



**Soha Housing
Tenant Inspectors Report No 3
Staff pledges and objectives in Resident Involvement
July 2007**

Preface **Tenant Inspection**

The government has for several years been looking into the ways of improving services for tenants, and The Audit Commission who monitor the performance of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), introduced Key lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) in 2004 as a way of testing service areas.

A government 'white paper' in 2004, outlined an agenda for 'strong prosperous communities', focusing on tenant involvement in key areas of service.

The Elton Review of 2006, commissioned by the Housing Corporation, made over 80 recommendations, including key areas of performance, prioritising inspections by tenants and the need for RSLs to involve residents in decision making.

The Housing Corporation, who inspect RSLs has indicated an interest in the possible viability of such tenant inspections, and their bearing on the relevant KLOEs being used in their inspections of RSLs.

It is under the recommendations of the above, that the tenant inspections of Soha are carried out.

Acknowledgements

The tenant inspectors would like to express their thanks to all members of staff who gave their time and help during the preparation of this report.

We would especially like to acknowledge the support and assistance of Catherine Little throughout this project.

**A TENANT INSPECTION INTO SOHA'S
STAFF PLEDGES AND OBJECTIVES IN
RELATION
TO RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT.**

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Section 3 Introduction

As part of its commitment to Resident involvement (RI) Soha requested that an inspection be carried out into its resident involvement performance in particular its staff pledges and objectives which are set as part of each employee's annual review.

The KLOE number 5 (see appendix) covers the following areas:

- Access, customer care and service user focus
- Diversity
- Tenant and Leaseholder (participation) compacts
- Resources for resident involvement
- The impact of resident involvement
- Value for money

A team consisting of both existing and recently trained tenant inspectors was formed and assigned to investigate the various departments within Soha, who due to the nature of the business have different opportunities and therefore varying levels of resident involvement as follows:

- Chief Executive (CEO) – responsible for resident involvement
- Customer Services
- Housing Management
- Repairs and Estate Services
- Supported Housing (includes Sheltered Housing and Floating Support)
- Finance and Resources (including Legal and Leaseholder Services)
- Development and Planned Maintenance

Section 4 Methodology

Soha currently produces several documents setting out its approach to RI, these include the following:

- A Tenant Involvement Statement
- Customer Charter
- How to Get Involved Booklet
- Resident Involvement Strategy
- The Soha Housing Compact
- Resident Involvement Action Plan
- Staff Resident Involvement Objectives

A desktop review was undertaken of the above documents and the findings and recommendations are included in part 5A of this report.

The inspection team then undertook a series of interviews with members of staff from each of Soha's departments who had expressed an interest in taking part. This would ascertain the staff member's commitment to their RI pledges and objectives, their reaction to the inclusion of RI in their job descriptions and to assess the reporting and monitoring procedures currently in place.

Where necessary and appropriate the inspection teams carried out further interviews with tenants, who staff members identified as being involved through the pledges and objectives made.

The reports of the inspection teams are included in parts 5B-H.

Section 5 Inspection Reports

5A Desktop Review

1. Tenant Involvement Statement

This document is Soha's commitment to its tenants, and as such sets out its four main aims.

However, the document is undated, and therefore there is no way to ascertain if these are current or past aims.

Regarding aim 4, members of the Chief Executives department, including the CEO, were unaware of the existence of a Tenant and Resident Policy.

2. Customer Charter

This document is undated, and as with the involvement statement there is no way to ascertain whether these are current or past aims. The Customer Charter booklet does however give tenants a clear introduction to Soha's standards of service.

3. How to Get Involved Booklet

This is undated. Although a good guide to the ways that residents can get involved, it could possibly be improved by grouping or listing the various methods by the amount of commitment required by tenants for each of the ways as shown in the Resident Involvement Strategy document structure menu.

4. Resident Involvement Strategy

Although a thorough guide to Soha's commitments to RI, any document should take note of the statement from the Audit commission in section 2 to the effect that "Make sure that the end result is important, not just the means of achieving it."

5. Soha Housing Compact

This document is undated, so as with the other documents its currency or frequency of review is unknown. Although there are several anomalies, most notably the section on Information which requires, that all documents are in a minimum of 12 point font size, and use of ornate or italic typefaces are to be avoided. However, the following section on Standard for Residents' Groups makes excessive use of italics.

It is only the overall view as seen by the CEO's department and further inspection may be required to check how each department's policies and procedures address the various commitments to RI contained in the compact and how these are carried through to the workplace.

6. Resident Involvement Action Plan

This plan is currently in the early stages of its operation, and there are several sections that may require expansion or clarification.

7. Staff Resident Involvement Objectives

The layout requires clarification with several items being repeated randomly throughout.

