



A member of the  Aster
GROUP

Mendip Housing Limited

Resident Involvement Strategy

2008 - 2011

INDEX

Section	Page
1. Introduction	4
2. Strategy Statement	5
3. Definitions	5
4. Legal & Regulatory Framework	5
5. The National Agenda	7
6. Tenant Participation Agreement	8
7. Developing a Strategy	8
• Strategic aims	
• Working with residents to improve service delivery	
• Getting involved – a menu of choice	
8. Resources	10

9. Assessment by our residents and staff 2008	
10	
10. Community Development Links	
11	
11. Monitoring & Review	
12	
12. Measuring our Performance	12
The SMART statement	Appendix 1
Action Plan 2008-2011	Appendix 2

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Mendip Housing Ltd (MHL) is the leading housing association in the Mendip area providing affordable housing and related services. Working with individuals and communities we are seeking to make a real difference. MHL is part of the Aster Group, the largest South West based housing group.
- 1.2 MHL provides over 4,300 homes across the Mendips. We also provide opportunities for shared ownership, sheltered, extra care and supported housing.
- 3 Mendip Housing has developed strength in the ways in which tenants can be consulted on the services provided by us and these key achievements moves us on to a new Resident Involvement Strategy incorporating a three year action plan linking in to the Aster Group vision "*Passion for excellence, pride in performance*" and the Mendip Housing strap line "*Customer focused, forward thinking*"
- 1.4 This document outlines our Strategy for Resident Involvement, which is to find new ways to work with residents and engage with communities. We are adopting a progressive, structured approach to involvement activities to achieve the objectives. The three year Action Plan sets out our future targets and commitments as an organization for residents to be involved in influencing services and decision making at all levels, locally and strategically.
- 5 The Tenant's Participation Agreement played a central part of this process and sets out how we and our residents will work together on how we run our services; and residents rights to take part and the support they will receive to do this.
- 6 Since March 2001 and the transfer of stock from Mendip District Council a lot has been achieved through Resident Involvement with four structured Area Forums and a forum covering sheltered housing all operating their own budgets and holding at least four open meetings a year, each with business plans in place to attract new residents.
- 1.7 The strategic body with which MHL works in partnership to deliver on The Tenant's Participation Agreement is the Mendip Tenant's Federation (MTF).
- 1.8 This document aims to build upon the Tenant's Participation Agreement and the achievements of our Resident Involvement Strategy and Action Plan from 2004-2009 by presenting a strategy for the future development of resident involvement, seeking to improve the way in which MHL works in partnership with residents and the local communities in which they live.
- 1.9 All staff are responsible for taking the strategy forward and the

experience and priorities of residents will inform the way services are delivered across the organisation. Annually we will carry out an Impact Assessment and publish a statement in Homelink of what has been achieved and plans for the following year.

- 10 Residents will review the action plan, attached at Appendix 2, annually at the Tenant's Away Day by telling us what their priorities are and how we need to improve. The way we work with residents is also informed by our service standards set by residents, mystery shopping by residents and customer surveys such as the STATUS.

2. Strategy Statement

2.1 MHL's Resident Involvement Strategy and Action Plan (2008-2011) sets out five key aims for resident involvement:

- Ensure all residents have the **opportunity** for resident involvement and that we reach 'hard to reach groups' ensuring representation of the 'wider' community.
- Ensure residents have the required **support** so that they can have an effective influence on the provision of services and the standards of delivery.
- Develop a menu of **options** for resident participation that suit the needs and abilities of residents who wish to participate
- Demonstrate commitment to working in **partnership**.
- Support and deliver a range of **community initiatives**, in line with the Community Development Strategy, to improve the quality of involvement for residents. services.

2.2 Involving residents is an essential ingredient in the provision of quality services and as such is regarded as central to our business. We are committed to the genuine involvement and participation of residents in MHL's governance, the development of new services and homes, the ongoing review and development of policies and strategies and in the day-to-day provision of service delivery.

2.3 MHL's policy statement in relation to resident involvement is contained within the document '*Resident Involvement Policy*', which outlines MHL's overall approach to resident involvement.

3. Definitions

3.1 Resident is defined as anyone living in a MHL home. This includes tenants, leaseholders, shared owners, freeholders who pay service charges, people in temporary housing and people in supported housing.

4. Legal and Regulatory Framework

4.1 MHL is required through legislation and regulation to enable tenants and residents to be involved in areas and decisions which affect the way their homes are managed and which may impact on the communities in which they live.

