



# St Leger Homes of Doncaster

## Customer Access Strategy

### 2020 – 2024



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# INTRODUCTION

## **A message from the Chief Executive**

Maintaining the homes our customers live in is important to us, but equally important is how we support and work with the people who live in those homes. Our focus is providing services that are co-produced in consultation with our customers.

Part of that focus is ensuring that the organisation, and our employees, put the customer at the heart of everything we do. Making it easy for our customers to contact us and involving them in how we deliver our services is a regulatory requirement and is something we value, not because we have to do it, but because it is the right thing to do.

The need to change and adapt how we deliver our services and how we use agile working to support our customers has been at the forefront of our discussions during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have had to adapt how we deliver our services, finding new ways of operating and encouraging a change in our customers' habits.

We don't want to waste these opportunities; we need to take the best bits of these approaches and build on these new models of working, to deliver services in a way which supports our customers and our business who are now used to interacting with us in different ways, whilst still supporting those who prefer the more traditional methods.

This Customer Access Strategy provides the strategic direction for the business over the forthcoming years, setting out a number of plans we will deliver to make it easier for all our customers to access our services, regardless of their personal circumstances, in a way and at a time that suits them and in a way which is efficient for both the customer and the organisation.

## **Chief Executive**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Strategy sets out the direction St Leger Homes will take during 2020 to 2024 to work with our customers to transform how customers access and engage with our services enabling us to delivery services in a way which meets their needs. For the purpose of this document customers include anyone who may contact us and is not limited to our tenants.

The Strategy will drive transformational change across the business to ensure the delivery of customer excellence when dealing with our customers, creating efficiencies for the business and the customer. The Strategy has 4 overarching objectives which are:

- 1. Improving the overall customer experience;**
- 2. Making it easier for our customers to do business with us;**
- 3. Increasing the use of digital channels and self-service;**
- 4. Understanding our customers better to provide services in a way that meets their needs.**

The Strategy proposes plans to be delivered over a 4 year period to encourage customers to shift the way in which they currently access our services. This from the more traditional methods of face to face and telephone to more digital methods, whilst still retaining the current methods of access, to deliver a digital by choice approach for those who may struggle with accessing our services digitally.

The overall aim of the Strategy is to make it easier for our customers to contact us, at a time that suits them, one which encourages our customers to channel shift and not to revert back to their previously used method of access. This Strategy is, however, not just about channel shift and transformation, it also includes a number of plans to ensure that our more traditional methods of access are improved, that we take the time to understand our customers' experience when accessing our services and that we use this information to build on our customer first culture and to embed this across the organisation.

The key outputs to be achieved from the implementation of the Strategy are set out below. All these will result in overall efficiency gains for the organisation.

- A reduction in contact to the Customer Access Team for routine enquiries;
- Positive Customer Feedback through STAR and Transactional surveys, focus groups, mystery shopping and customer journeys;

- Reduction in the number of non-digital face to face enquiries;
- Increases in the number of transaction carried out on-line;
- Increases in the number of transactions carried out on-line through the portal where customers can self-serve the end to end process;
- Reduction in the number of complaints regarding staff attitudes and behaviours;
- Increase in the number of compliments regarding staff attitudes and behaviours

The Strategy has been produced in consultation with our customers who are supportive of the overall aims and the Plans to deliver these.

