

## **VHA Policy Document**

### **TENANT ENGAGEMENT AND INVOLVEMENT POLICY**

**Reviewed: January 2020**

**Next Review Due: January 2023**

## VHA Tenant Engagement and Involvement Policy

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 VHA is a tenant focused organisation which takes account of the needs and aspirations of our neighbourhoods and communities. Resident involvement is a key part of who we are and what we do. We work in a challenging environment where encouraging good levels of tenant involvement in influencing service delivery and the business is difficult. This is due to existing high levels of tenant satisfaction. However, we view resident involvement as vital for the business and for the communities we serve and believe that the aims and aspirations of the organisation should be tied closely to those of our communities. Effective resident involvement links into our Business Plan but we cannot know if we are doing or have done the right things unless we are engaging our customers effectively and meaningfully. This is a starting point for our involvement offer and consequently we have adopted the principles of the National Housing Federation's 'Together with Tenants' project.

1.3 As a registered housing association, VHA is also bound by the standards laid down by the Regulator of Social Housing. They have made clear through their Regulatory Framework that housing associations, including VHA should work to an approach called 'co-regulation'. Within this, landlords are required to make sure that residents' priorities shape the services they offer, with tenants fully monitoring and scrutinising what they do and holding the organisation to account if performance needs to be improved.

1.4 Guidance on the required level of performance in this regard is contained within the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard (Appendix 1).

1.5 The Board actively supports the principles of resident involvement as a matter of best practice and seeks fully to deliver regulatory and best practice standards.

### **2. Key aims of the Resident Engagement and Involvement Policy**

2.1 We recognise that not all residents wish to get involved in an active and formal way, and that tailored approaches must be provided to suit the particular needs and wishes of every individual resident. We also appreciate that our residents have the right to choose not to be involved, but when they do get involved it should be, where possible, on their own terms.

2.2 This policy sets out how we will take positive action to introduce new ideas to involve people. We understand that this is often a dynamic scenario and we will look to regularly refresh our approach, and where required find new and creative ways to improve how residents and other partners can influence the quality of our services.

2.3 Specifically, we will also look to identify and reduce or remove barriers, which may stop or dissuade tenants from becoming involved.

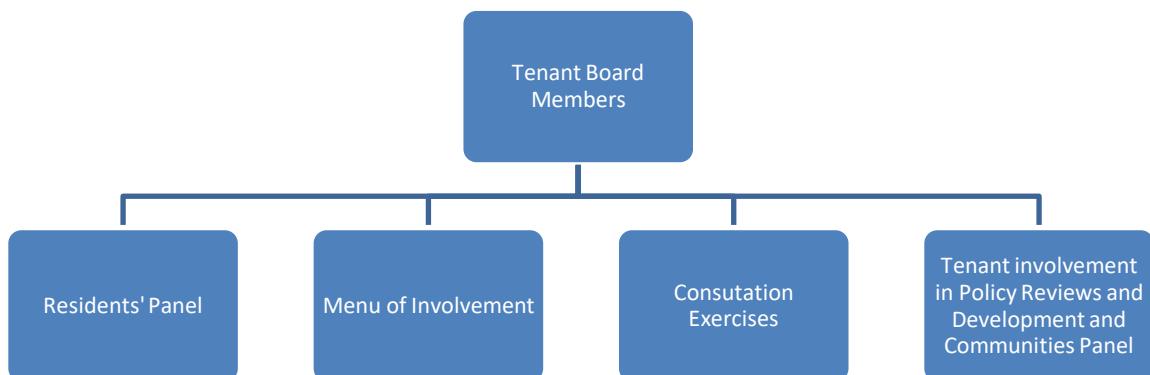
2.4 Through improved engagement and involvement, we will also seek improvements in service delivery and links between the community and the landlord, greater effectiveness and efficiencies through reduction in service failures and enhancement in social and community capital.

2.5 Through promoting involvement we believe we can extend the knowledge, skills and social capital enjoyed by tenants. This will not only enable them to engage in a meaningful and effective manner, but may also improve their potential for employment and/or raise their confidence to undertake other activities. In the medium and longer terms, this not only cements our relationship with our tenants, but also potentially safeguards VHA's interests in terms of income management.

2.6 The ultimate aim of this policy is to work in partnership with residents, other customers and partners in order to put the interests of residents at the core of VHA's business and provide wider opportunities for people to be consulted and put forward views.

2.7 In so doing, we will look to provide good quality opportunities for involvement which fully take account of the diversity of our tenants and make participation as rewarding as possible.

### **3. Structures for Participation**



3.1 We will look to integrate the tenant voice throughout VHA. This is illustrated in the figure above.

3.2 We will also support tenant representation on the Board of Management and seek to retain the services of two such residents in that capacity.

3.3 We will look to develop the Residents' Panel to be run by tenants for tenants and assist the panel to adopt a co-regulatory approach by developing a scrutiny role of VHA's services and the business.

3.4 We will aim to include tenants in all policy review and on the Development and Communities Panel.

3.5 We will look to support the establishment of neighbourhood and community groups and tenant involvement in the options available in the menu of Involvement.

3.6 We will continue to consult and inform tenants through a range of media such as written surveys, the tenant newsletter, SMS texting, Facebook and the website.

