

Unlocking the potential
of people and places

Southern
Housing
Group 

Active residents' guide

All you need to know about working with Southern Housing Group



Resident Involvement Statement

We are committed to understanding your needs as residents and involving you in shaping the services you receive. When we drew up our Corporate Plan for 2009-2012, we made this our number one strategic objective.

Our Resident Involvement Statement sets out our broad approach to resident involvement and is written for everyone who has an interest in our work.

Our Active Residents' Guide gives more details about our approach, our policy and our procedures and is aimed mainly at residents interested in working with us.

We see resident involvement as vital to ensuring the success of our business. Our primary goal is to ensure that we use the right tools to reach the right people.

We believe a flexible approach to resident involvement has a clear and necessary role in developing our services. We will continue to focus on achieving results from our work with our customers and continue to see our customers' ideas as a valuable asset. An asset that will help grow our business into our second century.

If you have any questions or concerns, call the Service Centre and ask for the Resident Involvement team. You will find contact details on the back page.

Consultation on this statement

We have involved residents in drawing up the statement, in the following ways.

- Our Residents' Panel Readers' Group read the draft, commented and suggested amendments and additions.
- We consulted on the approaches we describe in this guide through a programme of focus groups with members of the Residents' Panel and the wider resident population.
- We submitted the statement to recognised tenant and resident groups.
- The guide is reviewed each year by a panel of residents.

Translations

For help with translations, or if a large type, Braille or taped summary would be useful, please contact Southern Housing Group's Service Centre on 0300 303 1771.

Arabic لمساعدتك في الترجمة يرجى الاتصال بمركز الخدمة على هاتف 0300 303 1771.

Bengali অনুবাদ সাহায্য পেতে হলে সার্ভিস সেন্টারে 0300 303 1682 নম্বরে ফোন করুন।












French Si vous souhaitez recevoir de l'aide avec vos traductions, appelez le 0300 303 1771.

Somali Wixii ah caawimo turjumaan ka soo wac Xarunta Adeegga telefoonka 0300 303 1771.

Spanish Si necesita que le ayudemos con alguna traducción, llámenos al 0300 303 1771.

Turkish Tercüme konusunda yardım için 0300 303 1683 'den Hizmet Merkezi'ni arayın.

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Introduction

We have produced this Active Residents' Guide to help our residents and staff promote resident involvement. Our aim is to help you gain the skills and information you need, so that you can influence and become more involved in the way your homes are managed.

The guide will be most useful to you if you are already active in your neighbourhood and you need more information about us and the ways you can get involved. It will also be useful if you are active in a local group.

Although we have written this guide primarily for tenants, you will also find it useful if you are a home owner – especially if you are working alongside tenants to solve local problems. In the guide, we have used the words 'tenant' and 'home owner' when we need to refer to people who either rent or own their homes. Where there is no difference, we have used the word 'resident' or 'you'. If you are a home owner and you would like to set up a group just for home owners, please call the Service Centre and ask to speak to the Resident Involvement team. You will find contact details on the back page.

At the end of the guide, we have included a comprehensive guide to housing jargon. We hope you find this a small but useful aid to working with housing professionals.



Andrea Lees is one of the residents who worked so hard to get the Northbrook Project – a youth centre for West Durrington – off the ground.

How you can get involved

Resident involvement is about you positively influencing our services and having a say about our priorities, policies and ways of working. You are our 'customers' and your views are important. We use a variety of ways to involve you, which we refer to as our 'resident involvement menu'.

Resident involvement menu

The resident involvement menu set out below is designed to make sure we hear from the widest possible range of residents. Some options take up very little time, while others take more time and commitment. Our goal is for everyone to be able to choose an option that works for them.

Resident service panels

We have resident service panels in each region. They were set up to give residents the opportunity to scrutinise and shape improvements to the services in their region. Meetings are held three times a year and we provide full training and support. When we have vacancies on our resident service panels, we advertise them in Open Door residents' newsletter.

Customer involvement panels

We set up customer involvement panels when we are working on improvements to particular services. As a panel member, you get the chance to work with key staff members on a project that will provide real service changes. Some panels meet once or twice, while others meet over several months, so the time involved will vary. Even if you've only got a few hours every few months, we'd like to hear from you.

Boards and committees

The Group's main Board oversees the work of all the Southern Housing Group companies. The Board includes stakeholders from our regions, who may also be residents.

Residents also play a key role in our Customer Services Committee, which oversees all the services we provide to existing residents. Up to half of the places on the Customer Services Committee are reserved for residents.

When there are vacancies on the Group's Customer Services Committee, we advertise them in Open Door residents' newsletter.

Annual resident events

Every year we invite residents to a conference or other resident event. These events usually involve a mixture of presentations, workshops, and question and answer sessions. We provide lots of information and staff from our key departments are available to talk with you.

Our Isle of Wight region also holds a day of activities for supported housing residents.

The Residents' Panel

If you would be interested in attending occasional consultation events, you could join the Residents' Panel. We invite panel members to take part in focus groups, in-depth interviews or workshops, when they have the time. The events are professionally run, in comfortable and accessible venues, and we will cover your travel and childcare costs. Panel membership is open to all residents.

Residents and staff take part in the South region residents' conference in the summer of 2008.



The Readers' Panel

If attending events or conferences isn't your thing, but you do enjoy reading, the Readers' Panel might be for you. Three or four times a year we ask Readers' Panel members to look through some key information and let us know if they think we can improve it. The information might be a new leaflet or brochure, or a new policy or procedure. This is a great way to get involved from the comfort of your own home – interesting, informative, enjoyable and occasional. Panel membership is open to all residents.

Customer service monitors

Customer service monitors check that our services are up to scratch – for example, our gardening services, the repairs we carry out, or the major works we complete. Service monitors work closely with the Resident Involvement team and are given plenty of support to make the experience interesting and enjoyable. If you can spare a day every few months, then this might be for you.

Resident estate inspectors

We regularly inspect our schemes and estates, inviting residents to join us. Resident estate inspectors need to be available for around an hour every month. They work closely with their local resident services teams. In return, they see practical changes being made in their neighbourhood.



Customer service monitors inspect one of our empty properties before we relet it.



Taking part in an estate inspection at Wellend Villas in Brighton. Left to right: Simon from RGS gardening contractors, resident John Loveday, Resident Services Officer Chris Cook and resident Fred Allen.

Workshops and focus groups

We are constantly reviewing parts of our service and involving residents in workshops and focus groups to make sure we meet your needs and expectations. Focus groups last around two hours and workshops a little longer. Some are held at our regional offices and others in local community venues. We run around 50 events each year so there's always an opportunity to get involved.

Tenants' and residents' groups

We support estate and community groups at many of our schemes and estates. Some have formal constitutions and are officially 'recognised', while others are small and informal, or act as social groups. If you are interested in setting up a group, we'll be happy to offer support and advice.

Clean and Safe Estates (CASE)

We understand that getting the basics right is important, so we are running a programme of projects called CASE. CASE projects aim to improve customer satisfaction with our estate services such as caretaking, cleaning and gardening. If we run a project at your estate or scheme, we will invite you to get involved by completing surveys, attending local meetings with your resident services team, or by taking part in estate inspections.

Surveys

We run a rolling programme of around a dozen customer surveys across our services. We call this programme 'What matters to residents'. Every year, we collect information from around 10,000 completed surveys, inviting you to tell us what it would take for you to give us 10 out of 10 for our service. We regularly report on the findings in Open Door residents' newsletter.

Neighbourhood project teams

We set up project teams in some neighbourhoods. These teams may work with local partners such as the council, the Police and other landlords, to look at issues affecting the local community. Residents play a key part. To find out more, phone the Service Centre.

