



Onward

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IMPACT REPORT

2021



Welcome.

Welcome to our first annual Customer Engagement report.

The report will provide a summary of how customers have been working with us over the past year to influence and shape our services.

We are engaging with more customers than ever before and our Customer Engagement Community is growing day by day. One of our objectives is to have 10% of our customers engaged in each of our neighbourhoods and we are well on our way to achieving that. Our vision is to place the customer voice at the heart of everything that we do.

It has been a challenging year to say the least, but working together we have achieved some fantastic things. We hope that this report gives you a flavour of how we are collaborating with customers to ensure that they influence the way we do things here at Onward.

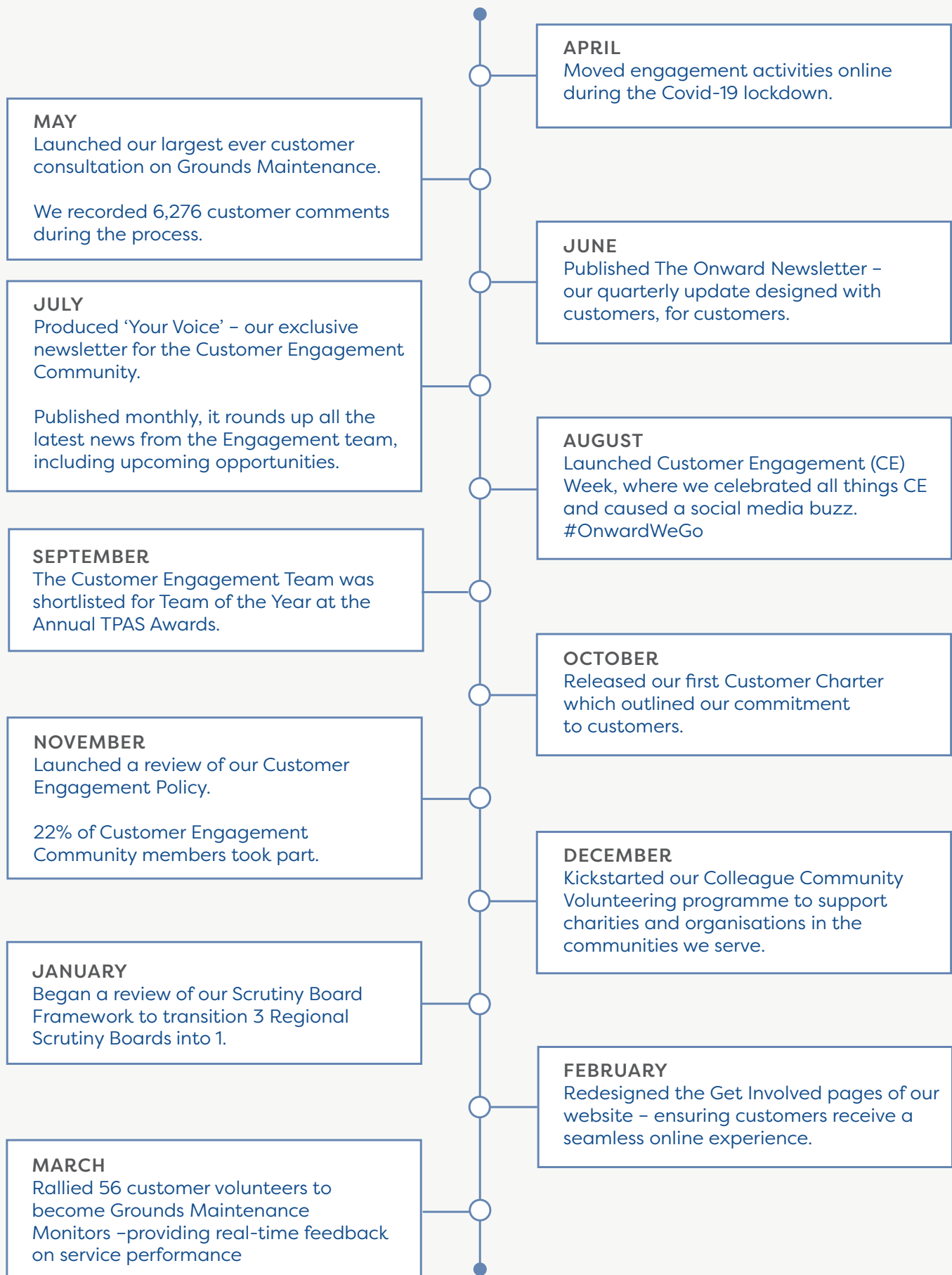
Read on to find out more and see for yourself just how a little engagement can make a big impact.



