



# Community Services Strategy

Local community group Bee Together receives funding from our ROCA scheme and Oldham Council's Green Dividend Fund



## Introduction

First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO) is an ambitious and innovative organisation. We provide and manage housing but also do much more. We support customers through a range of services designed to empower and improve lives.

FCHO has a number of services which deliver more than the traditional landlord function such as: our Directions Service which provides employment and training support and our Community Impact Team that offers financial support and advice.

We are continuously looking at ways to improve our community offer and striving to ensure customers are engaged in decision making and that wider consultation is used to support service improvements. We ensure that we are working with our partners to maximise the services we deliver to help create communities where customers want to live and work.

Our mission of 'improving lives in Oldham', supports our goal to provide homes for those in need, improving the neighbourhoods that customers live in and to provide services that improve the quality of customers lives.



## Our priorities

We have identified six priority areas to direct our resources and ensure we are delivering a successful community offer to customers:



1. Be accountable to customers and provide opportunities for customers to be involved



2. Build strong partnerships



3. Help customers with the skills and knowledge to be financially independent



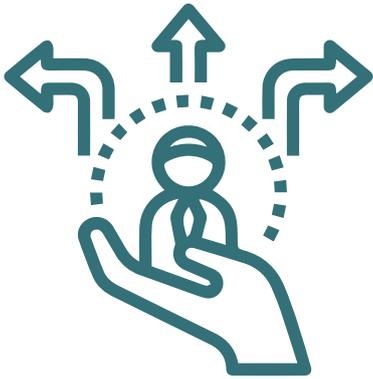
4. Support customers to live well, healthy and safely in their homes



5. Provide customers with the skills and knowledge to secure employment opportunities through training, placements and volunteering



6. Promote sustainability and environmental improvements



## Priority 1

Be accountable to customers and provide opportunities for customers to be involved

We aim to ensure customer involvement is at the heart of everything we do. By working with our customers and involving them in decisions that affect their homes and neighbourhoods, we believe we can continually improve our services.

We aim to ensure that customers feel safe in their community, are listened to and live in good quality, affordable homes. We:

- Have a Customer Voice Panel (CVP) that gives customers the opportunity to share their views on the services we offer and our performance. Through the CVP we will ensure customers are at the heart of our decision-making process; providing us with a valuable source of feedback, which will help us to continually improve services and increase customer satisfaction
- Have Neighbourhood Champions in our neighbourhoods, who complete neighbourhood inspections and are able to have their say and get actively involved in improving our services. This work will influence the services our Environmental and Neighbourhood Teams deliver
- Provide customers and communities with access to several funding streams including our own Respect Our Community Awards (ROCA) and community grants
- Provide training to customers who want to expand their skills in customer involvement
- Publish the Stronger Communities newsletter on the website to inform customers of any service changes or updates to services that happen as a result of their feedback.

### Case study

*We have 24 Neighbourhood Champions and over 40 customers regularly engaging with us as part of our Customer Voice Panel (CVP), which launched virtually in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.*

*Customer Ghzalh Jabbar said: "Thank you for allowing me to take part in the CVP. I really enjoy myself and I actually prefer this method of getting involved rather than attending in person as I struggle to get out of the house."*





## Priority 2

### Build strong partnerships

We understand that partnership working is essential in community investment and to drive positive change and to promote thriving communities. We will work with partners to get the best possible results for our communities and increase our capacity to make a difference. This includes:

- Working in partnership with Oldham Council to deliver services that benefit the community, including having an active role in the delivery of place-based initiatives
- Working in partnership with community centres to deliver our services locally
- Working in partnership with The Bread and Butter Thing (TBBT) to deliver an affordable food offer
- Seeking external funding to support projects and working in partnership wherever possible to reduce customer costs and to deliver the most efficient and effective services
- Working with a range of partners including voluntary organisations and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to provide valuable support services to our customers.

