

# customer involvement strategy 2015-2018



Improving lives Incommunities

## Introduction and aims

### Our Vision and Values

Incommunities is committed to our vision of 'Improving lives Incommunities'.

Sadeh Lok became part of the Incommunities Group structure in April 2015 and this strategy is inclusive of Sadeh Lok and reflects their vision of 'Inspiring Excellence Improving Lives'.

We need to make sure that we listen to all our customers and offer a range of opportunities for them to have a role in developing our services and scrutinising our performance.

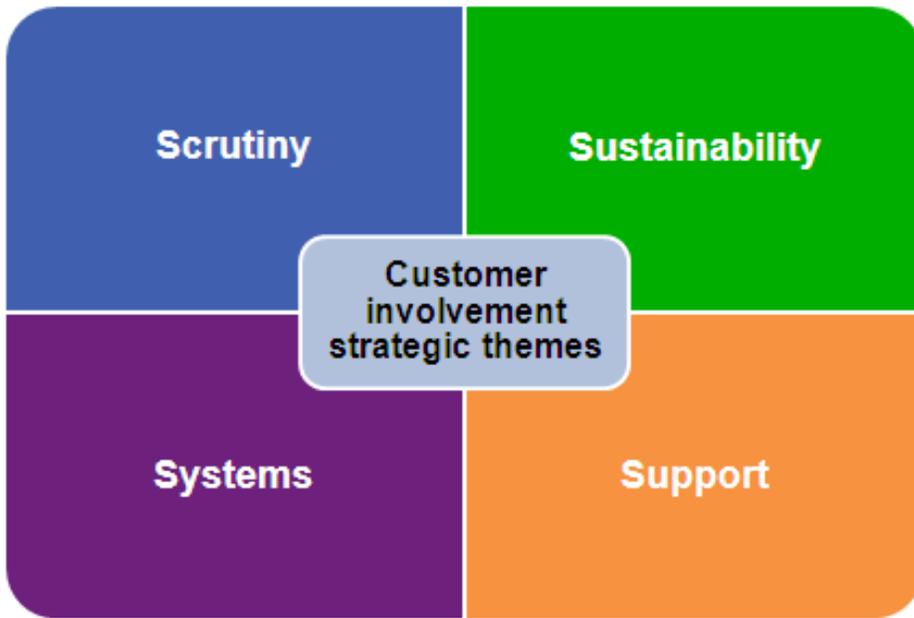
Incommunities is committed to the creation of sustainable communities and to delivering the best quality homes and services. We believe that a major factor in realising our commitment is the effective involvement of customers and stakeholders. Incommunities will offer all customers whether a tenant, leaseholder, shared-owner or prospective customer the opportunity to be involved and have a say in the way we deliver our services.

Our promise to our customers is that:

**"Incommunities values and recognises the benefit customer involvement brings and promises that all of our customers will have the opportunity to be involved in deciding how we deliver our services and how their homes and neighbourhoods are managed.**

**Incommunities will listen and involve customers in the planning, decision making and implementation of changes and will ensure that all customers are kept informed of all changes."**

## Customer involvement strategic themes



Supporting these four themes is our 'involvement offer' to customers, this is currently being updated to reflect the revised objectives of the strategy.

## Summary of customer involvement strategic themes

To **Support** customers to be involved by providing a range of involvement methods, promoting these in a variety of ways and offering a package of support to enable customers to take part including expenses, childcare, training and grants to groups.

To ensure that customers are at the heart of the **Scrutiny** of our services. This encompasses both customer scrutiny of individual service areas and overall monitoring of the consumer standards.

To adopt a **Systems** thinking approach to scrutiny and service review. Customers and staff are trained in systems methodology and we use measures to track progress and identify issues and our customer inspections will take a systems approach.

