



RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

2007 - 2010

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Foreword

This revised strategy builds upon the work carried out since 2004, when the Association's first strategy was launched. It has been reviewed with input from both staff and residents in a variety of mechanisms. Its purpose is to ensure residents are involved in improving services and influencing outcomes. It will be reviewed every 3 years with as part of an overall assessment made in the quest for optimum involvement and influence of residents in the shaping of services.

Our commitment to this is embedded in the business plan through which we demonstrate that resident involvement is an integral part of all our activities. We recognise that to develop full effectiveness and efficiency we need to develop policies and services in conjunction with residents.

It is also accepted that direct involvement in all matters affecting the stability of the community within which Association residents reside is a central feature of service provision.

The challenge faced by the Association is to encourage residents to get involved when the 2006 satisfaction survey suggested 67% of residents are not interested in any further involvement. We must test and challenge the reasons for this and ensure everybody has equal access to comment and get in involved if they wish.

Definition

The Association sees resident involvement as a process that involves sharing information and ideas where residents are able to influence decisions and have a say in how services are delivered. In order to effectively demonstrate this, the Association recognises the need to be accountable and show how residents' views have influenced and shaped service delivery.

Introduction

The involvement of residents in the management of their homes is an essential element of effective housing management. Not only does it provide valuable feedback as to what our residents think about their services, it also contributes significantly to the development of communities. As a result of the strategy residents of Cosmopolitan Housing Association will have the opportunity to get more involved in matters that directly affect their everyday lives and homes.

The importance of maximising participation is fully recognised by the Association. The publication of this strategy document and the increased investment made in staffing resources and training, ensures that the Association is properly equipped to deliver what it promises and aspires to and what is required by its residents and outside agencies.

We also acknowledge the need to work within the boundaries defined by our regulators the Housing Corporation and follow guidance from our inspectors published in the Key Line of Enquiry documents.

Statement of Aims

Our Aim

All Association services will be defined, designed, implemented, monitored and reviewed in partnership with residents.

Key Principles

- residents will shape and comment on services
- respond to resident's views as a matter of course and use their opinions
- to shape services and improve services

- explore the best way to get residents involved in a way that suits their circumstances and needs

- plan our business to allow us to carry out the above to best effect and provide adequate training and/or financial support

- involve as many residents as possible and provide a wide range of opportunity for this to happen

- look afresh at what we do in involving residents and attempt to fit in with the way residents think is best

- adhere to the requirements and expectations of the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code

- hold ourselves accountable to residents for our actions, and provide opportunities for involvement and influence in how we deal with complaints

- involve residents in the governance, management and development of the Associations homes

- We will openly demonstrate and maintain records in relation to how we:
 - involve residents in service reviews and monitoring standards
 - take residents views into account
 - give feedback
 - deal with complaints and learn from the
 - encourage more resident involvement in the well-being of communities generally
 - record resident satisfaction and compare this with others
 - provide opportunities for local resident control

- adhere to principles of equal opportunity.

Statement of Intent

1. Publicity

The Association recognises that in order to involve residents in shaping service delivery and standards it is essential that it promotes the opportunity to get involved at every possible level and opportunity. It will use a variety of media to do this, which includes:

1.1 Newsletters

The Association will publish a minimum of 2 editions of its resident's newsletter "What's New" per year and will include feedback on how residents have influenced services. These newsletters will be produced with assistance from a tenant editorial panel. In addition specialist newsletter will inform resident of progress against target relating to ASB, rent income and repairs.

1.2 Best Value Annual Report

This will be produced annually and gives residents the opportunity to identify priorities for service improvements and offers the chance to become involved in Annual Review Groups during the following year.

1.1 Annual Conference- (Residents' Day)

Offer residents the opportunity to meet and share views and opinions and make comments about the services they receive.

1.4 Post tenancy Sign-Ups

All new residents of the Association are visited within 8 weeks of moving into their new accommodation to ensure they have settled in and to discuss involvement options. The visit will be used to inform, encourage and discuss with residents how they can influence the services they receive. The number of new residents becoming involved with the Association will be closely monitored to ensure the effectiveness of this process.

1.5 Annual report

The Association will continue to publish and distribute its annual report to all tenants. This will contain information about the overall progress made by the Association, how it intends to move forward and how it has performed

2. Training

It is vital for the successful implementation of this Strategy and the involvement of residents, that a comprehensive robust and regular training programme is introduced and where possible joint training involving staff board members and tenants will take place. Training is important on two levels:

2.1 Staff and Board Members

Both staff and Board Members need to understand and support the aim and statements of intent contained within this Strategy. All new staff to the Association must be made aware of the “involvement culture” and regular refresher training will be delivered to existing staff. In addition the Resident Involvement Team will deliver a programme of awareness raising, throughout the Association on an annual basis.

2.2 Residents

The Association will offer a variety of training tailored to individual needs. It is important to recognise that residents will wish to have a variety of levels of involvement and training should be suited to the levels of involvement they choose.

