



Customer Panel Feedback

The Social Housing White Paper and Tenants Charter

Even though we cannot meet in person, we know how important it is that we provide all the opportunities we can, to ensure your voices are heard and that you are still able to influence our priorities going forward. On 8 February 2021, we held our third virtual Customer Panel, with 24 tenants giving up their time to give us their views on the development of a Tenants Charter, and to ask questions around the Social Housing White Paper.

Social Housing White Paper

The Social Housing White paper sets out the direction of travel for the sector, with a key focus on strengthening regulation, raising the standards, ensure the customer voice is loud, clear and listened to, and ensuring that a home is more than 4 walls and a roof.

You can read the more about the White Paper by clicking this link

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/935880/The Charter for Social Housing Residents - Social Housing White Paper.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/935880/The_Charter_for_Social_Housing_Residents_-_Social_Housing_White_Paper.pdf)

It's based around 7 key themes;

- **To be safe in your home**
- **Transparency of landlord performance**
- **Prompt and fair handling of complaint resolution**
- **Tenants treated with respect**
- **Strengthened resident engagement**
- **Good quality homes and neighbourhoods**
- **Better access to ownership opportunities for social housing tenants**

Although it was a whistle stop tour of the main headlines, you didn't disappoint us with your questions;

You asked;

The White Paper refers to data collection and collecting more of it. How do you know you are collecting the right data in your surveys?

We replied;

You're right – and its important that we only collect and store information that we are going to use. We carefully plan our surveys so that we're asking the right questions in the right way. This year we're trying to do more Research based on people's expectations and experiences.

You asked;

The White Paper refers to league tables, is this something that is still going to happen, as is can be tricky to compare landlords on this basis?

We replied;

We're unsure of the detail and will be keeping an eye on it. But in the meantime we'd like to know what is important to our customers, what performance information we should we be sharing and how.

You asked;

Why do Berneslai Homes have a 3 tier complaints system when the Housing Ombudsman recommends a 2-tier system?

We replied;

We do have a 2-tier system in place. The first stage is reviewed and responded to by the Service Manager and the second stage by the Service Director.

You asked;

There is a requirement for tenants to be involved in the complaints process, is this being done?

We replied;

Yes, we hold Complaints Review meetings with our customers and share how we have responded to complaints, asking for their views on whether we have taken the right approach and reached the right conclusion.

You commented;

It was apparent that the tenants voice was not heard at Grenfell and the White Paper states it is so important that voices are heard and not lost. We just need to make sure this is the case locally as well as nationally.

We replied;

Totally agree. We need to have a strong relationship with our customers, and we have a good track record of listening and responding to the tenant's voice. We have a wide range of opportunities for our customers to interact with us and a broad range approach when it comes to our menu of involvement.

You asked;

It's concerning that some TARAs have not received any communication whilst in lockdown. How are you keeping in touch with the TARAs, as we don't want to lose the valuable local community experience that they have?

We replied;

We'll follow up the specific TARA you mention, as our Community Engagement staff keep in regular contact with the key TARA members. We also send out an involved tenants' newsletter every quarter and keep in touch via phone calls. Some TARAs have chosen to meet on line, which is great, and we have provided them with the tech and support to do so. When we get back to meeting face to face we will relaunch our activities and our Community Engagement team are already planning for when this happens.

You asked:

Do you have a procedure or policy that sets a cap on the number of operatives that can work in a house at any one time?

We replied:

We have established safe working practices that determine how our operatives should be working. We do ask that customers remain in a different room and in terms of numbers it's all about practicality and operatives should be maintaining social distancing and wearing the correct PPE. We regularly update the guidance we issue to staff, which includes wearing face coverings and sanitising surfaces prior to and after work has been completed. We will send a reminder out to staff regarding this.

Thanks for all your questions and we will continue to keep you up to date on the progress we are making and any new legislative changes.

