

**Synergy Housing Group**

**Resident Involvement  
Strategy 2008-2013**

**(Dec 2008)**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Synergy Housing Group wishes to secure feedback from our residents (this may refer to service users, tenants, leaseholders and other customers) to influence the shape, quality and cost of the services that we provide. This new strategy provides greater clarity about the degree of influence available to residents and commits the organisation to a strong plan for our service that has residents at its core.

We have reviewed our aims and objectives which come under three main headings:

- Meeting our desire to be more accountable to residents;
- Increasing the relevance, quality and cost-effectiveness of services we provide; and
- Improving the quality of life for residents living in our properties.

We see resident involvement as crucial to ensuring that we are:

- Providing the range of services people want or need;
- Recognising changing needs and aspirations and responding positively to meeting these;
- Securing quality feedback about how our services are performing;
- Making improvements to services;
- Improving Value for Money; and
- Undertaking fundamental service reviews on a five-year cycle that leads to positive change.

This strategy sets out our approach to pro-actively engage residents in reviewing policies and procedures, monitoring performance and re-shaping services to best match resident needs and preferences.

## **2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

Synergy Housing Group recognises there is a strong case for resident involvement that is focussed on delivering outcomes. As we have already said, we have three main aims:

- Meeting our desire to be accountable to all of our residents;
- Improving the relevance, quality and cost of services we provide; and

- Improving the local quality of life for residents living in our properties.

The degree of priority that we afford to each of these three main aims will vary from area to area and from year to year, depending upon the emerging needs and amount of success we have, e.g. successfully dealing with poor environmental conditions in one locality this year will mean that we have a differing aim for next year for that area.

These annual priorities will be contained within a Resident Involvement SMART Plan<sup>1</sup> and will be agreed annually by each board, following a regular programme of consultation with residents and discussed with the Panel / Forum

The overall priorities for the period 2008-2013 are:

- Establish and deliver according to a comprehensive set of service standards so that residents know what they can expect from our services
- Secure regular satisfaction feedback from a wide range of our residents to inform service improvements and use this to inform service improvements
- Use both modern and traditional methods of connecting with residents to shape and monitor the services we provide
- Make more use of a partnering approach to improve the efficiency and cost effectiveness of our repairs, major works and planned works services
- Revisit standards for local estate services such as grounds maintenance and cleaning to improve the quality, cost of services and ensure that everyone gets the same high quality of service
- Raise awareness of diversity and make sure that access is fair and services meet a wide range of needs

### **3 THE METHODS WE USE**

We recognise that most residents have an opinion about where they live, whilst fewer have opinions about more strategic policy-making and performance management. Accordingly, we see Resident Involvement activities at:

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<sup>1</sup> Specific Measurable Achievable Resourced Time-bound

- The local level - involves working with local people to address issues that are causing concern and building confidence and skills to improve quality of life;
- The strategic level – where residents can influence policies, procedures and priorities across all of the Synergy Housing Group services; and
- Reaching individuals – to ensure that we have feedback from residents of all ages and with differing lifestyles before we introduce changes aimed to improve services or areas.

### **3.1 LOCAL LEVEL RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT**

- 3.1.1 At local level we will engage with residents to consider the positive and negative aspects of the area, including the housing stock, the environment, the local amenities and how policies and procedures impact on the area. Wherever possible we will develop a Neighbourhood plan and set annual priorities for change in close consultation with local people.
- 3.1.2 Local preferences will be observed, some areas may want to have a Tenants' & Residents' Association, others will want a less formal group that meets only 2 or 3 times each year setting their Neighbourhood agenda and hearing updates of progress being made.
- 3.1.3 PHT and EDHA Housing Officers / WPH Area Housing Officers have the lead responsibility for ensuring that Neighbourhood plans are in place; have been agreed with local residents; targets have been set and are being met; and updates are being made available locally on an annual basis.
- 3.1.4 Not all targets set will be the responsibility of Synergy Housing Group. Some may require input by the local Authority, Health Board, Police or Youth Services for example. In these cases, Purbeck Housing Trust will provide support to local people – as agreed in the Neighbourhood plan, to secure as much co-operation as possible to address local issues.