## CONTEXT AND ORGANISATIONAL OVERVIEW

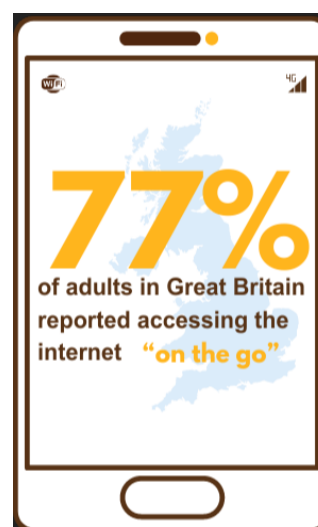
### National Context

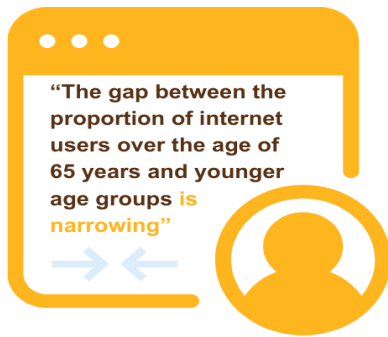
The Institute of Customer Services (ICS) indicate that customers want easy access to services and to have their enquiries dealt with as quickly as possible, but they also want a quality, personalised service. This is echoed in the feedback from our customers. The ICS also indicate that some public sector organisations may struggle to maintain service delivery that provides a positive customer experience, due to limited budgets and financial constraints. This is against a background of reduction in the number of customers satisfied, as recorded in the UK Customer Satisfaction Index (UKCSI) 2019, when compared to 2018.

The ICS cite “one the key learnings from the UKCSI is that consistently high performing organisations don’t see customer service as a set of transactions or a discrete department, but as a way of doing business that is fundamental to their values and purpose”.

According to the Office of National Statistics (ONS) there has also been in increase in the number of adults accessing the internet “on the go” using mobile devices.

*(Source:ONS report March 2019)*





The ONS also cite a growth in the use of the internet nationally and a narrowing of the proportion of younger and older people who are using the internet.

These statistics support our strategic plans to transform access to our services digitally. However, also relevant for this Strategy, if we are to make the most of digital access to transform our services, are the barriers our customers may face accessing or using the internet. The ONS report cites a lack of skills and inclination for the main reasons why people do not engage digitally.



This matters, because if we are to encourage our customers to access our services, to channel shift and to self-serve we need to ensure that they have the desire, opportunity and the skills to do so and for those who do not, that we do not create a digital divide. Plans are set out within the Strategy to address these potential barriers, which include training, video guides and engagement to support.

The publication of the New Deal for Housing Green Paper, recent changes by the Housing Ombudsman and the regulatory consumer standards, focus on greater transparency of customer satisfaction and the need for organisations to improve. How satisfied customers are with accessing our services will impact on satisfaction ratings.

The actions contained within this Strategy not only provide efficiencies for the organisation and the customer but support customers' and government expectation to improve services and customer satisfaction. Implementing transformational change that supports how our customers access our services, not only impacts overall customer satisfaction, it ensures that we continue to meet our statutory obligations and consumer standards in the most effective way.

## Local Context

Doncaster is the largest borough in England, covering an area of 220 square miles, comprising of 62 separate towns and villages. The Council, as part of Doncaster Growing Together has a strategic theme of a Connected Council, Ready for the Future.

The borough of Doncaster comprises rural as well as urban areas. 20,100 properties within the borough are council homes which we manage on behalf of Doncaster Council, 29% of these properties are bungalows for older persons. There is a split of properties across the borough areas, 5899 in the Central area, 5825 in the South West area, 4445 in the North and 3932 in the East of the borough.

As well tenants who access our services regarding housing issues we also have a number of other customers who access our service in a variety of ways. Examples include, leaseholders, customers who are on our waiting list, individuals contacting about employment or procurement opportunities, other private landlords and organisations or individuals acting on behalf of our tenants.

The consultation on the Strategy, carried out with our customers, evidences that the local picture regarding customers' expectations around accessing services is similar to what customers expect nationally. Our customers want to be able to contact someone easily and have their enquiry dealt with as efficiently as possible, without being passed around the organisation.

