

BRISTOL COMMUNITY HOUSING FOUNDATION

RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

Revised June 2008

1.0 Introduction

The Foundation's slogan 'More Than Just a Roof' makes explicit that providing quality services to our tenants, enabling and supporting residents to involve themselves in the work of the Foundation and the community, and helping to create sustainable neighbourhoods is its core business.

This Strategy is an outcome of the Service Review of Resident Involvement carried out in April 2008. Meaningful resident involvement is a core aim of BCHF, ensuring that statutory and regulatory objectives are met and that tenants are able to see the effect on their involvement.

2.0 Key objectives

The Foundation's Resident Involvement Strategy aims to:

- Make clear BCHF's commitment to involving residents
- Provide a number of opportunities and choices for residents to choose the extent to which they can get involved in the way their homes are managed and services delivered.
- Listen and be responsive to residents' views about the efficiency and effectiveness of services provided to ensure that there is continuous improvement.
- Be accountable to residents, listening to issues raised, complaints and suggestions. Time is taken to inform and explain actions taken so that residents understand what can be achieved and the budgetary and other constraints within which the Foundation works.
- Be regarded as an organisation that helps people living in and around its properties to engage, join with others and work towards a better quality of life for all communities. This is particularly relevant in Horfield where the Foundation works with the Upper Horfield Community Trust and has the largest number of BCHF properties and where a new community is being created.

3.0 Background

In 2007 the Housing Corporation's '*People First*' set out the Corporation's expectations on involvement for housing associations and their associated circular outlined regulatory requirements. Also in 2007 the Chartered Institute of

Housing (CiOH) produced ‘ *Leading the Way: achieving resident –driven accountability and excellence*’, which detailed approaches to increasing resident empowerment.

BCHF’s first Resident Involvement Policy was approved in December 2004 and a number of opportunities were provided for tenants to be involved. As BCHF expanded, the Tenants’ Panel (a meeting open to all tenants), requested that a more representative structure should be set up. An interim Tenants’ Committee was formed and in the summer of 2007 a new Tenants’ Committee was formed.

With the appointment of a Community Development Worker in April 2008, BCHF has expanded its work with communities in the Upper Horfield area.

This Strategy encompasses the recommendations from the Review of Resident Involvement in April 2008 and sets out how residents will be involved in influencing the work of BCHF in the future.

4.0 Opportunities For Residents To Be Informed And Involved

- Status surveys will be sent out by post every 3 years. The next one will be in summer 2008 following the completion of phase 4 in Horfield. Individual questionnaires will be carried out on specific topics in between these times; these may be by post or face to face.
- Questionnaires about repair services will continue to be sent to tenants; in addition, telephone questionnaires will be used to assess the quality of the repairs service.
- Exit interviews – tenants leaving BCHF will be asked to fill out a questionnaire.
- Newsletters will be sent out three times a year giving tenants information and requesting feedback. Tenants will form part of the editorial panel for the newsletter.
- The Tenants’ Handbook gives information about services and is regularly updated as is the BCHF website.
- Service Improvement Review Panels. Up to two Board members and two tenants will be members of each Service Review Panel which is chaired by the Chief Executive. Focus groups of a random sample of tenants will be used for each review.
- Tenant inspectors/mystery shoppers will be developed during 2008/9.
- A Readers’ Panel will be set up during 2008 to read leaflets produced to ensure they are free from jargon and easily understood.
- The Disability Forum is made up of tenants who have various disabilities. They will be consulted on key service and design issues to ensure the needs of disabled people are taken into account when any changes are made.
- Tenants will be consulted when they are affected directly by a proposal such as the installation of a bench near their home or changes in design.

- Tenants are consulted about service charges in line with legislation; this may be on a face to face basis for a scheme or by letter.
- Settling in visits are made when a tenant has lived in their home for around six weeks to check out any problems with the home, housing and welfare benefit or the environment.
- Complaints and compliments are used in making changes to service provision.

5.0 Accountability

The following structures are in place to provide accountability to BCHF tenants.

5.1 Tenants' Committee

BCHF's Tenants' Committee is made up of tenants who have volunteered to get more involved in the work of the Foundation, ensuring that residents' views are incorporated and that problems that affect a number of residents are raised with staff.

5.1.1 Membership:

Tenants' Committee members come from various locations where BCHF owns or manages properties. Membership will be reviewed over time as BCHF expands into different geographical areas. Currently membership will be sought from :

- Upper Horfield West 3 tenants
- Upper Horfield East 3 tenants
- Austen House/Eliot Close 1 tenant
- Southmead/Henbury 1 tenant

5.1.2 Role:

The Tenants' Committee has an approved constitution. The role of the Committee is:

- to raise and discuss issues from the wider body of residents (often through street contacts)
- involvement in local groups such as the Pride of Place walkabouts and PACT (Police and Communities Together)
- to understand tenants' and landlords' rights and responsibilities, the level of service to expect and what to do to make a complaint
- to help set local performance indicators and receive reports including how BCHF compares with other housing associations
- to make suggestions on how BCHF can improve
- to challenge BCHF staff or to ask the Board to account for something

- to have an input into the setting and monitoring of service standards eg. answering the telephone, dealing with an enquiry etc.
- to have an input into reports, reviews going to the Board including the community strategy, the budget, the asset management strategy
- to suggest estate improvements informed by the Pride of Place group
- Tenants' Committee members, having had appropriate training, should regularly take part in interview panels for staff recruitment.