### **3.2 STRATEGIC LEVEL RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT**

- 3.2.1 At our strategic level, we will engage with residents in three main ways:
  - Strengthening our existing, but renamed Resident (Tenant) Panel / Forum (representing interests of all residents who receive services from each company) made up of tenants and leaseholders who have an interest in policy and who are able to give more time to

this level of resident Involvement. This Panel / Forum is the main body of residents that we consult on strategic matters before recommendations go to each Board on critical policies. The Panel / Forum agrees annual priorities for Resident Involvement, taking account of feedback secured from residents, whether through suggestion schemes such as Brainbox, surveys, Focus Groups, Surveys (of various kinds), organised or more loosely formed groups of residents. The Panel / Forum will recommend these to Boards annually, based on the collected feedback from a much wider range of residents. The Panel / Forum will also influence the methods that are employed – issue by issue –to ensure that they are satisfied that each company is addressing issues in a thorough and appropriate way. Each year’s SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, resourced and time-bound) plan for Resident Involvement will ideally be agreed with the Resident Panel / Forum. Each company board may choose not to accept all of the Resident Panel / Forum recommendations and when this occurs it will be the subject of discussions between the Panel / Forum and a Board member chosen by the Board to deliver this task.

- By having 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the subsidiary Board places for tenants, we always have residents’ experience at the core of our decision-making. These residents “champion” Resident Involvement at Board level, ensuring that all staff have consulted on annual priorities, have secured a balanced range of feedback from residents and this is reported to Board when Board is asked to accept officer recommendations for change. Cover sheets for Board papers will have a section that requires the author to say who has been consulted and if those consulted are broadly supportive of the officers' recommendations.
- Setting up short-life groups that involve residents and staff (and Board Members) that have responsibility for reviewing policies and procedures OR undertaking Best Value Reviews of whole service areas. Residents contributing to these groups will have a particular interest and enough time to see reviews through.

### **3.3.1 REACHING INDIVIDUALS**

3.3.1 We are fortunate to have a number of residents who are happy to give us their time in order to improve services and resolve problems. These residents make a valuable contribution, however it would be unreasonable to expect volunteer residents to be representative of everyone who lives in our properties.

3.3.2 Therefore, when we are working with local people in groups AND at a strategic level, Synergy Housing Group will also use market research methods, where this will ensure that we secure feedback from a wide enough range and number of residents. The use of surveys (whether written/postal, face-to-face or telephone) focus groups and mystery shopping will happen when it is felt that we need more robust feedback than has been volunteered by residents. We will make use of market research methods to ensure that we secure feedback from a wide enough range and number of residents.

3.3.3 We are building a database with details of all of our residents, household composition, communication preferences and their interest in giving us feedback from a menu of options. As we populate this database we will use it to secure greater, more balanced feedback from residents.

3.3.4 To engage with residents we will:

<b>AT A LOCAL LEVEL</b>	<b>AT A STRATEGIC LEVEL</b>	<b>REACHING INDIVIDUALS</b>
Encourage local people to give us feedback on our services and the area they live in. Offering a menu, as little as 2 hours each year to as much time as they wish to give	Create a Core Residents' Forum (name to be agreed) that works closely with us to identify annual priorities, agree how to engage with residents to tackle these and monitor the progress made through time	Capture 100% of data in our Customer Profile - Identify residents individual preferences about how we communicate with them – e.g. by phone or e-mail – then use that method
Provide information about the services we deliver and how they compare with other landlords	Work to a 5 year rolling programme of service policy reviews – involving residents in all reviews	Keep the database up to date and use it to secure feedback from representative range of residents
Offer choice about how services could be different and new services introduced	Make them aware of best practice in the field and the reality of choice in doing things differently, to enable real choices to be made	Keep in touch with people, e.g. if a residents has said they would take part in a focus group, invite them along and tell them what happened as a result of the FG

