

## Appendix 1

### Draft Resident Communications & Engagement Strategy

#### 1. Introduction

The City of London believes that high quality and consistent communication and engagement with residents is vital to a landlord/resident relationship and helps to improve services on a continuous basis. This strategy sets out our approach to resident communications and engagement on our 11 social housing estates and identifies the key mechanisms used to deliver it.

#### 2. Aim of strategy

The aim of this strategy is to ensure that residents:

- receive timely, accessible and accurate information on matters affecting them, their homes and their estates;
- have ways of giving feedback about services provided to them;
- are fully consulted on any significant changes affecting them, such as major projects on their estates;
- can engage in a dialogue with officers about landlord services provided by the City of London;
- have opportunities to participate in activities which benefit the estate and in making decisions on matters which directly affect them.

#### 3. Legislative and policy framework

The only legislative requirement for landlords to consult with residents is the obligation under the Landlord & Tenants Act of 1985 (revised by the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act of 2002) to consult with leaseholders on works and services which will result in direct financial charges to them over specified limits.

This strategy has, therefore, been developed with regard to good practice amongst social landlords and the user engagement work of other departments in the City.

#### 4. Equal opportunities

The City of London operates an Equality & Diversity policy and this applies to all aspects of its services. When communicating and engaging with residents, we will ensure that no resident is treated less favourably on the grounds of age, race, religion or belief, disability, sex, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, marriage or civil partnership

This strategy and all related information can be made available in different formats and languages on request.

#### 5. Scope of the strategy

The strategy covers the City of London Housing Service's work with tenants and leaseholders of its eleven social housing estates. It also applies to work with other residents on the estates, such as freeholders and the tenants of private landlords. Parts of it may also be applicable to leaseholders and freeholders who are not

resident on our estates but let their properties privately. We have used the term 'residents' as a broad descriptor to cover all these groups.

The strategy does not cover our work with tenants of commercial properties on our estates, and we propose to add a section covering communication and engagement with these stakeholders at a later date.

## **6. Delivering the aims**

To meet the aims set out in Section 2, our strategy is to deliver a range of activities and opportunities for residents. These are divided into five categories:

- Information
- Feedback
- Engagement
- Formal Consultation
- Participation.

### **6.1 Information**

We undertake to ensure that the information we provide is:

- made available at the appropriate time;
- available in paper form, via email, on the City's website and on any estate Facebook pages;
- clear and easy to understand;
- available in alternative formats and languages;
- accurate and up to date.

We strive to ensure that all our information meets the above needs. We will use a range of methods to provide regular information to residents, including, but not limited to:

- an Estate Newsletter, published four times a year and made available to all households;
- a one-page Estate Bulletin, published weekly;
- an Annual Report of our performance;
- a Welcome Pack for all new tenants and homeowners;
- leaflets on a range of services and subjects;
- Estate Plans, produced annually to publish the results of feedback and the actions staff will take to address issues on the estate.

### **6.2 Feedback**

We believe that feedback is vital in helping us to understand any concerns residents have about their estates so that we can make improvements to address these. We also need to know which aspects of our services are satisfactory, so that we do not make unnecessary changes.

We will seek feedback from residents through:

- Annual surveys of satisfaction with estate services;

- voluntary participation in the national Survey of Tenants & Residents (STAR) held every 3 years;
- conducting occasional surveys of all households on specific topics affecting the estate;
- a simple and effective complaints process.

Residents will be informed of the results and outcome of feedback through the information mechanisms listed above, in particular Estate Plans and Newsletters.

### **6.3 Engagement**

We believe that an ongoing dialogue with residents can help foster a positive relationship. This ensures that issues can be raised in a constructive manner and appropriate solutions found in a way that involves residents and officers.

In order to encourage engagement, we will:

- advertise the dates and times of meetings, events and walkabouts at least four weeks in advance and via various information channels;
- hold some events out of normal working hours so that residents who are not available during the day can attend;
- provide feedback on issues raised and actions promised to all residents via Estate Newsletters and other mechanisms listed above.

Opportunities for residents to engage with us include:

- regular Estate Meetings open to all residents and held at least twice a year (see Section 7 - Housing Meetings Protocol);
- Estate Walkabouts, attended by estate management and Property Services staff, held quarterly;
- Residents' Celebration Day, held annually;
- The Housing Users Board (HUB), a panel of residents who have expressed an interest in having greater involvement and can be invited to attend one-off events or to complete detailed questionnaires on specific matters affecting all estates.

