

Spitalfields Housing Association Tenant Involvement Statement and Participation Strategy

Tenant Involvement Statement

Why do we want to involve residents?

- Because we believe Spitalfields H.A will provide better services if we take account of residents views.
- Because we started life as a community led organisation and believe in helping people to bring about change from the grass roots.
- Because we want to work at being democratically accountable to our users and members.

Whom do we want to involve?

- We want to involve those not already involve as well as those who are.
- We want to involve those in groups as well as individuals.
- We want to involve all sections of the community including women and the young who are currently under represented.

How do we want to involve residents?

- In as many ways as possible
- In receiving information about our services
- In informal and formal consultation
- In exploring opportunities for control.

What are the main principals and considerations guiding this statement?

- That we are guided by principals of equal opportunity and cultural diversity.
- That we are guided by principals of openness, honest and integrity.
- That we work for the benefit of the communities we serve only.
- That we operate a blame free and co operative culture.
- That we aim always to expand the democratic basis of involvement and its influence.
- That we consider carefully and then do what we say.

Spitalfields Housing Association Tenant Participation Strategy

Purpose of the paper

This paper aims to draw together previous policy documents developed by Spitalfields Housing Association on the subject of Tenant Participation and incorporate aspects of these with new elements identified by the Housing Corporation in its recent paper 'Involvement policy for the housing association sector' into a single document.

This paper will be presented to the Tenants Forum, wider staff team and Senior Management Team for discussion and comment before being presented to the board of management for approval.

History

In recent years Spitalfields has utilised two policies, a tenant participation policy written by Ian Weightman and approved by the Board of Management in 1999 and a Tenants Working Together strategy created in consultation with the Tenants Forum and approved by the Board of Management in 2002.

These two documents are different in nature, the former focuses on certain basic aims with regard to providing information to tenants, on setting up, monitoring and funding tenant associations and on setting up a tenant's forum. The latter was action plan focused to help capacity build the work of the Tenants Forum.

Neither these two documents together nor any single document have aimed to cover comprehensively the range of activity in this area.

This document aims to rectify this in order to further build the momentum of work in this area and to take account of the Housing Corporations recent guidance to Housing Associations set out in its paper 'Involvement policy for the housing association sector.

Information to Tenants on Spitalfields Housing Association Services - What we aim to provide and how we aim to provide it.

The Tenants Handbook

A Tenant Handbook is provided to all new tenants at the commencement of their tenancy. The Handbook is available in English / Bengali and will be reviewed each year by SMT, staff and the Tenants Forum to ensure that the document maintains its relevance. The date for the review will be set each year by the Chief Executive.

Leaflets

Spitalfields H.A currently has no individual policy/ information leaflets. Each of the main departments will organise the production of 1 information leaflet in English/ Bengali on a service area of importance. This will be set out in work plans.

The Tenant Newsletter

4 Newsletters are produced annually in English / Bengali. Each household receives 1 postal copy.

All Departments within the organisation will in future communicate information relevant to their area of activity directly via this medium. The newsletter will be used to feed back information on service improvement and results of consultations as well as other information.

The Community Development Team will service the newsletter.

The Community Development Team will work with the Tenants Forum to produce articles for the Newsletter.

The Annual Report

A single report is produced annually. It is produced in English / Bengali and copies are retained for giving to interested stakeholders.

In future the Community Development Team will work with the Tenants Forum to produce a section from Tenants. A section focusing on improvements to services is also to be considered.

Spitalfields H.A website

Spitalfields H.A currently has no web site. The Community Development Team will work with tenants towards providing a website. The feasibility of this being a project which incorporates employment and training is to be considered. A section for Tenant Associations and a Youth Forum or similar are also to be considered.

Written Communication

Spitalfields H.A communicates with tenants via a mixture of standard and individually drafted written correspondence. Some of this written correspondence is translated into Bengali.

Departments will work towards improving the quality of standard letters and increasing the range of standardised written communication which is translated. This will be set out in work plans and will be reviewed in line with Normal Service Review processes.