Youth forums

We work with young residents to give them a voice in their neighbourhoods. In some cases, we set up local youth forums to give young people the opportunity to engage with us, and with other organisations such as the Police and the local council, to get their views heard.

To find out more, call the Service Centre.

Young people from Coolinge Lane Estate in Folkestone worked with us to set up a teen shelter.



Interested?

To find out more about these resident involvement options, phone the Service Centre (details on back page) and ask to speak to the Resident Involvement team. Or email resident.involvement@shgroup.org.uk

What the law says

The Tenant Services Authority, the Chartered Institute of Housing and the National Housing Federation (NHF) see resident involvement as good practice.

The Housing Act 1980 gave secure tenants the right to be consulted about housing management matters that significantly affect them.

If you are an assured tenant, you have no legal right to be consulted, but you have been given similar rights by the Assured Tenants' Charter.

If you are a home owner and we own the freehold to your home, you also have the right to be consulted about your service charges and large works to your home.

What we consult about

When we consult our residents, we have to keep within certain legal guidelines.

Changes to the tenancy agreement

If we want to make a change to our tenancy agreement for secure tenants, unless it is a change to the rent, the law says we have to consult our tenants.

The Housing Act 1985 states that we must send tenants a notice in advance, setting out any change we want to make and how it will affect them, and asking for comments. We have to allow enough time for consultation and we have to take tenants' comments into account before we make the final decision.

When the decision is made, we have to send a notice of variation. The notice sets out the change being made, the effect it will have and the date it comes into force. We have to give notice of four weeks, or the length of the rental period, whichever is longer.

Although we do not have to by law, we have included a clause in our assured tenancy agreement saying we will take similar action if we wish to change our tenancy agreement for assured tenants.



Senior Community Regeneration Officer, James Rogers, outside our new homes in Kidbrooke. As we develop this new estate, we are consulting and working with the residents who will be our new tenants when they move from Greenwich Council's Ferrier Estate, which is being demolished.

Housing management changes

Before we begin any major project, we draw up a plan to consult you. Our aim is to involve you and make sure we comply with the requirements of the Assured Tenants' Charter and the 1985 Housing Act.

We will normally consult you before we:

- change our lettings or transfer policies and procedures
- change our arrangements for collecting rent
- provide or withdraw a shared facility, such as a play area
- alter or complete major repairs or improvements to your homes
- alter shared areas including staircases and landings
- choose colours to decorate staircases
- demolish or put up buildings on an estate
- change our local services.

We will sometimes consult you less formally, through focus groups, resident associations, in groups, as individuals and across the Group.

Rent changes

If you are a secure tenant, you have the right to consult the rent officer before we change your rent. If you are an assured tenant, you can appeal using our normal procedure if you think the rent set for your home is wrong. You also have the right to apply to the rent assessment committee to have a 'market rent' set.

Who we will consult with

We will consult you individually, for example if:

- we are putting in new windows (we will write to you telling you about the work that will be done and when, so that you have a chance to comment before work begins)
- we are modernising your estate (we will visit each of you personally, as part of a major consultation exercise).

If our plans will affect a number of you, we can call a meeting to consult you. This might include:

- a small meeting of neighbours to talk about car parking or play spaces
- a large meeting to discuss estate improvements.

If our plans involve all our residents, we may consult using focus groups, surveys and newsletters. We also regularly ask you to give us feedback in our Open Door residents' newsletter. We carry out surveys, hold open days, use questionnaires and run events.

We consult with our leaseholders when:

- we alter our service charges
- we are planning major works to your homes.

As leaseholders, the law gives you certain rights, because your lease states that you must pay for some services, repairs, maintenance and insurance or management costs in addition to paying ground rent. For example, you have the right to a summary of the costs on which a charge is based, the right to look at charge accounts and receipts, the right to be consulted about major, non-urgent works and the right to challenge unreasonable charges.



We invited a focus group to help us make improvements to the Southern Housing Group website.

How we support involvement and consultation

We provide information and support as part of our work to involve and consult you.

Information

We produce three resident newsletters every year. We also put out special and local newsletters from time to time. Copies of all our policies, our accounts, leaflets and other information are available from our offices.

We produce an Annual Report to Residents covering our performance, which is usually sent out with Open Door residents' newsletter. At other times we use our residents' handbooks, scheme noticeboards and letters to keep residents informed.

Resources

To promote resident involvement in our work, we provide:

- resident involvement staff, to help residents get involved in our work
- a range of publications on resident involvement
- set-up grants for new resident groups (for small social groups, not looking for full recognition, the grant is £50 and for fully recognised residents' associations the grant is £100 or £2 per tenancy, up to a maximum of £250)
- annual grants for recognised resident associations (using the same calculation as for set-up grants)
- a number of grants programmes (call the Service Centre and leave a message for the Grants Officer, who can tell you more about this)
- in-house training courses for residents on how we are run (we can also pay for you to go to relevant courses run by outside bodies)
- at many of our estates, a hall or clubroom is available for meetings and social activities.

Admin support

Staff at our regional offices can help with a reasonable amount of administrative work, auditing accounts and photocopying.

Expenses and incentives

We can pay your expenses when you are involved in participation work. We will often offer incentives to encourage you to become involved in our work.

Support to home owners

We provide help and support to leaseholders and owners who want to form a group.

Interpreting and translation

We can provide help at meetings and to individual residents whose first language is not English.



The community hall at Vanston Place. Many of our estates have a hall or clubroom.

Working with community groups

Our code of practice

To promote resident involvement, we have a code of practice intended to help residents and staff to form good working relationships by providing agreed guidelines and practices.

The code reflects the aims of our resident involvement strategy and draws on the experience gained by staff and residents over the course of working together. It recognises the different responsibilities and concerns of staff and residents, sets out mutual obligations and standards, and is based on the two key factors of trust and respect.

General principles

Both sides agree the following.

- Our policy on equal opportunities applies to all aspects of the code.
- Our residents come from a wide variety of backgrounds and have many different needs. All residents' associations must work with us to make sure they include everyone.
- When producing information and publicity material for residents, interpretation and translation should always be considered.
- Resident involvement can only be effective if residents' interests are represented. Associations should actively seek to represent the interests of all residents in their area.

Applying the code

We recommend that all recognised residents' associations adopt the code of practice, because it sets out how our residents and staff will work together.

It should be read and understood by:

- residents' associations
- housing staff
- Group Board and committee members.



Active residents at Hindle House in Dalston run a highly successful carnival group, which takes part in the Notting Hill Carnival every year. The group gets support from our small grants programme.

Day-to-day contact between groups and staff

We recommend that each residents' association agrees suitable and practical arrangements with local housing staff to cover:

- who will act as contact
- how staff and residents will stay in touch
- good practice rules for communication (that is, how long you and we will take to respond to letters and phone calls), while recognising that residents' association representatives are volunteers
- when consultation will involve the whole estate and when we will just consult with the residents' association.

Meetings

To get the most out of meetings between staff and residents, everyone should agree the following.

- Agendas will be circulated with all notices of meetings.
- All meetings will be minuted and copies will be passed to an agreed person within an agreed number of days.
- Both parties will give at least 14 days' notice of any meeting people are expected to attend.



Active residents in Aylesham run a highly successful boxing club for local young people, with support from our small grants programme.

- While both sides have to recognise that staff and residents may not always be able to attend every meeting, we expect people to make every effort and to apologise for non-attendance in good time.
- Staff will not be required to attend an excessive number of meetings a month.
- Staff will only ask resident representatives to attend a reasonable number of meetings. We recognise that you are volunteers and will limit the demands we make on your time.
- Committee members should tell the meeting if they have any conflict of interest in the items under discussion – that is, if the issue affects them personally in some way.
- Racist, sexist or other offensive language or behaviour will not be tolerated at meetings.
- Confidential information about individual staff or residents will not be discussed at meetings without their permission.
- If there are arguments, insults or someone behaves offensively, the chair will adjourn the meeting for a short time. Anyone who continues with such behaviour will be asked to leave the meeting. Behaving in this way may jeopardise someone's membership of a committee or association, or their job.
- Any complaints about housing staff or service should be voiced in a reasonable and constructive manner. It is not acceptable to criticise staff or residents personally.

