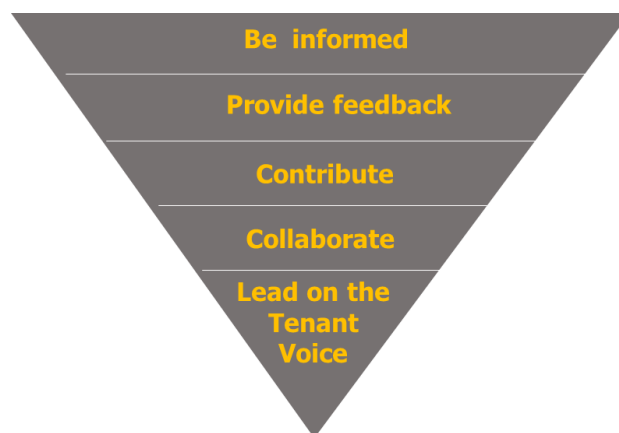


Annual Report on Customer Engagement 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025

1. Overview

In February 2024 we agreed a new strategy on customer engagement with our Tenant Committee, who had been heavily involved in developing a new approach. We agreed a shared vision for working with customers to ensure they can influence improve services, removing any barriers to engagement and communicating effectively. The strategy identified a range of ways that customers can be involved with CHS in ways to suit them:

- Be informed – CHS monthly newsletter, annual report, website, myCHS portal
- Provide feedback – through completing surveys, making complaints, day to day contact with CHS
- Contribute to discussions – focus groups, estate inspectors, the online feedback panel
- Collaborate with working groups – Scrutiny Panel, Complaints Panel, contractor core groups (not 'Meet the Contractor' events), task & finish groups
- Lead on the Tenant Voice – Tenant Committee, Customer & Homes Committee, Board member



2. Action Plan

The key areas that we set out in a new Action Plan for 2024 – 2026 were:

- Improving communication
- Offering different ways tenants can influence CHS
- Supporting our involved tenants
- Learning from complaints
- Accountability and Scrutiny
- Data / knowledge – particularly knowing our customers better

Strategy Actions completed during 2024 – 25 include:

- Increased resources for customer engagement to provide more support for involved tenants and to build on the new strategy
- Changed the format of Tenant Committee meetings to be a mix of online/in-person and morning/ evening

- Reached out to many more tenants to encourage them to be more involved with the Tenant Committee and Panels
- Consulted tenants more about policy changes that will affect them directly, as well as the Tenant Committee.
- Recruited 429 members to our online panel who are willing to give us feedback on particular topics
- Revised our core groups with contractors to a wider range of tenants who will all be invited to online 'Contractor Forum' events
- Worked with tenants to develop the design of de-carbonisation work in their homes during our 'net zero' project
- Started a project to improve satisfaction levels among shared owners
- Improving the website in promoting the range of ways to be engaged with CHS

3. The Year in numbers

| Event / | Number | Notes |
|--|--------|---|
| All Committee and Panel meetings | 17 | Now mixed format and timing, in-person daytime and online evening |
| Online Focus Group / Forum | 3 | Topics – the CHS Annual Report, Communities Strategy, Building Safety |
| Induction and training sessions | 6 | Including Committee skills, Scrutiny |
| Tenants attending national conferences | 7 | Tpas national conference, Scrutiny conference |
| Hosted Tpas regional event | 1 | Over 40 attendees from 16 landlords from across East Anglia attended the event to share ideas and good practice |
| Site visits | 3 | Contractor head offices, de-carbonisation project in Cambridge |
| Committee / Panel Chairs meetings | 6 | Including oversight of the Engagement Action Plan |
| Tenants scoring contract tenders | 4 | This was for responsive repairs contract, our biggest contract |
| Number of monthly online Tenant Newsletters | 12 | On average 55% of those we emailed opened this e-newsletter |
| Number of replies to surveys | 4441 | 16 different surveys |
| Number of tenants personally contacted about volunteering | 119 | 40 by phone, 79 by email |
| New volunteers taking part in Committees/Panels/focus groups | 17 | |
| Number of Estate Inspectors | 22 | Inspectors provide monthly feedback on the quality of estate services |
| Sheltered scheme tenant meetings | 12 | |
| Housing with Care tenant meetings | 28 | |

4. Engagement in Action

These are some examples of changes made as a result of suggestions and feedback from our customers or different ways we support our local tenant communities:

