



Section 10 - Policies

This section outlines the key policies referred to from time to time in this handbook. There is also a list of all of the Association's policies that are relevant to residents. A full copy of any of these policies is available on our website or on request.

RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT POLICY

The Association is committed to the rights of residents to be involved in the management of their homes. Opportunities will be promoted to encourage involvement in all aspects of service delivery to a level that is appropriate to the wishes of both individuals and residents' groups.

We will consult on issues where there is a reasonable and genuine opportunity for residents to influence the outcome. Where consultation is not appropriate we will ensure that we inform individuals and groups about decisions that affect them.

We aim to -

- Inform, consult and involve our residents in making decisions about, and setting standards for services.
- Ensure equality of access for all residents to become involved, and widen participation from under represented groups.

- Give feedback to residents about the results of their involvement, the performance of the Association, and the response to complaints and any changes made as a result.
- Monitor satisfaction levels and listen to the views of residents.

We will provide support and training for staff and residents to develop their knowledge, skills, capability and confidence so that everyone involved is able to work successfully together.

We will help with things like reasonable childcare costs, travelling expenses, training and stationery.

The Association currently offers the following opportunities for residents to become involved -

Individuals and groups of residents are consulted on matters that affect their home and the services that they receive from the Association, including day to day repairs, planned maintenance, and changes to rent and service charges.

Contract monitoring - residents' views are taken into account when monitoring contractors performance.



Publications - we use plain language in publications to make it easier for residents to understand and respond. These can also be provided on audio tape, in large print, Braille or in other languages.

Newsletter - the newsletter is published at least three times a year and overseen by a small editorial group of residents.

Annual report - a copy of the annual report is sent to every resident. It includes information about the Association's performance and the results of resident involvement.

Suggestion scheme - residents can make their suggestions for service improvements by filling in a simple form.

Compliments and complaints help us by letting us know what we are doing well and where we need to improve.

Annual meetings are held with leaseholders, who are consulted in accordance with the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002.

Twice yearly meetings are held at each sheltered scheme to consult with residents and discuss issues that affect their homes and the services provided at the scheme.

Twice yearly home visits are offered to all other residents giving them an opportunity to discuss any aspect of their dealings with the Association and express their views.

'Armchair Monitors' gives the opportunity for residents to have their say from the comfort of their own home by participating by telephone, email or post.

Residents Associations - residents are encouraged and helped to set up associations that can provide a voice for people who are interested in local concerns (not just housing issues).

Focus groups offer the opportunity for residents to meet with staff, discuss and influence service standards, policies and performance.

Board Members - one place on the Board is open to residents of the Association.



EQUALITY & DIVERSITY POLICY

The Association recognises the importance of its role as employer, service provider and purchaser of goods and services in eliminating all forms of discrimination and harassment, and in promoting tolerance, fairness and equality.

The Association will aim to ensure that no individual or group is treated less favourably on the grounds of race, nationality or ethnic origin, gender, sexuality, age, disability, marital status or religion.

Challenging targets will be set and monitored by ethnicity, gender and disability in the following areas - lettings, tenant satisfaction, dealing with harassment, Board membership, employment, resident involvement, complaints and procurement.

This policy is supported by a Disability Equality Scheme, Gender Equality Scheme, Race Equality Scheme and an Equalities Action Plan.

The Association will ensure that the lettings policy and procedure will not discriminate directly or indirectly in relation to race, ethnic origin, nationality, religious belief, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, or disability. All tenancies will be let in an open and accountable way that prevents discrimination and gives equal access to all groups of applicants. We will maintain effective monitoring and review systems to prevent discrimination.

Through its Resident Involvement Policy the Association aims to offer a range of consultation and involvement techniques to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to participate.

Feedback from residents is used to improve and shape services. The information will be analysed by ethnicity, gender and disability to help ensure that services are being provided in appropriate ways and to the equal satisfaction of all groups.

The Association's Harassment, Racial Harassment and Domestic Violence policies clearly state that we will not tolerate harassment based on race, gender, disability, religion, age or sexual orientation.

The Association's Board will aim to have a composition with a diverse range of backgrounds, skills and experience that is broadly reflective of the communities we serve. The Board will ensure that all working practices and business activities reflect the principles of equality and diversity, and consider regular monitoring reports on the performance of the Association in relation to equal opportunity matters.

All employees, Board members and members of the Residents Focus Groups will receive training to ensure that they understand and implement all aspects of this policy. The training will ensure that they have an appropriate knowledge of equality and diversity that relates to their roles and responsibilities and help them to recognise the diverse needs of people and deliver high quality customer service.