While training on certain subjects or aspects of the service will assist with resident’s development, the emphasis will be on helping and allowing individual residents to get involved at whatever level they prefer.

The Association will facilitate where possible training for residents that will equip them with transferable skills which can be used in their everyday life.

3. Outside Agencies

Crucial to the long term success of this Strategy is developing ways of spreading good practice and benchmarking against other agencies. The Association will use both the Regulatory Code and Audit Commission KLOE’s to set benchmark service standards and will aspire to become an organisation delivering excellent services. Where excellence is not yet achieved the Association will draw up action plans to facilitate and drive performance and improvement. Good practice should not be frozen in time and we will work with outside agencies to measure quality of service. In its pursuit of continuous improvement and excellence the Association will consult and benchmark with statutory bodies, outside agencies and other relevant agencies which includes:

TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service)- consultative/guidance

PIP (Partners in Participation)- joint working/efficiency

NHF (National Housing Federation)- guidance

CIH (Chartered Institute of Housing)- guidance- education

HQN (Housing Quality Network)- guidance/best practice

RSL’s (Registered Social Landlords) – benchmarking/ joint working/ guidance

LA’s (Local Authorities)- strategic guidance

A.C (Audit Commission)- inspection Key Line of Enquiry

HC (Housing Corporation)- regulation/governance

4. Organisational Commitment

The Association commits to engaging with residents at every level within the Association.

From Board of Management, to officer level, involving residents should be fundamental to what we do. It underpins the direction of the Association in matters of resident involvement and will ensure that major decisions will reflect the views and opinions of our customer.

Each Department will be responsible for engaging in or supporting resident involvement at both strategic and operational levels.

This commitment is re-inforced in the business plan and through regular awareness raising activities at officer level.

5. Forum

The Forum is responsible for discussing the major policy matters affecting resident and community involvement as well as the Association's Strategy on Resident Involvement and service delivery issues, in particular those, which affect continuous improvement.

During 2006 the Association has worked with the Forum and external consultant to review their purpose and role. The findings have resulted in the Forum assuming more of a monitoring role. All policy changes affecting residents will be presented to the Forum for their views both on the policy and whether sufficient user involvement has taken place in the review process. These views will then be made know to the Associations Board of Management prior to changes being implemented. The Forum will continue to develop and expand its role over the next couple of years.

Governed by their own agreed Code of Conduct and Constitution, the Forums seek to be representative of the wider resident population, both in terms of geographical spread and ethnic breakdown.

In order to carry out this function the Forum manage an annual budget, which will assist them and provide training for those requiring it enabling them to carry out their role.

6. Menu of Options for Involvement

In 2005 the Association launched its menu of options which gave tenants choice of what and how they can get involved.

To fully engage with all residents who wish to become involved, the Association recognises the need to offer a range of levels or ways of getting involved. The Association will offer and support the following mechanisms to suit individual circumstances, needs and priorities:

6.1 Resident Groups

The Association will encourage the formation of Residents Groups and Associations and recognises the valuable role they have to play in improving communication between the Association and its residents.

The Association will support Residents Groups and Associations by:

- Assisting in the formation of new groups
- Giving advice and assistance to established groups
- Providing a Start-up Grant to meet initial costs
- Providing on-going financial support to established Resident Associations
- Encouraging representatives to become members of the Forum
- Assisting with the provision of meeting facilities
- Assisting with typing, photocopying and postage
- Providing or locating training programmes and facilities
- Involving residents in Best Value Reviews

The Association will not recognise Resident Associations, which lack the support of the majority of residents they seek to represent, or which operate any type of discriminatory practice.

6.2 Neighbourhood Meetings

The Association will support and assist any group or groups of residents who wish to meet less formally than in Residents Groups, to discuss issues relating to or affecting services.

We are committed to offering solutions to issues relating to service delivery or improvement.

The Association will endeavour to send relevant staff whose area of responsibility the service is, to discuss and plan the way forward with residents.

It is vital for this to succeed that open, timely and accurate advice and feedback is given.

6.3 Service Review Groups

Since 1999 the Association has aimed to carry out 3 formal Best Value Reviews per year. These reviews have looked at individual services, examined current practice and taken on Board views and ideas from residents.

In order to involve tenants at a more formative stage, the Association will set up and seek volunteers for a Best Value Service Review Group.

The Review Group will be responsible for discussing which areas of the service they are reviewing, that they would like to see changed and reviewing information gathered, in addition to development of the final Strategy, policy or procedures.

6.4 Individual Readers

It is the Association's intention to find residents who would be interested in becoming readers. Readers would receive information on strategy/policy or any issue affecting service delivery, to enable them to comment or provide ideas to the Association. (Over the next 12 months we will compile a list and ask tenants if they would be interested in joining our reader group.)

This will give residents who do not or are not able to attend meetings but are interested in becoming involved in the work of the Association, the opportunity to do so.

