

Customer Engagement Strategy

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 It is our tenants' legislative right to take part in decision making processes and influencing decisions about housing policies, decisions and services.
- 1.2 Glen Oaks recognises the importance of tenants in this decision-making process and enables tenants to take part in a number of different ways that will be detailed in this document.
- 1.3 Glen Oaks endeavours to take on board all of our tenants' views and is constantly working to improve the means by which we achieve this.
- 1.4 This strategy is a working document and as such reflects legal, financial, constitutional and staffing constraints.

2.0 Equality & Diversity Statement

- 2.1 The Association is intent on ensuring people or communities do not face discrimination or social exclusion due to any of the following protected characteristics: age; disability; sex; marriage & civil partnership; race; religion or belief; sexual orientation; gender reassignment; pregnancy & maternity.
- 2.2 This policy complies with the Association's Equality & Diversity policy.
- 2.3 The Association will regularly review this policy for equal opportunities implications and take the necessary action to address any inequalities that result from the implementation of the policy.

3.0 Communicating with Tenants

- 3.1 Good communication is essential in order to achieve our aim of effective communication with our tenants.
- 3.2 The following principles will be applied in any communication with our tenants:
 - It will be clear, concise and easy to understand.
 - Printed material will be in plain language and jargon free.

- Where required a translation/interpreter service will be made available.
- Assistance for visual or hearing-impaired people will be provided on request.

3.3 Any special requirements will be identified at the start of the tenancy.

3.4 The Association will ensure that in any communication the staff member responsible for dealing with the matter is clearly identified.

3.5 The Association will undertake regular surveys to find out how well we are communicating with our tenants/residents.

4.0 Background to the Strategy

4.1 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 placed a legal duty on local authorities and Registered Social Landlords to have tenant participation strategies in place, and to maintain a register of tenant organisations (RTO's) that meet the criteria for registration. The Act introduced a right for tenant groups and individual tenants to be consulted by the landlord on issues affecting them.

4.2 Furthermore, The Scottish Social Housing Charter, which came into effect in April 2012, aims to improve the quality and value of services tenants receive and sets out 16 outcomes and standards that social landlords should aim to achieve.

4.3 There are three key outcomes with particular relevance to tenant participation, namely:

Communication: Social landlords manage their businesses so that: Tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

Participation: Social landlords manage their businesses so that: Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

Rents and Service Charges: Social landlords set rents and service charges in consultation with their tenants and other customers so that:

A balance is struck between the level of services provided, the cost of the services, and how far current and prospective tenants and other customers can afford them.

- 4.4 Tenants get clear information on how rent and other money is spent, including details of individual items of expenditure above thresholds agreed between landlord and tenants.
- 4.5 As a social landlord the Association is responsible for meeting the standards and outcomes set in the Charter. We are required to submit annual information to the Scottish Housing Regulator to demonstrate that we are meeting the outcomes. (Annual Report on the Charter - ARC)
- 4.6 We also require to report our performance to our tenants and other customers, and our customers will need to play a key role in determining the content of our annual report.
- 4.7 The Scottish Housing Regulator is responsible for monitoring, assessing and reporting on how well social landlords achieve the outcomes of the Charter.

5.0 Tenant Participation Structures

5.1 Glen Oaks Housing Association has the following existing structures of participation in place:

- **Board:** The Board is made up of 15 members responsible for all governance issues relating to the management of the organisation. It has the highest authority in the decision making process within the Association, and has the responsibility to promote and support the principles and processes that enable tenants to get involved in the management of their homes and in the wider community.
- **Sub-Committees:** The Sub-Committees are responsible for specific functional areas. There are 4 Sub-Committees, namely Technical (incorporates Health & Safety), Housing Services, Audit and Corporate Services. They have devolved responsibility from the Board for making decisions in accordance with the overall aims and objectives of the Association. All members of the Sub-Committees are also members of the Board.