Provide support to any existing local resident groups (or help create new ones) that are willing to give us feedback about our services	Involve residents in considering trends in complaints, to inform changes to procedures or policy and avoid repeat complaints	Provide all residents with regular information about new services, changes to existing services and how we are performing – compared to other landlords
Provide support to any existing or new local groups that help build local residents confidence, skills and knowledge – in order to participate	Involve residents in monitoring routine repairs, planned maintenance and capital programmes	Offer Grants to TRA's + local plan groups, raffle prizes, other "rewards" and practical help to show that we value residents' time and to make their attendance possible
Support less formal groups which are willing to create a local plan, then monitor progress made against the plan	Encourage Sheltered housing residents, Leaseholders and those in TRA's/Neighbourhood plan groups to participate in the Resident Panel on issues that affect all residents	Offer training opportunities that will increase residents skills and confidence – thereby increasing their ability to influence us for the benefit of all residents
<b>AT A LOCAL LEVEL</b>	<b>AT A STRATEGIC LEVEL</b>	<b>REACHING INDIVIDUALS</b>
Organise estate or neighbourhood inspections to gather feedback about local issues and monitor progress	Set up system for monitoring performance	Set up systems that send information to residents in the format of their choice, e.g. by text, in Braille, on tape, in a language other than English etc
Encourage other agencies to contribute to resolving local issues that are not directly the responsibility of Synergy Housing Group	Set up and support short life groups of Board Members, staff and residents that review policies, procedures and priorities	Ensure that welfare rights advice (through existing agencies) is made available to residents who may face challenges related to low income
Carry out surveys that inform us of how our services are performing	Balance the feedback that is volunteered by residents with market research	

	feedback that gives us comprehensive feedback, on which to base recommendations for change	
Balance the feedback that is volunteered by residents with market research feedback that gives us comprehensive feedback, on which to base recommendations for change	Develop a local performance indicator to make sure that we are securing balanced feedback from the whole range of households	
Feedback to local residents – the effect that their involvement is having	Build a pool of residents who are willing to be involved from 2 hours a year to intensive input	
Identify any resident training needs/wishes and work with educational agencies and other landlords to offer a programme of training annually	Identify any resident training needs/wishes and work with educational agencies and other landlords to offer a programme of training annually	
	Train residents to operate as mystery shoppers and test priority services as agreed with Core Residents' Forum	
<b>AT A LOCAL LEVEL</b>	<b>AT A STRATEGIC LEVEL</b>	<b>REACHING INDIVIDUALS</b>
	Ensure that we are linked in to the voluntary, public and private sector in ways that help to lever in funds to tackle issues of concern to residents, e.g. lottery funds for youth projects	

	Set up a system that will enable us to know what we are spending on resident involvement, compared to others – and test whether residents feel that this is good value for their money	
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### **3.3.5 A RANGE OF WAYS THAT RESIDENTS CAN CHOOSE TO GIVE US FEEDBACK/INFLUENCE OUR SERVICES**

IF YOU CAN GIVE US 2 hours **per year**, giving us your feedback, this will lead to improvements in the services we deliver. If you can give more time, you can help even more - Any time you give will be very much appreciated. You may be interested in:

- Asking survey questions by phone, on the web or postal surveys - or just filling out survey(s) to give your own view
- Taking part in a two-hour focus group discussing how to improve how we do things
- Being a mystery shopper where you pretend to ask us for a service to test how well we react
- Being a resident Inspector - looking at the quality of work being done by Synergy Housing Group - seeing if it is good enough
- Forming or joining a local Tenant or Resident Association to tackle local issues or run social events
- Joining the Resident Panel / Forum which meet regularly and considers how your company is performing, tackles problems tenants have brought to their attention, considers policy and procedure changes
- Sitting on our Complaints Panel considering residents complaints
- Taking part in a short life working group - set up for a short time to look at how a service is being delivered - e.g. how does your company tackle Anti Social Behaviour? Could we do better? how do other landlords do it?
- Identifying the standards and finishes in new build, refurbishment, or new kitchens/bathrooms, heating systems etc - to offer residents more choice.

