



Business Plan 2020 – 2025 Consultation Document

October 2020

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Our Vision

Excellent housing in vibrant communities

Our Values

Our values guide everything we do. Whenever we make decisions, we look to our values to make sure we are doing the right thing.

RESPECT - We see the positive in everyone.

We treat everyone fairly regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality or background. We ask for opinions even though we might not like what we hear. And we address people's concerns in any we realistically can.

INTEGRITY - What we say in public is the same as we say behind the scenes.

If we say something we mean it. Our tenants can count on us to solve their problems and make sound decisions.

ASPIRATION - We seek new opportunities and welcome change

We want the best for all our current and future tenants. We are not afraid to strive for things that won't be easy or try things that haven't been done before. If it doesn't turn out as planned we learn and improve. And then we try again.

Queens Cross Group

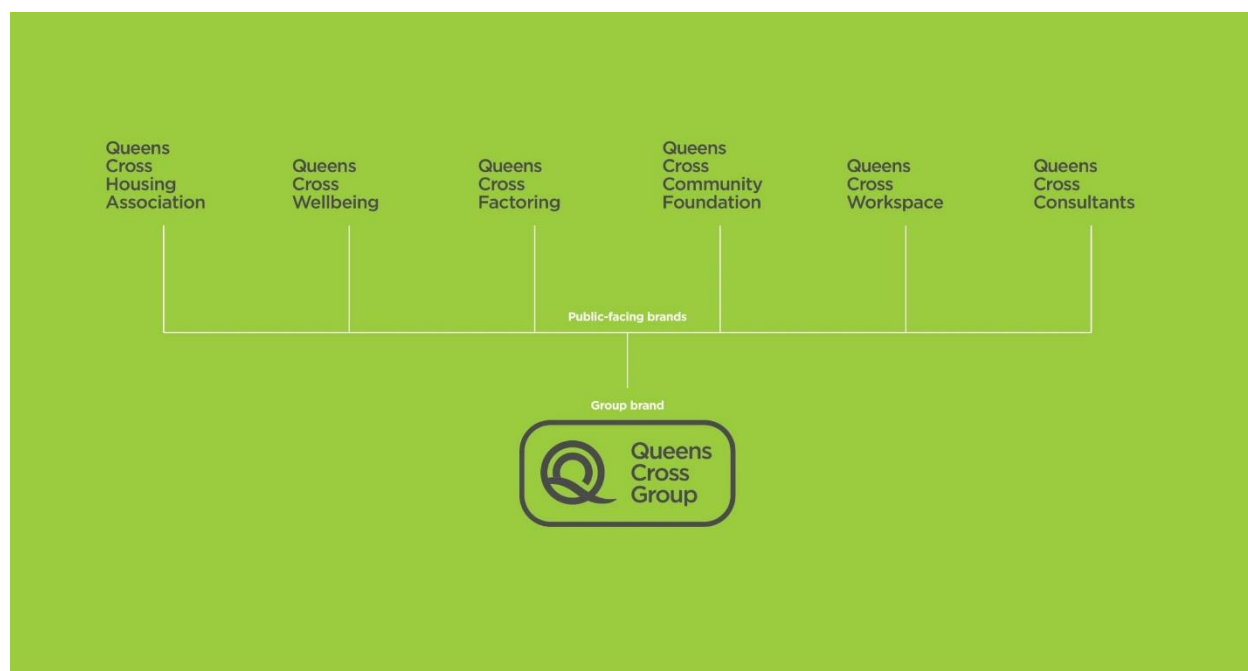
The Queens Cross Group is made up of four partner organisations who work together to improve lives through high quality housing and neighbourhood services, employment and business opportunities and a better environment for the benefit of local communities.

Queens Cross Housing Association: Provides high quality social housing, place-making, financial inclusion, community and wellbeing services for people of all ages and backgrounds with a strong emphasis on tackling inequality.

Queens Cross Factoring: Provides high quality property management services for private homes and businesses in Queens Cross and Maryhill.