HARASSMENT POLICY

The Association will not tolerate any form of harassment, and will take prompt and effective action.

The Association will adopt a victim centred approach. The interests of the victim are paramount and they will be treated sensitively, courteously and respectfully.

Harassment is deliberate or intentional behaviour that is targeted at individuals or distinct groups because of their particular ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability or religion. It is the interference with a person's comfort or safety. It is persistent and recurs.

Harassment can be physical or verbal abuse, intimidation, attacks on or damage to property including graffiti.

A full copy of the Association's Harassment Policy is available on request.

All complaints and information will be treated as confidential.

This policy can be made available on request in other languages, large type, Braille or in audio format.



RACIAL HARASSMENT POLICY

The Association is committed to ensuring that its residents are able to live without fear of racial harassment, intimidation or attack.

The Association will not tolerate any form of racial harassment. It is a criminal offence and all reports of racial harassment will be taken seriously.

The Association has adopted the definition of a racist incident from the McPherson Report:

"A racist incident is any incident, which is perceived to be racist by the victim, or any other person"

The Association will take a victim centred approach and the wishes of victims will be taken into account at all stages.

The McPherson definition as it applies to a housing organisation is that racial harassment is physical, verbal, non verbal or threatened conduct which is perceived to be unreasonable or offensive to the recipient and therefore interferes with their right to the use and enjoyment of their home and neighbourhood.

A full copy of the Association's Racial Harassment Policy is available on request.

All complaints and information will be treated as confidential.

This policy can be made available on request in other languages, large type, Braille or in audio format.



COMPLAINTS POLICY

The Association is committed to providing a quality service, which meets the needs of our customers. However, sometimes things go wrong and when this happens we need to know about it to help us to improve our service.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by a customer about the standard of service provided by the Association, whether justified or not.

It is the aim of the Association to resolve complaints effectively and as quickly as possible.

The Association is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and reasonably.

The Association recognises that complaints can provide valuable information about service delivery and will use this information to continuously improve services and also to improve the procedure for dealing with complaints.

A full copy of the Association's Complaints Policy is available on request.

A 'Complaint, Comment or Compliment Form' is also available on request.

A complaint may be made verbally or in writing by a customer or someone acting on their behalf. A complaint may also be anonymous although this may limit the action that can be taken in response to the complaint.

All complaints will be treated confidentially and taken seriously.

The Association will try to resolve complaints

at the first point of contact with the customer or at the earliest possible stage of the complaints procedure.

There are three stages to the Association's complaints procedure -

1st stage - if a customer is not satisfied by the response from their first point of contact then their complaint will be considered by a Senior Manager.

2nd stage - if a customer is dissatisfied with the response from the Senior Manager then their complaint will be considered by the Head of Housing Services or the Director of Finance.

3rd stage - if a customer is still dissatisfied with the response then their complaint will be considered by the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

If a customer is dissatisfied with the outcome after exhausting the Association's complaints procedure then they have the right to complain to the Independent Housing Ombudsman. The Association will co-operate fully with any investigation carried out by the Ombudsman.

If a policy or procedure is changed because of a complaint, the complainant will be informed and thanked for their help in improving the service

The Association will consider claims for compensation from complainants who have suffered financial loss.

Details of all complaints, including the level of satisfaction of customers with the complaints procedure, will be reported to the Association's Board.

This policy can be made available on request in other languages, large type, Braille or in audio format.



ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR & NEIGHBOUR DISPUTES POLICY

The Association is committed to ensuring that all residents enjoy their right to peace, quiet and security in their homes. The Association recognises the varied and diverse nature of the communities, in which it works and respects the differences of individuals.

The Association appreciates that anyone has the right to their chosen lifestyle providing that this doesn't spoil the quality of life of others. This implies some degree of tolerance and respect for the requirements and needs of others.

The Association aims to reduce and control incidences of anti social behaviour of residents, people living with residents and their visitors by taking prompt and effective action. The Association will demonstrate by its actions that it will not tolerate anti social behaviour.

The Association aims to provide a responsive service to meet the needs of customers.

Anti social behaviour can be of a serious and criminal nature including racial and other harassment, physical violence, and drug dealing. It can also include loud music (often late at night), barking dogs, verbal abuse and vandalism, which whilst not criminal in nature can be equally detrimental to the quality of life in the community.

A full copy of the Association's Anti Social Behaviour & Neighbour Disputes Policy is available on request.