### Current Access Channels

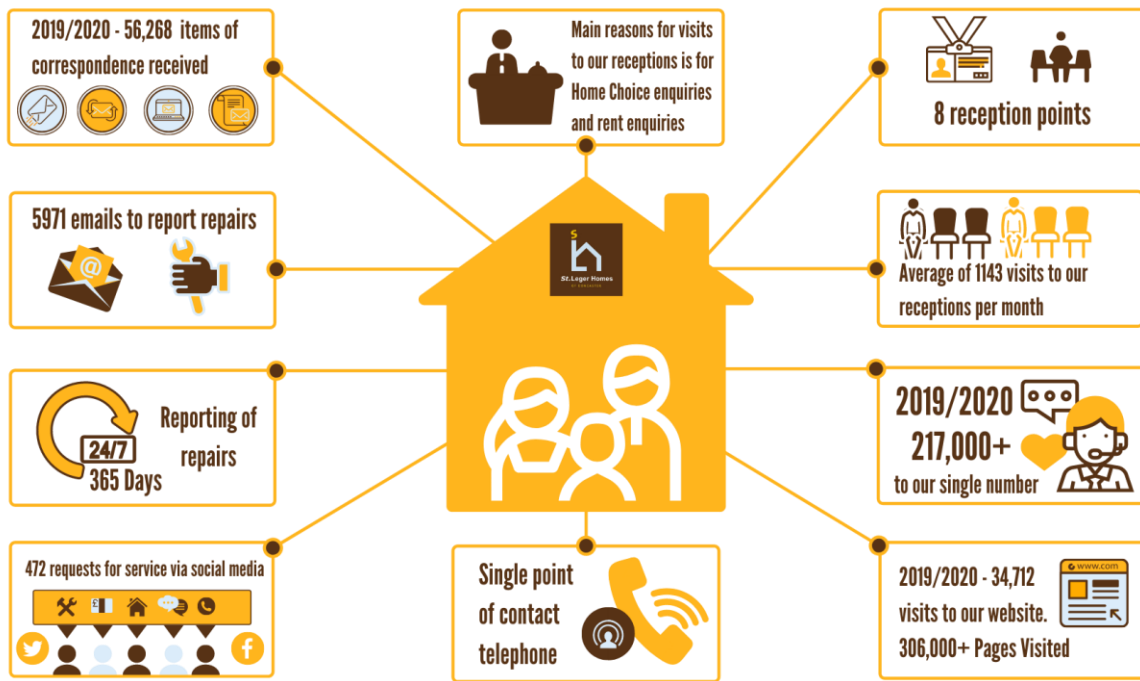
We currently provide a single point of contact telephone number for customers to report repairs, enquire about housing management issues, for rent payments and enquiries, to make an application to join our housing waiting list and for general enquiries. This is the main access channel used by our customers to contact us by phone. As well as the single point of access phone number customers can also contact by phone using a range of direct contact numbers across the organisation.

Customers can also contact us using social media platforms and email. These access channels are not integrated into back office systems and therefore require outbound contact to progress the enquiries.

We provide 8 reception points across the borough for tenants who prefer to speak to someone face to face. These are located at the Civic Office, St James Street, Thorne Office, St Leger House and the libraries at Woodlands, Mexborough, Bentley and Conisbrough. The reception at St James Street is the busiest reception with an average of 380 visits per month. The least

visited reception is at Conisbrough Library with 20 visits per month. The main reason customers visit reception is for Choice Based Lettings and rent enquiries.

The infographic below shows how our customers accessed our services during 2019/20.



In addition to the above access channels, we also provide a number of services to our customers via our website and customer portal; this is mainly to access information or for partial self-service, rather than fully interactive access. To support our channel shift strategy we need to extend the number of interactive services we currently offer to provide a better customer experience than that currently being provided. For example, our existing tenant portal only allows customers to make a rent payment, to report a repair and comment on our services. The reporting of repairs is only partial self-service. The infographic above show the number of unique visitors to our website. We want to increase the number of visitors and visits to our customer portal in line with our ambitions for more of our customers to channel shift and to self-serve.

We have already made some progress in improving how customers access our services by introducing a single point of contact team, the Customer Access Team, in October 2019. Currently this team is dealing with all first point of contact enquiries, predominantly by telephone, into the organisation regarding repairs, choice based lettings, rents, anti-social behaviour, estates issues and general enquiries. The intention is that this team will deal with all first point of contact enquiries for the organisation, regardless of the access channel and expand the current range of service provision.