- Shared Owners told us that they found service charge statements confusing so we now include a service charge guidance leaflet to explain the different amounts. We have introduced a similar statement for all tenants.
- The General Housing Team have introduced an early step in the Anti-social behaviour procedure, to give neighbours being complained about a clear opportunity to give their account. This was a result of feedback from a customer whose neighbour had complained about them.
- The Money Matters Team wanted to ensure our customers who were entitled to Pension Credit were receiving it. They found customers were more forthcoming about their health needs than their financial problems, so they changed the focus of their work to assist these customers to get Attendance Allowance which also makes them eligible for Winter Fuel Allowance regardless of income.
- We consulted the tenants and shared owners who would be affected by a change to the service charge policy, to introduce charges for safety checks in communal areas and pest control where it's needed. A few concerns were raised about the potential of such charges to increase (which we keep as low as possible) although the need to have these checks was understood. At one sheltered scheme the reassurance of continued preventative pest control measures was welcomed.
- Ellis House (sheltered scheme) residents expressed concerns about security after a break-in and CHS installed CCTV covering the front and back of the building.
- St Andrews Glebe (sheltered scheme) residents formed a gardening group and were awarded a grant so they can enhance the garden areas with planting pots and hanging baskets and they are going to re-paint the garden furniture.
- Moorlands Court (Housing with Care) residents asked for a games table for jigsaws and card games, and it has been ordered.
- Richard Newcombe Court (Housing with Care) residents raised concerns regarding the lack of protein on our restaurant menu, so the new spring/summer menu contains a lot more protein-based meals. Tenants were also asked what meals they would like to see on the menu, and their suggestions have also been implemented.
- Neighbourhood Grant - £925 has been paid by CHS to fund 6 projects in Cambridge, Cherry Hinton, Milton, and Little Paxton including face-painting for a community event, pots and hanging baskets for a gardening club, Christmas decorations for a sheltered scheme, buffet for 2 Christmas parties, and a skip day to address fly-tipping.
- We are trialling some new signage at Samuel Jones Crescent in St Neots as a result of feedback from the Building Safety Forum. Tenants wanted an app to report communal repairs, this evidence will feed into the CHS digital strategy.

5. Communication

Over the last year the Engagement Manager and Communications Manager have continued to develop the joint working on customer communications. The e-newsletter is emailed to all tenants and shared owners for whom we hold an email address, and a quarterly print version is posted to all other customers. The newsletter has been an important way to inform customers about a range of issues e.g. rent increases, support for domestic abuse, changes to repairs services, building safety and support for Universal Credit migration.

The Communications Manager analysed the data on which articles were most popular and developed a strategy to engage readers by sharing more case stories, updates on events, guidance and resources for tenants. A photo shoot captured images of staff interacting with tenants and the photos feel warm and authentic; with the diversity of tenants, with different ages, backgrounds and disability represented. A tenant survey in March 2025 highlighted more ideas to be implemented in 25-26, such as a calendar of upcoming events. We continue to monitor which content is most popular.

The 2023-24 Customer Annual Report featured 5 pages on the Tenant Voice, including insights from Tenant Satisfaction surveys, complaints and the work of the committee and panels. Feedback from the annual report focus group was used to shape the content and style of the report, ensuring it was accessible, easy to understand and had the right level of detail that customers wanted.

Changes were made to the website, particularly the Making a complaint and Tell us what you think pages, with input from involved customers who wanted the language to be less formal, convey empathy and understanding.

6. Tenant Committee

The core group for our involved tenants is the Tenant Committee, members of which also sit on the Panels focussing on Complaint handling and Scrutiny of CHS services. During the year 8 new tenants joined the Tenant Committee, some of whom are also getting involved in the other Panels. Towards the end of the year our longstanding Chair of the Tenant Committee stood down, and the Committee has agreed a new Chair to take it forward during 2025 and beyond.

The Consumer Standards emphasise that engagement opportunities need to be accessible to everyone. The Smart Review carried out for us by Tpas in 2023 review identified that the timing and format of Tenant Committee meetings (in-person during the working day) could be a barrier for some customers. The Tenant Committee changed its terms of reference, to remove a requirement to attend at least two meetings a year; and changes to the format and timing of meetings to include two evening meetings and one online meeting a year.

