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Customer Involvement Statement

2010/2012

Introduction

Golden Gates Housing Trust (GGHT) believes tenants should be at the heart of all decision-making and have a fundamental role in shaping services. GGH has an established history of involving tenants and residents* when making changes to services or introducing new services. In 2007, the Housing Inspectorate described customer involvement as a "*significant strength*". We intend to build on this strong base and continue to improve opportunities for customers to give their views and get involved. GGHT's vision is "A leading housing provider creating quality homes and neighbourhoods where people want to live". Our vision and aims for GGHT could not be achieved without the involvement of tenants and residents.

Statement of involvement

Our Customer Involvement Statement^{**} underpins our Strategy for involvement and is supported by a service plan for customer involvement. This statement is, in essence our policy on how we will involve tenants and residents to get involved.

To us, involvement means all the activities and processes that:

- We undertake to help us understand what residents and communities want;
- Enable residents and communities to have more influence over decisions, when they want it;
- Enable people to get involved should they want to.
- Enable tenants to get involved in the management of their homes
- Build capacity in communities to empower tenants and residents to get involved and promote community cohesion

GGHT is committed to ensuring that all customers will have the opportunity to be involved both on a formal or informal basis, as individuals or as members of groups, at a level they feel comfortable with and at a pace that they determine. A recent Housemark study found a correlation between low investment in involvement equating to lower satisfaction with being kept informed and views being taken into account. In a recent survey of our tenants, satisfaction with being kept informed was 80% (median quartile performance)*** and satisfaction with views being taken into account was 74% (upper quartile performance)***. We wish to continue to build on these positive results and ensure involvement is adequately resourced.

GGHT believes that customer involvement is the primary tool to enhance and develop its efficiency and effectiveness. This can be achieved in the following ways:

- local involvement in decision making ;
- accountability at local level including a performance monitoring role;

- built in customer perspective for the service ;
- determining existing and future service quality and standards;
- strong community links and relationships.

GGHT is committed to ensuring all tenants have a choice in how they can share their views, get involved or play a more participatory role.

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) and the new regulatory framework

The new regulator for social housing, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), was established to give clear objectives to give more choice and empowerment for tenants. At the launch of their consultation paper "Building a new regulatory framework" (June 2009), Chief Executive, Peter Marsh stated, "Fundamentally we want to see a renewed focus of landlords engaging with their tenants and both working together so that tenants and those in housing need get the best possible deal".

There is a focus on a co-regulatory model which encourages landlords, tenants and the regulator to work together to define the future direction. Findings from their national research found tenants want genuine involvement over a broad range of issues. The government has set out the directions in which the TSA should operate. The government wants:

- To ensure all social housing tenants have the confidence, skills and power to engage on housing and housing related neighbourhood issues in ways that are right for them; and
- For all social housing providers and the needs of their tenants and the neighbourhoods in which they live, and offer tenants support and a full range of opportunities to influence service delivery and policies.

One of the six standards within the new regulatory framework, launched in March 2010, is tenant involvement and empowerment. There is a strong emphasis on ensuring tenants are empowered to be effectively involved in housing and the management of their homes. Tenants will play a key role in scrutinising performance and will need the appropriate skills and knowledge to challenge their landlord.

GGHT have invested in tenant training and development to empower tenants to get involved. Capacity building will be a key priority for GGHT to enable tenants to have the skills necessary to challenge performance, service delivery and make sure we are accountable in the way in which we deliver services. Our aim is to provide excellent services for all tenants and leaseholders which meet their needs and expectations.

Objectives for involving tenants and residents

At a meeting of the Tenant Participation Monitoring Panel on 8 September 2009, a number of objectives were agreed for participation. The objectives will be reviewed annually:

- To increase opportunities for participation throughout the Borough through formal and informal contact with tenants and residents.
- To ensure appropriate support and training is provided to tenants and residents to get involved both individually and in their community at a level that suits them.
- To ensure effective consultation and participation in all aspects of service delivery and service improvement.
- To ensure all customers are kept informed, up to date and information is comprehensive, customer approved and in plain language.
- To ensure we promote equality and diversity and develop links with all hard to reach groups including, Black, Minority and Ethnic groups, the disabled, the elderly and the youth.