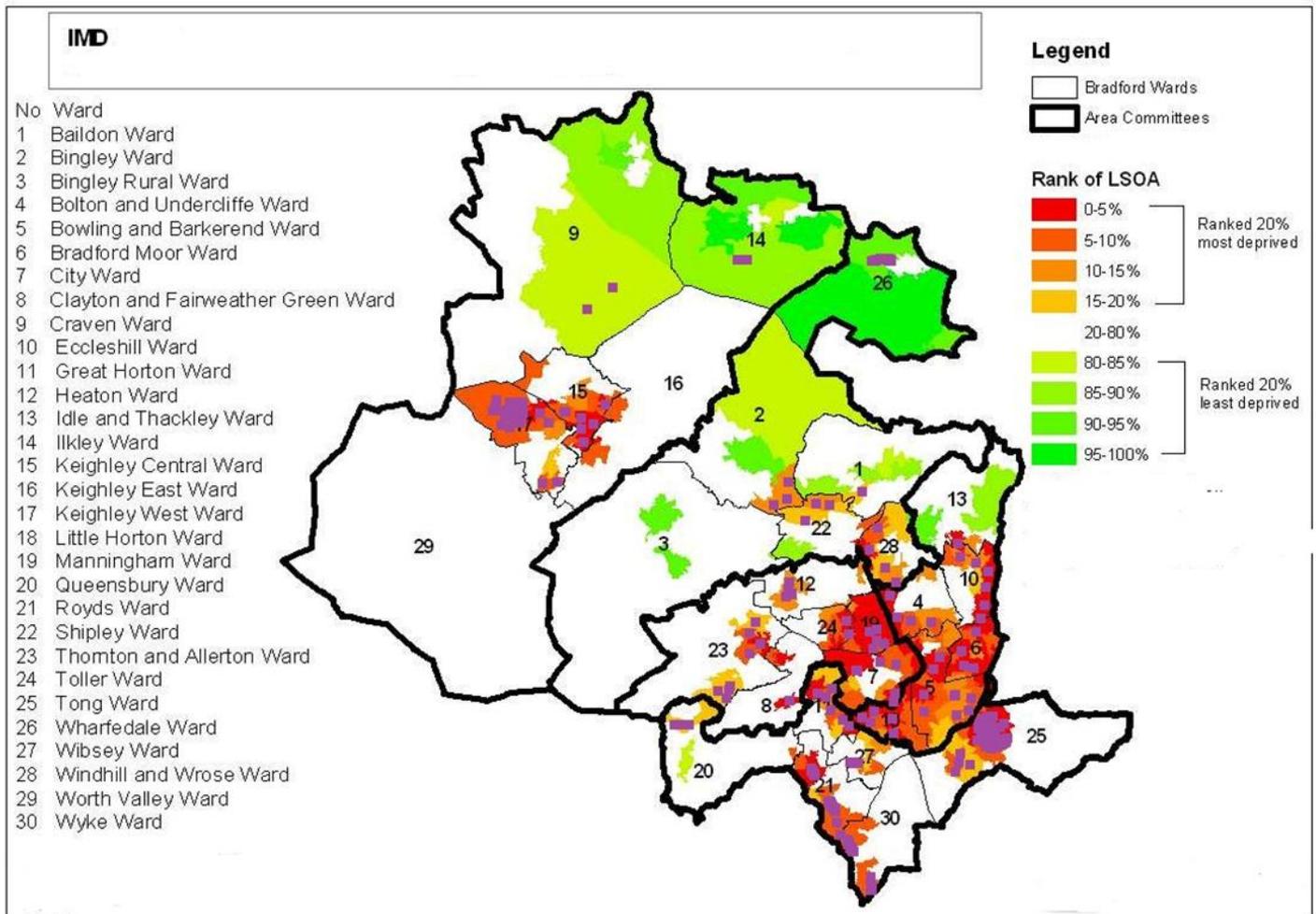
To strive for **Sustainability** in both our pool of involved customers and across the wider community. We will seek to recruit and engage involved customers from younger and under-represented groups in our communities, and also refresh our approach to involvement at a neighbourhood level to give people a real say on the local issues that matter to them..