- **Service Improvement Group:** All social landlords must deliver quality services, involve their tenants in assessing the performance of these services and be able to demonstrate value for money. We have therefore set up a Service Improvement Group to listen to the experiences and opinions of our customers. This group consists of tenants and / or owners who come together to discuss specific issues and tell us how they perceive services are provided. They will propose improvements to service delivery which will subsequently be considered by the Corporate Management Team and Board. Residents will be invited to take part in these groups via articles printed in newsletters, the reception screen and new tenant interviews.
- **Arden Tenants Association:** The Association works closely with the Arden Tenants Association which is a registered tenants' organisation. Staff members attend quarterly meetings where information is shared with tenants and residents. The Tenants Association is an independently constituted body. Glen Oaks consults with the Arden Tenants Association seeking their views on the services we provide.
- **Glen Oaks' Newsletter:** The Association's newsletter is produced every quarter to keep tenants/residents informed of the Association's activities and to notify them of policy reviews or changes to policies and/or procedures. Tenants' views are sought on articles to be featured. A variety of competitions and events request tenant participation and involvement.

5.2 The Association also places emphasis on consulting with our customers through various surveys. This form of tenant participation is important in finding out customers' opinions of our service. This in turn can lead to informed decisions that improve our customer service. Information from the results is used in a variety of ways. We discuss the results and agree relevant action plans with our Board and staff team. The results are published in our newsletters and on the website. The Association currently undertakes the following surveys:

- **Residents' Satisfaction Survey:** This is carried out every 3 years and will reflect any requirements set out by the Scottish Housing Regulator. The survey will seek to secure opinion from a representative sample of the Association's customers and will be carried out by an appropriately qualified consultant. The survey seeks to ascertain customer satisfaction on the majority of the

Association's services. In approaching this survey the Association will seek customer input into the design of the survey to ensure that it reflects issues identified through contact with our customers.

- **Tenant Profiling Survey:** This is carried out to gain a deeper insight into our customers and their needs. It provides crucial information to allow us to better respond to tenants' needs and expectations. It also helps us to tailor our services and identify where resources are most needed. It gives us a better idea of future housing needs and an assessment of tenants' priorities for major repairs.
- **Customer Satisfaction Surveys:** These are used to monitor our customers' experience of our service. The outcomes from the feedback received are reported and distributed to each department on a monthly basis to ensure that we continually review our service delivery. We currently survey the following services on an ongoing basis:

Access to Allocations: We ask prospective applicants to tell us about how they found the process of applying for a house. From this we update and review our Allocations procedure and provide relevant additional information for prospective new tenants.

New Tenants: A survey is sent to all new tenants to ask them about our standard of service from being offered the property to acceptance. We request feedback on the condition of the property and satisfaction with repairs. We take the opportunity to ask if there are any other services that the tenant may need or like and follow this up accordingly.

Stair Cleaning: A sample of our customers who have a stair cleaning service are asked for their views on a monthly basis. The results of this are confirmed to the contractor and also reported to our Board. This helps to inform us of the standards our residents expect and allows the Committee to be fully aware of the contractor's work.

Post Occupancy: These seek the views of tenants/sharing owners who have moved into new developments. The survey places an emphasis on physical aspects of design and environment.

Repairs: All tenants are sent a survey form that monitors their views of the Association's repairs service. The survey seeks customers' opinions and their perception of the service.

Cyclical Repairs / Planned Maintenance: These surveys seek the views of our customers on how satisfied they were with the work that was carried out in their homes either internally or externally. We use this information to monitor our customers' issues which helps us improve our service.

Garden Maintenance: This survey is sent to all customers that are on our Garden Maintenance Scheme. We are seeking the views of our customers who pay for this service to monitor areas our customers are or are not particularly happy with. We take these comments on board and discuss with our Estate Maintenance Contractor ways in which we can improve the service we provide.

Complaints: Customers who complain about any aspect of the Association's service are asked to complete a short survey to allow us to monitor how effective our procedure is.

Gold Service: This survey is used to ascertain tenants and sharing owners' opinions of Gold Service, and is used to review policy and procedure to improve this service for our Gold Service tenants.