Queens Cross Workspace: Supports the local economy, providing affordable business space, generating opportunities for employment and training to reduce the impact of poverty.

Queens Cross Community Foundation: Is a grant giving charity for local community projects, individuals and voluntary organisations to support those who are disadvantaged or have specific needs.



Chair's welcome

Queens Cross Factoring continues to develop our business, and the next five years open up opportunities to both expand our reach and to improve the quality and range of services we offer to maximize our impact within the community we serve. Our business planning process has been more consultative than ever before, to ensure that we reflect the views of our stakeholders in the 2020-25 plan and achieve our ambition ***to be the factor of choice in our area, a trusted and valued community partner.***

Our operating environment is constantly evolving and, as well as opportunities, this presents us with challenges. We look after a range of properties which reflect the history of the area and create a healthy housing market with significant choice for owners. However, most of our blocks are mixed tenure and inner city neighbourhoods like ours need intensive management, so we need to work closely with QCHA.

We also have a diverse group of customers which makes successful engagement with them both challenging and rewarding. With 2500 properties now under management, we still strive to get to know each customer as an individual and to offer a tailored service where we can. Despite their different circumstances, we know all of our customers appreciate Value for Money, and we have looked to incorporate service improvements and efficiencies in our five year plan.

Continuing to deliver our major repairs projects is a priority. Many of the properties we manage are over 100 years old, and our surveys indicate that they will require significant investment from time to time to preserve their future. For customers, our role in helping them to plan ahead for major repairs is essential, so that they can manage to pay their share of the costs.

Finally, the future prospects for the business depend on working successfully with customers to protect the quality of their homes and wider neighbourhoods. As we aim to make our business sustainable, we are also making greater efforts to consider environmental sustainability across our services, doing our bit to face up to the challenge of climate change.

This plan covers our next five years, but, as a factor, our vision must always be long term, and we look forward to continuing our work to preserve and improve Queens Cross' neighbourhoods for many years to come.

Cathie Corbett
Chair



Chief Executive's foreword

The Queens Cross Group has one aim over the next five years, to demonstrably improve the lives of the people who live in our neighbourhoods.

The Group's Vision 2025 document sets out - not just a promise - but a step-by-step guide on how we plan to achieve this. Queens Cross Factoring has helped to shape the Group's Vision, and our Business Plan has been devised following an extensive process of consultation, ensuring our stakeholders and community partners were invited to comment on our future direction.

As part of the QC Group, we pride ourselves in being the anchor that holds our community together. The organisations within the Group provide essential services, support to individuals, and work to represent and enable our diverse communities in northwest Glasgow. Each part of the Group has its own role to play, working with sections of the local population, and for Queens Cross Factoring that role is to provide services to owners, ensuring their homes and neighbourhoods are well maintained. We represent owners' interests and work with Queens Cross Housing Association (QCHA) to protect and improve our built environment, and, along the way, create thriving, dynamic neighbourhoods that all residents can enjoy.

In the next five years, the Group aims to contribute to building a wellbeing economy, underpinning our business aspirations and decisions with the ultimate goal of creating a fairer, more sustainable, society. For Queens Cross Factoring, this means that our Business Plan 2020-25 has a particular focus on the role we have connecting owners into community-led improvements, enabling them to be part of the solution to the challenges our neighbourhoods face.

We have made a fantastic start in transforming our neighbourhoods into places people feel proud to live, and as this work continues, Queens Cross Factoring will ensure that owners have a place at the heart of the transformation.

Shona Stephen
Chief Executive
Queens Cross Group

The Queens Cross Group: Shared vision, shared values

Queens Cross Factoring Ltd is part of the Queens Cross Group alongside Queens Cross Housing Association, Queens Cross Workspace and Queens Cross Community Foundation.

The Group Plans are the result of consultations and conversations with our customers, staff and Board members. With this evidenced knowledge as our starting point we have been able to lay out a plan that addresses the challenges and opportunities of the next five years.

