Communications Strategy 2024-2027

Executive summary

This Communications strategy outlines our approach to enhancing the impact and effectiveness of our communications to meet the needs and demands of our customers, colleagues and stakeholders over the next three years. Communications is a key strategic function that will support us to deliver against the objectives in Our 2030 plan, building trust and confidence in whg as we articulate our mission, ambition and achievements.

The objectives for this strategy are:

- Tell our story, together
- Keep people informed
- Increase engagement and involvement
- Encourage a move to digital by choice
- Learn and enhance our communication through data

Keeping customers informed is one of the government's Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) and through this strategy we will build on the good work we are already doing. Across external and internal communications, we will enhance our use of data and insights to continually improve, enhancing our work through ongoing learning and maximising opportunities to incorporate best practice and new technologies.

Context and approach

We are whg, a regional housing association with 22,000 homes owned and managed across the Midlands. A not-for-profit organisation, we were formed in 2003 following a stock transfer from Walsall Council. Since then, we have successfully delivered more than 4000 new homes and now operate across 21 local authority areas, providing access to affordable homes and supporting local communities. Around 10% of our homes are now outside Walsall.

It's good to talk and we have a great story to tell. We believe that a good quality, affordable home is the cornerstone of a successful life and we are proud to be more than just a landlord.

Since the development of our last communications strategy in 2020 the landscape of social housing has changed, and the global pandemic means the way people and organisations communicate has moved on. We all expect information to be available at the touch of a button and in a format that's quick and easy to understand. Increasing regulation and a renewed commitment to customer voice means we need to be sure our messages reach the intended audience and two-way dialogue is critical.

Good, effective communication and engagement has never been more important.

Our 2030 Plan responds to the challenges faced by whg and the wider social housing sector, and the opportunities too. We're committed to being a strong and influential voice, championing the need and value of social housing and amplifying the voice of our customers. Our communications strategy plays a key role in us achieving the organisational objectives set out in Our 2030 Plan and other strategies. It will frame how we protect and enhance our reputation with our different audiences. Our mission, ambition and values underpin everything we do, so we'll ensure these are embedded throughout our communications too.

Through telling our story, sharing our successes and challenges, and being honest if things don't go to plan, we can develop stronger relationships with our customers, colleagues and stakeholders, built on trust.

Our priorities

Our communications will support the successful delivery of our organisational objectives through the six transformational programmes which form Our 2030 Plan.

Taking a storytelling approach, we'll promote and explain our progress and plans across these areas of work, adding context about how our foundations underpin our activities.

Through our language and tone, and the development of a messaging framework, we'll articulate who we are and the things that are important to us. We'll keep customers and colleagues updated with changes in regulation and what this means for them.

Through the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), customers have told us we need to keep them better informed about the things that matter to them. And in response to this feedback, the new Consumer Standards and accessibility legislation, we will ensure we are providing timely, relevant and honest information that is accessible for our customers.

Effective communication driven by this strategy will also be critical in mitigating at least eight of our 10 organisational strategic risks.

Our foundations

- Understanding our customers
- Great customer service
- Effective communication
- Strong governance
- Managing our risks
- Technology and digitisation
- Strong and effective partnerships

Our sector partners

whg is an active member of national and regional forums including PlaceShapers, the National Housing Federation, the Chartered Institute of Housing and TPAS.

Our membership of these trusted bodies allows us to amplify our messages and the voice of our customers throughout their wider networks. Their political influence drives greater awareness and understanding of sector-wide challenges. And it supports us to add detail and nuance around the impact on our customers, communities and colleagues, including first-person accounts and customer stories.

This is particularly relevant as we embrace our transformational programme of work around Social Justice and influencing on the issues that matter most to our customers.

We recognise the potential risks in speaking out, but we are committed to being braver in how we approach these challenges. By leveraging these partnerships, we will reshape narratives and foster new conversations, enabling us to drive meaningful change, bolstered by the support of our collaborators.

We have collaborative relationships with these forums and our communications will also support their campaigns which reflect our values and ambitions. For example, advocating for the social housing sector and our customers. More information can be found in our External Affairs and Social Justice strategies.

The story so far

Our previous communications strategy ran from 2020 to 2024, driven largely by an effective pandemic response and the delivery of safety-focused priority messaging out to customers and communities. The move to remote and later hybrid working created new challenges for internal communications and colleague engagement.