## The local context

This strategy aims to enhance the range of customer involvement activity and engagement, recognising the context of challenging economic circumstances for both individuals and in terms of resources invested in communities. This includes changes to welfare benefits, cuts in council services and unprecedented levels of personal debt. Worklessness and financial constraints in turn can have an impact on health, crime, community resilience and wellbeing.

This strategy complements the work we do via our Open Field and Welfare Reform Teams on tackling worklessness and promoting financial inclusion, by providing opportunities for customers to improve their communities and gain skills and self-esteem from their chosen method of involvement.

Bradford contains several wards in the 20% most deprived wards in the country and as the figure shows, there is a high correlation between these wards and concentrations of Incommunities stock (shown in purple).



## The national context

The framework set by the housing regulator, the Homes and Communities Agency stresses the principle of co-regulation and the central role of boards and customers in scrutinising performance. This is alongside a 'lighter touch' from the regulator in relation to consumer standards, intervening only in serious service failures.

One of four consumer standards is the 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard'.

The main elements of the standard are:

**Customer Service and Choice:** Taking residents' needs into consideration when designing and delivering housing and communicating with residents, giving them choices over the services they receive.

**Involvement and Empowerment:** This focuses on the need for Registered Providers to offer residents

- ▶ Opportunities to be involved in the management of their housing
- ▶ The opportunity to influence housing and service delivery
- ▶ The opportunity to scrutinise performance on the delivery of housing services
- ▶ Support and enable residents to participate

**Responding to Complaints:** This states that all Registered Providers must have a clear and accessible Complaints Policy.

The actions in this strategy and our Supporting Involvement Policy evidence how we meet this standard.

## Strategic context

This Customer Involvement Strategy 2015-2018 supports our vision and strategic objectives in setting out how we will engage with customers and communities, across **four key themes**.

Our strategic themes from the Strategic Plan 2013-2017	How the Customer Involvement Strategy 2015-2018 supports these
Sustainable communities	<p>By involving people in their communities and our services we can help make places better to live in.</p> <p>We have a system of grants to support community groups and initiatives, and we support groups in capacity building and seeking additional funding. We will take our involvement activity and consultations out into neighbourhoods using a roadshow approach and make links with existing groups and partnerships to achieve community objectives.</p>
Customers and stakeholders	<p>We can offer a variety of ways to get involved in shaping our services and offer experience as an involved customer which can be valuable in personal development or obtaining employment by identifying and building upon transferrable skills.</p> <p>We will use the variety of involvement methods outlined in our offer to customers to help us understand our customers' needs and enable them to influence our policies and services.</p>
Governance and transformational leadership	<p>We will involve customers in the scrutiny of service areas and the development of improvements by continuing to develop and support our team of Customer Inspectors to scrutinise services using our 'systems thinking' methodology.</p>
Growth and innovation	<p>We will increase our use of electronic methods of consultation and of social media as a method of engaging communities and individuals.</p>

## Our current position

Our existing Involvement Policy contained some strategic elements and our current Customer Promises, setting out the menu for involvement, are due to expire. Following some detailed work setting out our approach to customer scrutiny a wider strategy setting out our overall approach to involvement was needed.

Initial discussions were held with the Local Management Trust (LMT) Membership Group comprising two representatives from each LMT. The group agreed that their purpose is:

## “To encourage wider participation and provide opportunities for all to have their say”

They considered some of the barriers to involvement and it was agreed that recruitment of more involved customers from a broader range of backgrounds was required. There has been some progress already with recruitment and further recruitment drives will be carried out when the revised involvement offer (which will replace the customer promises) is in place.