Our shared vision and values

Vision - *Excellent housing in vibrant communities*

Values - Our values guide everything we do. Whenever we make decisions, we refer to these values to make sure we are doing the right thing.

Respect - *We see the positive in everyone, we treat everyone fairly*

Integrity - *We can be counted on to be on the front foot and provide solutions based on sound information that improves the lives of our people*

Aspiration - *We seek out opportunities and welcome change.*

Objectives

- Building and sustaining popular neighbourhoods
- Creating and supporting greater life opportunities for all
- Developing greener spaces and community wellbeing
- Being a dynamic and listening community partner

About Queens Cross Factoring

Queens Cross Factoring Ltd is a property factoring company operating in North West Glasgow. We supply a common repair and general property maintenance service to over 2,500 privately owned residential properties.

Our services include maintenance of common areas as well as major repairs projects such as reroofing or stone repairs.

Part of the Queens Cross Group of companies, we are governed through a voluntary Board of five Directors, three of whom are drawn from the Housing Association's main Board and two are drawn from the wider community, but all with the expertise and enthusiasm to shape the factoring service to meet our customers' needs. We are a registered Property Factor (PF000258) and are governed by the Factoring Code of Conduct. We provide all of our owners with a Written Statement of Service which is a summary of the services we provide.

Queens Cross Factoring (QCF) was created by QCHA to meet the needs of owners by offering effective property management for multi-owned and mixed tenure blocks. Focusing particularly on tenemental properties initially, this partnership helped protect the historic character of Queens Cross, maintaining and improving housing quality in the core of our area.

Following stock transfers of estates at Dundasvale and Woodside to QCHA, and taking on factoring for owners in the Westercommon estate which had previously transferred to QCHA, Queens Cross Factoring has extended its service to a wider group of owners, with properties in multi-storey, deck-access and maisonette blocks.

Recent years have seen the company take on management of a number of new build flatted blocks, and shared equity homes, as well as fully-factored (i.e. with no HA ownership) tenements. Queens Cross Factoring is also a landlord in its own right having bought 12 one and two bedroom flats, which it operates as mid-market rental properties.

Working hand in hand with the housing association, we have built our reputation and can achieve our wider ambitions for the area by ensuring that neighbouring properties and homes are managed and maintained to the same high standard, no matter the tenure. This seamless approach to common maintenance in such a diverse environment underpins the success and sustainability of our neighbourhoods.

Our Challenges and Opportunities

Formed in April 2005, Queens Cross Factoring is still a relatively new business and our operating environment continues to evolve, with the challenges and opportunities we face shifting each year.

Covid-19 - Whilst developing our future plan in 2020, QCF was confronted by an enormous challenge as a result of the Coronavirus public health crisis, and the Government restrictions that were enacted to limit the spread of the virus. QCF has been successful in maintaining its core services to customers, protecting their homes despite the imposed lockdown.

With our offices temporarily closed to the public, our team adapted quickly to work from home and new health and safety measures were adopted by our contractors, so customers could still access essential repairs. However, it was far from “business as usual” and some key learning has taken place around the opportunities and limitations of digital technology for delivering services in future.

Growth - After a major growth period in the first six years, where the company’s factoring portfolio had doubled in size by 2011, the last ten years have seen a stable period with growth of <5% per year. We still have ambitions to continue to grow our market, and we are surrounded by un-factored and poorly factored properties that present opportunities for new business. However, our reputation and community focus is more important to us, and we seek to retain existing customers (through delivering a consistent good value service) before adding new ones.

To maintain steady growth without losing community focus, our approach is to be selective in the properties we offer a factoring service to, prioritising as follows:

- Blocks which are next door to existing QCHA properties, or sit within neighbourhoods where QCHA has estate management responsibility
- Blocks in which QCHA owns some properties
- Properties delivered by the QCHA development programme for low cost home ownership
- Properties in our existing operating area, of a good quality where owners are committed to changing factors.