## Case study

*In less than a year, we helped our customers save over £280,000 collectively through our partnership with affordable food charity, The Bread and Butter Thing. The partnership began in November 2019 and meant we are now able to provide good quality food for a fraction of its usual price to customers in financial hardship. This increases the amount of disposable income in customers' pockets, so they don't have to choose between buying food, paying bills or buying other basics.*





## Priority 3

Help customers with the skills and knowledge to be financially independent

We want to ensure all of our customers have the skills and knowledge to be financially stable and able to access the basic financial services and products that are needed to participate in everyday life. That's why we will assist customers in a number of ways, including:

- Helping customers to maximise their income by providing welfare and benefit advice
- Providing budgeting advice and having an online budget management tool for customers to access
- Reducing fuel poverty
- Through our partnership with The Bread and Butter Thing helping customers to access affordable food
- Being committed to working effectively with our customers to support them to maximise their income and be economically active. We have developed an Oldham approach to tackling poverty and are members of the Food Partnership Board and the Poverty Steering Group
- Offering a hardship fund that customers can access through the Community Impact Team
- Providing drop-in support sessions in community centres and at our head office. This support includes help with budgeting and finances and employment advice
- Providing training programmes aimed at budget management and developing financial confidence.

## Case study

*Our customer Carol was referred to our Community Impact team after struggling to cope with debts of £7,000. Our advisor, Annarosa, put together a wraparound support package to help her find a way forward. Carol said: "I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Annarosa. She is my angel. My benefits had been stopped, I couldn't afford to eat and with my mental and physical health conditions it was all too much for me. I couldn't see a way out of the debt but she helped me so much. Today I have more money in my pocket and I'm in a better place all round."*



## Priority 4

Support customers to live live well, healthy and safely in their homes

**We aim to support customers to live well, healthy, and safely in their homes. We aim to provide our customers with support so they can live in their homes with access to the services they need. This includes:**

- Proving a dedicated support service in the form of our Live Well Service, which offers weekly contact with customers
- Helping customers to maximise their income and access any benefits they are entitled to
- Identifying opportunities for social interaction within the community for customers to reduce isolation and loneliness
- Helping customers to access any aids and adaptations that they may need in their home
- Being part of the Greater Manchester Housing, Planning and Ageing Group which supports the delivery of the Greater Manchester Ageing strategy. We are also part of the Greater Manchester Ageing Hub where housing providers work in partnership to improve the services offered to our ageing customers
- Providing customers with a dedicated advisor and a direct number to call, as and when needed
- Expanding and increasing the service offer following customer consultation.



### Case study

*May Evans is one of our Live Well Service customers, receiving weekly support from our Advisor, Diana. May turned 100 years old in December 2020, and after almost a year of increased isolation, we wanted to do something extra to mark her achievement. Diana visited May at home on her 100th birthday to celebrate with a card and a beautiful hamper from everyone at FCHO, to make her day that little bit more special.*



## Priority 5

Provide customers with the skills and knowledge to secure employment opportunities through training, placements and volunteering

**We aim to support customers in developing their skills and accessing training and volunteering opportunities to secure and sustain employment. This includes:**

- Providing pre-employment support and advice
- Assisting customers to find suitable employment
- Helping to remove barriers to work
- Providing skills development and training opportunities
- Creating employment and volunteering opportunities
- Supporting work placements and work experience
- Working with schools to increase educational achievement
- Up-skilling customers for the job opportunities that are available
- Developing links with local businesses to provide job opportunities
- Creating job opportunities for younger customers including the Kickstart scheme
- Providing apprenticeship opportunities
- Being part of the Athena partnership which brings housing providers together to deliver training, employment and other initiatives across Greater Manchester to reduce inequality and poverty.

