



Customers and Communities Strategy

2023 - 2027

Introduction

This Customers and Communities Strategy sets out Orwell’s ambition to make a positive difference to the quality of life and future opportunities of our customers and communities, and how we will achieve this ambition and the associated objectives within the Strategic Plan 2023-27.

Our mission is ‘that together we make a difference by providing housing, care and support services with the customers at our heart.’ We recognise that the needs of our customers are changing, and believe that social landlords can, and should, provide added value to the communities in which they work above and beyond being a good landlord.

The Customers and Communities Directorate is central to this ambition, as it is dedicated to providing high quality frontline services to customers, ensuring that customers remain at the front and centre of all of our activities. With a renewed emphasis on customer engagement and empowerment, our aim is that everyone living in an Orwell home has a voice. Equally, with resources available to help people to sustain their tenancies when they may need additional help to do so, Orwell is committed to investing in the diverse communities in which our customers live, and to creating social value.

We recognise that, as an organisation delivering housing and care and support services, we have a diverse range of stakeholders including tenants, leaseholders, shared owners and other customers. Everyone we interact with will have a preference about how we refer to them. We have decided to use the word ‘customers’ to reflect the full range of stakeholders with whom we interact, including residents in all types of accommodation owned and managed by Orwell across all tenures, and anyone who receives Orwell care and support services.



Orwell's Operating Environment

Our customers

Orwell currently has around 4500 homes in management across a broad and diverse geographical area, spanning from north Essex to Norfolk and from East Suffolk to Cambridge. The area in which we work is diverse, encompassing city living and urban areas, deprived coastal towns, affluent market towns with high proportions of second homes and small villages set within large rural areas. As such, our customers have a diverse range of needs and aspirations and face differing challenges. We deliver services to families, young people, older people, women fleeing domestic abuse, people experiencing mental ill health, learning disability and homelessness.

Our communities

There are currently an estimated 763,375 people and 349,940 households in Suffolk, and 916,120 and 432,500 households in Norfolk. These numbers are predicted to rise by 6.8% for Suffolk and Norfolk by 10% over the next 20 years to 2043. Both areas have a higher percentage of people over the age of 65, around 24.2%, than the national average of 18.6%, and this too is set to increase further to around 39% over the next 20 years.

18.3% of the population in Norfolk and 16.9% in Suffolk has a disability which limits daily activities to some degree, compared to the national average of 17.7%.

Median annual salaries for full-time workers in Suffolk and Norfolk are lower than the national average with a higher proportion of unskilled workers in the region than nationally. This compares unfavourably with the fact that market rents and property prices are often well beyond the reach of average local household incomes with average house prices being eight and a half times average salaries. In Suffolk, the median price of a property is £280,000 and in Norfolk it is £271,000 (Feb 2022 – Jan 2023) with average salaries of £33,205.00 and £33,058 respectively.