Engaging with Customers – As our business has grown, so has the diversity of our customers and we see significant variances in their understanding of and expectations on the service we provide. Our neighbourhoods contain significant numbers of smaller (one bed and two bed) properties, and not surprisingly the majority of our customers are single or two person households.

We have a stable customer base, and this reflects the quality of housing and neighbourhoods. However the value of the properties we factor does vary considerably (£50k - £500k), and therefore the income levels of the occupants also span a broad range. Most of the lower-priced properties we factor are in high density estates, which require more intensive management, and, where they are regularly part of cyclical maintenance and investment programmes. As a result, the customers on the lowest incomes can face more significant costs, and rely on us to help them manage this.

We also see different service expectations from those customers who are owner occupiers, in comparison to those who are private landlords. As local residents, our customers who are owner occupiers tend to be more invested in their neighbourhoods and more interested in the quality of the environment surrounding their home. They are also occasionally affected by neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour, and seek our advice to the routes available to address these difficult issues.

Managing Major Repairs – Our company has built a successful track record in managing Major Repairs, and our biggest project (in 2019) involved co-ordinating works for 72 customers at a cost of £215k. Most of the projects we undertake reflect the age and property profile of our portfolio, with stonework repairs and roof repairs being most common in our fully factored blocks.

As noted above, QCHA has an ongoing programme of investment works and where owners live in mixed tenure blocks, their homes will be affected by major works to any common parts of the block such as walls, roofs, common supplies and services. Where owners are not in the majority, the housing association will often take the lead in managing such works and Queens Cross Factoring will work with our customers and the Association to ensure owners are able to engage effectively and get the best Value For Money from the investment process. It's not always easy to be in the middle in these negotiations, but ultimately we can ensure that there's more effective communication on all sides, and a better chance of a satisfied customer being the outcome.

In recent years we have seen increasingly that owners understand the benefit of investing in energy efficiency improvements that will deliver reduced running costs and be better for the environment. This clearly fits with our company's own green agenda, but we know that improving energy efficiency is a major challenge.

Many properties in our portfolio are stone-built pre-1919 tenements; these exhibit the worst energy efficiency rates by property type, and are also considered "hard to

treat”, as options for insulation are very limited. However, when Major Repairs are planned, we investigate any options for improving energy performance within the project and ensure owners can get this added benefit.

The costs associated with energy efficiency works can be significant but many grants and loans are available to owners, supported by local and national Government, charities and energy companies. In particular, support is available to those suffering from fuel poverty and those in poor health. Our team collect information on any relevant funding streams, and provide owners with guidance to help them access financial help for their share of property investment costs.

Queens Cross Factoring’s activity is delivered within the context of the wider Group’s vision and values and all activity is designed to deliver against the key objectives outlined in the Group Vision 2025.

Our ambition

Queens Cross Factoring's ambition for 2025 is:

To be the factor of choice in our area, a trusted and valued community partner

We want to be the factor of choice, a factor that is trusted by its customers and the wider community. This will help us build a responsible business which offers true value, help us to deliver high quality services that our customers are happy with, and to maximize our impact in the Queens Cross community.

To help us achieve this, we have identified three strategic aims that will direct our focus:

1. To develop the company as a ***viable, responsible and well respected business*** that serves our customers and the community
2. Work with customers to establish and maintain ***safe, accessible and attractive neighbourhoods***
3. To engage with our customers more effectively to create ***happy customers***

What has been achieved since 2017

We have achieved much over the past three years. Nine key objectives were set out in our previous Business Plan. Of these, six have been achieved and substantial progress has been made towards the remainder.

Better Structure

- We've changed our team structure, created specialist roles and added capacity in customer-facing roles - Lettings and Maintenance.
- We've redefined our manager roles and provided better support and training for managers, allowing more effective leadership and team working.

Better Systems

- We have reviewed and updated a range of policies and procedures enabling us to manage internal controls and service delivery more effectively.
- An analysis of recharges has been completed helping increased recovery of costs.
- Our database information for factored properties has been improved allowing us to respond more quickly to customer queries.