Verbal Correspondence

Spitalfields H.A relies heavily on this form of communication with tenants and employs a number of bilingual staff. The employment of bi lingual staff in key positions is extremely important to ensure this channel of communication remains effective. The Associations general equalities and cultural diversities policy sets out Spitalfields H.A's stated aim of employing staff from the communities it serves.

Consultation with Tenants on Spitalfields Housing Association services – What structures we will have in place to consult with tenants.

Best Value Comprehensive Service Reviews

Comprehensive service reviews will allow a representative panel of staff and tenants to choose and direct the progress of one service review per year.

A panel, comprised of 2 Tenant Forum members, 2 front line staff, 1 Senior Member of staff will be formed to determine 1 comprehensive service review per year. The panel will be able to request information from the relevant service manager in order to make recommendations for service improvement and the construction of service standards.

Normal Service Reviews

Normal Service Reviews will ensure that a minimum level of consultation will take place with tenants and staff prior to policies being approved by the board of management.

Managers will ensure that each service review they undertake is brought before the Tenants Forum, wider staff team and Senior Management Team for structured debate.

The Tenants Forum

The Tenants Forum provides a structure for individual resident associations to meet and share ideas among themselves as well as with representatives from Spitalfields Housing Association. Spitalfields H.A will utilise the Tenants Forum to consult on a range of policies and improvements.

The Tenants Associations will be represented on the Tenants Forum which will increase the rate of its meetings from 4 per year to 10 per year. These will be serviced by the Community Development Team but Managers of other Departments will use the forum for their own information and service improvement processes.

The Tenants Forum will have a partially structured agenda for the year which will include meetings which serve the following purposes.

- Debate and contributions to the Newsletter
- Debate and contributions to the Annual Report
- Consultation on normal service reviews with Departmental Managers.
- Discussion on Tenant Survey results and suggested areas for service improvement.
- Invitation of key agencies to help develop the capacity of the Forum and Tenant Associations and range of Community Development Activities.

The Tenant Survey

A tenants' survey will be completed once every 2 years. The survey is the NHF Status survey which may be slightly reviewed and amended.

The survey will be posted to each household. Following a period of 2/3 months the returned surveys will be counted. If the % of returned surveys falls short of 60% of the total number of households, targets will be set with departments for front line staff to increase the collection of surveys. The Community Development Department will co ordinate this activity.

Data from surveys will be inputted into SNAP by the Community Development Team as it is received and Departmental Managers will be able to utilise the data , using the SNAP software, for their own service performance reporting and improvement purposes.

The Community Development Team will ensure data from the survey as a whole is fed back to tenants through the Newsletter, to the Board at a Board meeting and to Staff at a Staff meeting.

It will also be the responsibility of the Chief Executive to ensure the data is used when developing the Business plan and in formulating the annual report.

Ad Hoc/ Issue Based Consultation

Issues of concern to tenants will arise in which it is appropriate to call a meeting of a group of affected tenants to discuss matters. This may be initiated through the action of tenants or staff.

In these cases Spitalfields H.A representatives will ensure that meetings are called at convenient locations and times and with due advance notification to allow all who wish to participate.

It will be normal in these circumstances for the department whose area of responsibility the issue is to take a lead in organising and hosting meetings. Other relevant parties, including other departments may also be invited to attend.

Maintenance

A Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire will be sent out with each repair order which is raised. This will be returned by the Contractor who carried out the repair when they return their invoice.

Where the tenant states that they are not happy with the repair a post inspection of the repair will be carried out.

The Maintenance Manger will report data on customer satisfaction with repairs to the Board and the Tenants Forum and will use this information to inform service improvements.

Major Repairs

Tenants will be given details of any major repairs which are planned to their homes before they are carried out. They will be provided with the following information:-

- What work is planned
- Start and finish dates
- Working times
- Contractor code of conduct.

Tenants will be given the opportunity to attend a meeting with representatives from Spitalfields H.A and the Contractor before works are started to discuss the above and any other matters of concern.

In some cases Spitalfields H.A may provide the additional service of a resident liason officer, whose responsibility it will be to manage any problems tenants experience as a result of the work.

