

Participation and Consultation Policy



1 Aims of policy

This policy aims to provide a framework that will give every tenant the opportunity to initiate, be involved in and influence decisions that affect their homes and neighbourhoods at a level they choose.

2 Scope of the policy

This policy relates to opportunities for tenants and residents to participate in the development, monitoring and improvement of services provided to them.

3 Monitoring, review and consultation

Chorley Community Housing will monitor the effectiveness of this policy by collating all relevant information and statistics and will use these when undertaking reviews of this policy and service delivery.

The policy will be reviewed whenever there are any relevant changes to legislation, case law or good practice that would impact on this policy.

The policy will be reviewed at least annually by the Tenants Forum.

4 Responsible Officer

Director of Customer and Neighbourhood Services

5 Contact details

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Executive Summary

Chorley Community Housing is committed to putting tenant involvement at the heart of everything it does. We appreciate the value of involving tenants in decisions about how their homes and neighbourhoods are managed and maintained. We are committed to ensuring that tenants can be involved to a level of their choice and in a range of ways. This policy outlines how this will be achieved.

1 Introduction

Chorley Community Housing believes that tenant involvement is key in order to:

- Continually improve services and the housing stock.
- Enhance accountability.
- Increase satisfaction levels with our service
- Build social and community capacity in order to create sustainable communities.
- Help strengthen communication between tenants and staff.

Chorley Community Housing will work with tenants to develop a new Tenants Compact and work towards agreeing and implementing a comprehensive tenant engagement strategy setting out options for involvement, standards for tenant engagement, targets and reporting arrangements.

We appreciate, however, that not all tenants wish to be involved by attending formal meetings. We will also bear in mind that some tenants are willing and able to contribute more time than others and that different levels of involvement need to be made available to accommodate this.

We will explore alternative involvement methods with tenants for informing, consulting and involving. Our aim is to agree with tenants a menu of involvement opportunities, from simple methods such as repair reply slips and surveys in their homes through to Board membership.

1 Policy

The decisions that we take to develop our services can have a real impact on the lives of tenants, their homes and neighbourhoods. Therefore we intend to go further than carrying out ordinary market research to find out what tenants want from our services; we also aim to involve tenants in helping us make decisions about the business and we consult widely when we consider making changes to services.

Participation can be at various levels:

Information - information to all tenants about services, performance etc

Consultation – consultation with tenants about changes to services

Involvement – involvement in decisions about local services, overall management decisions etc.

Control – controlling local services, tenants on the Board

Our Key Objectives:

- Keep tenants informed
- Ensure effective consultation methods
- Provide a range of ways for genuine tenant involvement and participation that meets the needs of individuals and collective groups of tenants, either informally or formally
- Provide training to individuals and groups of tenants
- Respond to the different needs of minorities and strive to ensure services are accessible and equality of treatment for all.
- Provide staff resources and funding to make involvement happen
- Work in partnership with customers and others

Access, Customer Care & Service Focus

We will:

- Make tenant engagement an integral part of our business & culture
- Ensure all tenants have a copy of our Tenants Handbook, which contains information about our business and useful contact details.
- Provide a range of ways for service users to contact us – by telephone, in person or electronically.
- Use a broad range of channels to enable effective communication with tenants as well as traditional methods e.g. meetings, surveys and newsletters we will investigate the use of innovative methods such as e-mail, virtual forums and text messaging.
- Provide all our information in easily understood language and where possible our literature will be approved by our tenants by developing a panel of tenants to proof read and advise on the language used in our documentation.
- Ensure written information is made available in various different formats including, tape, large print, Braille etc. We will ensure full records are kept to ensure that all tenants are communicated with in the format that they require/request.
- Put in place an Engagement Strategy containing aims and objectives agreed with our tenants and an Action Plan of how this will be achieved
- Agree a set of service standards with our tenants against which aims and objectives can be measured
- Develop with tenants a comprehensive compact
- Continue to produce, in partnership with tenants, a quarterly newsletter.
- Provide regular feedback to tenants on tenant involvement showing how their involvement has influenced services or future plans
- Ensure staff are adequately trained

Options For Involvement:

The Tenant Participation structures will run alongside the Board. All groups will report into the Tenant Forum, which will be run by the Tenant Forum Committee. The Committee will monitor the performance and targets relating to Tenant Participation and will make recommendations to the Board on behalf of tenants.