Estate-based staff

Estate staff and their immediate families may not serve as voting members of resident associations. Family members of estate staff who become associate members of such associations must be aware of and respect the confidential nature of information that may be available to them.

Information

We will encourage and assist all residents' associations to produce estate newsletters.

Staff will also agree how they will:

- brief residents about their plans – for example to survey the estate
- send copies of relevant letters.

It is standard procedure to address letters to the secretary of the association with a copy to the chair.

Making a complaint

We recognise your right to ask your local residents' association to take up a complaint on your behalf.

Recognising residents' associations

If you wish to gain formal recognition for your residents' association, you should refer to the agreed criteria.

The Resident Involvement team

The role of the Resident Involvement team is to:

- promote and offer resources to meet our resident involvement strategy
- support housing management staff as they involve you
- support your resident groups
- assist by providing you with information
- report back and contribute to the development of resident involvement policy and practice.

Equal opportunities

We are committed to equal opportunities in every aspect of providing you with services. We expect your residents' associations to share the same commitment.

Your associations must make positive efforts to encourage people who are black, from an ethnic minority, or from other minority groups (such as people who are disabled, lesbians and gay men), to make them feel their involvement is welcome and to encourage them to take part.

We do recognise that it can be difficult in practice to include people from all sections of the community in your association's committee. But you must make efforts to encourage and welcome everybody, wherever possible, so that your committee represents the needs and interests of the whole community.

We will help resident association members draw up local targets to make sure you encourage a good mixture of people to become actively involved and that your group reflects the local population. We will ask you to complete a short questionnaire once a year. If you do not work with us on this, we may refuse to recognise your association. We will work with local groups to make sure you are open to everyone, and that it really is possible for all sections of the community to get involved.

Residents' associations should be working for and with everyone. Many associations already have constitutions that say they are open to everyone. However, it is one thing to write something down and another to make it a reality. Our Resident Involvement team can help your group achieve greater levels of involvement from all sections of the resident population.



Our Disability Forum is playing an active role in making sure our services meet the needs of our disabled residents.

How we work to involve everyone

We want to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to get involved and give us feedback on our services. We recognise the importance of getting residents from all our communities and minority groups involved. We take active steps to encourage everyone to take part.

Involvement in strategic issues

When we are consulting Group-wide or across a region, we will:

- carry out any surveys so as to maximise involvement from all residents. For example, we may translate information or use a translator in interviews or focus groups
- make our focus groups broadly representative (sometimes we will hold special focus groups, for example in other languages, to maximise participation)
- make sure your residents' associations meet our code of practice, which emphasises the need to give equal access to all residents and to encourage participation by people from every community and minority group
- make partnerships with cultural associations or voluntary groups that include our residents.

Involving residents in the way we are governed also has to reflect our resident population. We are therefore committed to supporting you if you are interested in getting involved in our formal committees and you are from one of our under-represented communities or groups. The Resident Involvement team will help you gain the knowledge you need to play a role alongside existing committee members.

How your residents' association can work to involve everyone

Set out below are ten suggestions as to how your residents' association can improve its promotion of equal opportunities.

- **Commitment.** Make equal opportunities part of your constitution. Make sure that the association is known to everyone for its commitment to this policy. The Resident Involvement team can help develop this commitment on a practical level.
 - **New residents.** Make sure you make every effort to tell new residents about your association and how to join it, as soon as possible after they move in.
 - **Campaigns and publicity.** Make sure every resident can get involved in any campaign that affects them (for example, rent, rubbish collection, repairs, and road safety).
 - **Meetings.** Chairs should take a firm stand against racist attitudes, comments or any other form of discrimination. People will simply stop attending if they think they are going to be insulted or threatened.
 - **Elections and delegations.** Your association should encourage members from all parts of the local community to stand for election to committees, or to take part in a delegation to the landlord or a conference.
 - **Measuring progress.** It helps to know what progress has been made. The best way is for your association to set specific tasks or goals every year that can be easily assessed. For example, one year you might decide to mount a recruitment drive to increase the number of disabled members, setting a minimum figure for new recruits.
- **Harassment.** Your association must take a clear public stand against all forms of harassment. There should be no doubt whatever that you will not tolerate taunts, abuse, threats or physical attacks against any residents because of their race, religion, gender, colour, sexual orientation or a disability. It is usually best to work with us on this, so that we can follow the procedures we have worked out for dealing with harassment and helping victims.
 - **Translation.** We can help if you need to translate newsletters, posters or other publicity materials into the main language used by residents in particular areas.
 - **Activities.** Make sure everyone knows about any social or welfare activities you run. Try to find out what sort of activities or services residents from different cultural backgrounds or with different needs might want.
 - **Training.** We offer residents who want to become more active a variety of training courses. This can be very helpful because it gives residents the chance to find out more about our practices and policies, and more about how to deal with various issues.



Fun days, like this one at the Nightingale Estate in Hackney, are a good way for us to meet residents and encourage people to get involved.

Residents' associations

Residents' associations are democratic organisations set up to meet the needs of people in their own communities. Forming an association is a good idea, because it allows you to tackle issues and problems collectively rather than individually.

Residents' associations can give you regular contact with us, help you feed views into the decision-making process, form working partnerships and sometimes campaign on issues for the benefit of the wider neighbourhood.

Associations can also help you develop community spirit on your estates, helping people get to know each other by organising outings and social events.



Active residents from the Cyprus Area Project Panel helped us to design a natural play park for children at their Bethnal Green scheme.

How to set up an association

You can choose to set up an association for a wide variety of reasons. Some act simply as social clubs, others may become involved in every aspect of the landlord/tenant/home owner relationship. All associations take time to set up and a lot of voluntary effort.

Begin by phoning the Service Centre and asking to be put in contact with your resident involvement staff, so that you get our support from the start.

When you have spoken to us, consider getting a small group of residents together to organise things. Even at this early stage, the group should try to reflect the make-up of the community you want to represent, making sure minority groups are properly represented.

Leaflet everyone on the estate, explaining the purpose of the residents' association and who is involved.

Plan a public meeting to explain your ideas. Decide how to elect a representative committee and elect your officers (chair, secretary and treasurer).

Agree a written set of rules or constitution. It is important to have as many members as possible, so as to represent the whole community and make sure there is real equality of opportunity for everyone on the estate. This will help your association get the confidence of people living in the area and convince us that we should recognise your association. A model constitution or set of written rules can be found at the end of this chapter.

All this can seem a daunting task if you have not done it before. Remember that the Resident Involvement team are there to help. They can make what seems to be a daunting task a lot easier. You can also talk to other associations and find out how they did it. You might learn from their successes and mistakes. We can put you in touch with other associations.



Tenants and home owners at Royal Arsenal in Greenwich have got together to form the Royal Arsenal Project residents' group, which is successfully getting people together at this new estate. Pictured are estate children on a trip to the Science Museum.

How to run an association

There are no particular rules on how to run your group, but it is important to decide how to make sure the group works effectively and fairly.

Your committee

Your first aim should be to involve as many people as possible in running your group.

The committee needs to consist of people willing to help with work such as leafleting, newsletter production, running social activities and decision-making. It needs to be as representative as possible of the people living in the area and be fully aware of equal opportunities issues.

The committee should consist of at least four officers:

- chair
- vice-chair
- secretary
- treasurer.

Chairs

The chair (or vice-chair, in the chair's absence) has three basic jobs:

- to guide the association to achieve its aims
- to chair meetings
- to represent tenants.