Jo Phillips,
Customer Engagement Manager

A year in focus.

2020-2021



Customer Engagement Community.

We want to make sure our customers' voice is at the heart of everything we do, and our Customer Engagement Community (CEC) helps us to do just that. Over 2,600 customer volunteers take part in shaping services and driving improvements, helping to make our homes and neighbourhoods better places to live.

We regularly hold Customer Engagement workshops that focus on

- Understanding customer experiences
- Promoting involvement opportunities
- Promoting how involvement makes a difference

We recently moved from face to face to online events' instead. During 2020-21 we supported 99 customers to get online and engage with us in this way, as a result customers have signed up to a range of activities from joining the Complaints forum to becoming Grounds Maintenance monitors.

So what do our members think?

“Showing you are listening to your customers builds trust and people will respect the organisation more. It will encourage residents to give back to their communities and to Onward.”

“If you provide a service then you need to get feedback from the people at the sharp end, unless you get the feedback you don't know what it's like on the ground.”



We hosted

42

engagement
events



Getting it right.

We will consult with members of our CEC each year to gauge their experience of being an 'involved customer'. Our first survey provided us with positive and useful feedback which has enabled us to understand what is important to customers, and identify **areas where we can improve as well as understanding what we do well.**

- Almost 70% of customers told us that they felt more confident in getting involved in engagement activities since joining the CEC
- 66% of customers told us that they felt valued as a member of the CEC
- 46% of customers feel that their involvement makes a difference
- 71% of customers feel that they are kept up to date and informed with opportunities to get involved
- 75% of customers are satisfied with our newsletters

We want to keep improving our engagement service, over this next year we will:

- Increase the number of training and development opportunities
- Promote more widely the outcomes from involvement activities
- Identify new opportunities for customers to get involved

Supporting customers to get involved.

Providing training opportunities enables customers to effectively hold us to account and empowers them to take part, lead and influence our decisions.

This year we have provided support and access to training that has:

- Increased customer confidence
- Influenced national policy
- Developed knowledge and skills
- Improve IT skills
- Provided an understanding of how housing associations work
- Provided opportunities to share experiences and talk to tenants from other areas

The customer experience.

We were an early adopter of the National Housing Federation (NHF) 'Together with Tenants', programme, which aims to build more collaborative, balanced and stronger relationships between housing associations and their customers.

Committed to ensuring positive customer experiences and high levels of customer satisfaction we worked with customers to co-produce our Customer Charter. This details the service you can expect to receive as one of our customers and outlines our dedication to delivering exceptional customer service.

The Charter features several pledges focussed on:

- Relationships
- Communication
- Your Voice
- Accountability
- Quality
- When things go wrong

In 2020-21, we worked on several major projects to improve the customer experience and made huge strides in developing online services.



Responding to COVID-19

In April 2020, we asked customers how we could help them through the COVID-19 crisis.


The survey found that most customers (72.1%) had been contacted by Onward since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, and 60.8% of customers were satisfied or very satisfied with the information and support that we provided during the crisis. It also found that 20% of customers were most concerned about mental health, loneliness, and isolation because of coronavirus

Whilst 91% of customers told us they were ok, 2,200 customers requested further help, which we were able to provide.

Following feedback, we worked with technology provider Voicescape to make 74,640 welfare calls and deliver 16,600 voicemails and text messages to customers - just to say hi and check if they needed support.

20%

of customers said they were most worried about their mental health as a result of COVID-19



Customers
volunteered
more than

2,064

hours of their
time

“ Onward launched a concise communications campaign centred on the welfare of its tenants that resulted in stronger relationships at the most challenging time for many people. By automating thousands of tenant engagements, its team was able to maximise resources and quickly identify those in need. ”

John Doyle, CEO, Voicescape

Complaints to compliments.

In December 2020 we launched a review of our complaints service, then in January we published our new Complaints Resolution policy.

Three customers who each have experienced our complaints process were invited to take part in focus groups, to allow us to really understand their experience and where we could make improvements. In collaboration with customers, we developed a complaints process which is clear, simple, and more accessible to customers.

Alongside the new policy we also launched our new complaints forum.

“ The Customer Complaints Forum is a great opportunity to get customer feedback on our policies, processes, and performance.