We will ensure that all tenants have a channel of communication into the organisation, either through theme groups, neighbourhood groups or an individual basis in order to ensure all our tenants have a voice at the Tenant Forum.

We will continue to develop the Tenant Participation structures that are in place and ensure that a menu of involvement is developed in order to enable all our tenants to be involved in a way and to a level of their choice.

The Board

The Board of Chorley Community Housing will make decisions about the policies and strategic direction of the organisation.

Tenants will hold four of the twelve places on the Board, which will include an equal number of Council nominees and Independent members. Members of the Board are required to attend Board meetings.

Tenants who access our tenant participation structures will be encouraged and supported to gain the knowledge and experience necessary to stand for election to the Board. This will ensure a degree of democracy and accountability in the process of selecting tenant representatives on the Board.

Tenant Forum Committee

The Committee will provide a link between the Board and the Tenants Forum. They will be responsible for running the Tenant Forum and feeding through to the Board any recommendations that are brought up through our Tenant Participation Structures.

The Committee will be elected from the Tenants Forum at the Annual General meeting.

Tenants Forum

The Tenants Forum will remain our main consultative body. All other groups will report to the Forum, which will help co-ordinate and develop the work of existing and new groups.

The Tenant Forum is a tenant run organisation that is supported by the Tenant Participation Team. The members of the Tenant Forum will continue to undertake a great deal of training in order to develop their knowledge and thereby enable them to take a lead in developing the Forum and services to tenants.

With increased methods of Involvement becoming available to our tenants, the Tenants Forum will become ever more important in helping to support and develop more groups and individuals to ensure as many tenants as possible are involved in shaping all our services.

Tenants Investment Group (TIG)

The TIG will be consulted on items relating to all aspects of budgets and investment in the housing stock e.g. annual rent and service charge plans, investment programmes etc. They will make recommendations to the Board.

Local groups

Chorley Community Housing will work towards the principles of neighbourhood management in order to create sustainable communities. We will develop our work with new and existing tenants groups to build their confidence and capacity to question and give their views about the services they receive.

We will work with tenants to establish a positive sense of community with values and aspirations based on reasonable standards of behaviour, tolerance and community confidence, pride and support.

Theme Groups

These are currently two focus groups set up to look at specific aspects of the Housing service;

- Repairs and Maintenance Focus Group
- Anti-Social Behaviour Focus Group

These groups meet on a regular basis to challenge, set, review and monitor performance indicators and investigate new and innovative ways of working.

We will continue to develop these theme groups and create new groups to look both at specific aspects of the Housing Service and to look at different issues; some proposed areas for themed groups are;

- Allocations group
- Disability group
- Young persons group
- Older persons group

Editorial Team

Chorley Community Housing will work in partnership with tenants on the editorial team of the newsletter. The newsletter is a useful tool to get information to tenants about issues which affect them. It will be our main way of feeding back to tenants the work and achievements of tenant participation.

We will:

- Increase the opportunities for tenants to participate in and influence the work of the organisation by providing a range of options for engagement
- Consult and involve tenants in all parts of our service including
 - Setting service standards
 - Setting targets and monitoring performance
 - Issues relating to the maintenance and physical improvement of their homes and neighbourhoods
 - Development and acquisition of new Housing.
- Aim to provide new and innovative methods of involvement such as:
 - open days
 - road shows
 - drop in sessions
 - postal surveys & questionnaires
 - telephone surveys
 - information technology – e mail, internet
 - tenant inspectors
 - annual tenants conference
 - one to one interviews
 - text messaging
 - virtual forum

We will monitor the level of interest and the impact of initiatives. We are prepared to be flexible and are willing to experiment and try new ways of engaging tenants.

Tenant Management Organisations

Chorley Community Housing recognises that tenant management organisations can also provide effective housing management that delivers community benefits. Any applications received would be considered in accordance with Housing Corporation guidelines to ensure that issues in relation to current regulations are adhered to at the time of application.

