



Tenant & Resident Participation Policy

If you require this policy in a different format please ask a member of staff

Date of Approval
June 2015

Review Due
June 2018

1.0 General Aims and Objectives

1.1 Elderpark Housing Association is a locally based charitable housing Association operating within the Govan area and our aim is to put residents at the centre of what we do. Residents include tenants, owners, and other customers including homeless people and housing applicants. We do this by building good relationships with the people we serve.

As a locally based housing association we want to ensure that we properly serve the requirements of our community. To be effective we need to know what experience people have of our service and what their expectations are. Consequently, we survey residents on various aspects of our service, obtain feedback and where appropriate make service changes. In addition, we build the capacity for residents to scrutinise the services we offer with the aim of ensuring that we provide the right level of service on a consistent basis. This general principle accords with the aims of the new Scottish Social Housing Charter. Compliance with the charter will be assessed by the Scottish Housing Regulator. Their sole role is to safeguard and promote the interests of tenants and others.

The Charter means that there will be a stronger focus on registered social landlords to seek the views of all customers on what is measured, how it is measured and to report back findings to service users. The Association's objective in seeking this feedback is aligned to the Charter in that we seek to be transparent and to continuously improve and obtain value for money. This policy and the tenant participation strategy will be a key tool used by the Association to comply with the outcomes from the Charter. This will be approached in a planned and methodical way. The proposed objectives of the Scottish Social Housing Charter are to:

- Provide tenants and other customers with a clear statement of what they can expect from social landlords and help them to hold their landlord to account
- Focus the efforts of social landlords on achieving outcomes that matter to their tenants and other customers
- Provide the basis for the Scottish Housing Regulator to assess and report on how well landlords are performing. This will enable the Regulator, tenants and other customers and social landlords to identify areas of strong performance and areas where improvement is needed

The Association will need to develop a template for reporting which shows how the organisation is performing against the Charter. The information must be presented in a way which tenants and other customers want and can understand.

The Association's Tenant Participation Policy will aim to accord with the standards of participation and communication as outlined by the Scottish Housing Regulator in that it aims to ensure that social landlords manage their businesses so that:

- Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with

This outcome describes what landlords should achieve by meeting their statutory tenant

participation duties. It covers how social landlords gather and take account of the views and priorities of their tenants, how these views are reflected in the landlord's services and how landlords help and support tenants and other customers to build up their capacity for effective involvement.

In addition this policy we also aim to ensure:

- The positive and active participation of members of the community in the activities of the Association is encouraged, as is membership of the Association in line with the Membership Policy
- The general public, statutory and voluntary agencies and other organisations are well informed about the Association's activities
- The Association maintains a Register of Tenant Organisations with whom it will consult
 - Reviews its Resident/Tenant Participation Strategy and involves and consults tenants in accordance with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001

2.0 Delivery of Objectives

2.1 These objectives can only be delivered by effective and open communications based on mutual trust and understanding. The Association aims to comply with the Scottish Social Housing Charter on communication which states that:

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

- Tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services that the landlord provides

This outcome covers all aspects of landlords' communication with tenants and other customers. It is not just about how clearly and effectively a landlord gives information to those who want it. It is also about making it easy for tenants and other customers to make complaints and provide feedback on services, using that information to improve services and performance, and letting people know what they have done in response to complaints and feedback. It does not require landlords to provide legally protected, personal or commercial information.

2.2 Another tool to promote good communication is for the Association to effectively advertise our complaints procedure and learn from mistakes that we make. The outcomes from complaints can be a tool for tenants and others to influence and change the services which the Association's offers. This can be achieved by ensuring that complaints are dealt with in accordance to the Model Complaints Handling Procedure.

3.0 Participatory Tools

The Association will use the following methods to ensure effective participation

3.1 Housing Association Membership

All residents in properties managed or improved by the Association are encouraged to apply for membership of the Association and to attend the Annual General Meeting and other general meetings.

The Association will endeavour to ensure that tenants and others who have taken out membership fully understand the rights and responsibilities which attach to membership.

3.2 Committee Membership

All residents who are members and who are interested in the running of the Association will be strongly encouraged to stand for election to the Management Committee.