Customer Service feedback cards: These are issued with every newsletter, asking a series of questions on our service to provide regular feedback and opportunities for improvement.

- **Tenant Portal:** A tenant portal is available on our website which allows our tenants and residents to access information and to leave feedback on our services.

In all of these approaches the Association will ensure that:

- (1) The survey has a purpose and that tenants views are used to improve on our services.
- (2) Take appropriate steps to maximise response rate, whether this is in the form of face-to-face meetings or incentives for return.

- (3) Ensure feedback is given following the survey in a clear and honest manner.
- (4) Publish outcomes from any identified actions.

5.3 Another key element in providing the Association with valuable feedback is its Complaints Handling Procedure. Every expression of dissatisfaction with our service is recorded on our IT system and followed up in line with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's procedures.

5.4 The Association has a website as a means of two-way communication with our customers. Policy reviews are recorded on the website for potential feedback. The Association's website is available at **www.glenoaks.org.uk**

5.5 The Association also uses social media and text messaging as a way of communicating with our customers.

5.6 The Association is keen to involve its residents in a range of community activities during the year including:

- Residents Event / Conference
- Annual Gala Day for all of our communities which is held in Arden
- Darnley Gala Day and Fun Run
- Garden Competitions
- Over 60s Party
- Santa's Grotto

6.0 Information

6.1 Glen Oaks Housing Association aims to ensure that tenants, owners and sharing owners have access to information on its services and policies. This is achieved by:

- Convening a Residents' Conference.
- Providing leaflets to tenants on statutory obligations of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. These are given to new tenants.
- Giving tenants information in respect of Section 23 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 - Right to information.
- Producing an Annual Report highlighting the Association's performance.
- Providing a Handbook for tenants

- Providing an information sheet for prospective Right to Buy owners.
- Preparing leaflets on policies and services and ensuring these are easily accessible.
- Encouraging tenants to get involved by being on our Tenant Consultation Register for reviewing Policies and procedures.
- Issuing quarterly Newsletters to tenants, owners and sharing owners.
- Providing information and advice to customers visiting our Reception area at our office, via an LCD screen.
- Marketing Gold Service to all new tenants, advising of its benefits.
- Providing information to tenants and tenants' groups on request.
- Holding public meetings to provide information on specific issues.
- Having open days to encourage participation on particular proposals.
- Regular liaison with tenants' groups.
- Ongoing development of the website including the tenant portal.
- Providing translated information where appropriate.
- Subscribing to Happy to Translate and other relevant support agencies.
- Estate walkabout.
- Local Events/ Gala days / Garden Competitions.
- Social Media
- Texts about certain events

7.0 Consultation with Tenants

- 7.1 The Association will consult tenants where significant changes in policy are to occur. The process and levels of consultation will vary dependant on the issue being discussed.
- 7.2 Consultation will be carried out using the groups detailed previously in this document. Feedback from tenants in this process should be used to further improve services.
- 7.3 Consultation will also take place on matters concerning standards of service offered to our customers.
- 7.4 Glen Oaks will consult with relevant Committees where any improvement work is to be carried out.

7.5 Glen Oaks has a legislative responsibility to fully consult with tenants prior to any proposed rent increase, giving at least 4 weeks notice in writing.

8.0 Promotion and Support of Tenants' Groups

8.1 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced the concept of Registered Tenants Organisations. This gave tenants a recognised role in participating with their landlord.

8.2 Where local tenants and owners express an interest in setting up a tenants group, and where no existing tenants group exists, the Association will assist in the development of these groups by:

- Providing a start-up grant.
- Providing practical support, for example helping with letters, leaflets and meeting arrangements.
- Make staff available to help with routine constitutional and record keeping matters.
- Make office premises available for group meetings.
- Promote opportunities for training and development.
- Provide information about Glen Oaks Housing Association on request.
- Provide help, advice and support where possible.

9.0 Registration and Recognition of Groups

9.1 The Association wishes to support the formation of local groups and considers that this form of activity contributes to a community-based approach, and is central to the tenant participation process.