Since the launch of our last communications strategy in 2020 we have:

- Launched a new accessible website, with pared-back content and a fresh look and feel
- Developed our social media platforms, increasing our reach and engagement
- Refreshed our brand, increasing our visibility in communities and strengthening our reputation
- Invested in a digital marketing platform to effectively reach more customers
- Delivered a successful Covid-19 communication response
- Planned and delivered a well-received internal conference to educate colleagues on our sustainability ambitions and their role in reaching our climate targets
- Responded effectively to reactive requirements in response to breaking news and emergency situations, protecting the organisational reputation
- Delivered a successful internal conference and internal communication campaign to launch Our 2030 Plan to colleagues and ensure they understand our strategic direction and how their role contributes

In our TSM results for 2023/24 66.8% of customers were satisfied that we keep them informed about the things that matter to them and 56.3% were satisfied that whg listen to their views and act upon them.

Communication objectives

Tell our story, together	Keep people informed	Increase engagement and involvement	Encourage a move to digital by choice	Learn and enhance our communication through data
Promote our progress against our 2030 plan objectives and foundations through a customer and colleague lens to understand the impact of our work on customers and communities.	Improve awareness of services and how to access them. Effectively communicate our performance against published standards and regulation. Support colleagues to be the best by ensuring they can access the right information at the right time and using the right channel.	Promote opportunities for our audiences to provide feedback, influencing and shaping our services and their experience. Our communications will reflect the impact of the customer and colleague voice.	Increase usage of digital channels and self-serve options for those who choose to, through providing high-quality services and effectively communicating the features and benefits.	Use data to enhance understanding of our audiences, their preferences and interests to continuously refine and improve our approach, with the aim of providing a more proactive, forward-thinking communications service.

Our audiences

There are three distinct audiences we aim to reach. Regular, targeted communication will deliver the information that is important to them, at the same time supporting us to deliver against our strategic objectives.

- Our customers include tenants, leaseholders, shared owners and others who use our services, in Walsall and throughout the Midlands.
- Our internal audience is our 800 customer-facing and desk-based colleagues plus our Group Executive team, Board and Committees.
- Stakeholders include our local authority partners, regulators, the police, health services and charities, as well as other housing organisations and development partners. We also engage with MPs and councillors, industry bodies and funders as well as local, national and sector media. Our External Affairs strategy details our approach to engaging with our stakeholders.

Effective communication

We are proud to work across some hugely diverse communities, and we recognise how this must influence our communication strategy. According to Ofcom:

- Only 6% of adults in the UK do not have internet access at home.
- Digital exclusion is higher among people over 75, (a tenth of our customers) and in lower-income households.
- 31% of internet users in lower-income households only go online using a smartphone.

We will design our communications with our audience front of mind, ensuring digital content is easily accessible and 'mobile first', using printed materials where necessary and offering alternative formats.

The Midlands is a richly diverse area, with higher than average numbers who do not speak English as their main language. We will ensure our translation and accessibility services are promoted and we'll use our customer data to develop a greater understanding of customer needs, ensuring our communication is effective.

Source: Ofcom Adults media use and attitudes 2024

The majority of adults in the UK have a reading ability of age 11-14 years, but 1 in 6 people have very poor literacy skills. We'll communicate using Plain English principles and avoid the use of jargon to support understanding of sometimes complex messages. Our communications will incorporate a range of formats to enhance comprehension, including subtitled videos, animations and infographics.

Audience expectations

Through social listening, research and insights, we know customers would like to receive more information on accessing our services and updates on how whg and partners in their local area are addressing issues that affect their community.

We will share news on our work and progress in these areas, including safety, antisocial behaviour and flytipping, sustainability and the climate crisis, regeneration and investment, and employment and training opportunities. We'll also explain how customer feedback and involvement has helped to shape our services and how we deliver them, promoting opportunities for more customers to take part.

Managing expectations is an important driver of trust so we will be clear about our service standards and areas of responsibility. We'll ensure customers and stakeholders understand the scope and boundaries of our services and how these relate to other local and national public services.

Our communication will be open, honest and factual. Things don't always go according to plan. And if this happens, we'll be transparent and honest, providing opportunities for two-way conversation as we work to put things right. This is particularly important when it comes to safeguarding our integrity, which is central to the trust we build with customers, colleagues, and stakeholders. By embedding transparency, honesty, and accountability into everything we do, we reinforce the core values that define our reputation.

Our channels

We use a wide range of external channels to reach our audiences in a way that works for them. The channel-mix will be carefully considered as part of each individual campaign, as we know some topics can be delivered more effectively through more personalised direct communication rather than a broadcast approach.