4.2 Through legislation in the form of the Housing Act 1985 and the Housing Act 1988, tenants have a right to information and consultation. To develop a Resident Involvement Strategy that meets the Housing Corporation's new policy to put resident involvement at the centre of decision making; and the Audit Commission's recommendations to put the focus on the outcomes of involvement. The Action Plan sets out our future targets and commitments as an organization, for residents to be involved in influencing services and decision making at every level.

4.3 The Housing Corporation's approach to resident involvement is outlined in '*Involvement Policy for the Housing Association Sector*' introduced in April 2004. This approach places an emphasis on:

- Responsiveness – covers wide range of initiatives which encourage associations to listen & respond to resident's views, either face-to-face, or as a group
- Residents – includes tenants, residents, leaseholders, freeholders (who pay service charges) people in temporary accommodation and people in supported housing.
- Outcomes – results achieved in terms of improved services, rather than the methods used to make those improvements

This has been followed by a new policy more recently 'People First Delivering Change through Involvement' published in May 2007. The Executive summary sets out the following expectations for Housing Associations in relation to involvement.

- The business imperative for involvement.
- The Housing Corporation objectives, policy and requirements within regulatory guidance.
- The basic building blocks for effective involvement in Housing Associations.
- A new requirement for Housing Associations to have at least one resident Board member.
- A menu of additional approaches to involvement including the widening of Housing Association involvement activities to include communities.

4 This requires associations to set a framework for involvement and measure the outcomes of resident involvement activities through:

- Developing an impact assessment that incorporates the above policy and regulatory requirements and demonstrates how residents have truly influenced our service delivery.
- Developing and promoting a range of ways for residents to get involved and ensuring the outcomes are publicized.

4.5 MHL is committed to resident involvement and recognizes that the involvement of tenants and leaseholders is central to providing a housing service that can continuously improve.

- 4.6 Prior to the development of this strategy MHL's commitment has been enshrined within the Tenant's Participation Agreement and the Resident Involvement Strategy 2004-2009.
- 7 The strategy to date has been successful in embedding Resident Involvement throughout the organization with residents having a real say in their service delivery through either a formal route to participation through one of the five constituted area forums or through various focus and consultation groups or as part of a survey or telephone service. Areas covered include;
- Business Planning to include efficiency savings.
 - Property Services in helping to choose new partners for contracts.
 - Neighbourhood Services with working groups around local lettings, anti-social behaviour and choice based lettings.
 - Groups looking at Plain English.
 - Equality & Diversity Focus Group
 - Disabled Adaptations Review.
 - Editorial groups for Homelink and Chatterbox.
 - Care & Support consulting with sheltered housing residents about changes in how their services are delivered.
- 8 The strategy outlined the principles for residents to have the appropriate support, training, resources and funding required enabling them to participate. Residents training requirements have been set each year and this has included recruitment training to attend interviews as part of the company's recruitment process. An impact assessment is carried out every 12 months to see how services have improved as a result of resident involvement.

5. The National Agenda

- 5.1 Resident Involvement has increasingly become a major issue nationally and locally. In addition to the Housing Corporation and Audit Commission other drivers at a National level include:
- The Tenant Involvement Commission: produced 'What Tenants Want'- Getting the basics right and going the extra mile.
 - Hills Report – focusing on maintaining and improving the existing stock, housing choices, mixed neighbourhoods, supporting people into work.
 - The Elton report: - Less regulation more resident involvement' – with the Audit Commission have found that involvement promotes a more customer-focused culture.
 - The Cave Review: - produced 'Every Tenant Matters'- argued for a system of regulation which protects tenants rights and seeks to empower tenants and a new relationship of 'co-regulation' based on lighter touch inspection/regulation but more tenant/resident power.
 - Housing Green Paper – 3 million new homes by 2020.
 - National Housing Federation: IN Business for Neighbourhoods.
 - Department of Communities and Local Government: Government Housing

Agenda

- Tenant Participation Advisory Service: Provision of support; information & training for Associations and Residents.
- The Audit Commission provide clear guidance in relation to involving residents and customers. These are set through the Key lines of enquiry (KLOE's). KLOE 5 is specific to resident involvement and also overlaps with a range of KLOE's relevant to service delivery.

6. Tenant Participation Agreement

6.1 The Tenant's Participation Agreement is an agreement between MHL and its tenants about how we will work together on tenant participation. The Agreement details the structure currently in place to enable tenant consultation and participation.