The main role of the Committee is to exercise control over the affairs of the Association by receiving regular reports from staff and taking responsibility to ensure the Association is well run. To those members who stand for election, training will be offered to develop the necessary skills to carry this out.

The Association aims to encourage residents to participate at various levels throughout its activities.

3.3 Participation in Focus Groups

The Association runs a number of focus groups as and when required to discuss and scrutinise various aspects of its service. This allows tenants and residents the opportunity to put forward ideas, promote change and challenge current working practices of the Association. Areas of scrutiny, within service delivery, will be set out in the Housing Management Business plan objectives for the coming year.

3.4 Increase Opportunities for Those Who Find It Difficult to Participate

We will try to understand the needs of our tenants in order that we can provide a responsive and effective service. This will include obtaining information at sign up and by carrying out an annual survey aimed at personalising our service. In addition generic housing staff will seek to build relationship with tenants in their designated patch and refer tenants to support services where required. In relation to tenants with special needs; we will seek to identify those tenants who receive housing support and meet with the housing needs providers to obtain their respective feedback on service delivery to amend service provision where possible.

In relation to overcoming language barriers the Association, in recognition of the large number of Polish tenants, employs a translator who will seek to facilitate better communications and feedback from Polish residents. In addition, it uses the translation services provided by Govan and Craigton Integration Network.

Consideration will also be given to how we consult with groups such as homeless people and owners through meetings with the homeless casework team and owners as well as via surveys.

3.5 Informing Residents

The Association aims to have written policies and procedures on all matters relating to its dealings with all its customers. Copies of these documents will be freely available to all residents and advertised through our web site and Facebook page.

Residents will be given information on request and in various formats, including leaflet format, relating to our policies and procedures. This information will be available on our website and will be detailed in our Tenants Participation Strategy which is updated annually and reported in our newsletter.

The Association will produce an Annual Return on the Charter (ARC report) to tenants and other service users on the Association's performance against each of the charter outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter. The layout and detail of the report will be determined and subject to review by tenants and other users.

Newsletters will be produced four times per year and sent to all tenants and residents.

Tenants can request information about the service such as governance in terms of decision making and how the Association spends its money. Staff will endeavour to obtain this information and report to tenants.

Where there are specific proposals and activities which affect certain groups of residents they will be contacted and informed by letter and tenants and/or residents meetings arranged wherever appropriate. A particular example of this would be alterations, improvements, planned maintenance to blocks of houses/flats, or changes to specific services provided to groups of residents.

The Association seeks to be responsive to all enquiries and will ensure that staff are available to answer questions or clarify issues at the request of residents and others. The Association's staff will be visible on the streets and by doing so will seek to deal with communications and problems as quickly and effectively as possible. Relevant training will be provided to all staff to enable them to fully comply with these requirements. The Association will hold public meetings with tenants and owners in Elderpark, Ibrox, Cessnock and Kinning Park on an annual basis. The purpose of the meetings may range from obtaining feedback from those present about strategic issues affecting the Association, to giving out information.

The Association will endeavour to ensure that all information, whether written or spoken will be provided in plain, understandable language and in other languages or formats as required.

3.6 Service Reviews

Our aim is to put the people who use our services at the centre of what we do.

We therefore need to understand how our service affects tenants, what their expectations are whilst taking account of external factors which are largely out with our control to shape the development of our service.

The methodology used to review the service may include the following:

- Close / street /area public meetings
- Targeted interviews with tenants who have difficulty sustaining their tenancies
- Conversations with Residents on Facebook
- Environmental Audits
- Focus group meetings
- Tenant and / or Residents surveys
 - Ongoing customer surveys
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- Provision of written and oral information (newsletters etc.)Support to local groups which the Association can utilise as a means of opening up access to groups which may find it difficult to participate
- Liaison with Tenant/Resident associations

The Association aims to use the appropriate methodology to improve decision making, evidence what we do and to seek to continually improve.