To achieve these objectives a number of targets will be set each year by the Panel, who will monitor progress of their achievement.

Working in Partnership

GGHT works in partnership with other agencies, the Council, voluntary and statutory organisations to improve services to tenants. GGHT is an active member of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) which provides high level direction and planning activity across a broad range of partner circumstances, including Public Sector organisations which serve the local area, such as Police, PCT, Council, Fire Service, Third Sector organisations such as the Council for Voluntary Service and Warrington Disability Partnership and the private sector such as local businesses. Warrington has established a partnership structure including neighbourhood management/area Boards. GGHT is a member of 5 of the 6 Boards and plays a key role in helping to deliver the strategic priorities for the Borough.

Achievements in participation – outcomes for customers

GGHT want to involve tenants and residents in shaping services to ensure there are outcomes for the customer. Outcomes could be improved level of services, improved standards or increased satisfaction.

Recent achievements include:

- We have 5 tenants on our Board of 12 Directors (there are 4 independent members and 3 council nominees which means tenants are the largest group)
- Tenants played a fundamental and valued role in the review of housing options
- Tenants helped us to achieve an excellent, 3 star rating from the Audit Commission
- Tenant involvement in stock transfer and achieving a "yes" vote
- ✤ 80% of tenants are satisfied with GGHT as their landlord
- ✤ 69% of tenants are satisfied with opportunities for getting involved
- ✤ 74% of tenants feel their views are taken into account
- Tenants have been involved in 190 key decisions about service changes or improvements within the last 2 years (dates)
- Over 900 tenants are involved with us from sharing their views to being actively involved
- In 2009, we got 185 tenants involved with us who had never been involved before.
- In 2009, 421 young people have been involved in youth activities and events.
- Over 15 tenants have been involved in choosing 12 partners/contractors to help us deliver our services in 2009.
- In 2009 we held 74 informal events to encourage involvement from different groups in the community
- We have worked with partner agencies to bring in £5,500 funding to deliver activities
- We have delivered an average of 70 training courses per year and helped tenants develop skills in finding funding, fire safety, first aid, chairing, housing knowledge, budgeting, promotion and marketing, food hygiene and gardening skills
- We have 23 tenants who act as inspectors of our services and test what we do to ensure high levels of service delivery to all our customers.

 Tenants were at the heart of the stock options appraisal process and recommended stock transfer to provide better services and improved homes

Levels of involvement

Information

Information giving underpins all other levels of participation, and may be appropriate on its own in some circumstances. Whilst customers may not wish to get involved, we have a responsibility to keep tenants informed. We will provide information on:

- ✤ performance
- service delivery and service improvements
- changes that may affect you or your tenancy

We will keep you informed using:

'News & Views' (quarterly newsletter) Our Web Site – <u>www.goldengateshousing.org.uk</u> Through Public Advertisements Customer focus groups/consultative panels Tenant & Resident Associations The Federation Repair receipts/rent statements Letters

We will actively encourage customers to give us their views on what information they want.

Consultation

GGHT has a duty to consult tenants on issues which may affect them/their tenancy. Consultation is a higher level of involvement than information giving. You may be asked for views and perceptions on the issues, offered some options, or asked for comments. Consultation is appropriate when we can offer people choices on what we are going to do. We will consult customers on:

- Housing policies and strategies
- Repairs and Maintenance
- Improvements to the home and environment
- Estate & Tenancy Management Issues
- Rent Collection
- Allocations
- Caretaking
- Sheltered Schemes
- Money Advice

- Tenant Participation
- Choices available to you
- Customer Care
- Setting standards and priorities

We will do this by using surveys, panels or focus groups depending on the issue and the impact. Please see "Ways to get involved" which outlines the different methods we use to consult tenants.