Tenants may also be consulted about choices in relation to the major repair work planned and may be given the opportunity to take part in some part of the selection of suitable contractors.

Complaints

Spitalfields has a Complaints policy in use by staff.

A central complaints file will be kept on computer which will be used by Departmental Managers to log complaints in accordance with the complaints policy. Departmental Managers will make reference to this file when carrying out service reviews in order that information received from tenants about service failures in this form is used to improve services in the future.

The Chief Executive will ensure that reference is made to the complaints file when formulating departmental work plans, which include policy reviews for the year.

Estate Inspections

Housing Officers undertake regular inspections of external/internal communal areas. Where tenant representatives require it these inspections will be carried out in a joint manner and follow up action from these inspections will be reported back to Tenant Representatives and the Tenants Forum.

Mystery shoppers

Spitalfields H.A will investigate the possibility of training tenants to conduct mystery shopping audits of our services.

Control – What structures we have in place for tenants to exercise more control over Spitalfields Housing Association Services.

Setting up Tenant Management Organisations

Unlike council tenants, housing association tenants do not have a right to manage their homes in law.

However the Housing Corporation expects that if a group of tenants make a reasonable request to become involved in managing their homes, then a housing association should give a considered response to their request.

In keeping with this Spitalfields H.A will consider well thought through cases for self management where the Tenant body can demonstrate that they have tenant support in the area in question to explore the option/s for direct management of their homes.

Working with Tenant Management Organisations

Spitalfields will work with existing Tenant Management Organisations in keeping with the Management Agreements in place.

Estate Agreements

Estate Agreements are a form of non legal contract, negotiated between Landlord and Resident which are designed to lead to better management of services to an area and to tackle identified problems.

Spitalfields Housing Association will work with any group of tenants interested in setting up an Estate Agreement.

TPAS produces guidance on Estate Agreements which Spitalfields H.A will adopt.

Tenant Board members

Spitalfields Housing Associations rules allow for the election of a maximum of 5 Tenant Board Members or equal to one third of the total Board membership which must not exceed 15 members.

Tenants who are shareholders of the Association may be elected tenant board members. Any person who is a shareholder who wishes to be a candidate for election must submit a written statement containing necessary details. Elections to the board then take place at the Annual General Meeting.

Shareholders

Spitalfields H.A keeps a register of Shareholders and can admit new Shareholders in accordance with its policies and objectives for admitting new Shareholders.

Applicants interested in applying for a share can apply in writing to the Associations Office setting out their reasons for applying and qualifications and by paying the sum of one pound. New applications are considered by the Board.

This second section covers how Spitalfields H.A will encourage, regulate and support the activities of Residents Associations.

Resident Associations

Any group of people living in the same area can set up a tenants' or residents' association. By themselves they can choose who their members will be, how they will be represented and what they want to achieve. But, if a group wants to make sure that its views are listened to by other organisations, especially over a sustained period of time, or wants to apply for funds to help achieve their aims, they must expect to have to show that they are accountable, democratic and as far as possible representing the views of their members.

For tenants' and residents' groups in areas of housing owned or managed by Spitalfields H.A this usually means becoming a recognised Tenants' or Residents' Association. Spitalfields HA will not be prescriptive about how a Tenant Association or Tenant Group should develop and be organised. However, there will be certain criteria which need to be met by new and existing TA/Groups in order for them to be consulted on Spitalfields services and in order for them to receive financial and other help. SHA will aim for as many tenants as possible to be represented through recognised groups.

Setting up and running Tenants/Residents Association

TPAS produces a number of information sheets to help Residents/ Tenants set up and run effective groups. These are available from Spitalfields H.A who adopts its guidance.

Information contained in this policy sets out Spitalfields H.A's specific requirements in relation to what support it will offer new and existing groups and what it requires from Residents Associations to achieve recognition.