Members receive information on a range of things that enables them to influence and shape service delivery. Customers have already influenced letters that we send to customers - letters are now much more specific and provide information on our response times. ”

John Parkforth
Customer Resolutions Team Leader



A landlord for everyone.

Since day one, we've cared deeply about ensuring inclusivity and removing barriers to engagement. And the past year has been no different.

Throughout the year we worked on several campaigns and promoted key engagement events with the aim of sharing stories and advocating our diverse communities and our customers who live in them.



Standing with LGBTQ+ customers

In February 2021, we announced our intention to join the HouseProud Pledge Scheme.

HouseProud was set up in 2015 and its Pledge Scheme empowers landlords to be more responsive and accountable to LGBTQ+ customers.

We helped LGBTQ+ customers to raise their voice and take part in the Rainbow Roofs LGBT+ Customer Forum in 2020-21 - bringing together customers, housing professionals, agencies, and local authorities from across the North West.



International Women's Day

We shared the stories of some incredible women as part of International Women's Day 2021, like Jennifer John - an Onward customer and founder of Jennifer John Music, an organisation based in Merseyside which provides accessible music training and artistic development.

Jennifer John Music was awarded a grant from Onward to help the organisation continue its great work in the community. Together, we have been able to offer free music workshops to customers.

"A strong women is a powerful thing to behold and we need to see much more of that" - Jennifer John, Merseyside

Looking ahead, we aim to increase the number of engaged customers to 10% in each of our 55 neighbourhoods, to ensure a more representative range of voices will be heard.


During 2022 we will develop a customer Diversity & Inclusion forum, providing an opportunity to create and deliver inclusive services for all our customers.

Communicating with you

This year we have supported customers to review a range of customer communications to give us assurance that we are communicating in the right way.

Customers have been involved in reviewing and improving letters, our website, customer information guides and newsletters.

We recently relaunched The Onward Newsletter and this time, we worked in close collaboration with a group of customers on the design and content. Customers even chose a new strapline for the newsletter: 'Designed with customers, for customers'. Published every three months, the newsletter aims to update customers on the issues that matter to them most and let them know about the great work we're doing in their communities.



Customers worked with us on our approach communicating changes to Service Charges. They told us that letters needed to be less technical, the website page needed to be more engaging, and more detail was needed about how you could pay your service charge.

By working with customers to design communications we can get the information right for you, removing the need to contact us...ultimately freeing us up to deal with more urgent queries.

56

Customers became Environmental Services monitors.

Scrutiny.

Over the past year our Regional Scrutiny Boards (RSBs) have reviewed services, compared our performance against targets and analysed customer feedback to identify improvements. They form a crucial part of Onward and drive us to do better every day, play an important role in ensuring Onward are accountable to our customers.

A key focus for the RSBs has been our Repairs service. Members have collaborated with repairs colleagues to focus on issues that had been highlighted by customers.

Recommendations made included

- Improve communication with customers particularly about appointments and follow-on works
- Provide more details to the contractor about the job they are to do
- Test the gas supply and boiler when a home is empty to avoid new tenants having problems as they move in



2,613

Customers in
our Engagement
Community.

“ Customer Engagement is important because it drives improvements in Onward’s service delivery and offers people the chance to influence Onward’s performance culture.

I got involved with the Scrutiny Board for a number of reasons. I had worked for social landlords and wanted to use this knowledge and experience positively. I had also worked closely with tenants groups and cooperatives and understood how valuable a resource they can be.

I think that the work of the Scrutiny Board is becoming more focused and more refined. Our ability to pose critical and consistent questions has helped Onward to restructure the way in which it communicates with tenants and in how it promotes customer engagement strategies.

In the future the remodelled Scrutiny Board will continue to work proactively with Onward in order to improve performance in the areas of service delivery, policy revision and governance.

Once tenants are invited to the table, they stay! ”

Joe Corbett, Scrutiny Board Member



In 2021, following a review of our Scrutiny Framework with members, we have consolidated our three regional boards into one single overarching board.

Shaping our services.

Implementing our Customer Engagement Strategy has helped to promote the importance of involving tenants across Onward. Our Customer Engagement Community play a huge part in shaping services and decision making across all that we do.

We do our best to keep customers updated and informed about our services, and in particular any changes that we are making that may have an impact or improve an aspect of service delivery.

Influencing Policy.

Tenancy and succession.

We recently worked with members of the Customer Engagement Community to review our Tenancy and Succession policies and we received some great feedback.