Deciding the procedures to give residents enough time to choose through sitting on a Design Panel

- Editorial Panel member - if you are interested in how information is provided to residents - what info do they need? Should we print a leaflet? Should we write letters or put it on our website? You may like to join the Editorial Panel

Use this menu to choose how you might like to be involved. Contact us on 01929 558400 to chat with our friendly staff and get more detail of what might suit your interests best.

TYPE OF ACTIVITY	2 hours a YEAR	4 hours a MONTH	2 hours a MONTH
<p><b>SURVEY(s)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completing surveys (paper)</li> <li>• Asking other residents survey questions (phone)</li> <li>• Deciding what questions should be asked</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 surveys</li> <li>• 2 surveys</li> <li>• 1 session of 2 hours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 surveys</li> <li>• 4 surveys</li> <li>• 2 x 2 hour sessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 surveys</li> <li>• 2 surveys</li> <li>• 1 session of 2 hours</li> </ul>
<p><b>FOCUS GROUP(s)</b> One-off 2 hour sessions looking at an issue of interest to you.</p>	1 Focus Group	2 Focus Groups a month	1 Focus Group a month
<p><b>DISCUSSION GROUP(s)</b> Synergy Housing Group has a range of Discussion Groups such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repairs monitoring</li> <li>• Planned Maintenance Programme</li> <li>• Contractor tendering and monitoring</li> <li>• Grounds maintenance</li> <li>• Communal Cleaning</li> <li>• Customer Care</li> <li>• Compliments and Complaints</li> <li>• Equality and Diversity</li> </ul>			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sheltered Housing</li> <li>• Leaseholders</li> <li>• Young People</li> <li>• Waiting List/homeless people</li> <li>• Value for Money</li> <li>• Anti-Social Behaviour</li> <li>• Rents</li> </ul>			
<p><b>COMPLAINTS PANEL</b> Panels are arranged when a complaint has not been resolved at an early stage so we cannot predict how many Panel meetings may be arranged in a year</p>	1 Complaints Panel	2 Complaints Panels	1 Complaints Panel
<b>TYPE OF ACTIVITY</b>	<b>2 hours a YEAR</b>	<b>4 hours a MONTH</b>	<b>2 hours a MONTH</b>
<p><b>RESIDENT INSPECTOR(s)</b> Residents inspect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the condition of empty homes ready for letting</li> <li>• the condition of local neighbourhoods</li> <li>• the quality of major works and how residents feel about the process</li> <li>• shadow a repairs worker as they do their job for 1/2 day or 1 day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 1/3 day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 1/2 day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 1/3 day</li> </ul>
<p><b>RESIDENT PANEL/FORUM</b> The Panel/Forum troubleshoots issues that residents have tried and failed to resolve. It also considers changes to policy and procedures. The Panel/Forum currently meets every month to 6 weeks</p>	Not enough time to take part in the Resident Panel	1 Panel Meeting every month/6 weeks	1 Panel Meeting every month/6 weeks
<b>SHORT-LIFE WORKING</b>			

<p><b>GROUP(s)</b> From time to time Synergy Housing Group will set up Short Life Working Groups to take an in depth look at a particular issue and make recommendations about how to do it better. Short life can mean 3 short meetings of sometimes more.</p>	Not enough time to take part in a short Life Working Group	2 Working Group meetings each month - for around 3 months	1 Working Group meeting each month - for around 3 months
<p><b>MYSTERY SHOPPER(s)</b> This can involve making phone calls to each company testing how well we react to your "pretend" enquiry. It may mean you visiting a Synergy office asking a question and recording how well it is answered</p>	6 phone calls OR 1 visit to office	12 phone calls OR 2 visits to office	6 phone calls OR 1 visit to office
<p><b>MAJOR WORKS DESIGN PANEL</b> Looking at the quality and choice offered to residents when major works are being offered. Considering where works programmes should be done first</p>	Not enough time to take part in the Design Panel	Design Panel plans to meet twice a year	Design Panel plans to meet twice a year
<b>TYPE OF ACTIVITY</b>	<b>2 hours a YEAR</b>	<b>4 hours a MONTH</b>	<b>2 hours a MONTH</b>
<p><b>EDITORIAL PANEL/READING GROUP</b> Helping us to decide what information residents want and which are the best ways to provide it</p>	Only enough time to take part in the Editorial Panel if done on-line	Editorial Panel plans to meet 4 times a year	Editorial Panel plans to meet 4 times a year