Website and portal

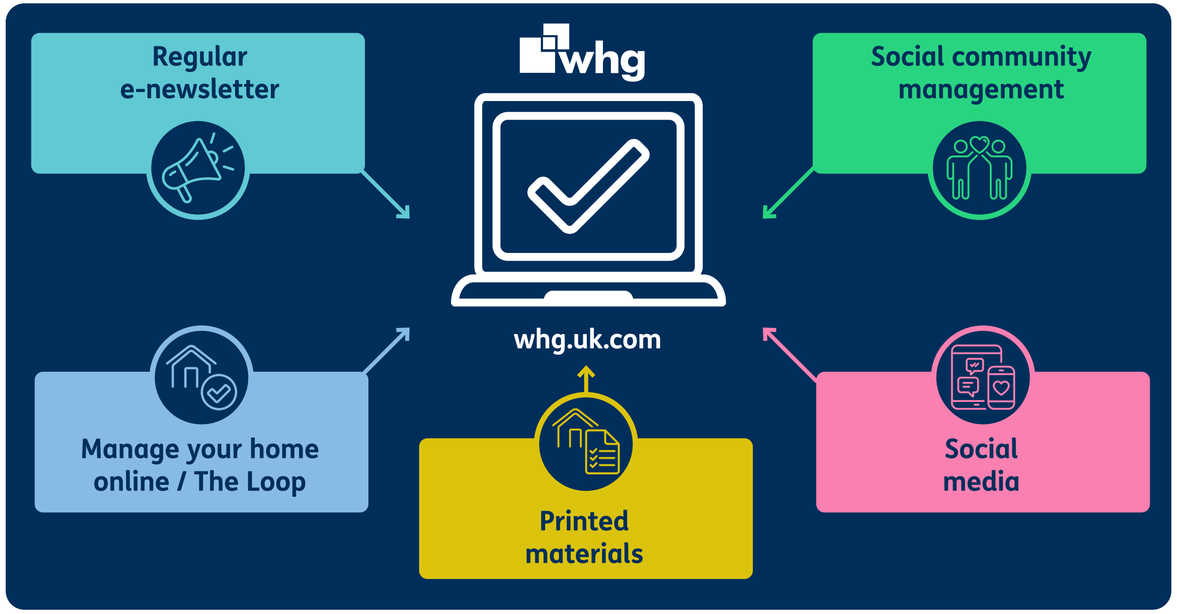
The whg.uk.com website is our central information hub and our ‘Manage your home online’ portal allows customers to complete tasks like reporting a repair quickly and easily. We will continue to develop and improve our website to ensure it meets customer and stakeholder expectations and has the information they need.

Targeted newsletters

Our regular e-newsletter allows us to keep in touch with the majority of customers and effectively promote our key messages on a frequent basis. Bespoke newsletters will be used to target smaller specific customer groups with relevant information, for example customers who provide feedback using The Loop.

Social media

We will continue to review and develop our social media platforms, to reach customers in their preferred ways. 78% of people in the UK use YouTube and 69% use Facebook (Ofcom 2024). Our social media channels are open for comments and messages, which are handled by our customer service teams. They are a popular contact method for many customers, creating two-way dialogue and a valuable source of customer voice feedback.



Our channels (cont.)

Printed materials

Our aim is to provide high-quality digital communications and services that encourage customers to move to 'digital by choice'. But there is still a place for printed materials, especially to reach people who are more likely to be digitally excluded. We will continue to use print, for example leaflets, posters and mailshots, when it will help us to meet our objectives, and always with the environmental impact in mind. The Round Your Way printed newsletter is available to customers on request.

Out of home

To help reach our customers in flats, we'll use digital screens in communal areas. Our fleet of vans travel throughout the communities we serve and are a recognisable brand presence which can help us a reach our customers and communities, enhancing the visibility of ongoing messaging.

In-person communications

Our teams of customer-facing colleagues are out and about in communities every day. They are a trusted presence on our estates and can support us to reach customers in a different way, adding context and the benefit of local understanding to our communications. We hold and attend a number of community groups which provide a safe and welcoming space for people to meet and engage and these play an important role in telling our story, updating customers on services and new initiatives and building stronger relationships. Launch events for our new housing developments provide opportunities to engage with new customers, the local community and project stakeholders.

Other channels

We will access other channels as required to meet specific objectives. This could include local media including radio and TV, sponsorship and working with relevant influencers. Wherever possible we will minimise the production and distribution of branded collateral and promotional giveaways which do not support our environmental ambitions.

Beyond corporate communications, there are ongoing opportunities to enhance the customer experience through timely and relevant operational communications and updates, for example appointment confirmations. Through the life of this strategy we will collaborate across whg to support clear and effective communication at every touchpoint.

