

Resident Engagement & Consultation Policy

Date Approved: 5 April 2018

Date Reviewed: December 2021

Date of Next Review: December 2022

Responsible Board/Committee: Board

Lead: Nick Brake, Head of Housing and Customer Services

1.0 POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 The Association seeks to embed a culture that values the voice and experience of residents. We consider that meaningful resident engagement and consultation makes a positive impact on the quality of services we provide and helps to ensure that those services are appropriate to residents' needs and aspirations.
- 1.2 We are committed to involving residents in the way their homes are managed and maintained and to consulting residents on matters affecting them. We will meet our statutory obligations, the Regulator's expectations and good practice recommendations.
- 1.3 We have adopted the National Housing Federation's (NHF) Together with Tenants initiative which focusses on strengthening the relationship between residents and their housing association landlord.

2.0 KEY POLICY PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 We will:
 - provide a range of ways residents can be involved and engaged and can influence our services and the development of strategy and policy.
 - provide and fund training and development opportunities for residents in order to enhance skills and to facilitate resident engagement.
 - promote the benefits of resident engagement.
 - provide the opportunity for formal representation on decision-making bodies, including our Board of Management and our Complaints Panel.
 - be open and make information available to residents, providing an independent check and enabling residents to scrutinise and challenge our performance and make recommendations for improvements.
 - encourage residents to contribute to publications, including our Annual Report to Residents and Residents Newsletter.
 - ensure that our staff receive the necessary training and development to better promote and support resident engagement.

3.0 REGULATORY & STATUTORY PROVISIONS

3.1 RSH Regulatory Framework – Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard (July 2017)

Registered Providers are required to ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- the formulation of their landlord's housing-related policies and strategic priorities
- the making of decisions about how housing-related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards
- the scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved
- the management of their homes, where applicable
- the management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed with landlords, and the sharing in savings made
- agreeing local offers for service delivery.

[Note: The RSH will be reviewing, updating and consulting on the consumer standards in order to implement the new approach to consumer regulation referred to in 3.2 below].

3.2 The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper (2020)

The Charter sets out the actions the government will take to ensure that residents in social housing are safe, are listened to, live in good quality homes, and have access to redress when things go wrong.

[Based on the new expectations in the White Paper, the RSH is developing its approach to consumer regulation. As at December 2021, there is no specific timetable for the implementation of the new consumer regulation as it is dependent on the passing of new legislation.]

3.3 The National Housing Federation Together with Tenants Charter

Adopters of the Charter make six commitments to their tenants to encourage trust and strengthen the landlord / tenant relationship. The six commitments focus on the following areas:

- Relationships
- Communication
- Voice and influence
- Accountability
- Quality
- When things go wrong

3.4 Tenancy Agreement

It is a condition of our standard tenancy agreements that the Association shall consult the tenant before making changes in matters of housing management or maintenance that are likely to have a substantial effect on the tenant.

3.5 Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 – Section 20 Notice

We are legally obliged to issue a Section 20 (s20) notice to let residents know about certain proposed works or services planned to our properties or on our estates. A s20 notice will explain what work is planned, why it is being carried out and the anticipated costs. It provides the opportunity for residents to comment on the plans; these are called 'observations'.

The type of notice residents receive will be determined by the anticipated cost of the works and whether or not we plan to use a contractor with whom we already have a long-term agreement. We issue s20 notices for major works or qualifying long-term contracts.

4.0 SCOPE

4.1 This policy applies to all customers, including tenants, shared owners and leaseholders.

5.0 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

5.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Bucks Housing's Service Standards
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Complaints Policy and Procedures

6.0 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

6.1 Residents' Voice and Scrutiny Panel

We will establish and support a Residents' Voice and Scrutiny Panel. The Terms of Reference of the Panel will be agreed and reviewed annually by the Board of Management.

The Panel will monitor the Association's service delivery and performance in key areas, ensuring that high quality services are maintained and meet the best interests of residents. The Panel will act as a sounding board for new policies and procedures as they affect residents. Panel members may be invited to participate in service reviews and make recommendations for improvement and may also take part in the tender process for new contractors.

6.2 Virtual Panel

We will invite residents, who express an interest in being actively consulted or in participating directly, but who do not wish to become members of the Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel or to attend meetings, to join a "Virtual Panel" of residents.

The Virtual Panel may, for example, be invited to comment on proposals or on draft, customer-facing documents, including to gauge whether the document is accessible and clear to understand.