3.7 Consultation on Issues of Strategic Importance

Issues of strategic importance will include for example, rent increases, prioritising the planned maintenance program and new build developments. The flow chart demonstrating residents' involvement in decisions of strategic importance is detailed in Appendix 1. By following this template the Association will have the evidence to show that decisions of strategic importance are based on the premise that we put tenants at the centre of what we do. The methodology will be adapted depending on each circumstance. The principles are:

We collate information and facts to justify an initial decision. For example, information on how tenants would prioritise spending and affordability levels regarding rents:

- We will outline the option or options available
- Put in place a methodology for consulting with people on the option(s) available, for example a focus group, via facebook, or tenant satisfaction surveys and the newsletter
- Review the initial decision making based on feedback
- Report back to Management Committee on any views collected.
- Report back on the outcome of the Management Committee to residents via the newsletter, web site or facebook
- Keep records to evidence base our decision making process

3.8 Tenants Questionnaire

The Association will carry out quarterly satisfaction surveys from an independent company into its core activities, which cover a range of services as per the indicators detailed in the Scottish Social Housing Charter. The results of which will be used by the Association to report on performance and benchmark its performance against other comparable housing associations.

3.9 Tenants and Residents Associations/Groups

The Association recognises that tenants and residents may wish to organise themselves and speak to the Association with a collective voice. It recognises that certain groups of tenants may find it difficult to participate, for example ethnic minority groups or the elderly. In order to consult and obtain their views on the services provided, the Association will support and may resource such groups on a case by case basis. Where such a group is seen to be representative of tenants and residents the Association will actively encourage such a group and provide assistance if required. The Association will also liaise with that group on matters affecting its members.

3.10 Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs)

The Association has in place a framework for encouraging and assessing applications for groups of tenants to form RTOs. However, it is apparent from past experience that residents in the area who wish to participate tend to join the Management Committee, although the Association will, of course, view the setting up of any RTOs positively and will give appropriate training, financial and administrative support.

Whilst therefore there may be tenants interested in forming an RTO, this has not been evident in past experience when the Association has tried to establish focus groups or identify tenants who may be interested in joining the Management Committee, there has been a typically poor response. Instead there is evidence that whilst tenants like to attend meetings they do not necessarily wish to form a constituted group.

Given that the level of resources (in terms of the time and staff levels we have available) is finite we have to prioritise all the important elements that form our tenant participation strategy. It is viewed as more productive to concentrate on other aspects of Tenant Participation. However, we will endeavour to encourage RTO's wherever possible in the newsletter or with interested parties.

4.0 Training

The Association will provide an induction and continued training for Management Committee members on an on-going basis.

Where residents wish to form a Tenants or Residents Association or Group the Association will support the provision of training for members of the Association and its own staff where this would be appropriate and of benefit and assistance. The Association will also endeavour to provide meeting facilities.

The Association will seek to develop and review on an on-going basis a detailed Tenant

and Resident Participation Strategy which maximises the opportunities for tenant and resident involvement and meets Best Practice Guidelines.

5.0 Monitoring

The Association's Committee will monitor the effectiveness of this policy. They will receive an annual update on our compliance with the Tenant Participation Strategy. Residents can review how well the opportunities for involvement are working by completing our annual survey on the overall effectiveness of our tenant participation policy and by responding to this matter at public meetings.

6.0 Model Complaints Handling Procedure

Where residents are unhappy with a service they can make a complaint through the Model Complaints Handling Procedure. Residents can make a complaint in person at our office, by telephone, by e-mail or by using the online complaints form on our website: www.elderpark.org. Complaints can be made within six months of the event. It is a two stage process with complaints either being categorised as a frontline complaint or investigation. Frontline complaints are normally resolved within five working days unless there are exceptional circumstances and extended timescales are agreed with the complainer.

In contrast, investigation complaints are normally resolved within 20 working days with any revision on this timescale being agreed with the complainer. The outcome must be relayed to the complainer either in writing or via their preferred method of communication.

Where the complainer is still unhappy with the outcome their complaint will be passed onto the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. If for any reason of disability or impairment they are unable to complain or appeal to the Association formally then they may authorise a representative to write on his / her behalf.

7.0 Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years, the next review being due in June 2018, or sooner if legislative or best practice changes require this.

Appendix 2

Issues of Strategic Importance

