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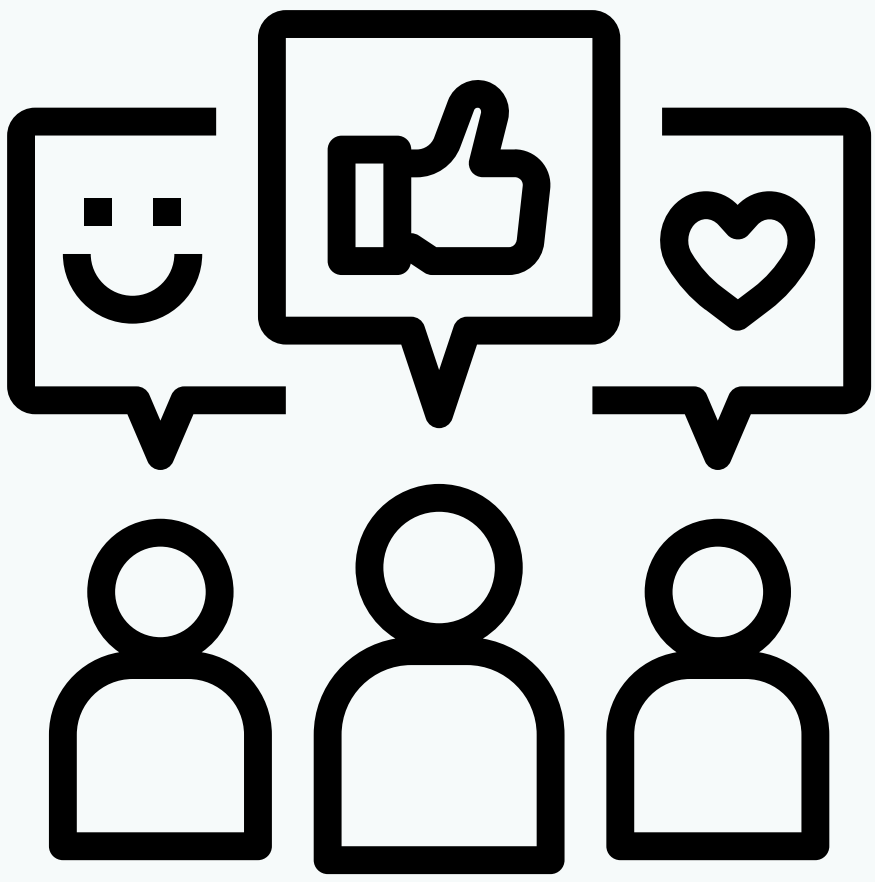
DRIVING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE FOR CUSTOMERS: USING DATA AND NEW LEGISLATION TO YOUR ADVANTAGE



A Blog With Emma Midgely

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MEET EMMA MIDGLEY

Emma is the Director of Integration and Transformation at Johnnie Johnson Housing Association based in the North West of England.

Emma is leading the integration of Johnnie Johnson into Sanctuary, as well as overseeing Communications, ICT, and the Project Management Teams at Johnnie Johnson Housing.

johnniejohnson HOUSING
living longer, living better

Read on to learn more about how change in regulations relating to customer engagement and satisfaction can strengthen your data driven decisions and drive sustainable change in your organisation!

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please can you introduce yourself and your role within Social Housing.

Hello, I'm Emma Midgley, Director of Integration and Transformation at Johnnie Johnson Housing. My role involves leading the integration of Johnnie Johnson Housing into Sanctuary, as well as overseeing our ICT, Communications and Project Management Teams. It's a broad remit, but its great to be able to work with so many different areas of the business, it's been a really exciting learning curve for me over the past few years and even more so recently as we've joined the Sanctuary Group.

Johnnie Johnson Housing manages 5,000 homes across the North West, North East, Yorkshire and Derbyshire, with a strong emphasis on providing independent living for over 55's. Our vision is living longer, living better and our mission, like many is to provide safe, secure, affordable homes for our customers, and to enhance their experience with outstanding services, so their JJH home is one that they love to live in.

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Can you tell me more about how the change to regulations and tenant satisfaction measures are having a positive impact on the sector?

In recent years, the sector has been on a huge transformation journey, driven by both new regulations that focus on customer and consumer standards, including the introduction of Tenant Satisfaction Measures, and also meeting the evolving needs and expectations of our customers . These changes have been widely welcomed across the sector. At Johnnie Johnson Housing, we have always strived to deliver an outstanding service and have continually embraced and acted upon feedback received from customers, it's how we drafted our Customer First strategy, which for the last four years has been the foundation on which our transformation has been built. In the ever-changing world in which we operate and live in, as customers we have come to expect a certain standard of service. Most of us expect to receive our Amazon goods within 24 hours, we expect to manage all aspects of our lives online and have instant access to people who can help us with queries, concerns or complaints from the services we receive. We are surrounded by companies who deliver exceptional service, just by doing what they say they will, or going even further to ensure a fantastic customer experience.

A home is more than just bricks and mortar; it's the foundation of life itself. It's where you build memories, raise your family, and find a sense of security. It's only right that the services surrounding something so fundamental should be of the highest quality. For JJH the Tenant Satisfaction Measures are strengthening how we understand what customers truly value and more importantly how they rate us in that delivery, and this is key to making meaningful improvements. I view them as a catalyst for driving genuine, sustainable change based on what our customers want, need and value the most.

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What can the Social Housing sector learn from other sectors?