Participation

GGHT values tenants getting involved through responding to surveys, being members of panels or attending meetings. Through tenant participation we can ensure that the services we provide are what tenants want. Tenants can participate in:

- Housing Policy
- Repairs and Maintenance
- Estate & Tenancy Management Issues
- Rent Collection
- Allocations
- Caretaking
- Sheltered Schemes
- Money Advice
- Tenant Participation
- Customer Care and complaints
- Performance Monitoring
- Accessing Services
- Contractor/partner and staff selection
- Mystery shopping/inspecting of our services
- Setting standards of service delivery
- Training and development opportunities
- Regulation and scrutiny of service delivery
- Managing their homes and estates

GGH is committed to empowering tenants to get involved in developing and monitoring services. We will ensure there are adequate and appropriate resources available to build capacity of tenants and communities.

Ways to get involved

There are a number of ways in which tenants and residents can get involved in developing new services, changing or implementing new policies and procedures and giving feedback on existing services. Our structures include:

Armchair Consultation – give your views by email, post, phone or text in the comfort of your own home.

Informal Chats - speak to staff about your concerns and suggestions

Leaseholders Focus Group – if you are a leaseholder then come along and give your views on issues that affect you.

Tenants & Residents Associations – join your local group and get involved with community issues and events.

FREE Training – anyone can get involved in one of our fun and interesting FREE courses, meet new people and learn new skills.

Tenant Board Member – be a Board member and be part of making strategic decisions about GGH.

Communications Panel - reviewing all forms of communications that GGH use to communicate with customers e.g. website, leaflets, News & Views and much more.

Scrutiny Panel - scrutinise our performance and how we deliver services, challenge decisions made by the Board, review policies and monitor GGH performance.

Tenant Inspector – see what goes on behind the scenes.

GGH Customer Consultative Panel (CCP) – a group of customers who meet every 2 months to give views on current service consultations.

Warrington Federation – A customer run group for interested individuals and constituted Tenants & Residents Associations.

Attending special/informal events – E.g. fun days, conferences, seminars, information days, coffee mornings etc.

Role of GGHT Board

GGHT Board is committed to ensuring tenant involvement and empowerment is at the heart of all the we do. GGHT Board of 12 includes 5 tenants, which is the largest constituent group. The Board receive regular reports on tenant involvement and ensure adequate and effective tenant consultation has taken place. GGHT is looking to develop formal scrutiny arrangements of service provision, performance and outcomes and there will be a clear link between a scrutiny panel and our governance structures.

Equal opportunities to get involved

GGH is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity and valuing diversity in service provision. We are keen to ensure that we have representative structures for involvement and set targets to encourage participation from all

sections of the community irrespective of age, ethnicity, disability, gender, religion or belief, sexual orientation or domestic circumstances. We are also committed to providing protection for people due to socio-economic reasons.

Our aim is to promote community cohesion and good relations between people of different backgrounds. We aim to "close the gap" by targeting resources at the deprived wards promoting social inclusion, service improvement and employment opportunities. An equality impact assessment has been completed of this statement to identify any potential barriers to involvement and actions have been included in the supporting action plan.

Resources and Training

GGH is keen to build the capacity of tenants to encourage their full and active involvement. In order to ensure we meet this aim, we:

- Provide a dedicated budget to resource staff, meeting rooms, refreshments and equipment
- Develop training programmes which meet local and individual needs
- Provide training and development opportunities which help tenants to work in their local communities
- We provide annual and start up grants for constituted Tenant & Resident Associations.
- We provide out of pocket expenses for travel, parking, carer's fees to ensure no tenant is out of pocket as a result of them being involved
- We will provide appropriate resources and support to work with tenants who wish to consider increased control over the services they receive
- Offer a package of induction and training for residents who become Board Members

A training programme is developed in full consultation with tenants. The Customer Consultative Panel approve grant and expense payments on an annual basis. Tenants are the largest group on GGHT's Board (5 out of 12 places). As a result, we aim to ensure we build the skills and capacity of tenants as part of our Board succession planning. Any tenant or leaseholder who has an interest in becoming a Board Member will be able to access support and training opportunities.

