

Bridgewater Housing Association Ltd Policy

Approved by Board 26 August 2015
on

Review Date: 26 August 2017

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Community Participation

1. INTRODUCTION

The Association recognises the benefits for itself as landlord, and tenants, service users, other stakeholders and owner-occupiers as customers, of promoting and improving partnership throughout Erskine. Consequently, the Association is committed to ensuring that there are on-going opportunities for all tenants to participate in the design and delivery of their housing service. Similarly we will promote opportunities for owners to participate in the service areas which affect them.

This policy links to the Association's Community Participation Strategy, which outlines our commitment to involving tenants and tenants/residents organisations in the decisions about their homes and communities, and how this will be achieved.

2. REGULATION

The Scottish Housing Regulator was created by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010. The Act sets out the SHRs statutory objectives, functions, powers and duties. It established the SHR as an independent regulator directly accountable to the Scottish Parliament.

The SHRs six Regulatory Standards and the respective guidance are applicable to every type of RSL and they have required Associations to comply with them from 1 April 2012. It is for each Association to decide how it meets the standards and complies with guidance based on its local context and individual circumstances. Associations are responsible for the standard of conduct within their own organisations and are publicly accountable to their tenants, other service users, funders and other stakeholders for the governance decisions they make.

The Regulatory Standard which provides the context to this policy is:

(2.1). The RSL gives tenants, service users and other stakeholders information that meets their needs about the RSL, its services, its performance and its future plans.

(2.3). The RSL seeks out the needs, priorities, views and aspirations of tenants, service users and stakeholders. The governing body takes account of this information in its strategies, plans and decisions.

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Association views effective participation as a two way process, recognising the important contribution that tenants and others have to make about the

services that they receive, so a number of key aims and objectives have been identified:

- i) The Association will promote engagement with tenants to ensure that all tenants are given the opportunity to become involved.
- ii) The Association will actively encourage the involvement of tenants in the work of the Association with a view to improving service delivery, policies, housing management practices, stock condition, value for money and community development.
- iii) In consultation with tenants, service users, other stakeholders and owner occupiers the Association will seek opportunities for the creation and development of new tenants/residents groups.
- iv) Respecting the independence of existing community groups, staff will promote good working relationships, servicing meetings and contributing towards the wider agenda for the area, within the context of available resources.
- v) The Association will maximise the opportunities for tenants to comment on the service delivery of the Association via continuous and/or ad hoc feedback mechanisms.
- vi) The Association views tenant participation as a continuous process and will therefore involve tenants and tenants/residents forums in all reviews of the Community Participation Policy.
- vii) The Association will respect the views of tenants and others who do not wish to actively participate in the running of the Association and will ensure that such tenants receive regular, high quality information.
- viii) The Association will ensure that its culture and organisational structure support the meaningful involvement of tenants and tenants/residents groups.

4. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

The Association acknowledges its legal obligation under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to explain how tenants will be kept informed. Furthermore, we recognise our responsibilities to achieve the standards and outcomes within the Scottish Social Housing Charter, and to report to tenants on our outcomes. The Charter requires the Association to manage its business 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.*

Effective participation relies on the sharing of information and ideas, therefore the provision of high quality information to tenants is essential. To enable tenants/residents and service users to access a wide range of information, the Association will, through its Community Participation Strategy, implement the following, ensuring that all written material is produced in a user friendly format, which is easily understood.

The Association will:

- i) provide each tenant with a Tenancy Agreement. All new tenants will be provided with a 'Welcome to your new Home' DVD, which covers the main aspects of the Tenancy Agreement.

- ii) issue regular newsletters, such as *Bridgewater News*, (a minimum of 4 per year) to inform tenants of topical issues, and promote membership of the Association.
- iii) Issue regular newsletters to sheltered tenants, such as *Sheltered Housing News* (a minimum of 4 per year) to inform sheltered tenants of topical issues concerning their housing support service, and social activities.
- iv) issue letters
- v) promote and make publicly available in leaflet form, summaries of policies relating to Housing Services and the Repairs Service.
- vi) hold public meetings
- vii) publicly display and inform tenants of the Association's performance in relation to the Housing Charter
- viii) provide up to date topical information on our website. This will cover services provided by Bridgewater, our partners and external providers.

Where required, written information will be made available in different languages and formats.