The chair will need to:

- be aware of the association's activities
- make sure other officers are carrying out their tasks
- prepare agendas for meetings (with the secretary)
- at meetings, make sure:
 - each item is discussed
 - a decision is made and recorded
 - everyone gets an opportunity to contribute to the decision.

Secretaries

The secretary's main job is to keep people informed and involved, for example by:

- making sure minutes are taken at meetings (that is, written records of the discussion)
- letting people know when and where the next meeting will take place and what it is about
- writing and receiving letters
- keeping members informed about letters and emails sent and received
- keeping a record of membership, important phone numbers and addresses
- helping the chair prepare agendas for meetings.

The secretary will need to make sure a record is kept of what has happened at a meeting, in particular, any decisions made and opinions expressed should be minuted.

Minutes should:

- state the name of the association, the date, time and the place of the meeting
- include a list of who was present
- follow the agenda
- be short, clear and easy-to-read and understand
- run through the key discussions and debate leading to a decision
- have an action column stating who is responsible for carrying out decisions made
- state the date, time and place of the next meeting
- be written up and sent out to other committee members or residents (as appropriate) as soon as possible after the meeting.

Treasurers

The treasurer is responsible for handling your group's finances. The treasurer will need to keep accounts, advise and keep people informed of the financial situation.

It is common for the treasurer to be one of several members who can sign cheques for the association. However, it is the committee that makes the decision to spend the money.

The treasurer should:

- open a bank account in the name of the association
- pay money received into the bank, keep a record of money received and issue receipts
- pay bills and keep a record of money spent
- keep an account book of all money going in and out of the organisation
- prepare a report and statement of account to the committee and for the annual general meeting.

Accounts should be sent on request, but it is also good practice to provide a quarterly accounts summary.



Making the great new play area at Warner Road in Camberwell a reality took a team effort. It involved the scheme's tenants' association, mother & toddler group and 11 young residents, backed by housing staff and staff in our Social and Economic Regeneration Department.

Other officers

The committee may find it necessary to appoint other officers with special responsibilities, such as a:

- fundraising secretary
- social secretary
- education secretary
- subscriptions secretary.

You have to decide how many people it takes to do certain jobs. Encourage people to volunteer by discussing and agreeing what people need to know in order to take on particular jobs.

The work of committees

The committee is a group of people working together towards a common goal. It is important to recognise that committees can run into problems, especially when there are differences of opinion or conflicts of interest. This is natural, and it is necessary for the group to consider the problem, as it will make the committee think about what it is doing. The best approach is to accept this from the start, try to face problems as soon as they occur and try to find ways to change things for the better.

Committee members should:

- attend meetings regularly and arrive on time
- make useful suggestions at meetings
- not be aggressive or disruptive at meetings
- keep comments short and to the point
- keep in mind the goal of the association
- listen to others and not talk too much or interrupt
- give others an opportunity to do things too
- abide by decisions.

There are people on committees who do not appear to be doing or saying much. This may be because they do not have the information they need, or they may simply lack confidence. Always try to use people's strengths rather than criticise their weaknesses – everyone has something to offer.

Help from us

We are committed to resident consultation and participation. If you require support, assistance or information about getting your views heard, please contact the Service Centre and ask for the Resident Involvement team.

Support and assistance will include:

- practical help from your housing manager
- putting you in contact with one of our resident involvement officers
- grants, allowances and tenant expenses, for those wishing to form an association
- formal recognition of residents' associations.

We will assist your association to develop a suitable constitution and appropriate practices and will formally recognise your group, and issue a recognition certificate, if you meet the criteria listed below.

The recognition process

Recognition is very simple. When an association is recognised, we state that in our view it is an open and democratic organisation able to represent diverse interests in its neighbourhood. Once we have formally recognised your association, you qualify for revenue funding. The decision to recognise you will be taken by your regional director.

The recognition process really begins when someone first contacts us to explore the possibility of setting up an association. The Resident Involvement team will try to make sure that as you form your group you are supported and assisted to set it up so that it will be recognised without difficulty.

To be recognised, an association must demonstrate the following.

Membership

Your association should aim to get 50 per cent of all residents from the area to join. If you do not manage this, but you are still democratic – membership is open to all – recognition may still be given.

Equal opportunities

Your association must demonstrate commitment to equal opportunities and have practices that reflect this. Your equal opportunities policy should be compatible with ours in the range of people it covers.



A Peacehaven resident assists her Resident Services Officer on an estate inspection. Residents' associations often get involved in these checks.

Constitution

Your group must have a written constitution that includes provision for:

- an Annual General Meeting (AGM), to be held every year and open to all residents in the area
- an annually elected committee of at least five members, or an annually elected chair, secretary and treasurer, who work through regular meetings of the association
- all officers and the committee to be elected democratically at the AGM. These should be residents or permanent members of their households from our properties in the area
- a special general meeting is to be called at any time by written request to the chair or secretary of the association by at least 10 per cent of the members
- a clear statement of intent welcoming people from every community and with differing needs to get involved the work of the association.

We will help you develop a suitable constitution and appropriate practices so that we can recognise you formally. The decision to recognise you will lie with the Resident Involvement team and ultimately with your regional director.

We have a model constitution that can be used by your association (see page 19).

Code of practice

Your association must be prepared to abide by the principles set out in the jointly agreed code.

Accounting

You must have a proper system for accounting and audit. This includes keeping accounts showing income and expenditure, and preparing annual accounts, which should be presented after audit to your AGM. We will meet the costs of the audit provided these are reasonable. Guidelines on the most suitable form of accounts will also be provided.

You will need to keep a building society or bank account which requires at least two signatures from separate resident household members of the association, before money can be withdrawn or cheques can be written.



De-recognition process

If your group fails to meet the recognition criteria or a new group fails to make sufficient progress, the Resident Involvement team will work with you to help you meet the criteria. If this proves impossible, we may encourage you to disband your group and look at other options instead.

If you disagree with us about whether you have met the criteria, we will recommend to the regional director that your recognition is suspended while we make further enquiries. What happens next will be the decision of your regional or executive director. But it is likely that your group will not get a grant.

More seriously, it may mean that we no longer view your association as speaking on behalf of residents. We may make efforts to set up a new resident group in the area or consult in your area using different methods. If your resident group has some responsibility for running the community hall, your position with regard to the hall should be reviewed on the basis of any management agreement in place.

Your group will have the right to appeal to the Customer Services Committee.

Sample residents' association constitution

1. Name

The name of the association shall be

2. Objects

To promote the interests and protect the rights of all residents at the scheme(s).

To promote residents' awareness of their living environment and the way the community operates.

To ensure that the management, maintenance and improvements made to homes are of an acceptable standard, by offering advice to Southern Housing Group.

To promote and uphold equal opportunities.

To work towards good relations amongst people on the scheme/estate.

To promote social and community activities for people on the scheme/estate.

To promote good communication between the Group and its residents.

3. Membership

Open to all Southern Housing Group residents and their families living in the neighbourhood of who shall be called full members. Every member shall have one vote.

Open to other residents, resident staff and their families living on the estate, who shall be called associate members. Associate members shall not have the right to vote at members' meetings except for intra-estate activities.

4. Subscriptions

All members shall pay the subscriptions decided at the Annual General Meeting. This will be used to cover expenses incurred in the running of the association, such as administrative work, newsletters, cost of venues, subsidised social activities.

5. Equal opportunities

Members must actively seek to represent the needs of the whole community and must not discriminate on the grounds of nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion or political belief, or disability.

We are opposed to discrimination in any form and fully support equal opportunities and the participation of all cultural groups.

6. The committee

The association shall be managed by a general committee to be elected at the Annual General Meeting. The general committee shall consist of a chairman, secretary, treasurer and at least.....other members.