In addition, one of our targets is to establish a panel of tenants which will carry out a scrutiny role, assessing performance across the organisation, achievement against the Tenant Services Authority standards and our local offers. The panel will be able to request service reviews to improve services to customers. It will be a key priority for GGHT to ensure that the panel have the training and development opportunities to enable them to carry out this role effectively.

Assessing outcomes and impact

GGHT sets its strategic priorities in consultation with the Board, tenants and key stakeholders. All targets should have outcomes for the customer and we have a corporate commitment to ensure we identify the impact of our actions. We will assess the impact of what we do through regular customer satisfaction surveys and discussions both on an individual and group level. For example, if the impact of delivering a programme of diversionary activities for young people is a reduction in youth nuisance and customer perception is that antisocial behaviour has reduced, there has been a positive impact.

Our core standards

GGHT had previously developed nine core standards for involvement. These included the six recommended by the government. The standards give both tenants and residents and staff a framework in which to operate and ensure effective involvement. We have reviewed all existing standards and have updated them to ensure they are inclusive. Our standards have been added as an appendix to this document so they can be more of a working document and checklist for involvement. See appendix A for more information.

Monitor and Review

GGHT, tenants and residents will review this statement on an annual basis. We will ensure together that we are continuing to meet our standards for involvement in all areas of service delivery. Outcomes will form part of our annual impact assessment.

A customer involvement service plan supports this statement and includes targets which will be delivered by the Tenant Participation team. The service plan will be reviewed annually and monitored quarterly.

Complaints and disputes

GGHT has a complaints procedure which is readily available to all tenants and residents. We aim to respond to all complaints within 10 working days. GGHT welcomes complaints from anyone who is unhappy with the service we provide and uses complaints positively to improve service delivery.

All complaints are reviewed by customers, staff and managers who monitor performance against responding within the timescale, taking action where service has failed and providing clear and full feedback to the complainant. Complaints will be a key focus for the scrutiny panel ensuring we deal with complaints promptly and improve services as a result.

Should you have a complaint about this statement and how it operates, we will aim to resolve the issue at the earliest stage. Mediators can be appointed where required to resolve more serious issues.

Anyone wishing to make a complaint, can contact the Tenant Participation Section on 0800 25 26 27 for more information, pick up a leaflet on making a complaint or check our website <u>www.goldengateshousing.org.uk</u>

Conflicts of interest

GGHT has a protocol to govern possible conflicts of interest between GGHT Board Members who may also wish to participate in our structures for tenant involvement. In order that they can do so in a transparent way, all Board

Members will:

- Wear their Board member identity badge at all meetings
- Ensure all attendees at meetings are aware of their position as a Board Member
- Where an agenda item concerns matters for which the Board is responsible or in which members have a personal interest, Board Members will:
 - > Declare their interest (to be recorded in the minutes); and
 - Not participate in the discussion; and
 - Not vote on the issue or attempt to influence the outcome of the debate

* All references to tenants and residents throughout this documents include all GGHT tenants, leaseholders and residents within the Borough

** Previously GGHT adopted a Tenant Participation Compact which was reviewed annually by a Monitoring Panel. The Panel agreed, that the word "Compact", was inappropriate and wanted to adopt a statement of involvement which would include a number of standards. This statement replaces the previously adopted Compact.

*** quartile performance is based on comparisons against other social housing providers – the top 25% of performers being classed as upper quartile, the middle range classed as median and the bottom 25% as lower quartile.

Appendix A

Core Standard 1

The way we involve you in the Housing Service

GGHT and our Tenant Participation Monitoring Panel agree that tenants, residents and leaseholders should have the opportunity to be involved in how we delivery services. This could be from receiving information on our services and planned changes to being fully involved in shaping policies and services.