Spitalfields will provide support and advice on gathering support, on planning a first public meeting and will help facilitate meetings where required in the first instance. Once recognised it will assist the Tenant/ Residents Association in a number of ways (see below)

SHA will provide a model constitution provided by TPAS and will support Tenant/Resident groups to develop and adapt this to their own requirements.

Recognising Tenant/ Resident Associations

In order to achieve recognition groups should be able to demonstrate that they have the following:-

A Constitution which details the name and aims of their group.

An elected Committee which is elected at the Annual General Meeting. Minutes must be available

A Constitution which gives details of its membership in respect of who can join and how they will be represented.

The constitution should also contain details of its equal opportunities/ diversity policy.

A Bank account :The group should have a Bank, Building Society or Post Office account which will requires at least two committee members to sign.

Evidence of holding Annual General Meetings and other Meetings which are quorate.

An AGM should be held annually to hold elections of principal committee members. Other meetings should be held throughout the year to discuss the affairs of the group including one to discuss the accounts for the year. The association will only recognise minutes from meetings where 10% of the membership is represented.

Code of Conduct

A Constitution of other Code of Conduct policy that details the organisations code of conduct with respect to members.

Child Protection Issues

Where Tenant Associations are working with children, delivering after school classes or organising trips they will be required to formally adopt an approved child protection policy and to carry out CRB checks on individuals who are responsible for the children.

Attached with this document are the Child Protection Policy of Muslim aid and the Protection of Children Act 1999. (see policy file on email)

Proof that a Child protection policy has been adopted and annually reviewed and of relevant CRB checks will be required by Spitalfields H.A as part of annual recognition checks.

Monitoring Recognition

Spitalfields H.A will monitor the recognition of Tenant /Resident Association groups once a year.

It will issue the Annual recognition form in April each year and will assess it according to the criteria set out in this policy.

On receipt of the completed application form and supporting details the Community Development officer will present these to the Community Development Manager.

If the criteria have been satisfied and there are no other concerns the annual grant will be paid within one month of submission of the application.

2.1 APPLICATION FOR ANNUAL RECOGNITION AND ANNUAL TA GRANT

1. Name of the Tenants/Residents Association/Group

.....
.....

2. Address (for correspondence)

.....

3. Contact Telephone number and email address

.....

4. Have you elected/selected a committee which includes at least a chairperson, secretary & treasurer?

Yes **No**

5. Details of the Committee members:

Name..... (Chair)	Name..... (Vice-Chair)
Address.....	Address.....
.....
Tel:	Tel:

Name..... (Sec)	Name..... (Treasurer)
Address.....	Address.....
.....
Tel:	Tel:

Name..... ()	Name..... ()
Address.....	Address.....
.....
Tel:	Tel:

6. Have you operated within the conditions of your constitution?

Yes **No**

7. Have you held an AGM where accounts have been presented?

Yes No

8. Bank Details

Account Name

Account Number..... Sort Code

Signatories

9. Details of TA Activities:.....

.....
.....
.....
.....

10. Documents to be enclosed with this return:

- a. Copy of the most recent constitution (may not be required if held at SHA office)
- b. Minutes of 2 recently held quorate meetings including the AGM
- c. A copy of your accounts for the preceding year

Start up Grants

If new groups are able to satisfy the recognition criteria contained in the above guidance and after satisfactory submission of the Annual Recognition form they will be entitled to receive an extra £100 start up grant **Support available to Recognised Tenant groups from Spitalfields Housing Association.**

Annual Tenant/Resident Association Grant:

Each Tenant/ Resident Association will be eligible for the Annual Tenant/Resident Association Grant of £500. The grant is intended for use to help with the day to day running cost of the Tenant/ Resident Association and may include things like:

Equipment
Training
Photocopying
Postage
Running costs

But may also be used to build support for the Tenant Association by organising

Tenants/residents events

And may help fund any ongoing activities organised and supported by the community including

Educational/Health/Employment activities

Community Facilities

Community Facilities / Buildings are an important resource for groups working within their community. Spitalfields H.A aims to support free/low cost use of facilities for the purpose of Tenant/ Resident Association meetings / community activities or events.