[A Tenants Charter for Berneslai Homes](#)

We are looking at developing a set of promises that is relevant to Berneslai Homes customers around what you can expect when you contact us, something that strengthens our relationship and demonstrates leadership in resident accountability. Developed and tested by Housing Associations, the Charter focuses on relationships and expectations. We think it's a great way forward and would love to have our own Berneslai Homes version, focusing on the 6 key themes below;

- **Relationships**
- **Communication**
- **Voice and Influence**
- **Accountability**
- **Quality**
- **When things go wrong**

We wanted your views on this and this is what you told us;

We asked;

Are you supportive of developing a Berneslai Homes Charter, that will set out a suite of service standards and expectations that we can be measured against?

You replied;

An over whelming yes, as it would be great to have something written down to manage our expectations. You also agreed it was a great engagement tool to ensure we work in partnership with our customers to continue to deliver great services. You also said;

- It needs to be a working document and reviewed on a regular basis.
- It should be bespoke to Berneslai Homes and started from scratch, and not just copied from other providers.
- You would like to be involved in the development and review of it.
- Frontline staff, especially who deal with complaints, should be involved in the development of the Charter.
- It needs to be monitored.
- Think about having a visual Charter for customers that may be dyslexic.
- Don't just put it on the website, think about customers that do not have access to online services.

That's great news and we'll involve you as we develop the charter.

We wanted your thoughts on each of the proposed sections of the Charter, here's what you told us;

Relationships

Here's the Charter commitment;

“We will treat all customers with respect in all of their interactions. Relationships between will be based on openness, honesty and transparency.”

We asked;

- How do you feel we measure up on this commitment?

You replied;

- You had mixed views on this. 2 group members particularly felt we are not as transparent as we should be, for example when we are working on properties, operatives turning up to measure windows etc without appointments, not saying when they will be back.
- A further example was given when works are internal, again not saying why they are there or what exactly is happening. Some customers felt they didn't know that they could say no to such works i.e. decent homes and questions around who will pay for the decoration damage etc. There is not enough communication, 2 way around choices that customers have in respect of some of this work.

- You also had concerns over the fitting of Air Source Heating or having gas fires replaced by electric to make your homes more energy efficient, you told us you feel that you do not have a choice, and it's not for everyone.
- You would like further information when jobs like new fuse boards are fitted and want to be forewarned that you may be without electric the whole day. It's important that you are not told on the day of the job.

We asked;

What does being treated with respect and dignity mean to you?

You replied;

- Saying what you are going to do and when.
- Tell us in advance what we should expect from you
- Communicate with us effectively

We asked;

Do you feel that staff treat you with dignity and respect ?

You replied;

- Operatives are polite, but sometimes leave a mess behind, so could improve on this.
- On the whole we are but an example was given of a tenant feeling they couldn't make a complaint about the standard of their new home because of the way a member of staff made them feel.

We asked;

What makes you feel valued and respected?

You replied;

- Listening to us
- Communicating with us in a way that suits us
- Offering choice and not a one size fits all
- Services that are accessible for all

So, what is this telling us?

- We have a lot of fantastic staff, but we don't always get it right. We need to step back and think about how we communicate with you and do the, " mum test", "Would I like it if my mum was spoken to in this way?"
- We need to ensure we communicate with you effectively on issues like repairs and be clear what we are doing in your homes
- We need to listen to you and really hear what you are saying, by providing services that meet your needs and treat you all as individuals

Communication

Here's the Charter commitment;

“Customers will receive clear, accessible and timely information on the issues that matter to them, including important information about their homes and local community, how the organisation is working to address problems, how the organisation is run, and information about performance on key issues”

We asked;

How do you feel we measure up on this commitment?

You replied;

- It has been a difficult period with Covid to be able to get members together due to isolating, so communication is even more important, so you are getting there
- Communication is good but it goes both ways and more needs to be done to capture the younger tenants voice
- Since Covid we think that involved groups have lost their memento, so it's really important to keep communication channels going.

We asked;

What does the term, “clear communication”, mean to you, what does it look like, is it just about making sure all our correspondence is in plain English, or does it go further than that ?