The Committee had a busy year including:

- Adopted the National Housing Federation's Together with Tenants Charter
- Policies reviewed and endorsed: Complaints, Service Charges
- Strategies reviewed: Communities (Neighbourhood), Communication
- Presentation by Money Matters on Universal Credit migration and cost-of-living support
- Presentation by Sureserve (Aaron Services) on winter maintenance plan
- Presentation by Fortem about the new repairs and maintenance contract
- Updates on CHS's decarbonisation works
- Procurement and contractor core groups were discussed
- Neighbourhood grant was discussed
- Input on value for money issues fed into CHS's self-assessment against regulatory standards including the new Consumer Standards
- At every meeting the latest Tenant Satisfaction Measures were reviewed

7. Scrutiny

The Scrutiny Panel was renamed by its members as the Tenants' Scrutinising Team to help people understand what they do. They delivered a valuable report on our approach to Damp and Mould, which was considered by the Board in February 2024, including many recommendations that were agreed by CHS and acted on during 2024-25. Actions delivered as a result include more proactively identifying homes at risk of damp and mould, improving communication, increased recognition of individual circumstances in procedures, increasing training for staff who visit homes to recognise damp and mould. The Panel continues to monitor the outcomes of this project. 11 out of 12 actions are complete, 1 is ongoing.

The Scrutiny Panel worked throughout 2024-25 on a Payment methods project, looking at potential efficiencies for CHS and the reasons customers may have for using different payment methods. The final report is being drafted however there are already positive outcomes as a result of the Panel's work:

- Around £30,000 saved due to a procurement exercise and signing a new contract with AllPay.
- A change to the sign-up process to eliminate cheques in Housing with Care

New members received Tpas training on how to do Scrutiny and three members attended the Tpas Scrutiny Conference. The Chair of the Panel continues to mentor the Vice Chair in preparing agendas and checking minutes to support the continuity of the Panel.

8. Complaints Panel

The Complaints Panel has developed over many years and members have become experts in good practice around complaint handling and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. During the year the Panel:

- Reviewed one stage 2 complaint and responded to the complainant.
- Co-produced the self-assessment on how CHS's policy and procedure measures up against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, which has become an annual exercise and is published on the website.
- Reviewed the Complaints Policy to make sure it keeps up with the Housing Ombudsman's requirements, for example that we accept complaints about incidents from the last 12 months.
- Members have continued to be champions for the complaints process and the new structure of the Panel will ensure that it holds CHS to account for the quality of its complaint handling.

9. The Online Feedback Panel

We asked the 400+ members of our Online Panel (who have agreed to give us feedback on an occasional basis through online questions) to let us know what would be important to them in a new repairs contract, in advance of the procurement exercise that concluded at the end of the year. They also reviewed the new navigation on the website and said that it would make it easier to find the information they were looking for.

10. Procurement

Tenants were actively involved in the scoping and design of the new responsive and planned repair and voids contract and also the communal cleaning contract. They evaluated tenders, participated in moderation meetings and are involved in the mobilisation e.g. visiting contractor offices to see how their systems work.

11. Contractor Forum

A new Contractor Forum has been developed with involved tenants and advertised to all tenants. The Contractor Forum will provide tenants with an opportunity to hear directly from their contractors on how they are performing and use this time to feedback their views.

12. Building Safety Forum

Tenants who lived in blocks were surveyed and invited to a new Building Safety Forum which met online in February 2025. Tenants gave feedback on their understanding of building safety and what improvements could be made in their blocks, and how best to raise awareness and encourage tenants to report safety concerns.

13. Tenant Satisfaction Measures

We survey every tenant and shared owner annually to ask the 12 questions required by the Regulator, plus a few extra questions. Overall satisfaction with CHS among tenants increased from 79.1% in 2023-24 to 81.7% in 2024-5; this could be the result of a number of different

factors however we hope it includes the degree to which customers feel CHS is listening. There have also been increases in the percentage of tenants who feel that CHS *Listens to my views* and *Keeps me informed*. Unfortunately our shared owners continue to be our least satisfied group of customer and we need to make further steps to connect with them and to make the changes they seek, for example in the transparency of service charges.

14. Flooring Policy

The development of a new policy of providing flooring for new tenancies is an example of working with those who would be most affected by a change to ask them for their views. The Communities Manager used the results of the flooring survey, sent to customers who had moved into a CHS home in the last 6 months, and feedback from the focus group to develop a business case for CHS to fund two pilot projects and to develop a new approach. The aim is to develop:

- A CHS Flooring policy – to formalise the practice of leaving all carpets in a good condition will be left in the property and gifted to incoming tenants.
- If cleaning is required, CHS will cover the cleaning cost of x 2 rooms.
- A pilot project to provide flooring in 10 of the 120 average annual relets.
- A pilot project to provide furnished tenancies in 10 homes.

15. Looking ahead

The last year 2024 – 25 has focussed on embedding the updated approach to engaging with customers set out in the new Strategy. Looking forward we will work with the Tenant Committee on the overall strategy to maintain momentum and to ensure the Tenant Voice is amplified further. We will add new plans that strengthen the engagement of all customers, however involved they wish to be.