Any affiliated group or section sponsored by the committee shall have the right to be represented on the general committee.

If vacancies occur among the officers or in the committee, the general committee shall have the power to fill them from among their members.

Associate members cannot take the role of officers of the general committee.

7. Annual General Meeting

The committee shall arrange an Annual General Meeting for the purpose of receiving the annual report of the committee and the audited statement of accounts, accepting the resignations of the committee, electing a new committee, making recommendations to the committee and voting, whenever necessary, on proposals to amend the constitution.

The Annual General Meeting shall be held every (month).

Each year, the whole committee must resign and a new committee be elected, or existing officers may be re-elected.

8. Special general meeting

The chairman or secretary of the association may at any time call a special meeting of the association, either to alter the constitution or for considering any matter the committee wants referred to the members in general.

They shall also call such a meeting at the written request of not fewer than 10 per cent of members, who shall give reasons for the request.

9. Quorum

No committee shall take place with fewer than committee members present.

10. Changes

The constitution can only be altered at an AGM. Any suggested changes must be handed to the secretary days before the AGM.

11. Finance

All expenditure raised by or on behalf of the association shall be applied to further the objects and aims of the association and for no other purpose.

The treasurer shall keep proper account of all income and expenditure of the association and shall open a bank account in the name of the association.

The accounts shall be audited at least once a year by an individual external to the association.

The treasurer shall make the accounts available to any member for verification. A copy will be provided to the Group on request.

Three cheque signatories shall be nominated by the committee (one to be the treasurer).

Any expenditure over £. shall be authorised by the committee at meetings.

12. Dissolution

The association may only be dissolved at a special general meeting called for that purpose.

At least of the members present at the special general meeting must agree to the dissolution. Any funds and possessions shall be donated to a charity or charities of the meeting's choice.

13. Standing orders

- a The association has adopted the Group's code of practice for resident involvement.
- b Members shall at all times conduct themselves in a reasonable manner at meetings.
- c Members shall be excluded if they contravene the aims of the association, use abusive language and/or violent behaviour.

This constitution was adopted as the constitution of
at a public meeting held at

Signed Chair

Signed Secretary

The information we provide

We recognise the importance of keeping you informed about how the Group is run, and about any changes in practice and policy that are likely to affect you.

Residents' handbooks

All new residents are given a handbook or home owners' guide. These handbooks have been produced to give you information on all aspects of your tenancy or relationship with the Group. It explains the terms and conditions of your tenancy agreement or lease and our responsibilities as your landlord or freeholder.

Residents helped us to compile these handbooks.

Newsletters

We produce a newsletter – Open Door – which is regularly sent to all residents. This contains up-to-date information about your homes and the services we provide.

On some of our estates, we also provide local information to keep you up-to-date.

We can offer assistance and support to resident groups wanting to produce their own newsletters, including typing, photocopying, advice on layout and design, and assisting with distribution.

Our website

For online information about Southern Housing Group go to www.shgroup.org.uk

The website gives an overview of the work we do to involve you at a local and Group-wide level. You can also download some of our recent resident involvement publications.

Annual report

Every year, we produce reports on our activities and performance. Our main report and annual accounts are available on request from any of the main offices. Our Annual Report to Residents is sent to every tenant, usually with Open Door newsletter.

Other information

We also make information available to you by using scheme noticeboards and by publishing leaflets and policy documents, which you can obtain by phoning the Service Centre.



Resourcing resident involvement

The Resident Involvement team

We employ Resident Involvement staff to support the delivery of our resident involvement strategy.

Training courses for residents

We run an annual programme of training for residents. For further details contact your resident involvement officer.

Administrative assistance

Our offices will always try to help with typing and photocopying, but please give plenty of notice if there are deadlines to be met.

Expenses and allowances for resident involvement

We have a budget to finance set-up grants for residents' associations, and to pay you back for certain out-of-pocket expenses. We want to make sure that money is not a barrier to your getting involved.

Revenue support to recognised resident groups

To get your general expenses paid back, your residents' association must be recognised by us.

We can make one-off payments to residents' associations from our supporting involvement budget, in the following circumstances.

- A start-up grant of £2 per tenancy, subject to a minimum of £100 and a maximum of £250, to help with the setting up costs of a new organisation.
- A grant of up to £50 for resident groups who meet regularly and help organise local scheme events, but who do not wish to be formally recognised as an association. This small grant will be administered by the relevant housing manager.



Tenant representatives take part in a training day in Ashford.

- Annual revenue support can be provided.
- Up to £100 in any one year to help finance special activities and events which are open to all residents on the scheme.
- For recognised associations, an annual grant of £2 per tenancy, subject to a minimum of £100 and a maximum of £250. The association will have to provide a copy of the accounts each year to qualify.

Expenses for individual residents

Residents normally claim expenses from their association for work associated with their scheme or estate. However, when individual residents are involved in Group-wide or regional activities, they can ask for help with the additional financial costs involved. For example, any resident attending regional or Group-wide meetings, training courses or seminars that we have approved or arranged can claim the following.

Travel expenses

Claims must be economical and wherever possible you should car-share or use cheaper methods of transport. If you use your car to travel to a meeting, you can claim a mileage allowance of 35p per mile. For longer trips, where it is cheaper to travel by rail, we will only pay back the cost of the rail fare.

Bus fares

You can claim return fares for approved local meetings and events.

Taxi fares

If you are disabled or have young children, or a bus is particularly inconvenient for attending evening meetings, you can claim a taxi fare for a short journey (less than £15). You will need to give us a receipt and a brief explanation as to why you needed to use a taxi.

Rail fares

We will pay the equivalent of a second class rail fare. However, if a lift can be arranged by sharing a car, this may be preferable.

Meal expenses

Not all day or residential courses or events include meals. We will meet the cost of meals up to £6 per meal, per person. However, we will only meet actual costs, so you must keep and submit receipts wherever possible.

Childcare expenses

If you cannot arrange for someone to take care of your children or other dependants while you attend a meeting or course, we can help with the cost of childminding. We will pay £5.73 per hour (or the current adult minimum wage) for the length of the meeting, plus travelling time.

Claims for courses

We will not normally pay you an allowance for attending a course unless we have agreed this in advance. However, other out-of-pocket expenses may be considered.



The community centre at Stamford Hill in Hackney is a major resource for residents and agencies working in the community.

Phone expenses

Customer Services Committee representatives who spend a considerable amount of time on the phone on Group business, can apply to have their business calls paid for. You will need to keep an itemised bill. If you cannot supply this, we will pay your quarterly line rental charge instead.

How to claim

We provide every recognised association with claim forms. For further copies, contact your regional office or resident involvement officer.

Taxation and benefits

It is possible that paying you out-of-pocket expenses as listed above could cause you complications with the tax office or your state benefits. You may wish to check with the relevant Government office if in doubt.

Resident involvement in local events

When we are organising a publicity event at one of our schemes, we will try to involve as many local residents as possible. However, we may not always be able to involve everyone, particularly at larger developments, because our budgets and staff time are limited. Because the events we hold vary widely in their format and aims, some will interest and concern residents more directly than others.

Once we have decided to hold an event for a particular development, one of our communications officers will:

- consult with the area or housing manager and resident involvement officer to consider how much resident involvement there should be
- if you have a residents' association, consult to get agreement on the proposals
- if resources are limited, consider writing to all residents offering a limited number of 'first-come-first-serve' invitations and explaining the reasons for the limit in numbers.



Residents taking part in the official opening of their scheme at Turner Close in Ashford.

Formal resident involvement

We offer residents four ways to get formally involved at a high level of our work, by becoming a member of:

- one of the resident service panels
- one of the customer involvement panels
- the Customer Services Committee
- the main Board of Southern Housing Group.