In 2014 we carried out a full sample survey of our customers with over 2000 responses which included questions on involvement. The survey found that:

- ▶ Over 80% of customers across all age groups have an email account
- ▶ In the 16-59 age group the top 2 methods for people wanting to be involved are through email or other surveys or through a community group/residents association
- ▶ All other age groups choose more traditional methods of involvement such as via letter/phone call/visit/magazine
- ▶ Over 70% of under 24s have a Facebook account which is 15% to 30% higher than other age groups. Twitter usage is also more than double in that age group. Facebook has high usage right up to the age 54 range and indicates it could be developed further alongside Twitter as a tool to encourage more participation in surveys from younger customers
- ▶ There is a steady interest in being a Customer Inspector from the 16-59 age group, which significantly reduces by 50% or more for age 60+
- ▶ Customers were asked if they were interested in getting involved with Incommunities and 17% of tenants said they would be interested, whilst 83% said they would not be. Over 200 customers expressed an interest in being contacted about being involved and these have been followed up

When we look at socio-demographic groups, we find the following differences:

- ▶ The 35-44 age group is more interested in getting involved than other age groups (27%)
- ▶ A higher proportion of ethnic minority tenants are interested in getting involved than ethnic majority tenants (23% compared to 15%)

Although age group 16-54 are more interested in being involved as customers, the actual number of customers in this age bracket who are involved is significantly lower than the 55-85+ age groups who are less interested in being involved but participate more.

This demonstrates a need to revise our offer to make options more attractive to younger groups who are interested in being involved but are not currently.

This need to do this is reinforced by responses to the question about customers satisfaction that Incommunities listens to their views and acts upon them:

- ▶ The 16-24 age group is the least satisfied (45%) whilst the 75-84 age group is the most satisfied (75%). The 35-44 age group is the most dissatisfied (20%)
- ▶ Ethnic minority tenants are slightly more satisfied than ethnic majority tenants (71% compared to 63%)

The implications of this are that more electronic methods of involvement should be offered and also the targeting of ethnic minority groups.

The measures outlined below will enable us to track progress in changing the profile of our involved customers to better represent our wider customer base.

## Our approach

A summary of each of the four customer involvement strategic themes, together with key actions for 2015-2018.



### Scrutiny

Central to the regulatory framework is involving customers in scrutiny of services and performance. It also makes good business sense to put customers at the heart of reviewing services in the spirit of co-regulation.

In 2014 we adopted a new approach to scrutiny to integrate it with our business wide approach to service review, 'systems thinking', which puts customers' experience of the service at the centre of the review. The framework is set out in Appendix 1

Scrutiny interventions can be commissioned by:

- ▶ Local Management Trusts
- ▶ Housing Association Board
- ▶ Performance and Policy Committee

Scrutiny is carried out by a team of trained customer inspectors using the model at Appendix 1a. They go directly in to service areas and capture customer demand, map out the flow of the customer experience and produce a final report with recommendations agreed with Service area heads.

Customers are also able to scrutinise our policies through consultation on policy changes via LMT, customer surveys, ad hoc consultation activity and Sadeh Lok Residents Panel.

## Performance

In addition to scrutiny of individual service areas. Our Local Management Trusts receive and comment on reports on performance against the consumer standards at their bi-monthly meetings and our Annual Report to tenants includes details of our performance.

We also communicate via Incommunities @home newsletter and Sadeh Lok 'Our news' about key performance areas.

## Complaints

Complaints, comments and compliments are a vital part of customer scrutiny. Our aim is to use feedback from these to help us redesign the way our services are provided. We also invite customers who have complained about a particular issue to have some input when those services are reviewed or policies change.

We are currently reviewing our policy and approach to complaints. This includes piloting a system of capturing all failure demand and responding to it before it hits the complaints process.

### We will:

- ▶ **Continue to plan and resource a timetable of customer interventions**
- ▶ **Recruit and train an additional cohort of Customer Inspectors**
- ▶ **Increase opportunities for Local Management Trusts/Sadeh Lok Residents Panel to influence policy**
- ▶ **Investigate accredited training in resident scrutiny for involved customers as part of a wider training and development plan**
- ▶ **Review the learning from our first two scrutiny interventions and revisit the process**
- ▶ **Review our complaints policy and continue to include customer representation on complaint panels**
- ▶ **Set out a clear purpose and relevant measures for customers following systems interventions to understand the service they can expect. These will replace our service standards**

## Sustainability

Incommunities aims to provide a thriving range of local activities that are relevant to the local area or particular services. In addition customers will be involved on a day-to-day basis in matters that affect their home, the neighbourhood they live in and the services they receive.