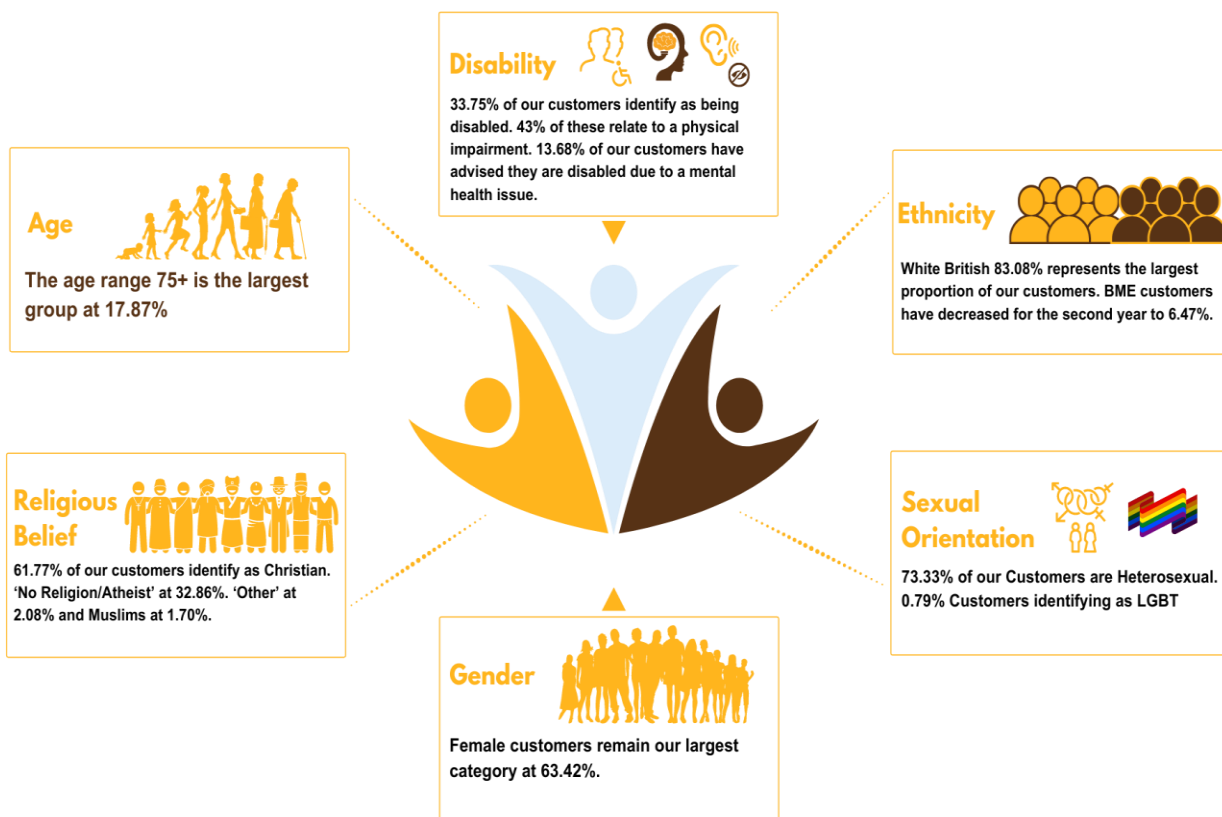


## Customer Satisfaction

The results of our STAR survey undertaken in February 2020 showed an increase in satisfaction in terms of ease of getting hold of the right person, increasing to 90.2% (+1%) with helpfulness of staff, increasing to 95.8% (+2.2%), 95.5% thought staff were able to deal with their query quickly and efficiently.

## Supporting our diverse range of customers

The graphic below shows our customer profile in 2018/19.



We have a range of support mechanism in place to support our diverse range of customers. We provide a text reporting service for customers who are speech impaired or hard of hearing. Our website includes a language translation service and we can also access a verbal translation service in the office or out on site for those customers whose first language is not English. We provide various documents in braille, on request.

At the same time however we want to provide a choice to customers as to how they can access our services and, therefore, whilst recognising that using technology and working innovatively can deliver benefits, our strategic priority is to ensure that we are a digital by choice organisation. Part of our Strategy will include working with our vulnerable and diverse range of tenants to support them to widen their choice of access.

