



Telling our story

2024 - 2025
Communications strategy



Welcome

The landscape for social housing is changing. With a new regulatory framework, commitment to listening and acting on customer voice, and increasing demand for services, good communication and engagement has never been more important. By engaging with our customers, colleagues, stakeholders and partners, we can tell our story and help them to understand the work we do, our main challenges and successes, and ultimately develop stronger relationships, built on trust.

Our communications strategy supports our mission, vision and values. It describes who we are and what's important to us, and gives direction and structure as to how we communicate. Effective communication will help us to achieve the objectives set out in our business plan and in other key strategies, to protect and enhance our reputation and to support the City of Wolverhampton Council and other partners in delivering on their plans for the city and its residents.

Our company values



Working
together



Open to
new ideas



Respecting
differences



Delivering
our promises



Our mission:

To help
people get
on in life



Our vision:

Unlocking
people's
potential through
housing, skills & technology



Our strategies

Business Plan 2024 – 2025

CSR and Community Investment strategy

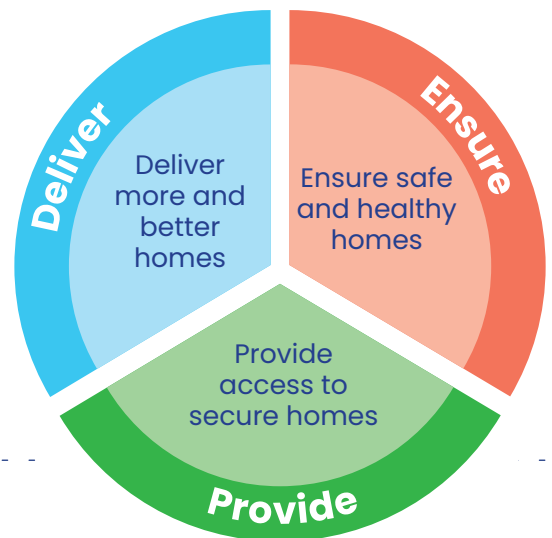
People & Organisational Development strategy

Customer Offer strategy

Carbon Reduction strategy

Asset Management strategy

Our business plan supports the City of Wolverhampton Council in delivering its objectives and is based on three strategic priorities:



The seven pillars of the Charter for Social Housing Residents sets out what our customers can expect from Wolverhampton Homes:

To be safe in your home.

The government will work with industry and landlords to ensure every home is safe and secure.

To know how your landlord is performing

including on repairs, complaints and safety, and how it spends its money, so you can hold it to account.

To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly,

with access to a strong Ombudsman.

To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved Consumer Standards for tenants.

To have your voice heard by your landlord, for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its Board.

To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in, with your landlord keeping your home in good repair.

To be supported to take your first step to ownership, so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow.



Our approach

Purpose:

We want customers, colleagues and other stakeholders to understand our business and the landscape we are operating in, recognise the biggest challenges and opportunities, and take the necessary actions to support us to deliver on our promises.

Objectives

The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of our customers through effective targeting of information relevant to them.
- Establish Wolverhampton Homes as a leading brand for housing, skills and technology, and one that listens and acts on the customer voice.
- Create communications that tell our story and create opportunities for two-way dialogue to help us to learn from our audiences.
- Be open and honest about how we are delivering against our mission, vision and values so customers, colleagues and stakeholders understand what we are doing and how it affects them.
- Develop existing and new channels to provide customers with easy access to information and self-service options.
- Support effective partnership working with the City of Wolverhampton Council and local and national partners through clear messaging.
- Ensure we're able to effectively communicate in the event of a crisis, keeping affected audiences updated and informed if something goes wrong.

For you

We know and understand our customers and accommodate their needs and preferences wherever possible. Our communication is inclusive and reinforces our vision and values, which are at the heart of everything that we do.

Trusted

Our communication is open, honest and factual, with a clear purpose. We will continue to develop and maintain a professional corporate identity – our brand – for consistent use across the business.

Open

Communication is accessible, plain English and free of jargon and the information we provide is easy to read and understand. Our communication will be driven by customer needs and our business plan.

Telling our story

Our communication will focus on these key themes to support the Charter for Social Housing Residents and our Delivery Plan.

- Providing good quality, safe homes in thriving communities.
- Developing consistent and transparent methods for communicating our performance against regulatory measures that help keep customers safe and informed.
- Supporting our customers.
- Creating two-way dialogue with opportunities for customers to be consulted and to have their say.
- Promoting our colleague offer and career opportunities with Wolverhampton Homes to retain local talent in the city and become an employer of choice.
- Provide excellent communications on a cost-effective basis, providing high-quality online services that encourage customers to move to digital by choice.

Our audiences

As a community business, we aim to be as inclusive and accessible as possible. Our audiences include tenants, leaseholders and Wolverhampton Homes colleagues, along with other people who access our services including homeless people, homeowners and community groups. We have developed a strategy that will engage with these different audiences through targeted communications. This will allow us to tailor our message so that it resonates with the relevant group and provides them with the information that is important to them.