Customer Involvement Officers will work closely with the Open Field team, Neighbourhood Officers, customer, service users community centres and community partners to develop initiatives to encourage community resilience, crime reduction, improve education, skills, employment opportunities and health. Neighbourhood Services and other frontline staff are key to delivering our Customer Involvement Offer.

At neighbourhood level Incommunities out consultation in the development of neighbourhood plans, and for those customers interested mainly in their local area. Our 'suite of indicators of neighbourhood sustainability will be updated and used as one of the methods prioritising support and involvement activity. An approach using electronic surveys in addition to drop in events and visits resulted in significant levels of feedback.

There are four Local Management Trusts (LMTs) across the Bradford District and representation is mainly customers, with some Councillors and local interested people. The LMT as a whole has a corporate scrutiny role in the commissioning of customer inspections and they also hold LMT meetings every two months where the trust members monitor in detail neighbourhood issues in the local area and the action being taken. These are supplemented by interim meetings on single issues set by the LMT Chair in response to the concerns of committee members. Our Sadeh Lok Residents Panel consists of tenants or household members and estate walkabouts are held across all our estates and include LMT members and Sadeh Lok Residents Panel members. We are currently reviewing how our Local Management Trusts are structure.

At neighbourhood level estate inspections give opportunity for residents to express their views about the appearance of their local area. Neighbourhood staff assist customers in becoming involved by making them aware of opportunities in their area.

We have a growing number of Tenants and Residents Associations supported by Incommunities as well as links with other groups. We recognise that these groups are not active in all areas, and may not appeal to all customers, however they are an integral part of the customer involvement structure. We meet twice yearly with representatives of all the residents groups to provide support with funding and fundraising and Neighbourhood officers and the Involvement team work with groups on individual community initiatives.

## Vision

Our approach emphasises involvement at a local level, building on existing networks, partnerships community groups and community facilities where they exist This will mean a reduction in large centralised events attended by a limited number of regularly involved customers. There may not be a cost saving however we envisage our involvement activity will have a wider impact and enable more customers to contribute. Our Decent Neighbourhoods initiative presents an opportunity to involve customers at neighbourhood level in priorities for their area. We carry out themes scheme focus events with partners, e.g. welfare reform, clean ups and illegal money lending awareness. We will map our involvement and community involvement activity and ensure we are utilising existing structures and partnerships (for example community centres, area forums)

As well as our work with the Police led Summer Camp, we intend to develop an approach of actively working with communities in neighbourhoods particularly with young people as we recognise the importance of this in terms of sustainability of both neighbourhoods and customer engagement.

We will work with community groups to enable them to access resources and funding.

**We will:**

- ▶ Investigate making 'free wi-fi' available in our community centres
- ▶ Refresh the measures in our 'community standard' neighbourhood sustainability indicator
- ▶ Use a roadshow approach to major consultations replacing centralised conferences
- ▶ Continue with estate walkabouts and targeted LMT visits to areas where there are community or stock issues
- ▶ Recruit people from community groups and under-represented groups
- ▶ Build on the annual Police Camp for young people offering additional 'mini camps'
- ▶ Via the Strategic Fund Team support community and tenant groups in obtaining additional funding
- ▶ Involve customers in our drive for 'decent neighbourhoods' through our involvement activity in communities
- ▶ Evaluate the effectiveness of our current range of customer groups
- ▶ Revisit the structure and function of Local Management Trusts as part of the 2015 Governance Review
- ▶ Utilise local community centres and existing groups to ensure that we can involve customers at community level in local and organisational issues
- ▶ Improve the links between Tenants and Residents Associations and the Local Management Trusts to enable better outcomes for communities
- ▶ Map our community activity and identify gaps and opportunities

## Support

### Support for our staff

All staff are encouraged to involve customers in services. Customer involvement forms part of the induction programme for all new starters and the team regularly update staff and managers on new involvement initiatives. We also work closely with the Strategic Funding Team to ensure that neighbourhood staff are aware of grants and fundraising opportunities for community groups.