### Case study

*Customer Monique was referred over to Directions by her Work Coach at Oldham Job Centre. Monique had been working for 16 years as a Sales Support Administrator and was made redundant. Throughout the pandemic, Monique was isolated and not able to see her family or friends and was getting very down. We contacted her regularly and offered support and training sessions. Monique did video interview training, application training, everything she could do to develop her skills all online. Monique is now back in work and said: "I am very grateful for your help through that terrible time. Your support was tremendous and even now I know you are there if I need to speak to you. I can't sing your praises enough."*





## Priority 6

### Promote sustainability and environmental improvements

To make our communities greener and cleaner places to live, they need to be equipped with the infrastructure and facilities our customers need to live more sustainable lifestyles. We will achieve this by:

- Encouraging the reduction of waste through recycling and reuse schemes
- Reviewing how we use our outdoor spaces to benefit the community
- Supporting customers to reduce their carbon footprint
- Working with customers and partners to keep places and spaces attractive and well maintained
- Supporting projects which promote more sustainable resource use
- Celebrating and rewarding community involvement and volunteering
- Providing opportunities for customers to be involved in community investment and development decisions
- Supporting the provision of projects and activities designed to reduce antisocial behaviour.

## Case study

*One community group we have supported is keeping their local park looking lovely and creating sustainable food by growing their own fruit and vegetables. The idea behind it is that anyone from the local community can take what they need, or bring their own seeds to grow whatever they fancy if they don't have the space or means to do so at home.*

Older residents in Fitton Hill enjoyed singo-bingo sessions throughout lockdown thanks to the Salvation Army and our ROCA funding



## Funding opportunities



We have a dedicated budget for our community work and we want to ensure this is used to successfully support customers and communities.

As part of this budget we have funding opportunities for individuals, groups and organisations. This is through our own Respect Our Communities Awards (ROCA) funding where customers can bid for up to £500 to support their local community or voluntary group. We also have a dedicated Funding and Partnership Officer who can work with customers on further funding opportunities

### Case study

*Through ROCA, we support many local community groups including the local branch of the Salvation Army, who received a grant and used the money to create isolation-busting 'singo bingo' sessions for older residents suffering from loneliness during the coronavirus pandemic. One resident, Hilda, said as she doesn't leave the house, the sessions were the highlight of her week and hopes they continue long after the pandemic.*

Community Impact Advisor Annarosa supporting residents over the phone



## Accessing our services

We want customers to be able to access our services in the way that they want. This may be over the phone, online, face-to-face in our community centres, head office or a visit at their home.

We will be aiming to deliver more of our services online to make it easier and quicker for customers to access any of our community services. We will also adapt the way in which we deliver our services so everybody is included; this means offering alternatives for those who may find it difficult to use digital or online services.

# Measuring success

It is important that we evidence the impact of the work and the value this brings to our customers and communities.

One of the ways that we measure our performance is by key performance indicators, some of these are below.

- Amount of money customers saved from The Bread and Butter Thing (TBBT)
- Number of customers sustaining their tenancy 12 months after support is complete
- Amount of one-off financial gains for customers
- Increase in disposable income for customers
- Number of job starts for customers
- Number of customers sustaining employment for six months or over.

We also look at the social value impact that we have delivered through services and projects and we are developing ways in which we can better evidence the social value we deliver.

FCHO is signed up to the [Together with Tenants Charter](#); which is about developing strong relationships between customers and housing associations over time.



## The Together with Tenants Charter key commitments include:



Relationships



Accountability



Communication



Quality



Voice and influence



When things go wrong

# Reporting

We believe it's important to be open, transparent and accountable and so we will update our customers on all of our community activities and performance every three months.

Publicity is also a key part of informing our customers and partners about the work that we do in our communities. We will ensure that we provide details of the communities and projects we are investing in and this will include information and case studies on our website and social media pages so make sure you are following us to stay up-to-date.

## Get in touch

If you would like to access any of the services we offer,  
**call our Community Services Team on**



**0161 393 5488 or**



**[email.servicecentre@fcho.co.uk](mailto:email.servicecentre@fcho.co.uk)**