The sector has always been one of the most collaborative sectors I have worked in and the sharing amongst us has absolutely played a part in where we are today. I think to further enhance our progress we can start to look beyond our sector and learn from others. We shouldn't be afraid to adopt best practices from companies that excel in customer service. For example, AO.com has a simple yet powerful mantra: "Treat everyone like you would your nan." This straightforward approach ensures that everyone understands the importance of empathy and care in customer interactions. Octopus Energy is another great example; they are known for their excellent communication, which enables them to maintain a high level of customer satisfaction.

Whilst we may be operating in very different environment, with different challenges, we can absolutely take snippets of their approach and apply them to our own organisations. At Johnnie Johnson Housing, we have taken inspiration from these companies by focusing on communication, engagement, and responsiveness. These are the basics that successful companies get right every single day. While we may not be a commercial entity with vast budgets, that shouldn't stop us from aiming to meet or exceed the standards set by these market leaders. Our goal is to provide a level of service that Customers feel is equal to that of the best companies, regardless of our status as a social housing provider. Afterall, we provide the one thing we value the most, a home.

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How do you create a culture of change and engage with customers?

Change starts with the people within the organisation. It's not just about setting objectives; it's about ensuring that everyone understands what those objectives mean in practice. During our "Customer First" programme, we prioritised understanding both the customer voice and the input of our internal teams. Colleagues must be engaged and aligned with our vision to make it a reality. Your colleagues are your best assets, change agents and advocates.

A critical component of our strategy has been developing a culture that prioritises listening to customer feedback and translating it into action, as well as empowering colleagues to make change and tell us when things aren't quite right, we've developed a great culture of continuous improvement that driven by colleagues. This cultural shift needs to happen at every level, from front-line staff to senior leadership. At the very start of this journey, we partnered with The Leadership Factor to conduct in-depth research with our customers, asking them what matters most to them and gauging their satisfaction with various aspects of our service. This process was enlightening; it showed us that while we were getting many things right, there were areas for improvement, particularly around the way we communicated with our customers.

For example, we discovered that the biggest frustration for many customers was not the time it took to fix things but the lack of explanation about why delays occurred or what was happening. This insight has been crucial in refining and improving our approach to communication. We learned that residents value transparency and consistent updates, even when the news isn't always what they want to hear. Saying something, is always better than saying nothing.

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What Has Been Implemented at Johnnie Johnson Housing?

We've launched several key initiatives in response to this valuable feedback. Our "Customer First" programme, focused on enhancing every stage of the customer journey. We've tackled this from three main angles:

- ***Digital Innovation**: We introduced a customer portal and mobile app, giving residents the flexibility to manage their homes in a way that suits them best. This self-service option is available 24/7, which means residents can pay rent, request repairs, or seek assistance whenever it's convenient for them.*
- ***Enhanced Face-to-Face Service**: We revamped our operating model to create more specialised teams, such as a Wellbeing Team and a Money Advice Team. These teams provide targeted support in areas that matter most to our customers, from managing finances to maintaining overall wellbeing. The value these teams have delivered is immeasurable, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. While digital tools are crucial, we remain committed to offering face-to-face service. This face to face contact is still vital for many customers, and we want to ensure that they continue to feel supported in every way possible.*
- ***Process Improvement**: We've worked to maximise our existing systems, so have worked to improve our process around the handling of both ASB and complaints, ensuring both record keeping, key information and experience improved for the customer and also our colleagues.*

Each of these initiatives is unique, but they all share the same underlying principle: doing the simple things well, consistently, to deliver the best possible experience for our customers.

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How do we stay ahead of the curve?

The journey of transformation never truly ends. To stay ahead of the curve, we must accept that change is constant and commit to continuous improvement. Using the Tenant Satisfaction Measures, insights, and data, we can build actionable plans that drive ongoing enhancements to our services. As we build on these foundations, our aim is to become more proactive, anticipating and addressing issues before they escalate. I think a key element of this is how organisations align their corporate plans and objectives with their transformation programme and projects, taking in and reviewing data as part of this will truly allow us to do best what matters most and where we can stay ahead or at the very least have a little more capacity built into our teams for when those inevitable things come in left field.

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How can Housing Associations demand more of suppliers?

Collaboration has always been a cornerstone of our strategy, both within the housing sector and with our suppliers. For example, we have successfully partnered with suppliers to enhance the support we provide to residents. During the winter, we launched a "Winter Blues" campaign where we distributed items like air fryers, heated blankets, and more, thanks to the generous support of our suppliers and the incredible work of our communications and neighbourhood teams.

We also secured 100 reconditioned laptops from Unilever to help our customers gain employment, learn new skills, and access education. This incredible opportunity came from a simple conversation between one of our colleagues and a friend at Unilever, despite us never having worked together as two organisations. This example shows the power of tapping into the private sector's drive to make a positive impact and holding them accountable to deliver on that promise.

Housing associations have significant commercial value to suppliers, and we need to leverage that to achieve more for our customers. We should be asking for more and collaborating more creatively to maximise the benefits we can bring to our communities.

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How would you summarise this conversation?

What stands out most to me in the social housing sector is the incredible willingness to change, transform, and improve services for our customers. Despite the ongoing challenges, we continue to make great progress. By maintaining excellent service as our baseline and constantly pushing for further improvement, we ensure that we remain on the path to success.

The sector is uniquely collaborative, and that spirit is something we must continue to nurture and maximise. Together, we can achieve so much more, learning from each other and continually striving to provide outstanding service to the people who matter most—our customers.

This blog reflects our ongoing journey at Johnnie Johnson Housing, showcasing the steps we are taking to enhance our services and better serve customers. It's an exciting time for the sector and for us as we join the Sanctuary family, and I'm eager to see what more we can accomplish together.

Have a story to Share?

Want to learn more about social housing and Share with Purpose?

Get in touch with the Recruit with Purpose team!

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