## Customer Excellence

We have secured, for the 10<sup>th</sup> year in a row, the Customer Excellence in Service Delivery award and was runner up in the Doncaster Chamber Customer Excellence Award, but we don't want to rest on our laurels. We recognise that providing great customer access is not just about technology, it starts with a customer excellence culture embedded across the organisation. Our employees are a critical success factor in ensuring that customers can access our service efficiently and that they receive a quality service when they do so. We therefore plan to underpin the delivery of this Strategy by delivering customer excellence training for the entire organisation so that we improve our standards of excellence.

## Our Vision, Strategic Objectives

**Our Vision** is to provide homes in neighbourhoods that people are proud to live in, delivered through the four strategic objectives. The Customer Access Strategy underpins the delivery of the four Strategic Objectives in our Corporate Plan.



## Links to the Corporate Plan and Business Planning

The plans set out within this Strategy directly or indirectly support the delivery of the key strategic objectives shown above. If we do not make it easy for customers to access our services, for example, to report repairs, to access housing support, to seek help with their complex enquiries, this could impact on their quality of life, the condition of their homes, the quality of service they receive regardless of how they contact us and the aims of Doncaster Growing Together.

How easily customers can access our services is integral to and dependent upon the implementation of other cross cutting actions and strategies, including the implementation of a single integrated housing management system (TOP) and the embedding of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) culture across all areas of the business. Improvements to agile working across team, as part of our strategy for employees to work digitally by default,

will increase access to back office information to enable staff and our customers to access our services whilst our staff are out on site. Work has already started on implementing these key areas of transformational change.

Other strategies which link to the Customer Access Strategy are:

The ICT Strategy (2020 - 2024);

The People Strategy (2020 - 2024);

The Equality and Diversity Strategy (2017- 2021);

Value for Money Strategy (2017 – 2022);

The Housing Management Strategy (2019 – 2024);

Customer Involvement Strategy (2018 – 2021)

## CONSULTATION AND OUR CUSTOMERS

Consultation on the key themes and actions contained within the Strategy has been undertaken with both internal and external stakeholders, involving a range of customer groups as set out below:

- Consultation through the Get Involved Group;
- Tenant and Residents' Panel;
- TARA meetings;
- The Communication College;
- Young Person's Group;
- People's Friend Group;
- Service Management Team;
- Heads of Service;
- Telephone Surveys with customers;
- Customer surveys using Twitter and Facebook

Feedback from the consultation showed that our customers are supportive of the objectives of the Strategy and the plans to deliver. Our customers want a choice of access options and are happy to access our service digitally, but they were also conscious that some of our customers may not have the skills or the opportunities to do so. They want a choice of access channels, including our more traditional access channels of telephone access and face to face contact, and are comfortable with the introduction of on-line Chat channels for routine enquiries, provided this is well implemented in consultation with our customers and has the option to be

blended with Customer Access Officer interaction to ensure hand offs to speak to an Officer where appropriate.

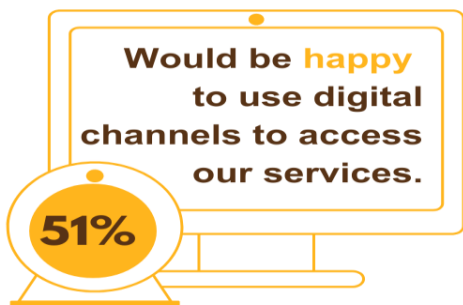
Comments received from our customers about not wanting to be passed about the organisation when dealing with their enquiries supports the right first time approach the Strategy is aiming to deliver.

Feedback was also received about the need for a website that is easy to navigate and for support for those customers who may not have the skills or opportunity to contact us digitally. Our plans to review our approach to customer insight is supported by feedback from the consultation sessions that we need to better understand our customers on an individual level, so we do not miss opportunities to tailor our services to their needs.