#### **4. Other Methods of Promoting Participation**

4.1 We will support our commitment to tenant engagement and involvement through a variety of methods:

- Provide a menu of involvement options and develop new ways to facilitate involvement based on customer feedback.
- Support minority groups who by virtue of race, age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or any other associated factor, might otherwise be marginalised from resident involvement, in accordance with our policy on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- Consult all residents about any major decisions affecting the delivery of service or the management of their homes, in accordance with the terms of the tenancy agreements;
- Consult all residents in relation to planned maintenance or improvement works to their homes;
- Regularly seek residents' views on the quality of services provided by way of satisfaction surveys, local questionnaires, Resident Panel and other meetings and by using other media.
- Inform residents of the Association's activities and community matters in a wide variety of ways, including Resident Panel and other meetings, newsletters, leaflets, website and through the use of SMS texting. We will also look to disseminate information through direct contact through neighbourhood walkabouts, Tenancy Health Checks, neighbourhood events and focused surgeries.
- Produce an Annual Report to Tenants, which outlines achievements in respect of involvement in the preceding year and outlines our performance against regulatory standards and in comparison, to our peers.
- Encourage and provide all reasonable financial and technical support for, constructive and innovative resident-led activities that enhance the objectives of the policy, in the context of the Business Plan, and develop measures leading to empowerment where these are warranted and appropriate;

## **5 The Vectis Promises**

5.1 To deliver on our commitment to promote and support resident involvement, we will make the following promises to tenants:

- We will publish a policy and an updated Menu of Involvement every three years about how we will engage with residents and support them to be involved with VHA.
- We will involve residents in making decisions that will affect them.
- We will offer a range of choices to get involved with options to suit different lifestyles that meet the needs of individuals.
- We will support new and existing residents both individually and collectively.
- We will offer training and development support to help residents influence our services.
- We will provide a range of opportunities for residents to monitor and scrutinise our performance and services.

5.2 To balance these promises, we will aim to develop an informal contract with our tenants whereby they recognise that these promises can only be properly implemented if tenants are prepared to respond to them and engage appropriately.

5.3 However, we recognise that such an outcome will not be fully realised in the immediate future. With the support of the Board and the Residents' Panel, officers will continue to monitor and explore innovative methods to ensure that tenants have the opportunity to become involved, in the management of their homes, and in ways which suit them.

## Appendix 1 Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard

### Required outcomes

#### 1 Customer service, choice and complaints

Registered providers shall:

- provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards
- have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly

#### 2 Involvement and empowerment

Registered providers shall ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- the formulation of their landlord's housing related policies and
- strategic priorities
- the making of decisions about how housing related services are
- delivered, including the setting of service standards
- the scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of
- recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be
- improved
- the management of their homes, where applicable
- the management of repair and maintenance services, such as
- commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed
- with landlords, and the sharing in savings made, and
- agreeing local offers for service delivery

#### 3 Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants

Registered providers shall:

- treat all tenants with fairness and respect
- demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their

- tenants, including in relation to the equality strands and tenants with
- additional support needs

## **Specific expectations**

### **1 Customer service, choice and complaints**

1.1 Registered providers shall provide tenants with accessible, relevant and timely information about:

- how tenants can access services
- the standards of housing services their tenants can expect
- how they are performing against those standards
- the service choices available to tenants, including any additional
- costs that are relevant to specific choices
- progress of any repairs work
- how tenants can communicate with them and provide feedback
- the responsibilities of the tenant and provider
- arrangements for tenant involvement and scrutiny

1.2 Providers shall offer a range of ways for tenants to express a complaint and set out clear service standards for responding to complaints, including complaints about performance against the standards, and details of what to do if they are unhappy with the outcome of a complaint. Providers shall inform tenants how they use complaints to improve their services. Registered providers shall publish information about complaints each year, including their number and nature, and the outcome of the complaints. Providers shall accept complaints made by advocates authorised to act on a tenant's/tenants' behalf.

### **2 Involvement and empowerment**

2.1 Registered providers shall support their tenants to develop and implement opportunities for involvement and empowerment, including by:

- supporting their tenants to exercise their Right to Manage or otherwise exercise housing management functions, where appropriate
- supporting the formation and activities of tenant panels or equivalent groups and responding in a constructive and timely manner to them
- the provision of timely and relevant performance information to support effective scrutiny by tenants of their landlord's performance in a form which registered providers seek to agree with

their tenants. Such provision must include the publication of an annual report which should include information on repair and maintenance budgets, and

- providing support to tenants to build their capacity to be more effectively involved

2.2 Registered providers shall consult with tenants on the scope of local offers for service delivery. This shall include how performance will be monitored, reported to and scrutinised by tenants and arrangements for reviewing these on a periodic basis.

2.3 Registered providers shall consult with tenants, setting out clearly the costs and benefits of relevant options, if they are proposing to change their landlord or when proposing a significant change in their management arrangements.

2.4 Registered providers shall consult tenants at least once every three years on the best way of involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of the organisation's housing management service.

### **3. Understanding and responding to diverse needs**

3.1 Registered providers shall demonstrate how they respond to tenants' needs in the way they provide services and communicate with tenants.