### **6.4 Formal Consultation**

We have a statutory obligation under the Landlord & Tenants Act of 1985 and the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002 to consult with our leaseholders on any works or services provided to them which will result in direct charges that are over specified limits per household. This obligation is commonly known as Section 20 consultation.

We also believe that we have an obligation to our residents to consult with them formally on any major works proposed for their homes or their estate, including the implementation of planned maintenance programmes and the possible development of new homes.

We will carry out formal consultation with residents by:

- following statutory guidance on Section 20 consultation;

- using the corporate model for majors works consultation, which prescribes a programme of letters, notices and meetings on any major project.

## **6.5 Participation**

We are committed to providing and supporting opportunities for residents to be more involved in their estate in order to develop and maintain a strong sense of community and collective responsibility. We believe that such voluntary participation not only benefits the community by, for example, reducing anti-social behaviour, but also benefits the individual, by helping them to develop a range of skills and experiences which will combat social isolation and may enhance their employment opportunities.

In order to encourage participation, we will:

- offer small grants to individuals and groups to help with the cost of running community activities and events, through a simple and transparent application process;
- provide legal indemnity insurance to cover any events run on estates by staff and/or residents;
- offer, in response to demand, training to groups and individuals on topics such as chairing meetings, equalities and diversity, running events, carrying out risk assessments (see Section 8.3 – Support available to all groups);
- offer Time Credits as an incentive and reward for volunteering and participation;
- provide support from a Community Development Officer and local staff to help groups or individuals develop proposals for activities and events to benefit the estate and to implement these.

We will offer residents opportunities to participate through:

- Supporting a range of resident associations and groups (see Protocol for working with Resident Groups);
- Offering opportunities to volunteer in the Good Neighbour Scheme or in estate community projects;
- Developing and leading the Remembering Yesterday, Celebrating Today four-year programme of community development activities;
- Inviting residents to submit and vote on proposals for spending a small Estate Improvements Budget on each estate;
- Taking part in working groups to consider specific issues, either through the HUB, or as part of consultation on major projects.

## **7. Protocol on Estate Meetings**

### **7.1 Introduction**

- The City of London Housing Service believes that holding regular meetings, open to all residents on an estate can be an effective means of building relationships, sharing information and answering resident questions.

- Estate Meetings are organised by the Housing Service four times a year on our larger estates and at least twice a year on our smaller estates. The meetings are held in the evening and are open to all residents to attend.

## **7.2 Purpose of meetings**

- The purpose of the meetings is to discuss matters which relate specifically to the City of London's function as landlord. The meetings allow officers to share information with residents and to enable residents to raise issues with and ask questions of their landlord.
- Other matters may be discussed if they relate directly to residents on the estate. Officers from other departments or agencies may be invited to discuss these matters. Examples would be; the local police attending to discuss crime or security on an estate; inviting a contractor to tell residents about some work they are carrying out; asking someone to come and talk about changes in welfare benefits which might affect the ability of residents to pay rent or service charges.
- The meetings are not to be used for the discussion of matters which are not Housing-related or to discuss political issues.

## **7.3 Organising and publicising meetings**

- Meetings are organised by the Estate Manager, who advertises the time, date, venue and main agenda items at least four weeks in advance. Allocated Members and Ward Members are notified of the meeting as early as possible to allow them to attend if they wish.
- Residents will be invited to suggest agenda items and to submit questions in writing in advance of the meeting. Residents submitting questions may ask to remain anonymous if they wish.

## **7.4 Management of meetings**

- Meetings are chaired by a senior Housing Manager or, on occasions, by an Allocated Member.
- The Chair will manage the meeting, ensuring that any agreed ground rules are observed, that speakers are kept to time and that residents are given a fair chance to ask questions and make comments, as appropriate.
- If any attendee behaves in a way which is disruptive or disregards the agreed ground rules, the Chair may ask them to leave the meeting. If they refuse to do so, it is the Chair's right to close the meeting.
- The meetings are not minuted, but the Estate Manager takes notes of issues raised and any actions agreed. These are then published in the newsletter which follows each meeting.
- The City of London, as landlord, has no obligation to hold open meetings on its estates, but does so because we wish to build positive, ongoing relationships with residents. If at any stage officers feel that the meetings on any estate are being consistently disrupted and/or are being used to generate conflict, the Housing Service Director has the right to cancel one or more meetings or discontinue them for the foreseeable future.