6.2 The Tenant's Participation Agreement was negotiated by Mendip Tenant's Federation on behalf of tenants and identified a number of aims for the implementation of the Agreement as follows:

- Empower tenants to participate in the way their homes are managed.
- Provide the necessary support services to encourage and offer all tenants the opportunity to participate at as full a level as they wish.
- Provide a structure which allows every tenant the opportunity to become involved in setting policies and practices which effect the management of their home and surrounding environment.
- Provide formal representation of tenants on all relevant committees.
- Ensure tenants' representatives are accountable and chosen through a democratic process and to represent the views of tenants accurately.
- Ensure a strong base of accredited local groups and neighbourhood voices who will be alert to local issues.
- Provide a framework for tenants to effectively monitor services provided directly by Mendip Housing and those provided under contract by outside agencies.

6.3 These aims are consistent with the aims outlined in the Resident Involvement Policy

6.4 The Resident Involvement Strategy does not seek to replace the Tenant's Participation Agreement. The purpose of the Strategy is to extend the

principles and aims outlined and ensure they are fully implemented through the strategy and continuing action plan.

- 6.5 This Strategy document is a means by which the structures, methods, rights, resources and standards detailed in the Tenant's Participation Agreement can be further developed and reviewed to ensure that resident involvement at all levels of MHL and across all departments is delivered and continuously improved.

7. Developing a Strategy

- 1 The strategy has been developed to meet the Housing Corporation's new policy to put resident involvement at the centre of associations' decision making; and the Audit Commission's recommendations to put the focus on the outcomes of Involvement. We have developed a strategy that:

- Takes a fresh look at involvement and searches out opportunities and builds on strengths and ensures Resident Involvement is the driving force behind everything we do.
- Focuses on outcomes
- Provides a menu of options for involvement, for a range of purposes, and the diverse needs of people and communities.
- Is demonstrably effective and sustainable.
- Delivers value for money.
- Enhance resident empowerment and involvement in key decision making and spending decisions.
- Deliver services based on the needs and aspirations of residents with clear ways for influencing services and decision making.
- Ensures the overall aims and objectives outlined in the Resident Involvement Policy and contained in the Tenant's Participation Agreement, are delivered across all MHL departments.
- Regularly reviews and monitors the Tenant's Participation Agreement to ensure its continued relevance and to ensure that appropriate structures are in place to enable consultation and involvement of all residents.
- Enables the involvement of residents in the governance of the organization.
- Ensures diversity is incorporated into resident involvement and to develop involvement and representation from all sections of the community.
- Develops a wider range of methods of consultation and involvement that enable residents to have the opportunity to be consulted and involved at a level and to an extent with which they feel comfortable
- Increases the number of residents who are actively involved in consultation and participation and in particular focus on increasing the involvement of young people, families and under represented groups such as gypsies & travellers, black and ethnic minority communities and residents with disabilities as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA).

- Improves communication between MHL, Tenant Representatives and residents in general.
- Enables residents to be involved in setting and effectively monitoring service standards to ensure continuous improvement.
- Continues to provide residents with the appropriate support, training, resources and funding required enabling them to participate.
- Investigates and develop opportunities for greater resident control.

2 The result involves stakeholders (particularly residents and staff) in the development and implementation, to produce a strategy that delivers the required

resident involvement outcomes; that is integral to corporate objectives, customer

focus, service development and continual improvement processes; and matches the capacity, needs and aspirations of Mendip Housing as part of the Aster

Group,

residents and stakeholders and;

- Provide clear information to residents about how to get involved and support them in doing so.
- Provide training for residents and also develop capacity to enable residents to participate in governing MHL.
- Work with residents to find solutions for local issues.
- Work with residents and other organizations to bring about long-term positive change through IN Business for Neighbourhoods and Neighbourhood Planning

8. Resources

8.1 Staff resources are for 2 full time Resident Involvement Workers and 1 part-time administrator. The department is also investigating at external funding opportunities.

For further information on Mendip Housing Limited's Resident Involvement Programme, please contact:

Community & Resident Involvement Team
Telephone: 01749 334453
E-mail - bbreeds@mendiphousing.co.uk

9. Resident Involvement and the Aster Group

9.1 This strategy brings together the work, influences and experience gained since 2001 and links in with our strategic partners to take us through the next three years.