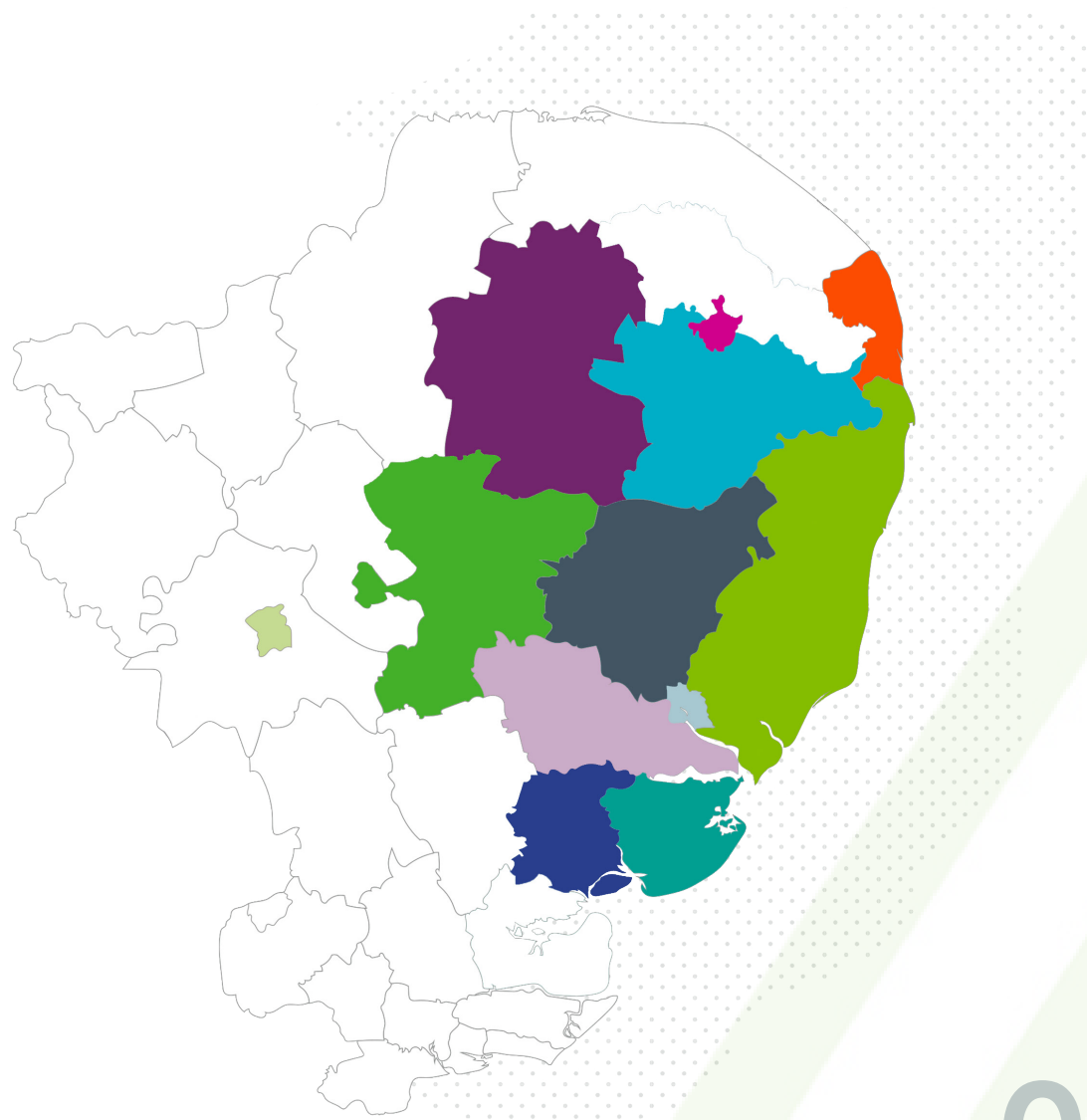
Deprivation

Suffolk and Norfolk are also characterised by a challenging juxtaposition of very affluent areas with high second home ownership and high house prices, sitting alongside pockets of severe deprivation. Both counties also have large rural expanses. The combined effect of these factors is that much of the local population faces significant barriers to accessing housing and services, be they geographical barriers such as the proximity of local services, or wider barriers which include issues such as affordability.

Housing demand and affordability gap




There is high demand for affordable homes in Orwell's operating areas, demonstrated by the housing registers for social housing in areas where we work (figures correct as at December 2022).

District	Orwell Homes	Housing Register
Babergh	487	786
Breckland	32	1218
Cambridge	13	1338
Colchester	10	2894
East Suffolk	1438	4158
Gt Yarmouth	164	497
Ipswich	916	2670
Mid Suffolk	373	577
Norwich	263	3906
South Norfolk	77	761
Tendring	155	2627
West Suffolk	153	2022
Totals	4,081	23,454



The Social Housing Regulation Bill

Following on from the White Paper on social housing, the Social Housing Regulation Bill ('the Bill'), which is currently passing through Parliament, sets out standards which every social tenant in England can expect from their landlords. The Bill reflects the following expectations which all social housing customers should have:

-  To be safe in their home
-  To know how their landlord is performing
-  To have their complaints dealt with promptly and fairly
-  To be treated with respect
-  To have their voice heard by their landlord
-  To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in
-  To be supported to take their first step to home ownership

As a social landlord, Orwell is committed to complying with the new legislation and the Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) new proactive consumer regulation regime, and are actively engaged in embedding the requirements of the Bill and the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standard introduced by the RSH.