Our Promise

GGHT will ensure information is accessible to all and all customers receive information on key issues which may affect them. GGHT will consult customers on any changes to service delivery and will encourage participation on all issues relating to GGHT and wider issues affecting the quality of life on our estates.

Our commitments

- Have structures in place to provide information, enable wide consultation and provide opportunities to participate.
- Provide appropriate training to increase skills and knowledge to empower tenants and residents to get involved
- Monitor and review customer involvement to demonstrate clear outcomes.
- Use all customer feedback to improve service delivery.
- Have a clear commitment to involvement in wider community issues which may affect customers on our estates.
- Encourage participation and customer feedback as described on the Statement
- Work with tenants who wish to be involved in managing the housing service
- Provide training and capacity building for tenants interested in becoming a Board member with GGHT
- Work with tenants to develop a local offer to tenants of the services they want and establish a scrutiny panel to monitor and challenge performance against national and local standards

✤ The information we will provide

GGHT is committed to providing a range of information covering all aspects of service delivery in a format which meets customer requirements.

Our Promise

GGHT will provide information to customers that meet the different needs.

Our commitments

- Provide information at appropriate times/intervals.
- Provide information in plain language which has been approved by our customers.
- Provide information in a format required by our customers.
- Ensure information is accessible to all.
- Provide a translation service.
- Offer information in different formats.
- Review all documentation/publications with customers as required.
- Seek customer feedback on the quality of information provided.
- Provide a Freephone for customer enquiries and feedback
- Use the web and email to keep you informed

✤ The range of different participation you can be involved in

GGHT offers a wide range of opportunities for customers to give us feedback and to fully participate in shaping services.

Our Promise

GGHT will promote existing structures and the benefits of involvement and seek to identify new and innovative ways to increase participation which meet customer requirements.

Our commitments

- Provide a menu of options for involvement which are adequately resourced and supported.
- Promote and support the Federation of Tenants' & Residents' Associations.
- Support and hold localised training events and fun days/open days.
- Promote technology as a means to communicate with our customers and increase participation.
- Use best practice to increase levels of participation and customer feedback on our services.
- Provide training on a wide range of issues to empower customers to get involved and build social capital
- Hold an annual customers conference.
- Provide prize draws on surveys to promote feedback.

How we will resource involvement activities

GGHT has a dedicated budget for tenant participation which is monitored by the Tenant Participation Monitoring Panel at meetings every two months.

Our Promise

To provide adequate support and resources to allow the set up, development and sustainability of tenant and resident groups so they can participate effectively.

Our commitments

- Provide staff support who are trained and committed to the standards in the Statement.
- Provide a specific budget for participation which is monitored by customers and is assessed against likely costs and longer term efficiency savings and benefits.
- Provide financial resources to constituted groups through set up grants and annual grants which will be reviewed in consultation with customers.
- Identify costs of involvement and measure against outcomes to demonstrate benefits.
- Provide expenses to all participants of consultative groups/panels and delegates at our conferences including:
 - Out of pocket expenses
 - o Carer's allowance
 - Subsistence allowance
- Assist groups to access facilities to enable the effective running of the group.
- Provide a training programme offering internal and external training opportunities.
- Provide photocopying assistance and advice and support in producing newsletters.

The way meetings will be arranged and conducted

GGHT is committed to ensuring all meetings are structured to meet customer requirements and result in outcomes.

Our Promise

GGHT will provide a structured approach to holding meetings and ensure meetings are held in accessible venues. GGHT will aim to promote this standard to constituted groups for their adoption.

Our commitments

- ✤ GGHT will:
- Publicise meetings in good time.
- Hold meetings in accessible venues.
- Circulate a clear agenda and supporting paperwork at least 5 working days in advance of the meeting.
- Minute all meetings and include actions and outcomes.
- Circulate all minutes of meetings within 10 working days.
- Make sure meetings are chaired in an open, transparent and democratic manner allowing all participants to share their views.
- Complete a summary report of discussions and costs of consultation and outcomes.
- ✤ Ask customers to confirm attendance at meetings.