9.2 From April 2007 to March 2008 we consulted extensively with residents through

the Aster Joint Forum, Busman's Holiday on Resident Involvement, Resident Focus Groups, telephone surveys, Landlord of Choice Focus groups and the Annual Tenants Away Days about how we can work more effectively with residents

to improve services. The Tenant Participation Advisory Service has helped to facilitate this work and many ideas were put forward but in particular there was an overall agreement that we need to develop;

- Greater understanding of the different groups of people receiving services from MHL as part of the Aster group and their needs and location so that we can consult more effectively.
- There is a need to engage with more customers from diverse groups, so that those who are involved are broadly representative of the resident population.
- Look at our methods of reaching people who do not normally put their views forward so that we can get a more representative view.
- Look at improvements in the way we communicate with and respond to residents with well planned resident consultation and involvement, which focuses on the service priorities identified by residents in order to deliver measurable improvements.
- Training, clear guidance and good practice information for staff and residents on ways to work together effectively.

9.3 A working group was set up to include staff and residents to consider the main strategic objectives. Resident Involvement has been looked at over a group level with tenants on the project group and through focus and consultation events.

9.4 A review of Resident Involvement was carried out in July 2007 to develop a framework at Aster Group level and the review involved residents from the three main operating companies, Mendip, Sarsen and Testway over two weeks. 'The SMART Involvement Guidelines' at Appendix 1 has been developed from this review and is intended to establish priorities and be a 'blueprint' for change. Best practice, primary research with residents, staff and Board members at a local level, along with research into regulatory requirements and guidance at a national level were used to inform the outcomes of the review.

9.5 This strategy and the service promises it makes together with the SMART statement will ensure we meet these requirements. The work to be done is set out in our three year plan 2008-2011.

9.6 At group level we now have an Aster wide residents steering group who meet up on a quarterly basis and look at policies and procedures relating to service delivery at this level.

10. Community Development Links

10.1 The Housing Corporation produced the 'Neighbourhoods and

Communities Strategy' in October 2006. The proposals within the strategy address five key areas:

- **Working together**- outlining how they see housing associations, local authorities and others to work together in partnership to deliver for local communities.
- **Sustaining mixed communities** – setting out how the Corporation and housing associations can contribute to delivering and sustaining successful mixed communities.
- **Adding community value** – highlighting the growing role of housing associations social entrepreneurs and neighbourhood – level delivery agents in addition to their core housing role.
- **Building respect** – detailing the critical role of housing associations in tackling anti-social behaviour and delivering the respect agenda, and the role of the Housing Corporation in supporting this. and
- **Empowering communities** – highlighting the critical importance of residents and communities informing the work of housing associations and holding them to account.

- 10.2 MHL recognizes the changing nature of the communities in which our residents live and work. As the main social housing provider in Mendip, MHL has a commitment to be involved in community development at a strategic level through the Mendip Strategic Partnership.
- 10.3 At a local level it is essential that in developing and managing our properties we ensure that we focus on the sustainability of those communities.
- 10.4 Resident Involvement is a tool which enables us to work at a local level with local communities, identifying the needs of local communities, working with them to identify priorities, capacity building and working in partnership with other agencies to enable local communities to be sustainable in the long term.
- 10.5 The Resident Involvement Strategy must therefore be seen within the broader context of community development and in particular MHL's Community Development Strategy 2007-10.

11. Monitoring and review

- 11.1 Mendip Tenants Federation and the Board will receive an annual report on the progress of the action plan.
- 2 The Resident Involvement Strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis in partnership with residents. An annual 'Visioning Event' with Representatives is held annually to achieve this.
- 3 This review will involve using an impact assessment to determine what difference has been made to improve our services as a result of resident involvement.
- 4 The three year action plan will be reviewed annually. The purpose of this review

will be:

- to assess delivery on the strategic aims
- to link in with the business planning process
- to ensure continuous improvement
- to ensure priorities identified are agreed by residents on an ongoing basis

12. Measuring Our Performance

- 1 A resident involvement database has been developed to record, monitor and manage tenant and resident involvement activities and their outcomes. We are working with Housemark to look at developing performance information for Resident Involvement to enable data to be compared with other organizations to see how we are doing. Housemark's benchmarking service provides a breakdown of the costs and resources involved in housing management and maintenance services to provide information for Housing Associations to compare data to self assess the efficiency of their organization and whether the services are of good quality and offer value for money.
- 2 The Cave Review of Social Housing Regulation, published in June 2007, recommends that all social housing providers should establish formal arrangements to;
 - Enable tenants to make periodic assessments of the quality of services provided
 - Share benchmarking information about their performance and costs with other providers and publish this information to tenants and more widely.
- 3 Residents will test our performance as Mystery Shoppers and let us know how we can improve our services.
- 4 Each year residents are consulted about service standards and prioritise their top service standards for the year at the annual Tenants Away Day.