Customers and Communities

Tenants

Leaseholders

Housing applicants

Homeless residents

Homeowners and private renters

Tenant and resident associations

Stakeholders and Partners

The City of Wolverhampton Council

Tenant management organisations

Public and third sector organisations

Unions

Elected members

Local and national media

Housing organisations

Industry bodies
(for example, National Federation of ALMOs, Chartered Institute of Housing)

Regulator of Social Housing

Suppliers and contractors

Our People

Colleagues

Senior Management Team

Our board



- **Develop** consistent and transparent methods of communicating our performance against regulatory measures that help keep customers safe and informed.

Reaching you

We have a range of different channels available to reach diverse audiences for various purposes. Our aim is to reach people with information that is relevant to them, using their preferred method and communicating in a way and at a time that suits them.

The main areas of communication we will develop are:

Website and self-serve

Our website was redeveloped in 2021 and all of the information on Wolverhampton Homes and our services can be found here. We'll continue to develop our website and we'd like customers to visit the website first if they have a question or need more details about one of our services. Our popular automated chatbot can assist users to find the information they need.

Our My Account service gives customers and potential tenants a quick and secure way of reporting repairs, checking on housing bids and paying rent. As part of our drive for continual improvement, we launched our My Account customer app in November 2023, which is available for smartphones and tablets as well as on desktop computers. The app offers additional functionality, including checking current and previous repairs and changing appointments; applying, searching and bidding for homes; and completing those everyday transactions that make managing your home easier.

Targeted email and text messages

Wolverhampton Homes customers already receive a monthly e-newsletter 'HomesTalk' by email, which covers important news and service updates as well as details of city and community events. Through audience insight projects, we plan to expand our email targeting capabilities to ensure we are sending the most relevant information to customers

about the services they use or may be interested in. We know many people prefer to receive time-sensitive news by text message, so we are also aiming to offer this as an option for customers. Electronic methods of communication will help us to achieve our environmental targets and are more cost-effective than sending out letters and other printed media.

Social media

With 84% of the UK population being a member of at least one social network (Statista 2022), social media is a cost-effective way for us to broadcast information that is relevant to the majority of our audience. Using platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn can help us to reach people with relevant content and also allow us to share important messages from partners including West Midlands Fire Service and the police. Our social media channels are all open for comments and messages, with our customer service teams managing these. They are a popular contact method for many customers, creating two-way dialogue and opportunities for the customer voice to be heard.

Face-to-face meetings

Supporting community groups and voluntary organisations is a key pillar of our Corporate Social Responsibility and Community Investment strategy. Local groups create safe and welcoming spaces for people to meet their neighbours and develop connections, reducing loneliness and social isolation, and they play an important role in building relationships with customers and partners. We support a number of active Tenant and Resident Associations, which hold meetings in person across the city, with representatives from WH often available to discuss services, and local projects and initiatives. Customers are always welcome to attend and get involved. Our aim is to reach people with information that is relevant to them and using their preferred method.

We additionally have a Customer Involvement Panel, which is made up of Wolverhampton Homes tenants. The panel ensures the customer voice is heard through our engagement, meeting and it meets to highlight any concerns and working to resolution with Wolverhampton Homes.

The main areas of communication we will develop are:

Digital screens

We are installing digital screens in all of our tower blocks across the city. This will allow residents and visitors to stay updated with news and information relevant to their home and their neighbourhood.

Printed materials

Despite the increasing shift to digital there is still a place for printed communication including posters, leaflets and mail-outs and tenant newsletters. We will continue to use these methods when it will help us to achieve our objectives, bearing in mind the environmental impact and our aim for customers to move to digital by choice.

Internal communications

Wolverhampton Homes colleagues have access to our SharePoint intranet site, Microsoft Teams and Viva Engage where all key internal messages are posted. A monthly e-newsletter, #WHLife, signposts colleagues to recent and upcoming news stories, events, training and job opportunities. The Chief Executive briefing is held every six weeks across all three offices, highlighting key business information. This in-person briefing is supported by different guest speakers allowing for focus on various areas of the business. Colleagues are encouraged to ask questions. Each office also has at least one digital screen where information and upcoming events are advertised. We promote in-person and online briefings by senior managers to keep colleagues informed and we will continue to send all-staff emails for time-sensitive and important information as necessary, but these will be kept to a minimum.

To promote specific initiatives and campaigns, we also access a range of other channels including local radio and TV, Out-of-Home or outdoor advertising, local newspapers and their websites.

Our aim

We want to reach people with information that is relevant to them and using their preferred method, while ensuring communication is inclusive and accessible.



Our diverse audience

We want customers to come with us on this journey. This means and we need to be aware of any challenges or considerations that could impact this.