#### 4 FOCUS ON OUTCOMES

**4.1** Every time that we involve residents we will be clear, at the outset, what we aim to achieve and agree the outcome with those we want. Some examples of what we hope to achieve are:

- More residents knowing what our service can offer them, and choosing the service they need/want
- New services introduced, e.g. garden maintenance, home decoration, floating support, handyman etc
- Problems solved through opportunities to identify issues and monitor progress through local plans
- Resident Panel/Forum has a better understanding of what today and tomorrow's residents want + need – as well as what potential new residents may want, through improving our knowledge of who we house, what they want and need and how they wish to communicate with us
- Residents, Board members and staff who know what is possible – through better information, benchmarking and service reviews – and can make more informed decisions about what to change based on what residents want
- Being able to tell residents the impact that their views have had on the service by keeping Impact monitoring records and producing Annual Impact Statement
- Delivering better Value for Money through partnership working, procurement and benchmarking and being able to test if residents believe they are getting VFM
- Improved performance in services as a result of Resident Involvement e.g. changes to the specification for grounds maintenance or through residents mystery shopping, secure better performance from contractors
- Reduced rent arrears – by improving the process of allocation, HB applications, provision of welfare rights advice and changing the tone of letters and attitude/skills of staff
- Improved satisfaction of residents – more repairs are fixed first time, following Resident Involvement in performance monitoring meetings with contractors
- Increased access to services through changes to opening hours, promotion of home visits and better use of technology, following RI in service reviews
- Agreements reached on best use of sheltered housing stock
- Service delivery staff “owning” resident involvement and using it as a means to improve services and tackle local challenges

## **5 THE RESOURCES WE MAKE AVAILABLE**

We will support any resident who is willing to give us feedback and help shape the services which we provide to customers. We will provide:

- Grants for local tenant and residents associations
- Financial help to meet cost of hall hire, refreshments at meetings, resident travel or care costs
- Training for residents - we will offer an Annual Programme of training to build confidence, knowledge and enhance employment opportunities
- All mystery shopping/resident inspector costs
- Resident Involvement promotional material
- Quality information about how we are performing as compared to other landlords
- Tenant Newsletter and calendar costs
- Full time Resident Involvement Officer

## **6 THE POTENTIAL FOR DELEGATED DECISION MAKING**

The Synergy Boards, EDHA, PHT and WPH, have overall responsibility for decision-making at each company. They delegates operational decisions to the Managing Directors who in turn, delegates decisions to staff in the organisations.

There is potential for some decisions to be delegated to residents, e.g. allocation of grants to community groups and from the Community Chest funded by some contracts, spending environmental budgets area by area, priorities for spending the training budget and for . In 2008/09 a recommendation will go to the Boards on whether any decision-making is to be delegated. This consideration will be an annual one.

## **7 HOW WE WILL MONITOR PROGRESS AND REVIEW THIS STRATEGY**

A SMART plan will spell out what we will do to make Resident Involvement central to each organisation over the period 2008-2013. The actions contained within the plan will be reviewed annually and progress will be reported quarterly to the Resident Panel / Forum. They will take responsibility for reviewing this strategy and progress made and will report to Board its view of the position and any related recommendations at least once a year.

The Resident Panel / Forum will oversee the development of an Annual Impact Statement which shows the effect that resident views have had. This will form an important part of the Annual Report to Residents and will be made available to the Housing Corporation as evidence of your influence over the Trust.

Fundamental review of this strategy is scheduled for 2013 but that does not preclude an earlier date being agreed by the Board.