for our customers.</p> <p>We will publish an annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures report from April 2024.</p>
<p>We will improve the quality and accessibility of local information, which provides customers with access to relevant information about their housing neighbourhood or aspects of the specialist service they may receive from Elim.</p>	<p>We will make better use of localised information sharing, including consistent use of noticeboards and other physical communication methods.</p> <p>We will consistently provide advance notice of neighbourhood visits and use this as an opportunity to share performance and involvement information with our customers in a proactive way.</p>
<p>We will engage with our customers to ensure that our building and fire safety information fully meets their needs.</p>	<p>We will share accessible and timely safety information in line with compliance requirements and best practice.</p> <p>We will use a range of communication methods with engagement activity to increase awareness of roles, rights and responsibilities for safety. This will be specific to the needs of different customers and buildings.</p>

What Impact will This Have on Elim's Customers?

We will be more accountable to customers, providing information on our performance and any improvements or reductions in the quality of Elim's service and customer satisfaction with these services. Where benchmarking information is available, we will provide our customers with comparable data from other Housing Associations so that they can check our performance against the sector. We will provide customers with more information and assurance about the safety of their home.

Measuring Success

We will deliver and monitor progress against this strategy using an annually revised twelve-month plan, which will set measurable targets and actions to complete against each of the strategy's three main aims.

We also expect to demonstrate the success of this strategy through a number of other measures which are directly linked to our customers' improved experience of their homes and our service. This will include:

Customer Satisfaction

We will measure overall satisfaction with our services as a landlord. We want our overall resident satisfaction score to improve year on year so that Elim's customers are within the highest satisfied quartile across the social housing sector.

Maintenance Satisfaction

We know that our maintenance and repairs service is one of the most frequently used by our residents and is a significant overall driver of satisfaction. We want our residents' satisfaction with maintenance to continuously improve so that it consistently achieves over 85% satisfaction.

Customer Involvement

We will measure and target increased participation in customer involvement activities at every level of our organisation and governance structure. Alongside this, we will record increased levels of feedback from customers and the improvements made as a result of customer influence.

Organisational performance

Improved communication and data driven customer service will deliver better outcomes for everybody and we expect our overall organisational performance to improve year on year as customers are better supported and equipped to manage their tenancy. We will measure our performance against annual Key Performance Indicators and an effective performance management framework, highlighting areas of internal and external under-performance and the action taken to drive improvement.

Complaints Monitoring

We will measure the frequency of complaints, satisfaction at resolution and feedback from any expressions of dissatisfaction that we receive. We will aim to reduce stage two complaints and escalation to the Ombudsman.

Right first time

We will measure the number of enquiries from residents that we are able to resolve at the first contact, and improve performance in this area over the life of the strategy.

Visible and accessible service delivery

Our service delivery is directed by our organisational policies. By the end of the strategy 100% of organisational policies that directly affect our residents will be able to demonstrate resident involvement in their development and review. We will seek resident feedback on the accessibility of our services to ensure that all our customers have easy access to our services in a way that works for them.

Appendix One:

Here are some of the ways our customers' voice is currently heard within Elim's governance and decision making structure.

If you are interested in taking part in current or future involvement activities, please contact your housing officer, or email us on info@elimhousing.co.uk

- We seek customer consultation on the development of key customer strategies, policy and procedures
- Customers are invited to join Housing Officer walkabout inspections and provide feedback on their homes and neighbourhood
- We invite customers to become involved in operational service procurement. Recent examples include our responsive maintenance service tenders, and our last round of gardening and cleaning contracts
- We undertake quarterly surveys in line with new Tenant Satisfaction Measures requirements. All of the quantitative results from this survey are reported to our Board and reviewed at our Board committees
- Qualitative feedback from these surveys is analysed by our Strategic Leadership Team quarterly with follow up action instructed and monitored across operational teams
- All complaints data is reported to our Board People and Culture Committee
- Customers are invited to attend relevant National Housing Federation / other sector events with Elim colleagues
- We have reported case studies of escalated Ombudsman complaints and customer disrepair cases to our Board People and Culture Committee and our Development and Assets Committee
- We have held digital 'Meet the CEO' evening sessions with an open invitation to Elim customers
- Customers are invited to join Elim Board Members at scheme visits / corporate events
- Our Board regularly receive films from customers giving their first hand positive and negative experience of Elim's service as part of our 'Voices in the boardroom' video series

As part of the delivery of this strategy, we will also introduce the following opportunities in 2024:

- We will increase the regularity of the customer stories and case studies that are provided to our Board and Committee
- We will re-introduce and launch a formal customer scrutiny structure. Several meetings were held throughout 2021-2023 but lacked consistency and a sufficiently robust support and co-ordination structure to aid their success
- Other Customer led engagement or oversight processes, including bespoke task and finish groups or single issue scrutiny sessions
- Customer recruitment to Board and Committee membership roles