



Customer Involvement Policy

(Revised Policy – Approved By Board – 24 November 2009)

SOUTHWAY HOUSING TRUST

CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT POLICY

Introduction

Southway Housing Trust is committed to customer involvement and ensuring that all customers are provided with information, consulted and given the opportunity to influence the services provided by Southway. To help achieve this commitment Southway has developed a three year Customer Involvement Strategy.

Southway believes that customers should be at the heart of everything we do and have provided a range of options for involvement which are defined in the Strategy and the customer leaflet; Ways to Get Involved.

Links to Tenant Services Authority Registration Criteria (2004) and Regulatory Code:

Properly Governed: 2.3.2, 2.3.3, 2.5, 2.5.2, 2.5.3, 2.5.4
Properly Managed: 3.3 and 3.5 a and b

1. Key Objective

Southway Housing Trust will work with, consult and involve all tenants, residents and leaseholders on a range of issues that affect their homes and the way that they are managed. The Trust will actively encourage customers to participate and discuss directly their views on the way in which its services are provided.

Southway will enable involvement in all aspects of its activities. Such tenant involvement will cover three key areas:

- Providing Information for Tenants
- Tenant Consultation
- Tenant Participation

2. **Policy Statement**

Southway Housing Trust recognises its obligations under the Tenant Services Authority's Regulatory Code and their expectations to involve customers in the delivery of the housing service.

The principles Southway will adopt to deliver effective consultation and involvement are enshrined in the Customer Involvement Strategy and the following policy statement.

We will deliver high quality customer involvement, by:

- 1) developing and supporting a 'menu' of involvement opportunities that will encourage all our customers to get involved in shaping what we do and how we do it.
- 2) providing high quality support to all our customers to help them take advantage of those opportunities.

The following is the Trust's commitment to involving customers;

- We will consult tenants about any plans we have to improve your home or the area around it. We will follow an agreed consultation procedure.
- We will encourage, support and promote involvement by individuals and the community as a whole.
- We will carry out a range of customer satisfaction surveys in partnership with tenants on a regular basis to make sure that the service is meeting your needs. We will act on the results of these surveys to improve and develop services.
- We will give you accurate, honest and timely information so you can make genuine choices.
- In line with the Strategy we will develop and use various consultation and involvement methods to ensure it is genuine and effective.
- We will ask local people about what consultation methods to use and when we should use them.
- Methods will be monitored and reviewed regularly to make sure they are still the most suitable.
- We will use consultation to find out what concerns residents - not just as a means to solve problems.

- Tenants have the right to start or join a local tenant and resident group. Southway will continue to support existing tenant and resident groups and will encourage and support the formation of new groups.
- We will encourage, support and help fund tenant groups so they can play an effective part in consultation. Tenant management options are available for consideration, subject to approval from the Board. Southway will make sure tenants have access to the advice needed.
- We will have a fair, efficient and widely available complaints procedure.
- Southway Housing Trust, tenant groups and individual tenants have the right to keep certain information confidential. This right will be respected. This includes information protected under the Data Protection Act and any personal details that do not need to be shared.
- Southway Housing Trust and tenant groups must work for equality of opportunity in tenant involvement. The information that we share and the advice that we give out will reflect Southway's Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy.

3. Key Policy Standards

3.1 Information

Southway will ensure that customers are kept fully advised about services that Southway offers and also provide information about performance and any matters of general housing interest.

This information will be made available through;

- Publishing an annual report.
- Producing and regularly updating a tenants' handbook.
- Producing a series of customer information leaflets.
- Publishing relevant performance information, service plans and standards as part of Southway's programme of achieving best value in its service delivery.
- Southway's website which will be regularly updated.
- Operating a complaints procedure and responding to the feedback received.
- Holding regular local meetings.

3.2 Consultation

Southway will ensure that customers are fully consulted on all issues which are likely to affect them.

Tenants will be consulted before Southway make any major changes which affect them. This undertaking is contained within clause 5.3 of the Tenancy Agreement. These changes may include;

- Proposals to alter the Tenancy Agreement
- Repair and Improvement Programmes
- Changes in the way we manage or look after our homes
- Changes in the cost or provision of services
- Strategic plans such as management of demolition programmes

Southway will let tenants know about the proposed changes in one or a combination of the following ways;

- Letter
- Visits to the tenant's home
- Calling a tenants' meeting
- Attendance at Tenant and Resident Group meetings
- Public exhibitions, drop in events and conferences
- Opinion surveys
- Newsletter
- Southway website

Southway will take tenants' views into account when making a decision and will tell tenants what has been decided.

If Southway is required by law to change policies or practice, Southway will inform tenants of such changes as soon as possible and usually in writing.

3.3 Involvement

Southway is committed to active involvement within its policy and procedural frameworks.