9.2 Details of the registration criteria can be obtained from the Association's office.

10.0 Regional Participation Strategy

10.1 Glen Oaks will continue to pursue opportunities to engage with Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) on a regional level. The goal of this policy is to encourage the sharing of knowledge, information and practice between

RTOs. Arden Tenants Association will be encouraged to participate in this forum.

11.0 Training

11.1 The Association will aim to ensure Board members, staff, tenants, sharing owners and owners are equipped to engage in meaningful participation by:

- Providing induction training and information on participation for all new Board members and staff.
- Assist tenants to identify and receive training in relevant skills and knowledge.
- To implement ongoing training for staff as the strategy evolves.

12.0 Resources

12.1 To allow tenants/residents to participate in the management of their homes and neighbourhoods the Association will allocate resources to ensure that tenants are supported in their participation.

12.2 The Association will assist Registered Tenants Organisations to identify funding sources and will also set aside an annual budget of £5,000 for tenant participation.

12.3 The tenant participation budget will be used to:

- Provide a start-up grant.
- Provide practical support, for example helping with letters, leaflets and meeting arrangements.
- Make staff available to help in routine constitutional and record keeping matters.
- Make office premises available for group meetings.
- Promote opportunities for training and development.
- Provide information about Glen Oaks Housing Association on request.
- Provide help, advice and support where possible.
- Host Residents Conference.

13.0 Equality & Diversity

13.1 In developing customer participation, the Association will take account of the requirements of all tenants/residents/groups who may have an interest in the process.

13.2 We will ascertain tenant requirements at the start of the tenancy to ensure that any special requirements are identified. A pro-forma will be used for this purpose.

13.3 We will use this information to ensure that we remove any perceived barriers to participation. Such barriers include:

- Methods Used: for example, by relying on methods which use IT, or which focus only on written communication.
- Physical Barriers: inaccessibility of venues, or lack of facilities at events. The Association has carried out an access audit.
- Attitudinal Barriers: the ways in which staff approach or respond to groups and individuals and the assumptions made.
- Financial: many equalities groups lack resources and this can affect their ability to respond.
- Cultural: for example, using inappropriate facilities or language.

14.0 Review and Monitoring

14.1 The Association will:

- Create a public register of recognised tenants' groups, which will be available at the Reception area in the Arden office
- Regularly review and update its policies and procedures in consultation with tenants, tenants groups, sharing owners and owners, and report changes in the Newsletter
- Work with the Service Improvement Group
- Report on outcomes of surveys to the Board
- Seek opportunities to develop and expand tenant participation
- Review and re-appraise the Customer Engagement Strategy
- Update calendar of events annually
- Engage in 'Wider Action Initiatives' with appropriate organisations.

15.0 Staff Involvement in Tenant Participation

- 15.1 In order to ensure the benefits of tenant participation, staff must embrace the principles of the Customer Engagement Strategy. All staff will be encouraged to operate within the context of providing a professional service to customers. All members of the Corporate Management Team will be required to ensure that staff understand the policy and its' implementation, and will have a responsibility to project tenant participation as an essential ingredient to good practice and not an activity that is undertaken separately.
- 15.2 It is through local contact that participation is carried out, and ultimately our Corporate Services, Housing Services and Technical staff are the key players in involving tenants to participate. However, it is important that all staff have a role to play in the implementation of this strategy.

16.0 Customer Charter

16.1 Glen Oaks Housing Association will:

- (1) Ensure that the Customer Engagement Strategy complies with the Association's Equality & Diversity Policy.
- (2) Ensure the fullest commitment from staff and Board members in the implementation of the strategy.
- (3) Provide where possible, practical support and training to enable tenants to participate fully.
- (4) Respond to recommendations and requests from our tenants and tenant groups in a manner that reflects dialogue and partnership.
- (5) Ensure that participation is an ongoing process and is reflected in all aspects of the Association's activities.
- (6) Make available information on services and performance across the range of its activities.
- (7) Ensure that communication is clear and designed for all customers who use our services.
- (8) Constantly review the Customer Engagement Strategy to ensure that it is relevant to customers' expectations of service.