Resident service panels

We have resident service panels in each region. They were set up to give residents the opportunity to scrutinise and shape improvements to the services in their region. Meetings are held three times a year and we provide full training and support. When we have vacancies on our resident service panels, we advertise them in Open Door residents' newsletter.

Customer involvement panels

We set up customer involvement panels, each with eight to 10 resident members, when we are working on improvements to particular services.

Panel members work with key staff members to decide our future direction and to develop services further – giving them a strong influence in our planning. Some panels meet once or twice, while others meet over several months, so the time involved will vary.



Customer Services Committee members Dennis Katungi (centre) and Jim Hitch (right) are pictured on an estate visit with Thames Gateway Regional Director Tony Hughes (left).

Customer Services Committee

We have up to six places reserved for residents on the Customer Services Committee (often referred to by Group staff as the CSC).

The Customer Services Committee is responsible for the areas of our work that most directly affect residents. In particular, the committee:

- approves our housing, maintenance and lettings policies
- checks the standards of service we provide
- monitors our performance and budgets
- oversees our supported housing agreements and our partnerships with other organisations
- takes note of our resident involvement work
- monitors complaints
- provides members for appeals and eviction panels
- checks how we handle bad debts.

The Group's main Board

The Group's main Board includes stakeholders from our regions, who may also be residents.

Any resident Board member is automatically a member of the Customer Service Committee too.

The Group's main Board has overall responsibility for the work of all parts of the Group, including:

- [Southern Housing Group Limited](#), the parent body, which holds the Group's rented housing
- [Southern Home Ownership](#), which handles some of our home ownership activities
- [Southern Space Limited](#), which is developing homes for sale on the open market. Surpluses raised will be used to fund other Group activities.

The Group Board's key tasks include:

- setting and reviewing the Group's overall aims, values and objectives
- making sure the Group's subsidiaries meet the aims and objectives
- monitoring the work of the boards of its subsidiaries and the Group's internal committees
- approving the Group's annual budget and cash flow forecasts
- approving and reviewing our future strategies and plans – for example, to decide how we will make the best use of our homes, plan programmes to upgrade existing homes, and the types and location of homes we will develop
- making sure we identify problems the organisation might face in the future and have plans ready for handling them
- checking the Group's performance against its business plans and helping to decide how performance should be measured
- reviewing and approving policies for setting rent and service charges.

Your role as a member

As a panel, committee or Board member, you would be in a unique position to bring a resident's perspective right to the top of our organisation. You would not be expected to represent all Group tenants and residents. Instead, you would be using your experience of being a resident to work for the development and benefit of the entire organisation.

In return for your commitment and willingness to learn, you would get the satisfaction of knowing that you were making a real difference.

The main Group Board and the Customer Services Committee each meet four times a year, usually at our London head office in Clerkenwell. Meetings begin at around 4pm and run for around three hours.

You would also be invited to attend other events from time to time and we would ask you to take part in training.

Becoming a panel, committee or Board member can seem daunting, which is why we have developed training to help all our members get to grips with the work. Early on in your membership, we would work with you to identify where you need to boost your knowledge. You might need to learn more about budgets or strategies, for example. We would ask only that you agree to work with us to develop those skills.

Payments and expenses

Board and Committee members can claim back reasonable travel expenses and the cost of child minding. We are happy to provide full details of our expenses policy on request.

In addition, resident members of the main Board of Southern Housing Group would be paid a small annual salary – currently £5,000 a year.

If you were interested in becoming a member of the main Board of Southern Housing and you were claiming benefits, you would need to get advice on how this payment would affect your future benefit entitlement. At present, you would not have the option of refusing the payment.

More information

To find out more about becoming a board, committee or panel member, you are very welcome to call the Group's Resident Involvement team via the Service Centre (see back page).

Works to your home

As your landlord, we are responsible for routine and emergency repairs when things go wrong in your home. We usually hear about these day-to-day repairs when you phone our Service Centre.

However, we are also responsible for the longer-term condition of our properties. This chapter explains what to expect when we make major repairs or improvements to the home you rent from us.

If you are a home owner, we will consult you formally as required by leasehold legislation.

Keeping our homes up to scratch

As well as carrying out day-to-day repairs, we have to:

- maintain our homes, including external painting and decorating
- replace items that are worn out, such as windows or guttering
- make improvements and additions, such as installing a door entry system or modernising an entire home
- bring our rented properties up to the Decent Homes standard by 2010.



These repairs and improvements may be straightforward, or they may mean you having to move from your home while we carry out the work. Most of these projects are now paid for from our own funds, but more major schemes may be funded by the Homes and Communities Agency.

What follows describes how we:

- choose the work we do
- plan and organise each project
- consult you and keep you informed if the home you rent from us is included in one of our planned repairs and improvement projects.

Choosing the work we do

We can never repair and improve as many homes as we would like, because there just isn't enough money to do so. Instead we have to choose carefully which repairs and improvements to tackle.

Each autumn, as our annual budget for the following year is being prepared, we begin by drawing up a list of the work we want to achieve that year. We do this by:

- looking at the information we hold about our properties, to decide where work is needed most urgently
- finalising a programme of the repairs and improvements to be completed, so that we can begin work the following spring.

How we organise the work

Repairs and improvement projects can become very complex and involve a large number of people. To keep everyone well informed, we begin by setting up a project team.

On small-scale projects, the team will include:

- development staff
- housing staff.

On more complex projects the team may also include:

- maintenance officers
- resident representatives.

Staff on the team are responsible for:

- working with the consultant who draws up plans for the project
- selecting contractors from our approved list
- taking decisions throughout the project
- informing and consulting residents while work is going on
- ensuring the work is completed satisfactorily.

The resident representative is there to:

- advise the team about residents' needs
- represent residents who have suggestions or problems while the work is taking place
- stay informed about our plans and decide if we are consulting residents appropriately
- on larger projects, help us plan how we organise the work.

Consulting you and informing you

Before we begin work on your home or scheme we will:

- consult you
- offer you choices where there are real alternatives – for example, the colour of fittings if we are replacing your kitchen
- make sure you are aware of the work to be done and how it will affect you
- explain any changes that will result, such as a rise in the service charge you pay to us.

How and how far we consult you will depend on whether you rent or own your home, how much disruption the repairs or improvements are likely to cause you and how much real choice we can offer.

Minor external repairs

Some repairs and renewals can be carried out to the outside of your home or on your scheme with little or no disturbance to you. Examples would include repair or renewal of:

- drains, downpipes and guttering
- boundary walls.

These repairs are normally straightforward and would therefore rarely involve you in making any choices.



Discussing plans for Hindle House in Dalston.

Major external/internal repairs

Some repairs to the outside or inside of your home or scheme are likely to cause you a certain amount of inconvenience, such as:

- window renewal
- installing central heating
- lift replacement
- painting and decorating.

We may be able to offer you choices, such as colours of paint or the type of windows.

Redevelopment/refurbishment

If we demolish and rebuild the homes on your scheme, or completely re-modernise your home, you will have to move out, either temporarily or permanently. This is known as 'decanting'. For work like this we can involve residents in a great deal of the decision-making – from the design and layout of newly-built homes, to the colour an individual tenant wants their bathroom painted.

Letting you know our plans

At the start of a project, we will let you know:

- the work we plan to do
- how long we expect it to take
- who you can get in touch with if you have any queries (usually the scheme manager or a member of the local housing team), how we plan to move you out, if your home is being demolished or refurbished.

We will let you know by letter if the work is minor. If the work is major, or residents request it, we will also call a meeting.

We can use a meeting to:

- show you displays of our plans
- show you the materials we will be using, or the choices you can help us make (such as types of window)
- let you know how much disruption to expect
- explain how we plan to consult you
- find out your views.

Giving you more details

When the plans are ready and a contractor has been chosen, we will let you know:

- when we intend to start and finish work
- the name of the contractor doing the work
- the hours the contractor will be working
- details of the work
- how we intend to keep homes and/or the scheme secure
- how to report problems or make a complaint.