### Support for our customers

Our involved customers are supported by resources including training, uniforms and equipment. Support for customers is included in detail in our Customer Involvement Policy currently under review.

Incommunities is committed to engaging with representatives from all the protected characteristic groups and enabling them to become involved customers. We will make every attempt to enable all customers who want to be involved to get involved. We are evaluating the effectiveness of all our involved customer groups and developing a wider range of methods of involvement which give the option of low level 'armchair' involvement. We employ a range of involvement techniques and activities and where appropriate we will use creative and inclusive involvement techniques to help customers communicate their thoughts and opinions. We will also maximise the use of electronic consultation.

We will take steps to increase engagement with those customers who may have traditionally been under-represented in involvement activities by offering a variety of methods. We will work in partnership with special interest groups and ensure that we monitor the profile of our involved customer base.

We will ensure that any involvement activity is carried out with customers in a safe space to share their thoughts and experiences. Customers should feel the time they are giving up to be involved is valued. We will reflect this in terms of the feedback people receive, qualifications or skills obtained, or payment for the time spent attending meetings and events.

Equality and Diversity concerns and priorities are intrinsic throughout this document and reflect the Protected Characteristics as highlighted within The Equality Act 2010.

Incommunities also recognise that socio-economic factors can often impact upon customers who are willing to access involvement events.

### Recruitment and retention

Following some detailed work with the LMT Membership Group we have refreshed our approach to recruitment.

- ▶ We contact all new customers within 6-8 weeks of them starting a tenancy to tell them the range of ways in which they can be involved

- ▶ When an interest is expressed we contact customers promptly
- ▶ Where a high intensity involvement interest is expressed a visit is made by a member of the Involvement Team
- ▶ New Customer Inspectors, LMT Members and Sadeh Lok Residents Panel members are supported by a dedicated team member in the early stages of their involvement
- ▶ We target existing community events to promote involvement
- ▶ We will also use other activities to promote involvement for example arranging dog chipping sessions and developing the interest of our younger residents through Summer Camp and 'mini camps'
- ▶ Sadeh Lok Residents Panel members go out on scheme annually to promote recruitment.

Many of our involvement measures, as detailed in the **Systems** section, are concerned with tracking our recruitment activity in terms of customer profile and retention.

### Support for our community groups

We offer support grants to groups who sign a partnership agreement with us – there is an annual support grant plus grants to grow groups and increase membership in an attempt to tackle isolation and improve neighbourhood sustainability. The Strategic Fund Team work with groups to enable them to gain the skills to raise their own funds to match or replace grant funding.

Sadeh Lok provide support for TARAs.

Twice a year our groups meet together for information, advice and networking. The details of our approach to support grants for groups, is included in our Supporting Involved Customers Policy.

### Training and development

We ensure customers are supported in a range of ways so that they are able to be fully involved. We will provide comprehensive support to individuals or groups which will mean that all customers have equal access to the same level of support, even if that support is given in different ways. We will do this in partnership with our customers.

Our Open Field employability and training services will signpost where appropriate to customer involvement as a means of gaining experience to assist in work readiness. It is important that as many customers from as wide a range of backgrounds and social groups as possible are able to take part in involvement activities and that they are properly supported to do this. In turn involved customers will be signposted to Open field services where

Often, customers who take part in involvement activities gain valuable skills and experience, which can increase their life chances. We will incorporate a training element into our

involvement programme, not only helping to change services but also to change the lives of people who take part. There will also be the opportunity to pursue accredited training. A full calendar of training for LMT Members, Sadeh Lok Residents Panel Members and Customer Inspectors is delivered annually mainly by Incommunities' staff.