- (9) Ensure compliance with the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

17.0 Complaints

- 17.1 We accept that despite our best efforts, problems arise from time to time. Should you have a complaint about how this Policy has been handled, or any other issue in respect of its implementation, then you should use our Complaints Procedure. This is a separate document and can be obtained from the Association's website or requested from the Association's office.
- 17.2 If you require the Complaints Procedure on tape, in Braille, in large print or in translation please tell us when you contact us.

18.0 Links with Other Policies

- 18.1 The Community Participation Strategy is related to the following policies:
- Equality & Diversity
 - Complaints
 - Customer Care

Appendix 1 - Events Calendar 2015

Month	Forum	Support	Activity
January	Arden Tenants Association Committee Meeting	Jean	Consultation about rent increase
	Board Meeting	Corporate Management Team	Governance
	Commonwealth Furniture legacy	Brenda	Community participation
	Over 60s Party	Sandra C & staff team	Community participation
February	Audit Sub Committee	Nicola	Governance
	Corporate Services Sub Committee	Alasdair & Nicola	Governance
	Technical & Health and Safety Sub Committee	Donald	Governance
	Service Improvement Group	Martha & Laura S	Tenant scrutiny
	Police & Communities Meeting	Jean & Alison	Information, advice & consultation
March	Board Meeting	Corporate Management Team	Governance
	Housing Services Sub Committee	Jean	Governance
	Arden Tenants Association Committee Meeting	Jean	Consultation
	Audit Sub Committee	Nicola	Governance
	Newsletter	Laura S & staff team	Information, advice and consultation
April	Service Improvement Group	Martha & Laura S	Tenant scrutiny

May	Board Meeting	Corporate Management Team	Governance
	Corporate Services Sub-Committee	Alasdair & Nicola	Governance
	Technical & Health and Safety Sub Committee	Donald	Governance
	Service Improvement Group	Martha & Laura S	Tenant scrutiny
June	Housing Services Sub Committee	Jean	Governance
	Audit Sub-Committee	Nicola	Governance
	Newsletter	Laura S & staff team	Information, advice and consultation
	Annual Gala Day	Sandra C & staff team	Community participation
	Arden Tenants Association Committee meeting	Jean	Consultation
	Police & Communities meeting	Jean & Alison	Information, advice and consultation
	Service Improvement Group	Martha & Laura S	Tenant scrutiny

August	Board Meeting	Corporate Management Team	Governance
	Corporate Services Sub-Committee	Alasdair & Nicola	Governance
	Technical & Health and Safety Sub Committee	Donald	Governance
	Police & Communities meeting	Jean & Alison	Information, advice and consultation
	Service Improvement Group	Martha & Laura S	Tenant scrutiny

September	AGM	Alasdair & Tricia	Governance
	Board Meeting	Corporate Management Team	Governance
	Garden Competition	Lynneanne & Sandra W	Community participation
	Darnley Fun Run & Gala Day	Martha & Laura S	Community participation
	Audit Sub Committee	Nicola	Governance
	Housing Services Sub Committee	Jean	Governance
October	Board Meeting	Corporate Management Team	Governance
	Service Improvement Group	Martha & Laura S	Tenant scrutiny
	Annual Report	Corporate Management Team & Tricia	Information
	Newsletter	Laura S & staff team	Information, advice and consultation
	Police and Communities meeting	Jean & Alison	Information, advice and consultation
November	Annual Board Strategy Session	Corporate Management Team	Business planning / Governance
	Board Meeting	Corporate Management Team	Governance
	Corporate Services Sub Committee	Alasdair & Nicola	Governance
	Technical & Health and Safety Sub Committee	Donald	Governance

December	Housing Services Sub Committee	Jean	Governance
	Service Improvement Group	Martha & Laura S	Tenant scrutiny
	Newsletter	Laura S & staff team	Information, advice and consultation
	Santa's Grotto	Kirsty, Sandra W & staff team	Community participation