## **7.5 Recording of meetings**

- The City can arrange for a meeting to be either filmed or audio recorded if residents express a wish for this to take place.
- Requests for recording to take place should be made to the Estate Manager at least one week before the meeting to allow equipment and staff to be organised.
- Any camera used will be focused on the speakers only. Any member of staff not wishing to be filmed can speak from the side of the room.
- The Chair will draw to residents' attention that recording is taking place at the start of the meeting. If a majority of residents object to the filming, it will not take place.
- If at any stage the view of the Chair is that recording is, in some way proving detrimental to the good conduct of the meeting, it is his/her right to discontinue it.
- A link to the recording will be placed on the estate pages of the City's website within one week of the meeting so that residents not able to attend can view it.

## **8. Protocol for working with resident groups**

### **8.1 Introduction**

- The City of London Housing Service believes that the existence of resident groups and associations enhances the richness of life on our social housing estates by encouraging residents to meet each other and to be part of the community.
- We support the right of any group, which is non-political and exists for the benefit of residents, to form on an estate. We are committed to treating all groups equally.

### **8.2 Registering group details**

- We have a simple form which groups must complete and return to the Estate Manager if they wish to benefit from the support available to them. The form should be renewed annually so that the Estate Office has up to date contact details.
- A group should comprise only residents of the estate and non-residential homeowners.
- A list of current groups on the estate and a contact for each will be printed in each Estate Newsletter.

### **8.3 Support available for all groups**

- Groups can apply for a small grant by completing a simple application form and submitting this to the Estate Manager. The form, and guidelines, are available separately. Applications may be made for help with ongoing running costs, or the cost of running an event or activity for residents. Grants are also available to individuals.
- Training for groups and individuals may be arranged if requested. Examples of the type of training which can be provided are:
  - Charing and running meetings;
  - Note taking;

- Running events;
- Carrying out risk assessments;
- Equalities and diversity;
- First aid.
- The Housing Service pays for indemnity insurance to cover events run by staff and/or residents on its estates.
- Facilities such as printing, copying, use of meeting space etc may be available from the estate office, depending on the number of groups requesting this and what availability there is. Materials such as printer paper may also be available.
- Model constitutions and equalities policies are available for groups to use if they wish.
- The Estate Office may allow access to estate noticeboards for displaying A4 posters and may also be able to arrange for information to be sent out to residents via email or social media. The Estate Manager has the right to refuse to display or distribute any material which he/she considers to be misleading, inappropriate or offensive.

#### **8.4 Consultation and issues raised**

- The Housing Service believes that we should communicate and directly engage with the entire estate community. We do so via newsletters, Estate Meetings, bulletins, walkabouts and other means of communications.
- The focus of Estate Managers' time must be on working with the wider estate community rather than any one group. Therefore, there is no obligation for the Estate Manager to attend the meetings of any group unless he/she considers on occasion, that this is an appropriate use of time. Members of any group have the right to attend all open meetings, walkabouts and other events as residents of the estate.
- All consultation will be with the whole population of the estate or, in the case of major works, the residents affected. However, we welcome the views of resident groups, so they may submit a collective response to any consultation exercise, in addition to their individual responses as private residents. Any group views will be taken into consideration when the consultation feedback is analysed.
- A group, through its Chair or other nominated individual, may raise any issue or question with the Estate Manager. The Estate Manager will look into the issue raised and will send a response to all residents on the estate, through the Estate Newsletter or other channels. The response will record that the issue was raised by a specific group.

#### **8.5 Unacceptable behaviour from resident groups**

- We understand that there will be times when a group will give negative feedback or criticism to the Housing Service and we welcome this being done in a constructive way so that we can address areas of concern. However, if any person representing a group behaves in a way which is unacceptable and becomes vexatious, then we would need to take action. Examples would be abusive, or intimidating behaviour during meetings or excessive and/or inappropriate correspondence.

- In such cases, our first action would be to draw the issue to the attention of the Chair or another officer of the group, asking for it to cease. If the unacceptable behaviour continues, it may be necessary to withdraw from communicating with or recognising the group.
- This will only take place with the agreement of the Director of Community & Children's Services. If approval to such a request is given, the group will cease to be eligible to apply for grants or to receive other support from officers.

## **9. Monitoring the strategy**

The Projects & Improvements Manager is responsible for monitoring the implementation of this strategy. A report will be brought to the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee annually to update Members on resident communications and engagement. The efficacy of the strategy will be monitored through the following key performance indicators:

- % of residents satisfied or very satisfied with communications and customer service on their estate
- % of residents who feel their views are taken into account.

These will be measured by the annual satisfaction survey and the STAR survey held every three years.

### **Further Information**

For further advice or information regarding the contents of this strategy please contact the Projects & Improvements Manager, Kate Bowen at [katherine.bowen@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:katherine.bowen@cityoflondon.gov.uk).