5. SERVICE DELIVERY – CUSTOMER CONSULTATION

In accordance with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 the Association is legally obliged to set out how it intends to consult with tenants, and indicate the issues that tenants will be consulted on.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter requires the Association to manage its business 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.*

In order to gauge levels of customer satisfaction, the Association will adopt a range of feedback mechanisms to encourage tenants to comment on the services they receive at the point of delivery. Feedback mechanisms will include continuous, regular and ad hoc monitoring. Such information will enable the Association to take prompt action to improve services where appropriate, and will enable customers' views to be taken into account during policy and practice reviews. In addition, the Association will consult with tenants/residents in the area to establish their views and aspirations on Community Participation. Any expressions of interest will be followed up.

The Association will encourage the participation of tenants in an annual review of the work of the Association. Resident Forums will be invited to take part in this.

In accordance with its Model Rules, the Association will hold an Annual General Meeting once a year to which all Association members will be invited.

The standard of maintenance and improvement works carried out to tenants homes has a significant impact on tenant satisfaction. It is therefore crucial for tenants to be part of the process of setting standards and, where practicable, extending choice.

Further information on the consultation process is contained within the Community Participation Strategy.

6. RESOURCING TENANT PARTICIPATION

The Association recognises that Tenants/Residents Associations require to access adequate resources in order to fulfil their role(s) within the community, and will provide appropriate support to new and existing groups. Examples include:

- guidance and support for starting new groups
- offering administration support, office premises and facilities to service meetings
- staff attending meetings.

Grants

In addition, the Association will aim to provide support by considering applications for:

- a) start-up grants from new Groups or Associations (Appendix I)
- b) annual grants to established Groups or Associations (Appendix II)
- c) Special Grants (Appendix II)

A procedure note is attached at Appendix III and application form at Appendix IV.

Annual funding will be subject to the following criteria being met:

- Groups have an agreed constitution, containing an equal opportunities statement
- There are elected office bearers
- Minutes of meetings are available for inspection
- Accounts are audited on an annual basis
- Groups hold open meetings that are advertised and accessible to all.

Registration Process

The Community Participation Strategy gives details on the registration process for groups in addition to other information on this topic.

Expenses

The Association believes that members of tenants' groups/tenants representatives should not be 'out of pocket' as a result of their attendance at training courses, conferences and so on. Consequently, such members will qualify for payments in line with the Association's Schedule of Authorised Expenses – Board Members Policy.

7. BOARD AND STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

Board Responsibilities

The Board will be responsible for reviewing the Community Participation Policy and for monitoring the results of Customer Satisfaction Surveys and performance against any established targets and standards.

Staff Responsibilities

All staff will be responsible for encouraging community participation, however,

Housing Services staff will primarily be responsible for the promotion and implementation of the Policy.

7. Training

The Association recognises the value of training and will ensure that all staff receive adequate training in relation to community participation. In addition, training will be offered to interested tenants and tenants/residents groups, in line with the Community Participation Strategy.

8. Equality and Diversity

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 places an overarching duty on Registered Social Landlords to exercise the functions conferred on them by the Act in a manner which encourages equality of opportunity and observes equal opportunity requirements laid down in other legislation and regulations.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter requires social landlords to perform all aspects of their housing services so that:

- *every tenant and other customers has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.*

The Association's Equality and Diversity Policy covers a range of issues such as access to housing, disability and age, and has the overarching aim of mainstreaming equality in all that we do. The Community Participation Policy should also reflect the principles of the Equality and Diversity Policy.

9. Policy Review

Tenants will be consulted on any future review of the policy, which will be linked to reviews of the Community Participation Strategy. The review will be tenant driven and will take account of any legislative changes, new policy guidance, best practice advice and the performance of the Association.

Bridgewater Housing Association Ltd
Community Participation Policy
Grants For Tenants Groups/Associations

1. Start-Up Grants
 - 1.1 Start-up Grants can be paid to groups of tenants/residents who are working towards establishing a properly constituted and organised group or Association.
 - 1.2 The purpose of paying such grants is to assist the group with costs relating to publicity, postage, hire of meeting rooms, telephone calls etc.
 - 1.3 Payment of grants will be made subject to the following criteria:
 - that the group represents one of or all the Association's estates and tenant members are in the majority.
 - that the group has a bank account or other satisfactory method of holding money, for example, through an agency such as the Social Work Department.
 - that the group agrees to keep accurate records of expenditure and to make these available to the Association on request.
 - that the group can demonstrate that it has the commitment to develop into a properly constituted and representative body.
 - 1.4 To ensure that these criteria are fulfilled it will normally be necessary for a member of staff of the Association to attend meetings with the group or its office bearers.
 - 1.5 Particular scrutiny will be given to applications for repeat Start-up Grants, that is, for a group covering an area where a grant has previously been paid where no formally constituted groups was set up or sustained.
 - 1.6 Where the above criteria have been met, new Associations will qualify for a Start-up Grant of £100.