6.3 Tenant Surveys and Tenant Insight

We will carry out a comprehensive Tenants' Survey at least every three years to assess how satisfied our tenants are with the services they are receiving and to identify trends.

We will also survey our residents on a continuous basis to ascertain how satisfied they are with different aspects of our service, including our Repairs & Maintenance Service, Lettings Service and Satisfaction with their New Homes. This information is supplemented by a regular analysis of residents' complaints.

We will continue to build a profile of our tenants, which we will use to help inform our delivery of services.

6.4 Digital Engagement

We will use our website and other platforms to encourage a two-way flow of information and feedback with residents. We will promote opportunities for digital inclusion amongst our residents.

6.5 Board Membership

We will ensure that one seat on the Board of Management will be reserved for someone with 'lived experience' of social housing. The process for election to this seat will enable all current tenants to have the opportunity to apply.

6.6 Residents' Associations

Scheme specific residents' associations will be encouraged, supported and formally recognised by the Association provided they are properly constituted.

6.7 Estate Inspections

We will aim to visit all of our housing schemes at least annually and those with communal areas at least calendar monthly. Our customers will be encouraged to accompany staff on these inspections and work in partnership to improve the local neighbourhood.

6.8 Tenancy Audits

We aim to carry out a Tenancy Audit visit to all of our residents at least every three years. These visits are used to refresh contact details, confirm who is living at the property and to discuss any tenancy / rehousing or neighbourhood issues.

6.9 Mystery Shopping

We will train and support Mystery Shoppers to test our services and provide feedback from their findings so that we can continue to provide or improve the service. Mystery Shoppers will receive a small reward for their time in the form of shopping vouchers.

6.10 Local Events / Meetings

We will hold local events / meetings on specific issues that affect residents living in a particular scheme / location.

6.11 St Hughs Close Residents' Meeting

We hold regular meetings with residents to discuss issues of concern to the residents at St Hughs.

6.12 Resident Suggestion Scheme

We encourage residents to write in with their suggestion for a service improvement and / or a cost saving. If an idea is implemented, the resident will receive £50 in vouchers.

7.0 RESIDENT CONSULTATION

7.1 We will consult residents on any proposed change which significantly affects them, including variations to:

- the terms of their Tenancy Agreement
- the services we provide
- proposed improvements to their home

7.2 The procedures we must follow to vary the terms of tenancy are set out in the Tenancy Agreement.

7.3 Depending on the nature of the issue and the number of residents affected, consultation may be via personal contact, letters, meetings or questionnaires (or a combination of these methods). We will consider all consultation responses before taking any further action and we will inform all affected parties of our decision.

7.4 We will consult residents on the arrangements for carrying out services on their estates, for which they pay a service charge, such as garden maintenance, cleaning of communal areas and window cleaning.

7.5 As outlined in section 3.5 above, we are legally obliged to issue a Section 20 (s20) notice to let residents know about certain proposed works or services planned to our properties or on our estates.

8.0 SUPPORT BUCKS HOUSING CAN PROVIDE

8.1 We will make a specific budget allocation in our annual budgets to support resident engagement and participation.

- 8.2 We will publicise and fund appropriate training opportunities for residents, in order to enhance skills and to facilitate the development of resident engagement.
- 8.3 We will provide practical and financial support to recognised resident groups. Reasonable travel and other expenses (e.g. childcare or carer's costs) will be reimbursed to involved residents.
- 8.4 Some engagement options, such as mystery shopping and our resident suggestion scheme, are rewarded with payment in vouchers.
- 8.5 We will ensure that information given to residents is in an accessible form and that translation / interpretation facilities are made available if required.
- 8.6 We will ensure that our staff receive the necessary training and development to better promote and support resident engagement.

9.0 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

- 9.1 The Association's Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy sets out our commitment to treat all residents fairly and with respect and to act in a way which does not discriminate against any individual or group of individuals.
- 9.2 Our Resident Engagement and Consultation Policy will be applied fully in accordance with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy. In particular, we will seek to encourage people from protected groups to participate in engagement structures and activities, where we recognise their participation is disproportionately low.

10.0 MONITORING & REPORTING

- 10.1 We will monitor adherence to this policy and we will provide an annual report to Board on our resident engagement activities. A summary of our activity will be provided in the Annual Report to Residents.
- 10.2 Activities covered by this policy are subject to periodic audit review.

11.0 POLICY REVIEW

- 11.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years, unless there are significant changes in legislation, regulation, or central or local government guidance.