We implemented several changes, following their feedback including:

- Using clear language to make it easier to read and understand
- Adding detail on what 'protected tenancies' means within the policy
- Providing more clarification on the statutory and non-statutory sections of the succession policy

Customer Engagement.

We are committed to shaping an engagement service that is accessible to all customers. We want to create a range of involvement opportunities that encourage customers to get involved. To ensure that our approaches are fit for purpose we carried out a review of our Customer Engagement Policy. We hosted an online event and sent a survey to all CEC members, with 459 members taking part.

The feedback we received will help us to shape the service over the coming year and we will:

- Develop customer groups that focus on our repairs service
- Involve customers in activities to identify neighbourhood priorities
- Promote involvement opportunities, local news stories via newsletters and website
- Promote how the customer voice is influencing services
- Continue with monthly prize draw for Customer Engagement Community members
- Identify and remove any barriers to involvement



Influencing services.

Repairs.

In response to customer requests, we have set up three 'Working Together' groups that have kickstarted our approach to involving customers within the repairs service. The groups have started to meet on a quarterly basis and will work with Onward to understand the customer experience and influence service delivery.

“ Customer feedback from regular surveys, the Scrutiny Boards and through understanding customer experiences is helping us to improve aspects of the repairs service.

Since the pandemic, we developed a way to continue with property inspections, doing virtual inspections and face to face and WhatsApp video call. Virtual inspections has enabled Repairs Specialists to increase the number of post inspections they can do, this has ensured value for money and that repairs are completed to standard. ”

Nikki Currie
Senior Repairs Manager, Greater Manchester



Planned Maintenance.

As part of a scrutiny project customers considered our approach to Planned Maintenance.

An element of the review considered the letters we send to customers when we are planning works to their homes. Feedback told us that letters were too technical, too formal, and sometimes confusing. Letters have now been simplified using a much friendlier and more informal tone and the content provides clarity on the works that will be carried out. Customers also told us that short films would help with understanding of works to be carried out, and these are well underway.



To understand the customer experience in more detail, we have introduced customer diaries.

During planned works customers are invited to complete a daily diary recording their experience of the service. The diaries provide us with feedback about the quality of the work, the efficiency of the service and contractor service. Feedback is helping us to improve the service where it needs improving and celebrate the service where it delivers.

“ Very happy with the new bathroom and all the people involved were great from both Onward and the contractor. They did a great job. Very professional, friendly, skilled, respected my home, all those things. 10/10. ”

Shaping our neighbourhoods.

Our new Grounds Maintenance service.

Before bringing in our new Grounds Maintenance contractors we asked customers for feedback on our environmental services. Thousands responded, and customers told us that they wanted a clearer schedule of visits, better quality control and more detail on works to be done. In response, we launched a refreshed grounds maintenance service, increasing the number of visits and setting out a more detailed list of the work our contractors will deliver. Alongside the introduction of the new contract, we also set about recruiting customers to become Grounds Maintenance monitors. 56 customers signed up to monitor the standards of service they receive on a regular basis.

Focus on fly tipping.

We have engaged customers to get input and feedback to a number of projects such as fly tipping, the Onward Community Fund and some of our policies. We are engaging with customers locally, to find out what issues they are facing or ideas they have to improve particular neighbourhoods.

Engagement has had a positive impact in several different areas. It has proved a good reality check for ideas and issues where you want feedback. It has provided valuable information on topics that we wouldn't otherwise know about.

We recently surveyed members of our Engagement Community on the issue of fly tipping. Almost 800 customers completed the survey, and their feedback has been useful in shaping our new strategy.

A key change that customers wanted to see was a stronger approach to tackling behaviours and enforcement. As a result we are taking a different approach to the way we shape our communications, reinforcing the action we will take against fly tipping. Findings from the survey also helped us to identify key hotspot neighbourhoods to focus on over the coming year.

Andrew Lord
Head of Neighbourhood
Services, Greater
Manchester Region





What's in store for 2021/22?

Over the next year we will:

- ✓ Involve customers in monitoring satisfaction with our Grounds Maintenance service
- ✓ Launch our online Customer Training Hub
- ✓ Ensure that customers are able to influence our Repairs service
- ✓ Strengthen our approach to scrutiny through the Onward Scrutiny Board
- ✓ Develop engagement activities within our capital investment programmes
- ✓ Involve customers in the procurement of new services
- ✓ Work with customers to develop a customer diversity and inclusion forum
- ✓ Develop engagement offer for our Leasehold customers
- ✓ Work with customers to co-design our engagement approaches that put residents at the heart of building safety