6.5 Widespread Consultation

There is statutory duty placed upon the Association to consult with all residents over issues, which affect service delivery and the Housing Management function.

The Association will consult and seek the views and opinions of all residents who the change might affect prior to changing services or altering Housing Management arrangements.

6.6 Community Events

The Association will support and, where possible, fund social events which bring together a group or groups of residents as a community.

We recognise the need to promote communities and neighbourhoods. Community events are a way of doing this and from this other initiatives often occur which helps to develop community spirit.

6.7 Editorial panel

It is important that the information sent to residents is clear concise and informative. In order to ensure this is the case the association will seek to involve service users in the production of newsletter leaflets and reports.

6.8 Satisfaction Questionnaire

The Association will use questionnaires throughout the year to determine and gauge current levels of satisfaction. Where possible the questionnaire will follow the National Housing federations STATUS model to enable comparison with previous surveys.

6.9 Repairs review team

The association has an established panel of residents who regularly meet to discuss issues relating to the physical management of properties. It will continue to use this group in addition to other methods of consultation to inform and shape property related services.

7. Resources

It is recognised that resident involvement in service delivery is essential in order for the business to be efficient, responsive and reflective of the customers it serves. Incentives will be offered to residents in order to encourage them to become involved. The following will be made available to encourage participation:

7.1 Travel Expenses

The Association will pay all reasonable costs or provide transportation to get to and from meetings and training.

7.2 Venue Hire

The Association will provide or pay reasonable costs in respect of room hire required to facilitate meetings or training. This will include offering its own office facilities and meeting rooms which will be made available free of charge.

7.3 Care

The Association will pay, on receipt of invoice, for a registered childminder or care cost to enable attendance of meetings or training events.

7.4 Staffing

The Association will ensure it has the appropriate staffing levels in order to deliver its Resident Involvement Strategy.

7.5 Training

The Association will annually set and review budgets and allocates resources for tenant Training and will promote where practicable joint training between tenants and staff.

8. Equality and Diversity

The Association is committed to and works towards giving every resident the opportunity to participate and be involved in the decision making process. It is therefore necessary to recognise the diverse groups the Association works with and adapt our approach to ensure the process is inclusive.

The Association will, in order to meet this demand:

- ◆ Ensure where possible meeting locations are accessible to all residents
- ◆ Offer material in other formats, large print, Braille, tape and in residents first language
- ◆ Arrange interpretation services in order for non-English operating residents

to attend meetings or training

The Association's Resident's Involvement Strategy aims to include the most disadvantaged sections of the community. In doing so it recognises the following reasons why groups or individuals may suffer direct or indirect discrimination:

- Race
- Religion
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Disability
- Age

The Association will work with these groups to ensure equality of opportunity for Participation with particular reference to the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and the Commission for Racial Equality's Statutory Code of Practice for Racial Equality in Housing published in 2006.

9. Supported Housing

All residents of the Association should be treated equitably, however the Association recognises that in order to be able to participate to the same level our approach to involvement must be different in regard to those with support needs therefore the Association will:

- Look at current ways of involving supported housing residents, recognise what is good and build on this
- Involve the managing agents of supported housing schemes in the process and provide them with training and development opportunities, as they need to be familiar with the Association's Strategy, policy and procedure as well as the principles underpinning it
- Letting supported housing residents prioritise what is important to them. Involvement should be sufficiently flexible to allow them to participate in a fun or unstructured way.

10. Performance targets, monitoring and review

The Association and residents together will set performance targets, monitor them and review policy and procedure accordingly.

Performance targets will be at both strategic and officer level. The Board of Management, Directors, Managers and residents will be responsible for monitoring performance, identifying trend and targeting resources/services accordingly.

The Association's performance indicators and targets are included in the

Department's key performance indicators. (KPI's)

The Resident Involvement service review group will be responsible for working with officers to seek ways to improve performance and services and make recommendations to the Forum and Board of Management.

The Association will in addition measure qualitative information around resident satisfaction to compliment its suite of KPIs.

During the next 12 months the Association will seek to develop ways in which residents are able to set, monitor and evaluate progress against targets.

11. Resident Involvement Statement

Annually in accordance with Housing Corporation regulation the Association will consult with residents and publish its Involvement Statement. The statement will advise residents what the Association's key priorities are for the next year and how it will deliver them. It will also look back and summarise achievements of the previous year. This statement will form part of the continuous cycle of consultation, improvement and feedback sought by the Association.

12. Policy

To deliver resident involvement the Association has a policy, which is robust, comprehensive and is designed to send out a clear message to those residents wishing to become involved.

It is also vital that the Association produces a policy statement, which summarises our approach to resident involvement.

Policies will be regularly reviewed in conjunction with residents in order to reflect changes to legislation, best practice and changing circumstances.

In pursuit of the above aims, the Association will use the following policies:

- ◆ Resident Involvement Policy
- ◆ Vulnerable Tenants Policy
- ◆ Supported Housing Policy
- ◆ Equality and Diversity Policy