This Customers and Communities Strategy gives more information about how Orwell will meet the requirements of the Bill and the regulatory standards, especially with regard to complaint handling, being treated with respect, and listening to the voices of our customers, ensuring they are heard and empowered. We support the 'Together with Tenants' initiative launched by the National Housing Federation, a sector-wide work movement focused on strengthening the relationship between customers and housing association landlords and are working with TPAs to review and strengthen our customer engagement offer.

Our Values



Everything we do is linked back directly to our vision and values. The objectives and targets in this strategy will help us track whether we are making a difference and align with our our PACE values and our Strategic Plan 2023-2027.

People-focused People are at the heart of our organisation. By recognising people's diverse needs and strengths and treating everyone fairly, we can both serve our customers better and support our teams to run a brilliant organisation and improve services.

Ambitious We are ambitious to grow the organisation so that it can do more and realise the full potential of Orwell, our employees, and those we support and house.

Collaborative We will work in partnership and search out best practice. We will collaborate with tenants, customers, colleagues and like-minded organisations to develop solutions together.







Effective We will be economic and embed efficiency across our services, ensuring we lead the way with our knowledge and expertise. We will ensure that our teams are committed and competent to be the best at what they do, in order that they can provide the highest possible standards of service.

Our Objectives

1 People-focused – Know our customers and our communities, putting them at the heart of our organisation and ensuring an excellent customer experience.

We will provide an excellent customer journey and experience. To do this we will work with our customers, so that they have a greater degree of choice and control over how they interact with us. We will use insight to know and understand our customers and the communities they live in, using this insight to inform the services we provide and where we need to make changes. We will work hard to learn from our complaints, responding to feedback from our customers and using it to improve our services.

What we want to achieve:

-  High levels of customer satisfaction.
-  Customers interacting with us via a range of engagement options and channels.
-  An excellent and consistent customer experience.
-  Efficient and empathetic complaint handling, using complaints as a rich source of feedback and insight to help us to learn from our mistakes and get better.
-  Choice for our customers about how and when they interact with us.
-  An in-depth understanding of our customers and what they want.

To achieve this over the next 5 years we will:

- Employ a Customer Insight Officer.
- Embed a CRM system across the organisation, and use this to develop useful customer insight to drive and influence decision making.
- Comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, and publish our self-assessment against this Code.
- Regularly report complaints information and other customer insight data to our Customer Insight Committee and Board, embedding a learning culture to use this feedback to improve the way we do things.
- Review the ways we capture and measure customer satisfaction, involving our customers in this process.
- Work with our customers and community-based organisations, and access existing statistical data, to understand our existing customers and the communities where they live, using this analysis to inform and influence the services we deliver.
- Use the information from this analysis to tackle stigma where our customers may experience it, raising the profile and reputation of social housing so it is a tenure of choice rather than last resort.
- Comply with the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures regulatory standard, carrying out an annual tenant perception survey, reporting the results to our customers. We will benchmark the results with similar organizations. We will use the feedback from the surveys and benchmarking to shape and inform our activity in the future.
- Take part in any consultations about changes to the regulatory standards and implement any changes needed to ensure compliance.

2 Ambitious- Be ambitious for our customers, ensuring they have a safe and suitable place to call home and the support they need to live their best life.

Support will be available for our customers should they need it to maintain their tenancy. We will develop pathways within Orwell's housing options, offering choice to our customers to live in a home that is right for them, with support if they want or need it.

What we want to achieve:

-  Homes that are safe and meet or exceed the Decent Homes Standard and all relevant regulatory standards.
-  Customers being empowered to sustain their tenancies, with eviction always being seen as a failure and a last resort.
-  Customers being able to remain under the Orwell umbrella of housing and care services and being able to move from one type of home to another.
-  The right homes being delivered for our customers in the right places, balancing meeting a range of housing needs in our communities so that they are suitable for our customers, whatever their needs.
-  Customers being confident in our landlord services, able to report issues to us easily and to receive the support they need to address them.