All complaints and information will be treated as confidential.

The Association will aim to resolve problems speedily and without recourse to legal action wherever possible. However, a firm approach will be taken against the perpetrators of anti social behaviour and legal action will be taken where necessary. This may include injunctions, demotion orders, anti social behaviour orders, parenting contracts and orders, and enforcement of the tenancy conditions that may ultimately lead to repossession of the perpetrator's (or their family's) home.

Advice and support will be provided to victims and witnesses of anti social behaviour.

The Association will work in partnership with the Police, the Council and other agencies to prevent and deal with anti social behaviour.

Where drug or other substance abuse, mental health and/or disability are causing a nuisance to neighbours the Association will work with relevant agencies and in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act to find a resolution to the problem.

Residents who are responsible for deliberate damage as a result of anti social behaviour will be recharged the full cost of the damage.

This policy can be made available on request in other languages, large type, Braille or in audio format.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY

The Association is committed to the rights of every person to live without fear of violence and abuse. Domestic violence is a serious crime and has a devastating effect on the people who suffer from it. Therefore, the Association will take prompt and effective action.

The Association will take a victim centred approach and respect the wishes of the victim at all stages. Their safety is paramount and they will be treated sensitively, courteously and respectfully.

Domestic violence is about one person having power and control over another person. It can be actual, attempted or threatened and typically involves a pattern of abuse and intimidation which escalates in frequency and severity over time. It may include physical violence, sexual violence, emotional or psychological intimidation or financial abuse.

The Association will take all reports of domestic violence very seriously. We aim to provide effective support for all victims and to take appropriate action against alleged perpetrators.

All complaints and information will be treated as confidential.

If a tenant commits domestic violence then legal action can be taken that will result in the loss of their home.

DATA PROTECTION, ACCESS TO INFORMATION & DOCUMENT RETENTION POLICY

This policy aims to protect and promote the rights of individuals and the Association, by identifying information that is to be treated as confidential, and outlining the procedures for collection, storage, handling and disclosure of such information.

The Association holds personal and confidential information about its prospective, current and former employees, board members, tenants, leaseholders, suppliers and contractors. This policy covers all records and information held by the Association in respect of these 'data subjects'.

The Association will not ask for information that is not necessary for business purposes.

Confidential information will only be accessible to staff who 'need to know' such information in order to carry out their duties.

Members of staff, applicants for housing, tenants, leaseholders and any other visitors will be offered a private place to discuss matters of a confidential nature.

When dealing with customers by telephone the Association will take steps to ensure the identity of the individual before disclosing personal information.

Employees will not discuss confidential



information with third parties who have no particular right to know about the internal business of the Association.

Personal information relating to tenants and leaseholders will be used to: -

- Assess and prioritise applications for housing
- Enable the Association to fulfil its responsibilities as a landlord, for example, passing names and telephone numbers on to contractors so that arrangements can be made to carry out repairs
- Arrange care and support services for residents
- Arrange other services such as concessionary TV licences
- Comply with the Association's legal and regulatory obligations
- Help prevent crime and deal with anti social behaviour
- Enable audit of services
- Ensure that the Association's Equality and Diversity policy is being effectively implemented

Information about ethnic origin or religion will be used to provide statistical information to organisations that regulate the Association. The information will be presented in a way that does not identify individuals.

Information will not be shared with third parties without the individual's written

consent other than in the exceptional circumstances detailed in the Data Protection Act 1998: -

- Where there is clear evidence of fraud
- To comply with the law
- In connection with legal proceedings
- To protect the health and safety of the individual, where the individual would be at risk if the information were not disclosed, or where there is a legal requirement to do so
- Anonymously for statistical purposes

The Association may use tracing agents for the collection of former tenant's arrears and other debts. Information will be passed to them as part of the debt recovery process.

Confidential items and papers that are no longer required will be disposed of by shredding or by an approved contractor who will supply a certificate of destruction of the items.

All individuals have the right to see the personal information about them that is held by the Association in electronic or 'structured' manual form (i.e. part of a file system). Any request from a prospective, current or former tenant will be processed within the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Information Commissioner's guidance. A charge of £10 will be made per request.



The Association also has the following policies (copies are available on our website or on request):-

Alternative Accommodation

Asbestos Management

Asset Management

Customer Service Standards

Debt Recovery

Disabled Adaptations

Disturbance & Compensation

Gas Safety

Information Security

Lettable Standard

Lettings

Procurement

Recharges

Rent Setting

Repairs & Maintenance

Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults

Smoke Free