Again, where the work is minor, we will send you these details in a letter. Where work is more significant, we will call a second meeting.

We can use this meeting to:

- introduce the people working on the project, including the contractor
- tell you about the access we need to your home
- run through any changes to parking while work is going on
- tell you who to contact if you have any problems or complaints.

The project team may provide a factsheet for you to take away at the end of the meeting. If redevelopment or refurbishment are taking place, we may also produce regular newsletters.

While work takes place

If you have any problems or complaints while the work takes place, you should take them to the person we have told you about.

On larger projects, we often choose someone to act as resident liaison officer. The resident liaison officer is available to deal with any questions or problems you have.

We may arrange 'surgeries' – times when you can call in to talk to us – which usually take place at or near your scheme.

If, at any stage, our plans have to change, we will write to you. If your rented home is being modernised, you will be invited to a tenants' choice day – usually at your scheme. You will be given a choice of materials and colours for items being replaced or put into your home. If appropriate, we may also visit you at home to discuss your choices.

Before we move you from your home, we will visit you to discuss your housing needs and see if you need help to move. We will run through the likely timetable for moving you out and tell you about any compensation you are entitled to claim.

When work is completed

When the work is finished, we will contact you to find out what you think about the way it was carried out.

The contractor is responsible for putting right any problems for six months to a year after completing work, and we rely on you to help us check that everything is satisfactory.

Where work has been major, we will send you a factsheet detailing the kinds of problems you should look out for. We will tell you how to let us know if you spot any of these problems.

If your home has new fixtures and fittings, we will also supply you with an information pack explaining how to use them.



Project Officer Lisa Burness inspects Decent Homes work at homes in Islington, with resident John Daly.

Works to your home – what you can expect

Before work begins

We will write to you as early as possible, but at least eight weeks before work begins, to tell you the work we plan to do, how long we expect it to take, who is managing the project and what to do if you have any queries.

Four weeks before work begins, we will ask for your views and if you have any specific needs or requirements. We may do this by holding an open meeting, by phoning you, by writing to you or by meeting with you individually.

At least two weeks before work begins, our contractor will provide information about what will happen. This will include details of their contact person (usually a 'resident liaison officer'). This person will also contact you to arrange appointments, confirm any arrangements you need to make and explain any choices you have.

During the work

If we are working inside your home, the contractor will keep to a set of standards they have agreed with us. These will be listed in the information provided to you. We always ensure that, at the very least, your home is safe and secure, your belongings are protected, your home is left clean and tidy at the end of each working day, you have electricity, water, cooking and toilet facilities at the end of each working day.

When the work is completed

Once the work is completed, the contractor will explain how to use any new equipment and leave written instructions. We will also send you a satisfaction survey so that you can give us your views on the work and how it was carried out. Your feedback helps us improve our programmes of work.



Who is involved?

Every major works project is managed by a member of our staff, who will contact you at the start of the project to discuss our plans. He or she will also work closely with your resident services manager, or your scheme manager if you live in sheltered or supported housing.

The building firm ('contractor') is responsible for most of the day-to-day arrangements once work begins. They will be your first point of contact and will confirm all arrangements for carrying out work inside your home.

We also employ building surveyors ('consultants') to advise us and to ensure that the work is carried out to a good standard.

We thoroughly check our contractors and consultants before we appoint them, to make sure they have the right technical expertise and they are fully committed to good customer service.

For more information about how we manage our major works projects and to see our service promises, visit our website at www.shgroup.org.uk, or call the Service Centre to speak to our Reinvestment team.

For information about how decisions were made for your estate or scheme, call the Reinvestment team via the Service Centre.

A guide to housing jargon

Housing workers often use complicated words and initials that other people can find difficult to understand. Professionals often completely forget that they speak a completely foreign language, leaving most people scratching their heads. This guide is designed to act as quick reference point for residents, when the gobbledegook gets too much!

AGM

An Annual General Meeting is held by an organisation – for example, a residents' association – at about the same time every year. At the meeting the accounts are presented to members and a new committee is elected.

Allocations (or lettings) policy

A policy is a statement, usually in writing, about how an organisation will work. An allocations policy sets down the rules used by a housing organisation when it is choosing who to offer housing to. The policy should make sure that those most in need get offered a home first.

Assignment

A landlord and tenant agree that a friend or relative of the tenant can take over the tenancy.

Assured tenancies

Since January 1989, all new tenants of housing associations and private landlords have assured tenancies. Assured tenants have fewer and different rights compared to secure tenants.

Audit Commission

The Audit Commission is currently responsible for inspecting housing associations, however the coalition government has announced that it will be abolished in the near future.

BRE

The Building Research Establishment gives information on technical design and building matters.

Best Value

The duty we have, as a publicly-funded body, to deliver services to clear standards that include cost and quality, using the most economic, efficient and effective means available.

Budgets

The amount of money an organisation estimates it will spend in one year.

CAB

A Citizens Advice Bureau offers free advice and information to local people, in person or by phone. They advise on problems like benefits, debt and consumer rights.

CASE

Our Clean and Safe Estates (CASE) projects are designed to improve local standards and raise customer satisfaction at your estate or sheltered scheme.

CIH (Chartered Institute of Housing)

The Chartered Institute of Housing (formerly the Institute of Housing) is the organisation that awards professional qualifications to people who work in housing. It is also the representative body for housing professionals.

Capacity building

The process of helping community and voluntary groups to boost their skills and resources so that they can do a better job of reaching the people they work with. For example, we are 'capacity building' when we offer training to residents' associations. These community and voluntary groups can be referred to as 'communities of place' (because they work in a specific local area) or 'communities of interest' (because they work with particular groups of people – for example, the disabled).



Community development work at our Durrington estate has concentrated on 'capacity building'. Active residents there run youth clubs and are setting up a centre for activities for children and young people.

Capital expenditure

The money landlords spend on buying land, or building and improving housing.

Choice-based lettings

Choice-based lettings schemes allow residents who need a transfer to bid for the homes available, instead of being made an offer. We do not operate a choice-based scheme of our own. However, in many areas we now provide choice-based lettings in partnership with other landlords. Many of these schemes are led by the local authority.

Communities and Local Government

The Government department that deals with housing law, policy and finance.

Community development officer

A community development officer has the job of helping to build, support and service community and resident groups.

Community plan/community strategy

All local authorities have to work in partnership with the community, businesses, the voluntary sector and other partners to develop long-term plans to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of local communities.

Community training and enabling grants

A programme of grants from the Housing Corporation to finance housing association projects which show innovation and/or good practice in housing management.

Customer Services Committee

The committee that is responsible for overseeing our frontline services, our performance and budgets and the policies that most affect residents. Up to six places on the committee are reserved for residents of Southern Housing Group Ltd.

Decant

Tenants sometimes need to be moved (decanted) out of their homes temporarily to another address, when their landlord needs to do a lot of work on their normal home that is dirty or difficult.

Decent Homes

The government introduced the Decent Homes standard to improve the condition of all social rented housing. Overall, it means that by 2010 each home must:

- be fit for purpose
- be in a good state of repair
- have reasonably modern facilities
- be comfortably warm.

Diversity

Used to refer to the different communities, and groups with differing needs, that make up society.

Draft

Any version of a document, such as a report, in which the ideas or wording have not yet been finally agreed.

Equal opportunities policy

A written statement which sets out how an organisation will treat everyone equally and fairly. For landlords, this should include how they select and treat their residents and workers. For residents this should include how they organise their association.

Estate management boards (EMBs)

Tenants and their landlord can agree to share the responsibility of management through a Board, with the majority of members being tenants. An agreement is drawn up saying which issues are the Board's responsibility and which are the landlord's.