8. Staff pledges for RI

Although the majority are sound RI targets, many do seem to be inclined more to be consultation, and there may be a need for better definition between involvement and consultation.

9. Conclusions of the Desktop Review

There are a considerable amount of documents issued in relation to RI, and although several are mandatory requirements of the Housing Commission, the unstructured nature of these could be a result of the lack of a clear Tenant and Resident Policy and Procedure.

5B. Chief Executive's Department

An interview with the
Chief Executive (Overall responsibility for RI)

He reports that he hardly ever meets with tenants, other than as a final resort to manage complaints etc and through the Tenants Forum and other formal meetings and he has not personally got any tenants into RI.

No pledges have been made or personal objectives set and, only measures his own performance through departmental goals.

Likes meeting tenants, and would like to think that they like to meet him, although this maybe as they expect him to resolve any problems.

Although day to day monitoring of staff pledges objectives relies on trust and self assessment, considers this to be reasonable in the short term but this may need to be reviewed. Relies on the reports to the Board etc for department issues generally as opposed to setting personal targets.

Believes we need to look again at more effort to attract existing tenants, there may be too much attention given to new tenants (as easy targets).

Regarding Tenant Involvement Statement item 4, reference to an RI policy. Had no knowledge of its existence, therefore one must assume that there is no procedure also and as such no direction on RI issues, which results in a random approach, including many statements, Compacts, Charters etc which could be reduced in numbers or simplified.

Is generally happy with the strategy statement that the end result is important not just the means of achieving it. But monitoring systems need to be strengthened to make sure this is achieved.

Feedback generally is an area that needs a lot more focus and work to improve. Soha is good at telling us what it is going to do, but little feedback in the way of information on how tenants who get involved can make a difference.

Also need to gather more information on tenants who express an interest to be involved, to target them better and within their comfort zones.

Maybe a need for more staff meetings, as opposed to CEOs briefings, for staff to report their own RI activities and experiences, so all can be involved.

Although responses to RI efforts are sometimes very poor, this does not lead to discouragement.

He is generally satisfied with the feedback he gets that the staff back his approach to RI.

Soha is beginning to work with other RSLs locally to compare each one's progress on RI, but more still needs to be done.

Overall considers that there is a 'value added' element to be gained from RI and is keen to see it progress.

5C. Customer Services Department

An interview took place with two Customer Service Advisors to discuss their role in resident involvement. The advisors were very happy and confident in their role in tenant involvement and had access to information and leaflets and material which they were able to pass on to any tenants showing an interest. They felt that in doing this they were also able to gain a good rapport with tenants. It was felt that more training in resident involvement would help in their understanding of Soha's goals.

There was a clear message from management to push for more resident involvement and they are very happy to be part of this strategy. However, they did feel that there was not enough feedback to them and they would like more information on the outcome of their efforts.

There was a positive outcome and it was easy to see this in increased staff morale and their objectives gave them clear incentives to reach the targets set.

The suggestion was made that it would be beneficial for a Customer Service Advisor to be involved in sign-up of new tenants to introduce themselves and their service and also to make visits to other social housing providers to learn from them.

5D. Housing Management report

An interview with the Allocations Officer

Objective is to identify 4 tenants whose details can be passed on to the RI team to contact about involvement and feels that resident involvement is very important and never loses sight of that and thinks that Soha should have a good relationship with tenants.

Has a lot of day to day contact with tenants, through transfers and visits them at home before a transfer can happen to make sure that they are happy with the

move. Often provides emotional support and empathy through telephone conversations with upset customers. Helps with RI days and attends the tenants' forum to give presentations and is actively involved in each AGM from face painting to having a stand.

Suggested that RI should try to involve younger families and felt that the last AGM was the most successful in terms on younger involvement through the entertainment for children. The AGM should also move within Soha areas and not remain at Crowmarsh.

5D. Housing Management Report

The member of the housing staff interviewed was of the opinion that provided tenants were not involved in the day to day issues undertaken by members of Soha staff, they had every right to be involved in matters concerning all tenants.

Asked whether there should be quality vetting of tenants who wish to get involved the answer was "No" as every tenant had the right to be involved. The only exception being tenants who were mentally unstable.

Tenants should have the opportunity to get involved as they have a vested interest in Soha and the way it is administered.

5E. Repairs and Estate Services

An interview took place with two caretakers to discuss their staff pledges and their roles in Resident Involvement.

As they meet tenants on a daily basis as part of their job description, they are hands on and directly involved with residents.

They try to go that extra mile to help people beyond their job description, and are pleased to receive the thanks from tenants as a reward.

They are keen to improve their role in resident involvement.