Diversity

Chorley Community Housing does not discriminate against any person or other organisation on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, disability, nationality, gender, sexuality, age, class, appearance, religion,

responsibility for dependants, unrelated criminal activities, being HIV positive or having AIDS, or any other matter which causes a person to be treated with injustice

We are committed to ensuring all sections of our community have a voice and believe that everyone has a valuable role within our participation structures.

We will:

- Be inclusive, ensuring that our all our mechanisms for involvement are fair, open and accessible to all within our communities.
- Develop methods of reaching Tenants that have been seen as traditionally hard to engage such as Young People, Older People, Ethnic Minorities, less physically able people and other sections of our neighbourhoods who do not generally engage within Tenant Participation.

We believe that by engaging with these groups we can ensure our services are tailored to everyone within our neighbourhoods whilst building individual capacity and community cohesion.

In order to achieve this we will;

- Identify hard to reach groups and assess their particular requirements and barriers to information, involvement and engagement
- Contact voluntary, community and religious institutions, as appropriate, to seek support, guidance and assistance in reaching their members.
- Produce information in a range of formats and disseminate through a range of channels, to ensure it reaches specific target groups e.g. in translation, large print or Braille.
- Ensure all our meeting venues are accessible to all sections of our communities including disabled access and being sensitive to people's religious and personal sensitivities.

Resources for Tenant Involvement

We will ensure that staffing and budgetary provision is sufficient to support and develop involvement structures.

Through staff training, job shadowing and advertising positive outcomes we will raise the profile of tenant participation within the organisation.

Training for Tenants

Tenants will be supported in obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary to be effectively involved. A skills audit of tenants will be completed and a training programme will be drawn up to include subjects such as;

- Housing Issues
- Committee Skills (Chair, Secretary & Treasurer)
- Confidence Building
- Assertiveness
- How to access funds
- Computer skills

- Training for potential tenant Board members
- Board member training package

We will endeavour to provide training in a manner that our tenants prefer for example, in their own communities or on a one to one basis. We will fully evaluate and review all our training in order to ensure that our training is effective.

Impact of Tenant Involvement

We appreciate the value of involving tenants in decisions about how their homes and neighbourhoods are managed and maintained. It makes good business sense, as we need to make sure that all our services are efficient and effective and respond to and meet the needs of our customers.

Involving tenants is essential in designing and improving services that people want. It also allows individuals and groups to build skills, knowledge, ability and confidence they need to improve the neighbourhoods they live in. This is key to developing sustainable communities.

We aim to achieve value for money by agreeing with tenants desired outcomes and measuring success against these.

We will closely monitor the outcomes of services we provide to give evidence that tenants are influencing and shaping the quality and effectiveness of services.

We will do this by:

- Developing and using a database to record tenants and other stakeholders preferred areas and methods of involvement
- Evaluating any training and consultation events to get feedback
- Carrying out an annual satisfaction survey of a representative section of our tenants, covering every part of our business. We will make the results public and use the data to influence policy decisions and our Business plan,
- Use of mystery shoppers

3 Monitoring, review and consultation

Performance indicators and targets will be set in conjunction with tenants. These will be regularly monitored by the Tenants Forum and reported to the Board on a six monthly basis.

In order to assess and compare performance, Chorley Community Housing will seek to obtain information from other comparable RSLs. The Tenant Participation Team will attend the North West Tenant Participation working group to ensure Chorley Community Housing is using all best practice.

A review of the policy will be undertaken whenever there are any relevant changes to legislation, case law or good practice that would impact on this policy.

4 Jargon Buster

Service standards - a minimum level of service that can be clearly described or measured (for example, we will carry out a repair within a specific period of time)

Virtual Forum - we aim to maintain a list of all tenants who are interested in getting involved by means other than face to face meetings. From time to time we will write to these people or contact them by telephone or e-mail for their views.

Mystery shoppers – independent people who test our services without notice to check the quality of services we provide.

Skills Audit – an assessment of peoples' skills and experience in order to identify training requirements.