Executive committee

A sub-group of an organisation's management committee, which meets to deal with decisions which cannot wait until the next full committee meeting, as well as carrying out detailed work as directed by the main committee.

FBHO

The Federation of Black Housing Organisations gives help, support and training to black housing organisations, workers and tenants.

Feasibility study

Study of a problem to see how and whether a suggested plan of action will work.

Focus groups

People brought together for a discussion on a specific topic. The aim is to find out what people think, feel, believe and their reasons for doing so, but not to reach any agreement. Mainly used as a research technique.

GO

Government office. These were originally set up by Government in response to the European agenda (in particular, to channel European funding to the areas that need it). But they have since evolved into the voice of Whitehall in the regions.

Group's main Board

The Group's main Board has overall responsibility for all the organisations that make up Southern Housing Group. It sets our objectives and directs the course of our work, as well as monitoring our work and approving our budgets.

Homes and Communities Agency

Set up by the Government to oversee housing and regeneration. The Agency provides funding for affordable housing, brings land back into productive use and aims to raise standards in the physical and social environment.

Housing association

A non-profit-making organisation that provides and develops homes for affordable rent and low-cost home ownership.

Housing Benefit

Money paid to people on income support or low incomes to help cover their housing costs.

Housing co-operative

1. Primary co-op

A group of seven or more people who agree to work together in a co-operative to provide decent housing for their members.

2. Tenant management co-op (TMC)

When council or housing association tenants take on the management (but not ownership) of their own homes and estates.

Housing transfers

See stock transfer.

Joint funding

Money from banks, building societies and sometimes from councils to help housing associations provide special types of homes, for example hostel schemes.

Resident and Board member Jim Hitch pictured outside his home in Hackney.



Joint tenancy

Where two or more people share the tenancy of their home.

Large scale voluntary transfer (LSVT)

The transfer of council housing to another landlord – sometimes a housing association set up by the council. It cannot take place if the majority of tenants oppose it. Also called housing or stock transfer, or voluntary transfer.

Leaseholder

A person who owns the right to use their home for a fixed period (as set out in their lease), but not the land their home is built on, which is owned by the freeholder. Leaseholders usually live in flats.

Local strategic partnerships

A single body that brings together (at a local level) public, private, community and voluntary sector organisations so that different projects and services support each other and work together to tackle key issues for local people.

Management agreement

The legal contract which sets out how an estate or group of homes will be managed and who by, for example an agreement between a local authority and a tenant management co-op or estate management board.

Management committee

The group of people responsible for an organisation and making sure that it obeys its own rules. It can either be elected by the members, like a residents' association, or be a group of people who have volunteered to serve, or a group of people who are paid for their time. Management committees are often called 'boards'.

NHF

The National Housing Federation provides information and support for its members and develops common policies and guidelines for housing associations to follow.

PFI (Private finance initiative)

A PFI is a form of public/private partnership (PPP) using private sector finance to provide public services through joint working. The private contractor must take on risk and be paid, in part, based on performance.

PPP (Public/Private Partnerships)

Joint working arrangements between the public and the private sectors.

Performance indicators

The Government requires social landlords to publish performance indicators – to let their residents know (amongst other things) how effectively they are managing and repairing their properties.

Performance standards

The standards of service organisations have to meet. Housing associations have their standards set by the Tenant Services Authority.

Primary housing co-operative

See housing co-ops.

Private finance

Money raised from non-government sources, for example, banks.

Quango

Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisation set up by and answerable to a department of Government. The Tenant Services Authority is a quango.

Quorum

The minimum number of members an organisation needs at any meeting to make any decision, as laid down in its constitution.

RMT (regional management team)

A meeting of our managers from a number of departments. Each of our regions has its own regular RMT.

RSLs Registered social landlord (RSL)

This term was introduced by the Housing Act 1996. Housing associations and local housing companies are RSLs.

Rechargeable repairs

Repairs carried out by the landlord that the resident must pay for, because they caused the damage.

Regional development agencies (RDAs)

Set up by the Government to decentralise decision-making on regeneration and economic development issues to the regions of England.

Regulations

Detailed rules issued by the Government on how laws are carried out.

Rehabilitation

Large-scale improvement to a building to bring it up to a good standard of repair. Also called modernisation or refurbishment.

Resident consultation

1. Refers to arrangements for involving residents in decisions on housing policy and practice that go beyond providing information, but does not include involving residents in the actual management of housing.
2. Legally, the duty of a landlord to inform residents about plans that will affect them, give them the right to comment and take their views into account when making its decision.

Resident participation

A two-way process involving sharing of information and ideas, where residents can influence decisions and take part.

Resident service panels

Southern Housing Group has resident service panels for each of its region. They were set up to give residents the opportunity to scrutinise and shape improvements to the services in their region. Meetings are held three times a year.

Residents' association

A voluntary group made up of people who live in a particular area or scheme, who have got together to have their say on local issues, improving their area or organising social events.



North Whitley residents discuss the plans for their Reading homes. Under a private finance initiative, we are managing and refurbishing this estate as part of Affinity, a consortium of housing and other organisations, which has a 30-year contract with Reading Borough Council.

Revenue spending

The money for items like paying off loans, employing staff and buying materials.

Right to acquire

Qualifying tenants whose rented homes were built using social housing grant after April 1997 are allowed to buy them at a discount, using their right to acquire.

Right to buy

Some council and housing association tenants have the legal right to buy their home if they have been living there for a qualifying period.

Secondary co-operative

An organisation which provides a wide range of services to housing co-operatives, small housing associations, council tenants and local councils.

Secure tenancies

The vast majority of council tenants and housing associations tenants whose tenancies began before January 1989 are secure tenants and have a range of additional rights compared to assured tenants, which are covered in the Housing Act 1985.

Service charge

The money tenants and leaseholders pay for some services such as scheme managers, common rooms, cleaning, lighting and the maintenance of common parts.

Service delivery

The way a service, such as repairs, is provided to the people who use it.

Sheltered housing

Special housing for people who need someone near at hand, to help them in an emergency.

Short notice inspection

Inspection of a social housing landlord, which is carried out at short notice by the Audit Commission. These inspections are designed to check that we are financially viable, providing good services to our residents and making good use of public funding.

Social exclusion

A term used by the government to describe how people living in the country's poorest areas get cut off from the housing, jobs, healthcare and security enjoyed by the rest of society.

Social housing grant

The money government gives to housing associations or co-operatives to help them to buy, build, repair or improve homes for rent or sale.

Starter tenancies

New tenants are sometimes initially given a one-year tenancy that automatically becomes a full assured tenancy at the end of that time, providing the tenant has kept to the terms of the agreement and been a good neighbour.

Statutory instrument

An order issued by the Secretary of State which changes the law without it having to go through Parliament.

Stock transfer

The transfer of council housing to another landlord – often a housing association. It cannot take place if the majority of tenants oppose it. Also known as 'housing transfers'.

Sub-committees

Small, specialised committees that make recommendations and report back to the full committee.

Supporting People

A Government programme to finance supported housing in the social housing sector.

Sustainability

A community or project is sustainable when it is balanced, in tune with the community's needs and the environment, so that it has a viable, long-term and independent future.

TMC (tenant management co-op)

(See housing co-ops).

Tenant Services Authority

Set up by the Government to regulate housing associations, and to champion the needs and wishes of existing and would-be tenants. It replaced the Housing Corporation.

Voids

Empty homes usually waiting for some work to be done or someone to move in.

Working party

A group set up to work on a particular task. It may only have the power to make suggestions rather than make decisions.

Workshop

A small discussion group at a conference, which may be given a task to work on.



Supported housing residents who took part in our first supported housing involvement event on the Isle of Wight in 2009.

Front cover: Discussing the issues at our 2010 Residents' Conference.

Contact us

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