

RESIDENT CONSULTATION AND INVOLVEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

English Rural Housing Association is committed to involving residents in the way we manage, maintain and develop. We aim to meet our statutory obligations, the Regulator's expectations, the requirements of good practice and residents' aspirations. On account of the Association's specialist nature, its rural focus, and the geographical spread of its schemes, a varied and multi-layered approach to involvement is necessary if we are to achieve the objective of resident inclusiveness.

There will be an impact assessment as necessary to review and evaluate progress made over the previous period, assessing achievements against targets, and identifying improvements for the future.

2. OPPORTUNITIES

2.1 ***Development Consultation***

Proposals for new developments will be displayed at public events to ensure that future residents and the local community has the opportunity to comment on housing need and technical issues such as location, design, layout, tenure and scale. Representatives from the Association's Development and Housing Management teams will be in attendance at such events, which will be convened at a locally accessible venue, at a time that will ensure maximum attendance from the community.

2.2 ***Residents Survey***

We will carry out a regular Residents Survey. The survey will meet the general expectations of the National Housing Federations guidelines. The results will be used to assess our performance over the year, as well as helping us to build a profile of residents, which will enable us to review our services. The survey will also identify management issues affecting particular schemes, details of which will be passed to the appropriate Officer for action. Comments on matters of design and construction will be submitted to Development Officers. A comprehensive report will be circulated to all Board Members, the Resident Scrutiny Panel and staff. The Report will be discussed by the Panel with a view to identifying areas for improvement. A summary of findings will be published in the Residents Newsletter, with a full Report available on request and published on the Association's website.

2.3 ***Board Participation***

The Association will ensure that as a minimum, at least one resident will serve on the Board of Management. The process for electing Resident Board Members will be agreed with residents, all of whom will have the opportunity to participate, either as candidates or as the electorate.

2.4 ***Resident Scrutiny Panel***

The Association will establish and support a Resident Scrutiny Panel, which will consist of representatives from the Board, staff and residents; membership will be determined by the Terms of Reference agreed for the Panel by the Board of Management. The objectives of the Panel will be to help inform decision making and strategy at all levels and to champion service improvement through feedback and performance monitoring.

2.4 ***Resident Associations***

Scheme specific resident associations will be encouraged and successes in this area will be highlighted via the newsletter to illustrate what can be achieved. Staff and appropriate Board Members will offer to participate in resident associations on a regular basis and will ensure that meetings are properly minuted and that appropriate action follows. The Association will also look to aid and facilitate the aspirations of any resident associations with regard to their wider community. Financial and practical support will be offered as appropriate.

2.5 ***Development Tours and Housing Management visits***

The Association will look to visit each development on an annual basis as a minimum. Local residents will typically be given prior notice of these visits, should they wish to address the local representative directly.

Board of Management and Resident Scrutiny Panel tours will also be arranged a minimum of one a year in varying areas, with the aim of visiting our developments and engaging with residents directly. Details of these tours will be publicised via the newsletter and by direct mail.

2.6 ***Maintenance Quality Checks***

Tenants will be asked to report on the quality of repairs and maintenance via the service checking system, when they are asked to complete and return a satisfaction questionnaire regarding completed repairs and maintenance orders. Invoices for work over £500 excluding VAT will be inspected by a representative of the Association and this will provide another opportunity for residents to comment on the works and on the contractor.

The Association will aim to develop a strategy to involve residents in scrutinising contractor performance and ensuring performance targets are met.

2.7 ***Publications***

Newsletters and Annual Reports will be sent to all residents, to keep them informed of the Association's performance and progress. We will actively encourage resident participation in these publications and we will disseminate examples of resident involvement.

2.8 ***Direct Contact***

Our rural focus and the relatively intimate nature of our developments have created a culture of direct contact. The use of local dedicated staff has helped to ensure that residents know who to contact and how to contact them. The culture of direct contact with staff is encouraged. Contact via mail, phone, text or email will be used to engage residents when reviewing service provision, particularly to ensure value for money with regard to service charges.

2.9 ***Virtual Engagement***

The Association will collate email contacts for residents with a view to circulating publications, press releases, policy and procedures and other appropriate documents for information and comment. We will also use our website as a way of facilitating a two-way flow of information with our residents.

Details on how residents can gain access to the internet and learn necessary IT skills will also be promoted by the Association via the newsletter and direct mail.

3. ENABLING AND TRAINING

- 3.1 The Association will publicise and fund appropriate training opportunities that will enhance skills and the development of resident participation for both staff and residents.
- 3.2 Practical and financial support will be available to recognised resident groups. In addition residents participating in the involvement strategy will be reimbursed for reasonable expenses incurred.
- 3.3 We will ensure that information on resident involvement is accessible.
- 3.4 Value for money will be assessed by the Resident Scrutiny Panel, with recognition given to the added value that resident involvement provides.
- 3.5 The Association will make a specific allocation each year within the budget to support resident involvement activity.

4. INVOLVEMENT IN THE WIDER CONTEXT

- 4.1 Through its Resident Consultation and Involvement Policy the Association will consider the wider benefits which could be brought to the rural communities where dwellings owned and managed by the Association are located. We will seek to maintain active and productive relationships with local authorities and Parish Councils, with a view to supporting and sustaining the wider community. Our involvement in rural areas goes

beyond the remit of providing affordable homes and we are committed to ensuring that the communities in which our residents live remain viable. Residents will be encouraged to suggest how they and we can work together to contribute towards this ideal.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 This policy is by no means conclusive or restrictive. The policy will pay due care and attention to the Association's equality and diversity policies. We recognise that these objectives can best be achieved through dialogue and by taking account of residents' views. The policy will be reviewed annually, in consultation with the Resident Scrutiny Panel, to ensure that our objectives are being met.