Where Spitalfields H.A owns facilities it will agree the use of these facilities with relevant community groups and will draw up a 'use of premises document' to be signed by all parties. These will be available free of charge.

Spitalfields H.A main office meeting room will also be available to groups and use of this room will be agreed with the Community Development Officer / Manager.

A member of staff will be required to be present to supervise use of the building if these meetings are held outside office hours.

Where Spitalfields does not own a facility but has access to it through it's links with other organisations it will offer to support to negotiate usage of a facility with the freeholder of the building. There may be charges for such facilities.

External Grant Applications

The Community Development team will offer support to Tenant and Resident Associations to identify sources of funding for their activities and will offer advice and support on completing applications.

This will include identifying fundraising training for Tenants/Residents involved in fundraising, linking them up with organisations who can offer help in this field (for example Community Organisations Forum) and making available resources which give details of funders. (Spitalfields has a copy of a Funder Finder CD ROM which Tenants/Resident Association groups are welcome to make use of at our office)

It will not be the responsibility of the Community Development section to complete and submit applications on the Tenant/ Residents Associations behalf .TAs are expected to take the initiative to make applications with support.

Where there are projects which Tenant/ Resident Associations and Spitalfields H.A wish to pursue jointly the Community Development Team may offer more sustained support in fundraising.

Capacity Building

SHA will maintain its membership with organisations whose role it is build the capacity of Resident/Tenant groups working in the voluntary/ charitable sectors. Spitalfields H.A is currently a member of the local Voluntary Council Service, Community Organisation Forum (COF) and the National Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS).

SHA will help facilitate links between Tenants/Residents Associations and these organisations and will make available information and training provided by these organisations on such things as developments in tenant participation, funding for community projects etc.

Small Grants Programme

Spitalfields H.A will begin operating a small grants programme for Tenant/ Resident groups and in certain circumstances for other small voluntary groups, where this may aid a Community Development objective of the Housing Association.

The aim of the programme will be to aid with the following:-

- Provide a small pot of money for use on annually designated projects to help foster a sense of community.
- To encourage tenant / resident groups to practice their fundraising skills.

Grants will be for amounts up to £400.00.

The application procedure will involve completion of a short application form. Only recognised Tenant Resident Associations will be eligible to apply.

Applications must be signed by two members of the management committee.

Closing dates for applications will be on a bi annual basis on the 1st of June and 1st of September.

Applications will be considered within one month of the closing date according to the criteria that have been set for the year by the Community Development Manager and Community Development Officer. These criteria will be in keeping with Neighbourhood Renewal objectives for the area.

Approved applications will be passed to the Finance Manger before the grant is paid. Applicants will be notified in writing of their acceptance/ rejection within one month of the closing date.

Applicants of failed applications will be able to reapply at the next closing date. Successful applicants will not be able to reapply for another year.

Evaluation and Monitoring – Impact Assessment for this policy.

This policy will be reviewed annually with the Tenants Forum.

The following checklist of outcomes will be used to assess how effectively the policy is being implemented and a report will be produced by the Community Development Team.

- Has the Tenant Handbook been reviewed?
- Have any policy leaflets been produced?
- Have 4 Newsletters been produced?
- What has the tenant input in the Newsletter been?
- Have tenant suggestions been incorporated into the Annual Report?
- Has a website been produced that involves a section for tenants?
- Has there been an improvement in the standardisation of correspondence with tenants? What is it?
- Do Spitalfields Staff continue to have the range of languages needed to communicate with tenants effectively?
- Has the Comprehensive Service review been completed, a policy produced and an analysis presented to board?
- Have all normal Service reviews been presented to Board, Tenant Forum and Staff ?
- Have 10 tenant forum meetings been held? Analyse attendance.
- Has the tenant survey response rate risen to 60%. Have results been used in survey reviews, and reported back to tenants through the newsletter, through the forum and the board?
- Have maintenance survey results been analysed and reported back through the newsletter, forum and board?
- Have complaints been presented to board, Forum and Newsletter?
- Has a Mystery Shopping exercise been set up?
- Have all Residents Associations submitted forms with necessary information and received grants?
- Has the small grants programme been administered?