In addition to the consultation carried out above we also carried out separate consultation with our tenants following the closure of our receptions due to COVID19, to understand the impact on service delivery and opportunities for change.

During the COVID19 pandemic all reception points were closed to ensure the safety of our staff and customers. To help inform this Strategy we carried out a customer survey to ascertain the impact of this on customer service and opportunities for customers to access our services in different ways. The responses, as at 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 2020 are below:

From the 475 surveys completed, 456 responded to the question on accessing services. 97% of these did not experience any problems accessing our services during the closure of all our receptions, when using alternative arrangements



From the 475 responses received, 51% said they would be happy to use some form of digital channel to contact us in the future, including using video conferencing, self-service, on-line chat, social media, text and email; 57% of these selecting text or email as alternative options. Out of the 49% of customers not happy, 41% of these prefer to use the either phone or letter to contact us, the remainder giving no reason.

The feedback from our customers evidences the potential to build on the change in behavior of our customers. Clearly a proportion of customer currently prefer to contact us using more

traditional methods. We need to understand why this is the case and what we can do to support our customers to use more digital approaches. We will explore how we can provide face to face contact without a physical presence; potentially through the use video conferencing, video phones, messenger or face time and explore the potential to integrate email and text into automated on-line chat.

## STRATEGY OUTCOMES AND COMMITMENTS

### **Vision and Objective of the Strategy**

This Strategy is applicable to all customers who access our services, including tenants, leaseholders and private landlords. It sets out our plans to transform our services and to make it easier for our customers to contact us, regardless of their personal circumstances or how they choose to contact us or do business with us. At the same time we want to provide a range of access channels that will deliver increased value for money for both the customer and the business, ones that will encourage our customers to channel shift and self-serve. This will make life easier for the customer, provide 24/7 access to services, will free up resources to deal with more complex enquiries and will improve the overall customer experience.

The Strategy sets out our commitment to support our customers to access services digitally, whilst still maintaining a digital by choice approach. It will enable customers to make greater use of on-line access channels such as self-service and automated response services for routine transactions whilst, at the same time, recognising and supporting customers to access services in way that suits their needs. This will be through the delivery of a choice of access channels either digital or via more traditional access methods, such as phone or face to face.

Key to the successful implementation of the Strategy will not only be providing access to new channels, but ensuring that these alternative means of access are as easy to use as existing channels and provide the same, if not better, level of service. We need customers to access our services on-line, to self-serve and to stay there. The use of virtual assistants, capable of dealing with basic and simple transactional enquiries, will enhance access to our out of hours service, as well as to our services during the day.

Transforming how we deliver and how customers access our services is as much about the people who deliver our services as the IT innovations which will enable this. One of our plans therefore, to underpin the delivery of this Strategy, is the continued development of our staff. This will ensure our values and behaviours are displayed at all times and staff embrace and embed a “my customer culture” across the organisation using a Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) giving visibility of all customer interactions, regardless of the point

of contact. We want staff to take ownership at every point of contact for the customers' enquiry, regardless of the nature of the enquiry or where that enquiry takes place.

The embedding of these plans across the organisation will ensure that employees not only focus on what service they deliver, but how they deliver services, treating our customers fairly and with respect and putting customers at the heart of everything they do.

The implementation of The One Project (TOP), our fully integrated housing system, and the review and on-going management of our website and customer portal are key elements of our Strategy to make the best use of our resources. This will free up the time of staff currently working in the Customer Access Team and other areas of the business so they can deal with more complex enquiries at the first point of contact. This will enable capacity to move the hand off points between front and back office roles and for the Customer Access Team to deal with more of the phone enquiries that are currently dealt with directly by the back office staff. This will generate capacity in the back office, adding value for the organisation and for the customer.

Understanding our customers better will help us to shape how we deliver our services to our customers and how they want to access our services in a way which suits their needs. To deliver this we need to gather insight data about our customers so that we can tailor our services around their individual needs. Our current process for collecting customer insight data will be reviewed to put in place a process for ensuring that the data is updated whenever and wherever we interact with our customers. We will also review the data we are collecting, to only collect what matters to improve the customer experience and to reduce waste.