A range of involvement methods have been developed and the details can be found in the Customer Involvement Strategy. These include;

- Service Improvement Groups
- Residents Audit Panel
- Mystery Shopping Team
- Residents' Conferences
- Estate Walkabouts

- Litter Picks
- Questionnaires
- Focus Groups
- Surveys
- Voice Panel

3.4 Tenant and Resident Associations and Other Groups

Southway welcomes and supports the setting up of local Tenant and Resident Associations and other groups that are recognised by appropriate bodies (e.g. Neighbourhood Watch Schemes recognised by the Home Office and the Police) and will provide assistance to such groups in the conduct of their activities. This will include the following forms of support;

- Advice
- Use of facilities
- Funding for room hire, postage, light refreshments etc. (constituted groups only or by discretion)
- Help with training
- Arranging venues for meetings
- Providing information about the Association's performance
- Involving them in policy reviews
- Seeking their views on service delivery
- Assistance with producing publicity including leaflets and newsletters
- Inviting them to become members of the Southway Consultative Group

If invited, Southway will send a representative to attend meetings of Tenants' Associations or other recognised groups.

Southway will recognise groups only if;

- They are located in the area covered by Southway and actively represent tenants of Southway.
- The group recognises Southway and supports the organisation's vision and values and uses Southway's complaints procedure if any disagreements arise.
- The group recognises and supports Southway's Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy.
- The group adopts Southway's model constitution and carries out its activities in compliance with it.

Southway accepts that not all tenants form fully constituted Tenants' Associations and in many cases tenants join together as a less formal group, for example social groups in sheltered housing schemes. Southway recognises the benefits of creating a relationship with such

groups and is committed to attending meetings of these groups if invited.

3.5 Southway Consultative Group

Southway is committed to having an effective and regular dialogue with its customers and aims to ensure that tenants can have an influence over the services they receive. One of the ways in which Southway does this is through the established Southway Consultative Group (SCG). The Group is made up of representatives of each of the Tenant and Residents' Associations and any new groups will be invited to attend. The group meets monthly at Southway's offices.

3.6 Tenant Board Members

Tenants of Southway Housing Trust are eligible to apply for any vacancies that arise for Tenant Board Members. Vacancies will be advertised as widely as possible and tenants will be encouraged to submit an application. A process for selecting Tenant Board Members will be agreed with the Southway Consultative Group and will be reviewed regularly to ensure it is still the most appropriate method.

Tenant Board Members are included within the membership of the Southway Consultative Group but do not have any voting rights at that group.

An update on Board decisions and activity is provided to the Southway Consultative Group by a Tenant Board Member and are regularly reported to all residents via the tenants' newsletter circulated three times a year.

3.7 Leaseholder Consultation

Southway will consult with leaseholders about;

- Repair work, which will incur costs above the prescribed amount, which will have to be recovered in service charges, as required by the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985. We will provide leaseholders with a statement of the work required and alternative estimates of the costs, before entering into a contract for the work.
- The extent and costs of works which are optional.
- Proposed changes to arrangements for maintenance, management or service provision which could have a substantial effect on them. (An example would be consultation regarding proposed environmental changes as part of a Southway improvement scheme).

And Southway will;

- Work with any leaseholder groups established in the area and will provide them with any necessary advice, support and assistance. We will consult groups of leaseholders affected and individual leaseholders affected, as appropriate.
- Advise leaseholders in writing at least 28 days in advance of any circumstances which affect them or their homes.
- This advice will include information about how they might appeal against a decision and seek further advice (for example, from the Leaseholder Advisor Service).
- Have a leaseholder representative on the Southway Consultative Group
- Provide leaseholders with a copy of its newsletter; Southway Stories (produced three times a year)
- Develop a Southway wide leaseholder group or forum and meet and consult regularly with the group. Until such a group is established Southway will continue to attend the Manchester Leaseholders Association meetings.

4. Key Targets and Performance Indicators

These are;

- To increase the number of customers involved, specifically those groups traditionally 'hard to reach'. For example young people and those from BME communities.
- To successfully implement the three year Strategy and varied methods of involvement.
- Current Tenant Services Authority Performance Indicators on tenant satisfaction and complaints.
- Comparative Benchmarking Performance Indicators from Housemark as detailed in the Strategy.

5. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed at least once every two years to ensure that it complies with relevant, up-to-date legislation.

Regular progress updates on customer involvement will be provided to the Residents Consultative Group, Southway's Senior Management Team and the Southway Board.

An annual Customer Involvement Statement and Impact Assessment will be presented to the Board as part of our regulatory requirements.

6. Equality and Diversity

Southway will ensure that this policy is applied fairly to all our customers. We will not directly or indirectly discriminate against any person or group of people because of their race, religion, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability or other grounds set out in our Equality and Diversity Policy.

When applying this policy we will act sensitively towards the diverse needs of individuals and communities.

This policy and any other related publications of Southway Housing Trust can be provided on request in other formats (e.g. in an alternative language, in Braille, on tape, in large print).

7. Linkages with Other Southway Documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with;

- Southway's Customer Involvement Strategy
- Southway's Equal Opportunities Policy
- Southway's most recent Customer Involvement Statement
- Southway's most recent Customer Involvement Impact Assessment Report
- Southway's Customer Care Policy
- Southway's Compliments and Complaints Policy

<u>POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW HISTORY</u>	
Date Approved by Board: 19/06/07	Date Implemented: 25/06/07
Review Date: 19/10/2009 Projected Date of Review: 24/11/2012	
<u>Amendment(s) Made/Reason</u> Amendments have involved the integration of Southway's Customer Involvement Strategy and policy renaming.	
Date Amendment(s) Approved by Board: 24 /11/09	Date Implemented: 30/11/09