Volunteering Policy/ Procedure

SHA will use this policy as a guide for recruitment and supervision of volunteers. Spitalfields H.A may from time to time seek volunteers to work on specific projects or aspects of its work in order to offer opportunities to the community it serves and in order to further its work. Spitalfields opportunity for seeking volunteers will be determined by the existence of suitable projects and the extent of Spitalfields resources. It is anticipated that projects may be initiated by the Community Development Department, however projects which are initiated by other departments may also wish to use volunteers and therefore refer to this policy.

This policy will enable SHA to refer to a written policy which ensures that all volunteers are treated equally and fairly and that decisions are not made on an ad hoc basis.

Recruiting volunteers

When seeking volunteers Spitalfields H.A will advertise opportunities in its quarterly newsletter and on its job vacancy board in Spitalfields H.A office reception. It will also use word of mouth by informing the Tenants Forum, Tenant Associations and Spitalfields Staff in order to identify enthusiastic candidates.

For testing the suitability of volunteers Spitalfields H.A will use one to one interviews with a maximum of 2 panel members present. It may also for certain projects rely on external service providers who recruit volunteers.

In line with it's Community Development objectives Spitalfields will aim to recruit volunteers on a representative basis from its tenant/ resident local community or where this is not possible from the wider community. Spitalfields H.A's Race and Cultural Diversity Policy will apply where applicable.

Supervising volunteers

Each volunteer will be given a named supervisor who will be responsible for them while conducting Spitalfields business.

The supervisor will be responsible for negotiating and judging what degree of support is required, depending on the activity.

Induction and training

The volunteer supervisor will be responsible for training the volunteer on the aspect of work they are to be involved in.

They will also be responsible for giving the volunteer basic information on the whereabouts of its properties and office housekeeping details, its aims and objectives as an organisation, health and safety at work, the security of Spitalfields property, its race and cultural diversity policy, confidentiality policy, and code of conduct policies.

The supervisor will also be responsible for informing other staff on the role of the volunteer and will act as a point of liaison for any issues which arise.

Insurance of volunteers

The activities of volunteers recruited by Spitalfields Housing Association are insured under our block select policy with Zurich.

Reimbursing volunteers

Reimbursing volunteers is important to show that they are valued in the work they undertake for the organisation. However it is important that volunteers are paid 'out of pocket expense only' in order to avoid falling foul of national minimum wage legislation and benefit rules.

To this end Spitalfields H.A will pay volunteers the following out of pocket expenses.

Transport costs – Spitalfields H.A will cover the cost of travelling incurred whilst carrying out the voluntary work. Spitalfields will reimburse according to the value of travel by public transport. Spitalfields will require receipt of travel before payment.

Meal costs – Spitalfields will cover meals in exceptional circumstances only. In normal circumstances it will expect the volunteer to bring their own food in the form of a packed lunch or other.

Child Care Costs – Spitalfields H.A will cover child care costs on the basis of £30.00 per day or a portion of that pro rata where the hours are less than an 8 hour day.

This will be payable only where the child is cared for by a registered child minder/nursery. Proof of this service will be required prior to reimbursement. Where care is provided by a relative of the child no payment will be available.

Incentives – In addition to the above and to help Spitalfields H.A attract volunteers to take part in community and consultation events Spitalfields H.A will also use a range of appropriate incentives and rewards for those who offer their time such as the following :-

- Gifts and prizes.
- Vouchers - shop and leisure based vouchers.

Minimum age of volunteers

Spitalfields will only consider taking on volunteers who are 16 years old or older. This will not apply to other schemes which may in conjunction with wider educational /training programmes e.g. work experience placements.

Voluntary work and claiming benefit.

There is no set time limit to the amount of voluntary work a person claiming JSA can do. However to be eligible for JSA a person must be considered to have enough time to be actively seeking work. They must also be available for interview at 48 hours notice and available to take up full or part time work at a weeks notice. The person who is on JSA must inform their JSA case worker before they take up any voluntary work with SHA.