Our Strategy will be implemented over a 4 year period and change will occur incrementally. However throughout the process of implementation we expect that the comments from our customer about how they access our services to be positive and in line with the Strategy's objectives. The diagram below represents the positive comments we will be striving for following the implementation of this Strategy.



## Channel Shift

One of the main drivers to deliver this Strategy and to create efficiency gains, both for the customer and the organisation, is our commitment to extend the range of on-line services we currently provide to our customers and to improve the overall on-line user experience across all customers' chosen devices. This will enable customers to channel shift from the more traditional ways of accessing our services to on-line self-service. This means, if we are to encourage our customer to channel shift we need to change their behaviours by providing a quicker, easier and more resilient on-line experience which is better than our more traditional existing channels.

This does not mean we will be completely removing personal contact with our customers. We aim to make on-line and self-service the first choice of access for our customers for more transactional straight forward enquiries which can be resolved by customers self-serving. Our ultimate aim is to make it easier for our customers to access our services digitally.

To deliver true channel shift we need to ensure that our access channels and all customer interactions are integrated into one system. We will not make efficiency gains if we are replacing one form of manual interaction with another that still does not allow a customer to truly self-serve, for example, there is no point replacing letters with emails or providing self-service that is only partial self-service, such as is the case with our current service whereby tenants' can report a repair on-line, but this only generates an email to make contact with the tenant. This current approach is not efficient and is not delivering customer excellence.

We also need to ensure that as well as having the technology in place to encourage channel shift we ensure our customers have the confidence and skills to self-serve. We will provide support and skills training for those customers who may need support through the use of

guidance documents, videos and training sessions. Providing our customers with the skills to access services on-line will help them feel more comfortable about accessing other services outside of St Leger's provision. This will have a positive knock on-effect on the quality of their lives.

The Strategy therefore has four clear overarching objectives:

- **Improving the overall customer experience;**
- **Making it easier for our customers to do business with us;**
- **Increasing the use of digital channels and self-service;**
- **Understanding our customers better to provide services in a way that meets their needs.**

## OUR PLANS TO DELIVER THE STRATEGY

Our plans to deliver the Strategy are shown at Appendix A. This shows how the Plans we aim to deliver link to the delivery of the objectives in the Strategy. A more detailed plan will be reported to Board and Performance and Improvement Committee detailing headline actions against each plan to be delivered that year and will include specific delivery timescales. We will know that we have been successful in achieving this Strategy and improving the customer experience through the achievement of a number of outcomes, set out below. Some of the plans to be implemented will deliver more than one outcome. Where this is the case the headline outcome is shown. All the outcomes identified overleaf will contribute to overall efficiency gains for the organisation and the customer.

- A reduction in contact to the Customer Access Team for routine enquiries;
- Positive Customer Feedback through STAR and Transactional surveys, focus groups, mystery shopping and customer journeys;
- Reduction in the number of non-digital face to face enquiries;
- Increases in the number of transaction carried out on-line;
- Increases in the number of transactions carried out on-line through the portal where customers can self-serve the end to end process;
- Reduction in the number of complaints regarding staff attitudes and behaviours;
- Increase in the number of compliments regarding staff attitudes and behaviours



## MONITORING AND NEXT STEPS

A yearly action plan, showing actions due for completion within the current year, our plans to deliver the Strategy and how they link to the achievement of our corporate objectives, will be reported to Board each year. Updates will be reported to Performance and Improvement Committee.

Heads of Service will take ownership for updating actions where they are taking a lead role.

As well as monitoring whether we have delivered the actions we set out to achieve, we will also introduce a monitoring and feedback mechanism within our website to measure the effectiveness of our channel shift strategy in dealing with the customers' enquiries, right first time, using a simple Yes/No question when a customer completes an on-line transaction.

The use of customer journeys, focus groups and user satisfaction survey will further test whether the actions we have implemented are impacting in a positive way on both the customer and the organisation.