5.1.3 Meetings:

Tenants' Committee members are involved in a number of BCHF activities and are able to discuss issues at meetings held approximately every six weeks, (the week before a meeting of the Board of Management.) BCHF street contacts will also let Tenants' Committee members know of any issues brought to their attention by other residents.

A meeting is held between the Tenants' Committee and the Board of Management annually. If Tenants' Committee wants an agenda item put on to the Board Agenda, the Chair can contact one of the tenant Board members or the Chair of the Board.

The Tenants' Committee holds open meetings several times a year and invites all tenants and local residents where appropriate on topics of interest such as the adoption of roads and landscaping by the City Council.

5.2 Board Membership

There are spaces for up to four Board members who are tenants on BCHF Board of Management. All Board members stand for three years and for a maximum of nine. Tenants are independent Board members and give their individual opinions on items for discussion.

When a vacancy arises, all tenants are invited to express an interest in becoming a Board member. Tenants who respond are asked to attend a Board meeting as an observer and a selection panel where their interest and ability is assessed.

5.3 Shareholding Membership

BCHF tenants are able to hold a £1 share. This enables them to vote at the Annual General Meeting held every Autumn.

5.4 Pride of Place Walkabouts in Horfield

All local residents are encourage to take part in walkabouts in the area and meet with agencies including BCHF who agree to deal with problems raised on the walkabouts such as dumped rubbish, uneven pavements, overgrown gardens

and pieces of land and other environmental issues. Tenants are encouraged to get involved in similar arrangements in other parts of Bristol.

5.5 Police and Communities Together (PACT) meetings

Local residents are encouraged to take part in local PACT meetings where the community police team agree a set of priorities with local residents which are reported on at the following meeting. The Housing Services Manager attends these meetings in Horfield for BCHF.

5.6 Neighbourhood Partnership

Local residents are encouraged to become involved in their local Neighbourhood Partnership which is attended by BCHF staff as a member of the Partnership.

6.0 Creating Sustainable Neighbourhoods

The Community Development Strategy sets out how BCHF will work as a community-based housing association. A great deal of work carried out in the Upper Horfield area by the Community Worker is carried out in conjunction with the Upper Horfield Community Trust.

In other areas where BCHF has properties, residents will be helped to engage with organisations and networks already running in the area.

7.0 Information And Training

BCHF recognises the importance of ensuring tenants are given support so that they are informed and have the confidence to raise issues, hold meetings and carry out specific functions such as Tenant Inspectors.

This will be provided in various ways:

- BCHF staff will speak to members of Tenants' Committee about areas of their work
- Independent training providers will give guidance and training to tenants on specific issues, for example involve them in developing the way the system of street contacts works
- Tenants will be given opportunities to meet tenants from other housing associations and get information and training in informal workshops through events organised in Bristol by Bristol Partnership for Tenants. Three events annually are organised on a Saturday for tenants on topics suggested by tenants on the feedback forms for each event.
- Tenants can attend events held by training organisations such as TPAS, INSTEP and CIH which enable tenants to meet other tenants from other areas of the country and discuss national issues.

- Visits will be arranged to other organisations with tenants to find out about projects and resident involvement in other areas.
- Policies and procedures will be written in plain English and in a way that they can be easily understood by all residents.

8.0 Resources

The Foundation will agree annual budgets for tenant participation and community involvement. This will cover costs such as transport, carers' costs, signing and interpreting to enable people to attend meetings, fact finding trips or training/networking events. In time, the Foundation may wish to devolve budgets to tenants for specific activities.

9.0 Equality And Diversity

The Foundation's Equality and Diversity Policy sets out the ways that the Foundation will ensure it meets the diverse needs of its residents. In particular with regard to resident involvement the Foundation will:

- Gather information on individual needs at sign-up and through the course of a tenancy to enable the Foundation to respond better to individual needs
- Hold meetings in accessible and acceptable venues.
- Use Interpreters and translations when the need arises.
- Meet with people in their own situations and gatherings and not always expect residents to come to a particular arranged venue.
- Encourage residents to get involved in other settings and be accompanied at times to increase confidence.
- Provide differing opportunities so residents can choose their level of involvement, if any.
- Racist or other comments directed at minority groups will be dealt with by BCHF members of staff, and tenants given help and opportunities to discuss difficult issues to enable them to feel confident in challenging remarks.
- Continue to partner with other agencies in addressing issues of community cohesion in the Upper Horfield area

10.0 Monitoring And Review

The impact of resident involvement will be monitored and reported bi-annually to the Board in the form of an Impact Statement. This Strategy will be reviewed in 2011.

TENANTS' EXPENSES POLICY

Tenants should not be out of pocket when attending meetings or training. This policy covers reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses.

Attending meetings

Transport will be arranged for people attending Tenants' Panel meetings or other training/networking events arranged by the Foundation where tenants request transport because they are unable to get to a meeting themselves. Tenants will be expected to share transport to minimise costs.

When attending Board meetings, tenant Board members are entitled to claim expenses in the same way as other Board members.

Training/networking events

Tenants using public transport will have the cost reimbursed; the ticket should be attached to the claim form.

People using their cars for journeys within Bristol will be reimbursed for the mileage clocked at 40p per mile.

When travelling to places outside Bristol, second class rail fare should be claimed (mileage should only be claimed if this is the cheaper option).

Carers' costs

Reimbursement of the actual cost incurred will be made, so long as this is reasonable, where a tenant cares for a child or children or an elderly or disabled person in their own home, and care needs to be provided while they are out. It is the tenant's responsibility to find a suitable carer.

A receipt or note from the carer must be attached to the claim form stating their name and address and the amount charged.

Expenses will not be paid for care provided by a family member living in the same household.