Better Services

- We have completed a Stock Condition Survey and are now developing five and ten year programmes for planned repairs for fully factored blocks.
- Our web portal and app is now in place allowing easier customer access to information and requests for services 24/7.
- We have significantly increased the availability of promotional information about our services for new and existing customers.
- Our programme of installation of low energy lighting is complete, reducing running costs and maintenance costs for customers. We will continue to offer this programme to new groups of owners.
- A review of insurance reinstatement values has started, with the aim of billing more fairly and accurately.

Reflecting on just how much progress we have been able to make since 2017, has made us determined to set ambitious targets for the next 5 years, and has renewed our enthusiasm to see what more we can deliver for customers and the wider community.

How we plan to achieve our aims by 2025

Key aim 1: Develop the company as a viable, responsible and well respected business that serves our customers and the community

Sustaining an ethical and financially viable business is critical if we are to work to support the wider ambitions of the Queens Cross Group and be a force for good in our community.

We need to keep focus on our customers and develop the services we offer in response to their needs so that we continue to increase the value of our business in their terms.

We have to build upon the reputation we have worked hard to establish as a company to be trusted. Within the Group we will contribute to the creation of a wellbeing economy, and our customers and other stakeholders can trust us to behave as an ethical business with clear social and environmental objectives. We want people to recognise our brand as part of QC Group, a business that is making our community a better place.

With pressures on people's pockets and affordability a priority, we want customers to trust us to continually seek ways to improve our efficiency and reduce costs. Following the Covid-19 health crisis, an economic downturn is inevitable and customers' incomes will be impacted. Value for Money must stay at the top of our agenda.

What we will do to achieve this:

- Explore the business case for new services, involving customers in testing and developing an improved service offer
- Review our charging and proportioning to reassure customers that all charges are fair and accurate
- Promote the QC Factoring brand as part of Queens Cross Group, updating key marketing tools, our website and customer service materials
- Provide great service while reducing our costs, encouraging use of our web portal/App for routine customer transactions, and investing in new software and mobile working technology to improve our property management delivery
- Demonstrate our environmental and social conscience clearly by ensuring our services are designed to protect the local environment and promote wider community benefits.

Key aim 2: Work with customers to establish and maintain safe, accessible and attractive neighbourhoods

What matters to us all is not just the quality of the house we live in, but also the quality of the neighbourhood it sits within. As factors, we have to ensure that every property and its environment are effectively managed, to protect our customers' investment and the reputation of the area as a good place to live – helping to create a settled and sustained community.

We need to ensure that we work with contractors who can deliver what our customers want time after time. We want to continue working with good local contractors, even when they are small operators because they will meet our performance standards. But working with lots of smaller contractors, requires robust management processes.

Our neighbourhoods need regular investment and occasional major works to maintain the quality of owners' homes. Our customers want to know the plans for future investment in their property and we are developing long term asset management projections for our full portfolio - helping them to plan for future costs. We are also focusing more on environmental quality and want to ensure that our customers have a stake in making our neighbourhoods safer, greener, and more attractive.

What we will do to achieve this:

- Ensure that we have a clear policy framework, which will deliver consistently good performance on procurement and contract management
- Improve how we work with contractors, making our requirements clear and regularly feeding back on their performance
- Provide information to owners about up-coming Major Repairs programmes that will affect them, so they can plan ahead
- Engage owners better in agreeing the standards for environmental maintenance, making sure they get what they want
- Encourage owners to get more involved in neighbourhood improvements that deliver a better environment for everyone.

Key aim 3: Engage with our customers more effectively to create happy customers

When our customers are happy it means we can be more efficient and do more for them. Happy customers free up our time to focus on performance improvements and introducing new services.

Over the next five years we want to improve our knowledge and understanding of our customers, as well as our customers' knowledge and understanding of our services. By engaging more effectively with our customers, we can build up a realistic picture of their needs and offer better services. To do this we need to recognise differences between groups of customers and be flexible in service delivery.