You replied;

- It's about giving a choice of how we are contacted, email, letter and face to face and social media
- Needs to be in a clear manner
- Some customers find it difficult to communicate with technology and it can prove difficult to take it all in, so offering a range of contact is important
- Using on line platforms such as Zoom rather than Teams, makes it easier for us to communicate with Berneslai Homes

We asked;

Are we doing enough to keep you informed about your services and your local community, and what could we do more of/less of?

You replied;

- Keep doing the welfare visits, it's good to know that vulnerable customers are being looked out for, and the knock on the door really means a lot to a tenant that may have been isolating for nearly a year.

We asked;

We know we can improve in certain areas of communication such as long-standing issues like planned repairs, do we keep you informed in a way that suits you, what could we do more of to keep you in the loop?

You replied;

- It is Important for communication to be in a timely manner.
- Regular updates are important
- Use all the methods available to you

We asked;

Our scrutiny group are currently reviewing the website, tell us your views on our website is it accessible, can you find what you are looking for quickly and easily, do you use it on a regular basis, are the online reporting forms easy to use?

You replied;

- You like the use of IT and on-line reporting to keep people informed rather than just pointing people to the website
- It can be difficult to find information on the website

We asked;

How do you think we can measure that we are meeting this commitment?

You replied;

- Make sure there is something for everyone, from face to face, email, letters, paper copies of things as well as all the virtual stuff
- Add a commitment that help community groups get their mojo back and meet in person when the pandemic is over

What is this telling us?

- You like to be offered a wide range of opportunities to contact and communicate with us.
- The online offer is excellent, but we shouldn't forget about our customers that are not on line.
- We need to continue to support our community groups. We have 2 dedicated officers that work with the local TARAs, and we have provided them with iPads to ensure they can still meet and make a difference in their communities.
- Our website can be a little difficult to navigate, but we are working on this with our Scrutiny Panel, so it shouldn't be long until you see some improvements.

Voice and Influence**Here's the Charter commitment;**

“We will seek and value the views of customers and will use this information to inform decisions. Every individual customer will feel listened to on the issues that matter to them and can speak without fear.”

We asked;

What makes you feel that your voice is heard?

You replied;

- When we receive good service from Berneslai Homes
- Sometimes when we ask about something, we are told that there is no money, or we don't do that. This feels like we are being fobbed off.
- We need to be given better answers and more honest explanations.
- We don't feel like our voice is being heard around bigger important issues that affect the whole community, such as the new school at Keresforth

We asked;

Do you feel able to raise issues with us and what way would you do this?

You replied;

- We mostly use email, as its quick and convenient
- We know about the Housing Officers and their role, but do not feel that we always got the answers we wanted from this way of communication.
- We know about the website, but don't often use it.
- We appreciate the use of social media but don't think that this should be the only method of communication, as some people do not have access to the internet.

We asked;

As a paying customer of Berneslai Homes what do you expect from us?

You replied;

- You felt that we don't reach out as much as we should and would like to see more being done to capture the silent voices
- You were worried about raising issues as to whether that would affect your tenancies if a complaint was made, so you need reassurance that this is not the case, and that we welcome and learn from complaints.
- Respect and you felt that you had received 100% respect when you had reached out to us.

We asked;

Tell us about your experiences when contacting us and are the range of opportunities we have enough?

You replied;

- Some don't listen when we tried to talk about an issue, when a complaint was made to someone higher, the officer rang to apologise, and we didn't feel this was good enough.
- We are not aware of the complete complaints process.

- We felt that no one was listening to us about our issues around the building of the new school.

So, what is this telling us;

- It's great that you feel respected when you contact us, but when we can't do something, we need to tell you why
- We need to do more to publicise our complaints procedure and provide reassurance around raising a complaint
- We need to really listen to you on issues that are affecting your communities
- We need to ensure we have a blended approach to contact and not forget our customers that are not on line, this is something that we already have and provide a range of opportunities to contact us

When things go wrong

Here's the Charter commitment;

“Customers will have simple and accessible routes for raising issues, making complaints and seeking redress. Customers will receive timely advice and support when things go wrong.”

We asked;

How do you feel we measure up to this commitment?