A lower grant may be paid where circumstances suggest that a group will incur few costs in administering its affairs.

2. Annual Grants

2.1 Established and constituted groups can apply for an Annual Grant to help with their running costs and costs of other activities.

2.2 Payment of Annual Grants will be made subject to the following criteria:

- that the group has agreed a Constitution, including a membership policy designed to ensure that it is representative of its area, which is acceptable to the Association.
- that the group operates a membership policy with Bridgewater Housing Association tenants in the majority.
- that the group has held an Annual General meeting within the last year and other meetings including Committee meetings, in accordance with its constitution.
- that the group's accounts have been approved by the Association or have been audited externally.
- and where a group has bank balances or surpluses which are considered to be excessive or reflect a lack of activity then payment of a grant may be refused.

2.3 In consideration of any application for an Annual Grant, the Association staff will be consulted on their views of the group's activities over the previous year. Groups may also be asked to provide further information to assist in consideration of their applications, and will normally be expected to have attempted to raise funds from other sources.

2.4 Annual Grants will be paid based on the number of Association tenancies covered by the group as follows:

0 - 100	£100
101 - 200	£150
201 - 300	£200
301 upwards	£250

2.5 A new group which establishes itself part-way through the financial year can apply for payment of a relevant proportion of its Annual Grant as well as a Start-up Grant.

3. Special Grants

3.1 Special Grants may be paid to Tenants Groups who apply for one off or special payments towards the costs of specific items of expenditure.

3.2 Special Grants may be paid to assist with major expenditure such as attendance at conferences or seminars or purchases of equipment.

3.3 Payment of Special Grants will be made subject to the following criteria:

- that all of the criteria for payment of Annual Grants have been met.
- that the item of expenditure is considered to be reasonable and compatible with the group's aim.

4. Procedure

4.1 Applications for any grant should be made on the Association's Application form 'Grants for Tenants Groups'.

4.2 Applications for grants should be made in keeping with the following timescales:

Start-Up Grants

- applications may be made at any time.

Annual Grants

- applications should be made by 28 February each year, with forms having been issued to registered groups by the Association in January each year.

Special Grants

- applications may be made at any time but at least one month before it is planned to incur any expenditure, for example, before booking a conference place.

4.3 Payment of grants may be authorised by staff on the following basis:

Start-Up Grants and Annual Grants - Housing Services Manager
(subject to budget provision being available) with a report to the Board.

Special Grants or any grant which will result in budget provision being exceeded - Chief Executive
(with a report to the Board)

4.4 Refusal of any grant application can only be made by the Chief Executive or Housing Services Manager with a right of appeal to the Board.

4.5 Payment of grant will be by cheque made payable to the group.

4.6 A record of all grants paid to each group shall be kept by the Association.

4.7 The amount of grant payable as detailed in Sections 1.6 and 2.4 above will be subject to yearly review by the Association.

GRANT APPLICATION FORM

Bridgewater Housing Association Ltd
1st Floor
Bridgewater Shopping Centre
Erskine
PA8 7AA

Name of Tenants' Group

Secretary's Name

Address

Telephone No

Chairperson's Name

Address

Number of Bridgewater Housing Association houses represented: _____

Does the group have a register of members? Yes [] No []

GRANT(S) APPLIED FOR complete as appropriate

PART A

Annual Grant []

Start Up Grant []

Date of last audit of accounts _____

Date of last AGM

Special Grant []

Please give details of what you propose to use a special grant for

Have you made any other funding requests to anyone else to assist this project?

Yes [] No []

If yes, please give details

Please give a summary of your activities over the last year.

Please turn over for Parts B

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

STAFF COMMENTS ON APPLICATION

Number of properties in the area: _____

Number of tenanted properties represented: _____

Amount of grant payable

Annual grant: _____

Start up grant: _____

Special grant : _____

Total grant: _____

HOUSING OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION

Signed _____

Date: _____

HOUSING SERVICES MANAGER'S DECISION

Signed _____ Date: _____

Cheque Number _____

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DECISION

Signed: _____ Date: _____

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