25%

of residents live in social housing, compared to 17.1% for England



19.4%

of residents identified as being disabled, compared to 17.7% for England

15%

of residents

do not speak English as their main language, compared to 9.2% for England

Currently **fewer than two-thirds of customers** have registered their email address to receive news and essential service updates.





- **This strategy** gives direction and structure to how we communicate, helping to achieve our objectives.

Supporting our strategic priorities through communication

Universal Credit housing costs

Following the annual rent review in March 2023, we needed to remind customers in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) about checking their updated housing costs using My Account and updating their UC account with the new information. This action would ensure their UC payment would reflect the new rent amount and they would not fall behind on their payments.

We emailed all registered My Account users with a reminder and ran a small campaign across our social media channels. In the two weeks of the campaign there was an increase of 227% My Account logins as customers checked their rent details. Calls to Homes Direct reduced by 25% as customers could get the information quickly and easily through the online system. This in turn reduced call waiting times for other customers.



- **227%** increase in 'My Account' logins as customers checked their rent details, as a result of our campaign.



- **4000** website visits and more than **350 applications** to the apprenticeship programme.

Apprentice Recruitment

Our apprenticeship programme is very popular as it provides on-the-job training alongside college-based learning which will set our apprentices up for a great career, allowing them to specialise in their chosen area, for example, bricklaying, plumbing or business administration. It's important that we reach local talent in the city and attract the best candidates for these challenging and rewarding roles.

The campaign was planned over three weeks on social media, on a range of job sites, in local newspapers and via customer emails. In fact, we had to stop the social media campaign after just eight days as it was so successful! More than 4,000 people visited our website to find out more about the opportunities and over 350 people applied for the apprenticeship programme.

The applications were of an extremely high quality, meaning we were successful in recruiting an excellent cohort of apprentices to support us to deliver services for our customers.

Our brand

Our brand is more than just the Wolverhampton Homes logo. It captures who we are and helps to shape our reputation. It's one of our most valuable assets and is seen on our vans, our uniforms and in our photos. It is how our customers, stakeholders and residents recognise us. Our brand reflects our beliefs and values, as well as our personality. It is a visual representation of how we wish to be seen: collaborative, open, approachable and honest. It's a brand to be proud of, and to ensure the brand remains strong and trusted, we need our communications to be written and designed in a consistent way.

Everyone in Wolverhampton Homes is responsible for our brand. We will improve it through:

- Delivering a good customer experience.
- Addressing reputational issues quickly.
- Using the appropriate logo and branded templates.
- Following corporate guidelines for language, sentence structure and tone of voice.

We will update and promote our brand guidelines and toolkits to ensure all colleagues can use the branding appropriately. Managers must ensure that all staff apply the brand guidelines and house style in their work with the help of the communications team.



- **It's who we are**

Our brand reflects our beliefs and values, as well as our personality. It is a visual representation of how we wish to be seen.



Celebrating success

We want to provide information and service updates in a way that makes it easy for customers. Wherever possible, we will evaluate communications performance to understand if we have achieved what we set out to, and how we can improve next time.

The monitoring will vary, but is likely to include analysis of 'the three O's': that is the Outputs, Outtakes and Outcomes of our work.

Measurement

Outputs

are the most basic form of measurement and look at what was produced, for example, videos, news articles or customer emails.

Outtakes

looks at who we reached through our communication. For example, how many people read the article, watched the video, or attended our event.

Outcomes

consider how behaviour has changed as a result. For example, did more customers log onto their account and update their personal details, or apply for the apprenticeship programme?





Our goals:

In summary, the communications strategy will underpin Wolverhampton Homes, organisational objectives mapped out in the Business Plan and guided by Our Future.



As the voice of Wolverhampton Homes, communications play an essential role in conveying clear and understandable key messaging to colleagues, customers and other key stakeholders. The Communications team will support all messaging output, while working cohesively both within its own team and the wider business to ensure we are organised, efficient and proactive.

Strategic planning is crucial; a proactive 360 approach across internal and external communication and embracing customer involvement and community engagement will maximise outcomes. This will ensure agility to articulate reactive messaging, which is necessary in a continually evolving landscape.

This strategic approach will support delivery of the following goals:

- We will deliver effective communications to tell our story – strengthening our partnerships and helping customers get the best out of their relationship with us.
- We will communicate in line with our values, so that we are clear, open, honest and friendly.
- We will tailor our communications to a range of audiences to support the wider objectives of the business.
- We will continue to build our brand, positioning us as a community-focused business that is bold, dynamic, and forward-thinking.
- We will use a wide range of external channels to offer choice and convenience to our customers and partners.
- We will deliver engaging and informative internal communications, exploring innovative ways to reach our team.
- We will provide creative marketing support to ensure the success of our commercial activities.
- We will monitor and measure the success of our activities so that we can continue to improve.



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