To achieve this over the next 5 years we will:

-  Maintaining an in-house tenancy sustainment offer.
-  Developing and roll out an in-house tenancy training programme and making this available to all new Orwell customers.
-  Reviewing our sheltered accommodation offer and assets with our customers and making any changes needed based on their feedback.
-  Developing a system to understand the housing needs of our own customers and in our wider communities, enabling us to work collaboratively across the organization and with our partners to prioritize homes to make best use of them.
-  Ensuring compliance with all relevant building and fire safety regulations and the Decent Homes Standard.
-  Maintaining exceptional standards of housing management, addressing rent arrears and antisocial behaviour where they occur, working with other agencies where appropriate.

3 Collaborative- Work in partnership with our customers and other organisations to develop solutions together.

We want to work together with our customers and partners to shape and deliver high quality services which our customers want, share best practice and ensure best value for money.

What we want to achieve:

-  Empower our customers to influence the places where they live and the services they receive.
-  Give a voice to all of our customers through meaningful engagement, ensuring customer feedback drives service delivery, improvement and innovation.
-  Collaboration with our customers in key areas.
-  Partnership working to achieve the best results for our customers








To achieve this over the next 5 years we will:

- Considering shared roles and services across Independent East where these would deliver shared benefits.
- Looking for opportunities to bring our customers together with those of other housing providers.
- Using Independent East engaged customers to create and carry out an action plan for scrutiny of our services.
- Putting new digital options in place for our customers to engage with us, give us their feedback and make sure their voice is heard.
- Empowering Orwell Residents' Group to undertake at least three scrutiny exercises per year, including our Development Design Guide so that the customer's voice influences key decisions.
- Continuing to create opportunities for our customers to be involved in procurement, ensuring the customer experience and quality are key considerations when procuring products and services.
- Involving our customers at an early stage in our journey to carbon net zero.











4 Effective- We will improve our efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

We will ensure that our teams are committed and competent to be the best at what they do, in order to provide the highest possible standards of service to our customers. We will invest in making our homes more energy efficient and move forwards in our journey to net carbon zero.

What we want to achieve:

-  High quality homes that are safe, warm and energy efficient for our customers.
-  A highly proficient workforce with the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to best serve our customers.
-  Progress in our journey towards net carbon zero for our homes and services by 2050.
-  Efficient customer-facing processes, maximizing value for money for our customers and making it easy for them to interact with us.
-  Income maximisation whilst supporting customers who are facing financial hardship.
-  Homes being empty (void) for less time.
-  A cohesive expression of our social value.

To achieve this over the next 5 years we will:

-  Ensuring adequate investment in our stock through our planned works programmes, improving the fabric of our homes to increase energy efficiency.
-  Enabling colleagues to undertake relevant professional qualifications and keep up with professional development appropriate to their roles.
-  Working to make Orwell an employer of choice, and Housing a career of choice, by embedding a professional attitude, ambition and focus on delivery into our team who will act as positive role models for a career in housing.
-  Supporting and promoting the standards of our professional body - the Chartered Institute of Housing.
-  Producing annual Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Reports, illustrating how we meet sustainability goals.
-  Seeking funding opportunities for decarbonization projects, working with our partners where appropriate to do so.
-  Develop our customer portal and app, offering more options to our customers to self serve and manage their tenancy.
-  Managing our housing stock effectively, ensuring maximum occupancy, by:
 - Operating effective lettings systems, including working in partnership with local authorities and other Housing Associations as appropriate.
 - Working closely with the Development and Growth Team to ensure swift letting of new build homes.
 - Ensuring the time a property is empty between tenancies is minimised.
-  Offering welfare benefits advice and appropriate support early on where customers are struggling to pay their rent or are facing other financial difficulties.
-  Producing annual social value reports which use stories as well as numbers to tell the story of our positive social impact.

Our Measures and Metrics

P

Achieve 92% customer satisfaction with our housing services.

60% of customer-led transactions to take place via digital services by the end of the strategy.

A

At least 85% tenancies sustained where customers access support from our in-house team or training.

Rent arrears 2.5% or less of our annual gross rent (AGR).

C

Increase the number of engaged customers by 10% each year.

E

Reduce the carbon baseline of our homes by 10%.

Relet general needs properties within an average of 28 calendar days.

100% of senior managers to have an appropriate qualification by the end of the strategy.



**If you would like this leaflet in another
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comms@orwell-housing.co.uk
or call 0345 60 100 30**

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