We also recognise the benefit of external networking and our customers have opportunities to attend national and regional conferences and events.

Involved customers will be expected to follow Incommunities' Code of Conduct in terms of behaviours, confidentiality of information and training on the Code of Conduct.

Our Support for Involved Customers Policy outlines our approach in more detail.

#### We will

- ▶ Review the incentives we offer new and existing customers to sustain involvement
- ▶ Consult with our customers on a revised support package (informing the revised Customer Involvement Policy)
- ▶ The Strategic Fund Team will work with groups and communities to maximise fundraising to top-up grants
- ▶ Investigate accredited CIH training on resident scrutiny
- ▶ Revisit the involved customer appraisal process

## Systems

Our approach to customer inspections uses a systems thinking approach which is set out in detail in the section on [Scrutiny](#).

Integral to systems thinking are measures set out in the section on monitoring and evaluation, to ensure that we are meeting the 'nominal value' of our customers.

The LMT Membership Group established a purpose of encouraging involvement – one which forms the backbone of this strategy **“To encourage wider participation and provide opportunities for all to have their say.”**

The group worked with us to agree the measures listed and these will be used to monitor our success in delivering this strategy, in particular expanding and sustaining involvement.

Our customer service standards will also be revised using a systems approach with the purpose of the service captured and relevant measures identified.

## We will

- ▶ Revisit our service standards to reflect customer purpose and measures
- ▶ Continue to carry out customer inspections using systems thinking approach
- ▶ Use measures to track our progress with involvement
- ▶ Act on any involvement and community development issues arising from the neighbourhood intervention.

## Implementation

Customer involvement activity is led by the Policy Performance and Involvement Team.

- ▶ Detailed action plans to be drawn up to reflect the broad aims of the strategy
- ▶ Key actions will be communicated to relevant staff
- ▶ The planned neighbourhood intervention for 2015 will inevitably capture issues in relation to customer involvement and community development, which will inform the implementation of the strategy

## Monitoring and evaluation

Our performance will be tracked through the monitoring of measures (listed below) and customer satisfaction feedback on events and involvement. We will measure the wider impact through our annual involvement impact statement and links to the wider monitoring of corporate social responsibility measures organisation wide.

We will report on progress to the Local Management Trusts and Sadeh Lok Residents Panel with regular updates including measures.

An annual progress report will be provided to Housing Association Board.

## Our measures

<b>Strategic Measures</b>
Use of social media in decision making
Number of funding bids delivered in partnership to benefit neighbourhoods
<b>Operational Measures</b>
Creation of new tenant and residents groups/links made to existing non Incommunities groups
Number of new customers engaged
Profiling of new customers engaged (equality characteristics/tenure/neighbourhood/location/economic status and household type)
Number of customers who are receiving specialist support via customer profile
Engagement level of all customers and profiling
Number of customers voting using electronic surveys
Number of customers responding on social media
Number of customers friends or followers of Incommunities Facebook
Length of engagement of customers involved
Level of engagement of customers involved
Types of topic involved in
Number of customers touched by involvement methods (total)
Number of hours by method (based on minimum wage)
Number of appraisals outstanding (LMT and Customer Inspectors)
Customer training hours/type
Number of good practice events attended
<b>Financial measures</b>
Funding awarded to involved groups
Number of good practice events attended

## Linked documents

- ▶ Customer Involvement Policy 2015
- ▶ Customer Involvement Promises for 2013-2015
- ▶ Complaints Policy
- ▶ Strategic Plan 2013-17
- ▶ Equality and Diversity Policy and Strategy
- ▶ Suite of customer involvement offer cards (in development)
- ▶ Sadeh Lok Charter for Involvement



Incommunities - The Telegraph & Argus,  
Job Creator of the Year 2013, Winner.



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