We will provide:

- Training and support to all new Chairs, Secretaries and Treasurers.
- ✤ Assistance in securing venues for holding meetings.
- Training in meeting skills and minute taking.
- Expenses to allow attendance at meetings (where applicable).

The criteria Tenant & Resident Associations (TRAs) should operate to

GGHT will support and advise groups as required to promote an inclusive and structured approach.

Our Promise

To provide guidance to tenant associations in the promotion of social inclusion, equal access to participate and a democratic environment.

Our commitments

- Promote and support the formation of groups which represent an agreed area of the Borough.
- Set a template model constitution and code of conduct for use by all groups.
- Promote equal opportunities in all groups.
- ✤ Advise groups on publicity for annual general meetings.
- Advise groups on financial accounting practices and procedures.
- ✤ Advise on minimum quorums when voting.
- Provide groups with regular updates on participation news and wider GGH issues.
- Publicise groups in New Customer Welcome Packs, News & Views, GGH Website and the Tenants' Handbook.
- Consult groups on all key issues which may affect them or their members.
- Provide relevant information and contacts to all TRAs.
- Advise all TRAs how they should have a role in this Statement.

How quality of life issues will be included

GGHT wants tenants and residents to enjoy living on our estates, promoting a good quality of life.

Our Promise

To involve and work with all groups on social, economic and environmental issues which may impact on the lives of the tenants and residents on our estates.

Our commitments

- Consult and involve customers and groups in the development and monitoring of GGH's Business Plan to account for quality of life and liveability issues.
- Support and offer training to customers to enable them to be actively involved in the social, economic and environmental issues affecting them and their homes.
- Work with partners to tackle issues that may impact on our customers and customer groups and "close the gap".
- Work with partners to benefit our customers.
- Develop partnerships with organisations who work with customer groups to improve their quality of life.
- Work with individuals and groups to promote cohesion and sustainable communities.

***** The role of Staff and GGH Board Members

Our Promise

To involve and train staff and Board Members in the effective delivery of customer involvement and Customer Involvement Statement.

Our commitments

- Promote customer involvement and the Statement in job descriptions.
- Provide staff support and attendance at customer groups as appropriate.
- Provide staff training on participation particularly for new starters and refresher training for all staff.
- Seek the views of staff on the importance and value of involvement in shaping service delivery.
- Publicise progress on customer involvement to all staff every 6 months.
- Encourage staff to participate in joint training events and seminars.
- Empower staff to promote involvement.
- Promote awareness of the Statement and its role with Board Members.
- Provide training and development opportunities on customer involvement for Board Members.
- Keeping Councillors informed.

✤ How monitoring and measuring performance will be carried out

GGHT is committed to the effective implementation of our Statement and its adoption by all stakeholders.

Our Promise

To monitor, assess and review the Statement with customers, staff and stakeholders.

Our commitments

- Conduct a full customer survey every three years.
- Review the Statement annually in conjunction with staff, customers and stakeholders.
- Produce an annual report on participation, including progress against targets.
- Involve customers in the monitoring and scrutiny of performance of GGHT services
- Develop local offers with tenants on the services and standards they expect
- Measure customer satisfaction on a regular basis.
- Monitor all groups on the achievement of equality and compliance with their code of conduct.
- Aspire to be excellent by learning from best practice and comparing against the best performing organisations.
- Evaluate participation regularly to assess options to review our approach and encourage wider involvement.
- Monitor involvement through a database of customers who participate and seek to profile each group to ensure groups are representative.
- Measure satisfaction with participation, value for money and local area through our Customer Survey.

| Approval process | When |
|--|----------------|
| Tenant Participation Monitoring Panel | September 2009 |
| | January 2010 |
| Customer Consultative Panel | February 2010 |
| News & Views | Spring 2010 |
| Stakeholders | March 2010 |
| Staff | April 2010 |
| Equality Impact Assessment completed and | |
| signed off by Scrutiny Panel | May 2010 |
| Board | July 2010 |