You replied;

- A dedicated person should be responsible for taking on a customer enquiry and dealing with it from start to finish.
- When we chase up repairs, we don't get the same answer twice when we phone 787878 for information. This is really letting us down. There needs to be better communication.
- We feel that chase up messages aren't passed on, so we phone to chase something on 787878 and we don't hear anything.
- Communication between departments is a problem and people don't get back to customers with updates or keep them up to date with the situation.

We asked;

When dealing with complaints, do we treat you with dignity and respect, give examples?

You replied;

- It is felt there is a lack of communication during the resolution stage of the complaint
- Some staff don't like complaints – you treat us differently when we make a complaint.
- One customer stated that when they make an informal complaint and it gets passed from person to person and they never get a resolution that it feels like Berneslai Homes are trying to avoid the complaint. One person just gave up on the complaint.

- There are Issues around reporting repairs, operative visits, then we get told that another operative will need to come out.
- Sometimes we are told we need to make a phone call ourselves to report another further repair. Sometimes the operative says they will refer it back. Again, different staff say different things around this.

We asked;

As a learning organisation we welcome complaints and see them as an opportunity to improve our services. Do you feel able to complain without fear of reprisal and why? If not how could we improve this?

You replied;

- You had mixed thoughts on this with some customers feeling able to make complaints without fear, but some people do feel fear of making a complaint and the consequences although they could not be clear about the consequences they were worried about.
- It is possible that people do not like the formality of it and don't like to complain. Maybe never made a formal complaint in the past so worried about the procedure.
- Some customer's feel that they are treated with contempt by staff when they are visited to discuss their 'complaint' and say things like 'I hear you're putting a complaint in'

We asked;

Is our complaints procedure accessible, would you know where to look for information if you wished to make a complaint?

You replied;

- Customer need a charter to know what to expect.
- It's not easy to find how to complain on the Berneslai Homes website.

So, what is this telling us?

- We need to understand why some customers feel unable to complain
- We need to publicise our complaints procedure more effectively and make it easy for customers to complain
- We need to provide reassurance that its Ok to complain and that we welcome complaints, as that's how we improve services

Quality

Here's the Charter commitment

“Customers can expect their homes to be good quality, well maintained, safe and well managed”.

We asked;

How do you feel we measure up to this commitment?

You replied;

- We feel that you are well on the way to a Quality Commitment with what you already have in place.

We asked;

What are your thoughts on the maintenance of your home, do we do enough to ensure your homes are maintained to a high standard? We used the example of a kitchen.

You replied;

- We think the tenant's choice of the kitchen is excellent as is the overall quality.

We asked;

How safe do you feel in your home and what makes you feel safe?

You replied;

- The element of safety practices already in place i.e. Gas Service, electrical testing, etc within our homes is very good, and it was suggested that we look at intruder alarm systems.

We asked;

Thinking about your local community and estates, do you feel they are well managed and why, are there any issues of estate management we excel at and what could we improve on?

You replied;

- There is a lot of Dog fouling there was on the estates and we would like some action on this if possible.
- We don't really see a problem with anti-social behaviour, so this gave a positive that the group was satisfied in this area.
- We think our estates are looking ,much better, an example was the St Helens ward where driveways were being introduced with block paving, new boundary walls and fencing. This is a great way of reducing cars on the streets and the works supplying employment, apprentices and increasing local skills.

So, what is this telling us?

- Overall you are satisfied with your neighbourhood and homes, but we need to do more on issues like dog fouling
- Brilliant you feel safe in your homes and you are happy with our safety procedures

- It's great that customers are satisfied with the quality of our kitchens, but we need to dig a bit deeper than that and are waiting for the detail in the White Paper.
- We had a great discussion about the supply of intruder alarms, but unfortunately it's not feasible, but did discuss our commitment around the supply of adequate lighting where it needs to be.

Thanks for all your thoughts and ideas, here's the main takeaways from the session:

- We will continue to listen to our customers and offer choices, accepting that people are individuals.
- We will look at expanding our range of communication and include videos for certain things, making sure we really do have something for everyone
- We will plan out our next step for the developing the Customer Charter and involve you!

If you would like to get involved in developing the Berneslai Charter please email clairehawley@berneslaihomes.co.uk