It matters to our customers that we listen to them and are open to change. By improving customer conversations, we can track our service performance better and put things right more quickly and effectively if needed.

To benefit our community, we want to support customers to look after their homes and the surrounding environment. We think the best way to influence these responsible behaviours is through encouragement and reward.

What we will do to achieve this:

- Make better use of technology to get to know our customers and to provide information and service updates - using our App and website for 24/7 contact, introducing online Factoring surgeries and regular feedback surveys
- Consult and involve customers in new service developments or changes to existing services
- Improve customer relationships with a refresh of our approach to complaints prioritising early resolution
- Work more effectively with QCHA to ensure information about owners' requirements is communicated and customers get a seamless service
- Complete the feedback loop, ensuring that our contractors get details of customer praise and customer dissatisfaction and can respond
- Recognise customers who help us to do our job and think of ways to say "thank you"
- Treat customers as individuals and offer a personalised service whenever we can.

How we will measure success and report on our plan

Our strategic aims and the actions we have identified to achieve these, have been mapped out in the 2020-25 Service Plan which is presented on the next page. For each identified action, we will consider the resources required and establish timescales and measures, so that we have a structure for reporting on progress each year of this Business Plan.

An annual update will be provided on our website and we will use our customer newsletters to ensure our customers are kept up to date with significant achievements.

2020-25 Service Plan

Strategic Aim	Action	Outcomes
Viable, responsible, well respected business	Developing the service to meet customer demands	Review of charging and proportioning ensures accurate and timely billing and reduces queries. Business case explored for new services - private lettings and repairs – improves service offer
	Market effectively to build our brand	New Business Plan and logo establishes QC Factoring profile within Group. Review of customer-facing materials promotes our brand. New website developed as key tool for online marketing.
	Prioritise value for money for customers	Continued development of web portal and App extends our service and improves efficiency. Property management system improvements and mobile working increase our effectiveness and reduce cost.
	Demonstrating environmental and social conscience	Maintain a programme of investment in common areas which produces environmental benefits e.g. recycling facilities, cycle storage. Major repairs contracts are written to protect the environment. Community benefits will be assessed as part of any procurement which affects the whole of the factoring portfolio. Owners are made aware of community activities and events that are available to them.
Provide safe attractive neighbourhoods	Managing out contracts more effectively, through improved policies and clearer agreements with contractors	Revised procurement and repairs policies ensure consistent performance, recognising the constraints on smaller contractors. Contractual agreements with existing/new contractors have detailed requirements resulting in better quality.
	Providing our owners with information to allow them to plan ahead	Programme developed from the condition survey is available to customers. Inspection programme (with QCHA) in place for mixed tenure properties.

	and manage the cost of major repairs	Customers can opt to build up savings for proposed works.
	Engage owners better in maintaining and improving their environment - ensuring our neighbourhoods are maintained to their expectations	Review of environmental tender information ensures higher quality of works procured. Promotion of local environmental improvements projects helps owners get involved in improving their area.
Happy customers	Improving our knowledge of our customers	More regular feedback mechanisms are developed to track customer views of our standard services e.g. responsive repairs. Customers are consulted on the development of new or revised services. Pilot of online short-duration focus groups, new customers and block meetings helps to refresh our established contact methods.
	Improving communications with customers, QCHA colleagues and contractors	A refresh of our approach to complaints and training for staff helps customers get quicker resolution to issues and queries. Regular team talks and manager catch-ups with HA departments make information flows more effective and joint working more common. A Shared Approach agreement between QCF and QCHA is written and adhered to. A process of feedback of staff/customer comments to contractors builds better understanding of our requirements.
	Influencing customer behaviours, encouraging and rewarding positive engagement with our factoring services	Customers who assist us to do our job effectively are recognised. We try to personalise our service where possible and look for ways to offer choice and added benefits. Customers have a clear Statement of Service to understand and judge our performance against.