## Appendix A

### Our 4 Year Plan to Achieve Our Objectives

Objective	Plan	Delivery Date	Outcome
<b>Improving the overall customer access experience, regardless of how our customers choose to access our services</b>	Develop and deliver a corporate wide programme of Customer Experience Training for all employees to embed values and behaviours that impact on the customer experience	2020 - 2022	Increase in compliments/decrease in complaints
	Review engagement with hard to reach groups to improve access to our services	2021 - 2022	Positive feedback from customers
	Identify who is not accessing our services to understand why	2021 - 2022	Positive feedback from customers
	Investigate the use of “staff on their way” technology	2023 - 2024	Reduction in calls to the CAT
	Review and implement corporate wide procedures for responding to customers' enquiries when out of the office	2020 - 2021	Reduced calls to the CAT
	Review existing and implement mystery shopping across all customer touch points	2021 - 2022	Positive feedback from our customers
	Investigate the use of automated outbound customer surveys to measure the quality of customer service in real time	2023-2024	Positive feedback from our customers
	Rationalise the number of email addresses available for customers to contact us and review who responds.	2022 - 2023	Positive feedback from customers

<b>Making it easier for our customers to do business with us</b>	Implement on site electronic payment collection	2023 - 2024	Reduction in calls to CAT
	Identify any further opportunities to use mobile working to improve access to services	2023 - 2024	Reduction in calls to CAT
	Consider the introduction of additional communication channel to support our customers, e.g. WhatsApp	2020 - 2021	Positive feedback from customers
	Identify additional services which can be delivered by the CAT	2020 - 2021	Positive feedback from customers
	Review customer access, in the light of any proposals coming out of New Deal for Housing paper	2021 - 2022	Positive feedback from our customers
	Trial new models of service delivery to reduce the need for customers to contact us e.g. use of drones for repairs/Internet of Things	2023 - 2024	Reduction in calls to CAT
	Pilot virtual viewings using video films	2021 - 2022	Positive feedback from our customers
<b>Increasing the customers' use of digital channels and self-service</b>	Develop the tenant portal, involving tenants, to provide further opportunities for customers to self-service	2020 - 2024	Increase in self-service
	Undertake a review of St Leger reception facilities and locations with a view to introducing digital face to face access	2020 - 2021	Positive feedback from customers
	Implement self-service for the end to end repair process	2021 - 2022	Increase in self-service
	Implement on-line Chat as a means of accessing services	2021 - 2022	Reduction in calls to CAT
	Undertake a complete refresh of the St Leger's website to support customers to engage digitally	2021 - 2022	Increase in self-service
	Review the owners and authors of our web pages to ensure these are continuously kept up to date and relevant	2021 - 2022	Increase in on-line transactions
	Develop a video guide for customers to access services on-line and self-serve	2021 - 2022	Increase in self-service

	Review the St Leger Homes' Customer APP	2022 - 2023	Reduction in calls to CAT
	Develop and deliver a training programme for customers to access our services digitally	2021 - 2022	Increase in self-service
	Reduce the number of email interactions by offering an alternative on-line service integrated to back office systems	2022 - 2023	Increase in on-line transactions
	Develop an annual calendar of campaigns to promote existence of and benefits to customers of using digital access channels	2020 - 2021	Increase in on-line transactions
<b>Understanding our customers better to provide services in a way that meets their needs</b>	Embed a “my customer” culture throughout the organisation to promote ownership, underpinned by all employees using the HUB/CRM for recording all customer interactions.	2020 - 2021	Positive feedback from our customers
	Investigate the potential for using Open Housing functionality to send correspondence in first language preference	2021 - 2022	Positive feedback from customers
	Implement Next Generation Text for customers who are hard of hearing or speech impaired	2020 - 2021	Positive feedback from customers
	Undertake end to end customer journey mapping, across all touch points, to measure and improve the quality of service delivery	2022 - 2023	Positive feedback from customers
	Review how we currently capture customer insight information, the data we capture and how we use this to shape future service delivery.	2020 - 2021	Positive feedback from customers
	Work with BAME groups to ensure effective access into services.	2020 - 2021	Positive feedback from customers