Internal communications

Our internal communication ensures colleagues are informed about and engaged with whg's strategic objectives and our mission. We'll effectively manage and develop internal channels and campaigns, with a range of leadership communication including business briefings and our colleague conference.

All colleagues have access to our whoogle intranet and MS Teams on their desktop or mobile devices, which together serve as our internal content hub for updates and important information. Our intranet will support increased efficiency by providing relevant information, policies, procedures and templates, based on a task-driven approach. This will better meet the needs of the business, enhancing our work for customers.

We'll work collaboratively to continually improve our communication channels and enhance our internal offer to colleagues, and develop effective two-way communication for customer-facing and desk-based colleagues. Our colleague e-newsletters and office digi-screens will continue to highlight important updates and reminders, keeping everyone engaged and informed.

While we will still send critical updates via all-colleague emails, this strategy aims to reduce the overall volume of internal emails by providing guidelines on when to use email, Teams, or other channels.

Our annual colleague engagement survey will support us to identify areas for improvement. We will close the loop and keep colleagues engaged by clearly demonstrating where their feedback has driven valuable changes to systems, processes and ways of working.

Measuring impact

This strategy forms an integral part of our overall business strategy as detailed in Our 2030 Plan, providing essential support to other key strategies within the organisation and supporting all teams to achieve their objectives. This cross-cutting approach ensures that our communications efforts are aligned with and bolster the core whg objectives, driving a consistent approach.

Data-driven decisions

We will enhance our evaluation and reporting mechanisms, to deliver more meaningful and actionable insights on how our communications are performing against objectives and using them to improve.

Collaboration

Through a business partnering model we will work closely with the business to set goals and ensure effective communication. Together, we'll agree on the organisational and communication objectives of a campaign, and the metrics we will use to evaluate performance. The business will share data and feedback on whether these goals are being met.

Continuous improvement

We will review performance throughout the life of larger campaigns and projects, optimising content and channels to ensure we are able to achieve the best outcomes. At the end of the campaign we'll review performance and produce an insight report to learn from what went well, and what could be improved next time.

Reporting our progress

We will provide regular reports to our Executive team and Board, ensuring that progress is consistently measured against our strategic objectives. The valuable insights and constructive feedback from these groups will play a critical role in shaping the strategic direction of our communications, supporting continuous improvement.

In the first year of the strategy we aim to increase the TSM score for 'keeping customers informed' from 66.8% to the median score for 2023/24 of 69.5%.

A professional service

To deliver a high-quality communications service to the business, we need more than just a high-performing and professional team. We need a team that is fully supported at every level of the organisation. It's essential that leadership understands the role of the Communications team and the support we require to manage expectations, especially at the executive level, where strategic alignment and collaboration are key.

We are committed to investing in the ongoing professional development of our people to ensure they have the skills, knowledge and expertise needed to excel in their role and meet the evolving demands of the business.

Through a culture of continuous learning, the team will stay up-to-date with industry trends and best practice, knowledge sharing through professional networks to enhance and promote our work. And developing new skills across a range of communications specialisms, including measurement and evaluation, will support the team to innovate and try new approaches and technologies.

As demands on our attention increase from smartphones, apps and social media, the ability to develop compelling content relevant to the channel and audience becomes ever more important. Staying informed on insights and creating content that quickly conveys the most important information will enable us to continue to engage effectively with customers, colleagues and stakeholders.

A programme of development will be identified for the Communications team and the Group Executive / Chair of the Board. This learning will ensure we are prepared and able to effectively deliver our crisis response strategy and mitigate associated risks, as well as further enhancing the delivery of our leadership communications to both an internal and external audience.

The Communications team will knowledge share across the business, working with teams to improve standards and consistency for operationally-led customer communications, ensuring trust is built and maintained at every point of contact.

Action plan – year 1

Topic / Objective	Supporting strategies	Completion date
Review and refine internal comms channels to improve colleague experience and message flow through the business.	People strategy D&I strategy	July 2025
Create and implement employee experience (EX) journey from pre-selection through onboarding, induction, professional development and exit including developing and rollout of employer brand	People strategy	Phase 1: December 2025
Develop and deliver a programme of data-driven multi-channel internal communications that support the delivery of our 2030 plan and development of work and workplace of the future	Our 2030 Plan People strategy	Ongoing to 2030
Develop and deliver a programme of data-driven multi-channel external communications campaigns that support the business to deliver their objectives	Our 2030 Plan All customer-facing strategies	Ongoing to 2030
Providing support to deliver customer-facing activities and events which amplify key messaging and enhance reputational impact	Our 2030 Plan Customer and Communities strategy Customer Voice strategy D&I strategy	July 2025, ongoing

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