5F. Supported Housing Report

1. An interview with a Scheme Manager at a Sheltered Housing Scheme, where the recorded file of Tenant Involvement was presented for inspection.
2. Their RI objective was "To ensure that RI was ongoing and to further develop all that had so far been achieved".
3. Thinks that most scheme managers felt RI definitely had a place in their department. Due to the age of the more senior residents it was difficult to motivate them, as the whole idea of supported housing was for resident to be able to relax. In the some instances residents were perhaps not able to become involved and were in the scheme to be cared for and not "Involved".
4. Support and feed back from senior scheme/line managers was good. Feed back is also received at the monthly meetings.
5. At the regular Chief Executive's briefings the need to RI is clearly explained and encouraged. The message is put across in a clear and enthusiastic way.
6. RI results in an improved service where residents have been involved in consultations with Grounds Maintenance, Cleaning and window cleaning contactors meetings. Where residents have been involved setting Pets Policy and reviewing the DDA provision better policies have been written.
7. Face to Face contact is better than delivering leaflets or posting notices, for getting the RI information to residents. Supported Housing Residents prefer the personal contact, and the scheme mangers are sure that the involvement invitation is understood.
8. The ethos of RI is communicated very strongly from the Chief Executive and their line manager and amongst all of the Scheme Managers at their regular meetings.
9. There had been no formal structured training for RI. Their Line Manager had talked about it and a group strategy was agreed at one of the regular meetings. All of the Scheme Managers had contributed to setting up the strategy and were enthusiastic. RI is frequently talked about at these meetings. Everyone thought it was really good when the Chair of the Tenants Forum attended one of their meetings and gave a talk about the Tenants Forum. It made them feel valued and included.
10. Amongst the younger supported housing residents RI is well received, but amongst the more senior age group the message is not always understood and is generally not a high priority for them

Conclusions

RI is well received and implemented amongst the Supported Housing Managers. They take every opportunity to involve their residents and have selected methods

of involvement to suit their residents. Good records are kept to form an audit trail for all of the involvement activities.

Recommendations

Structured training for RI should be arranged for all Supported Housing Scheme Managers.

Supported Scheme Managers should be invited to observe a Tenant Forum meeting.

Tenant Forum members should request an invitation to attend a group meeting of the Supported Housing Scheme Managers and familiarize themselves with the role they play in Soha's services.

5G. Finance and Resources Report

An interview with a member of the IT section and the Legal Leasehold Section.

From these two interviews the following views were expressed on Tenant Involvement.

1. All tenants should have the opportunity to become involved and offered training, in areas where required, to enable them to become fully involved.
2. Tenant involvement is essential to obtain feed-back and to improve customer satisfaction. A two-way system is essential to provide an efficient customer service.
3. Although not all tenants are able to become involved where a serious input is undertaken, encouragement should be given if necessary to obtain this and a financial incentive should not be ruled out.
4. Tenants' involvement can slow down the process of improvements but their input is essential for projects where they are affected.
5. All tenants have a vested interest as customers of Soha and therefore have every right to become involved.
6. Tenant Inspectors input helps to make Soha more efficient. Feed-back on their activities would be helpful to members of staff.

5H Development Department Report

An interview with the Home Ownership Co-ordinator.

Meets with prospective shared owners on a regular basis, as part of the selection and purchasing procedure, but has not considered introducing new tenants to RI.

Has made one pledge/personal objective to obtain better feedback from new shared owners, but to date has not received any positive responses.

Has no current knowledge of RI in the department's policies and procedures.

Has little or no contact with new shared owners after purchase, but after discussion felt that there may be value in Soha emphasising to new owners that they are valued and are included in the general term of 'tenants' and maybe a follow up by Legal Services at the time of issuing service contract statements could result in signing up as 'lookouts' or similar, by explaining that it is in ones interest to look after the areas to enhance the value of the asset in their homes.

Considers better feedback and interaction between departments would be of value. Overall, considers that there is an 'added value' element to be gained from RI.

5H Planned Maintenance Report

An interview with a Surveyor on resident involvement. Meets with tenants on a regular basis as part of day to day job and hands out leaflets etc when considered appropriate but has no way of knowing how successful this has been.

One pledge made is to take part in focus groups of tenants and needs follow up to check on progress of focus group. Likes meeting tenants and keen to expand RI as part of job.

Has no current knowledge of department's policy and procedure of RI – need to check out and update.

Is encouraged to expand RI, but only recently as part of current drive by CEO.

Monitoring of objectives/performance based mainly on self assessment and trust needs to be stronger.

Concerns that many RI efforts are consultation rather than RI and this needs more work.

Own job gives a lot of scope for RI. Good support from managers but mainly at time of annual assessment. No meetings with other staff only CEO briefings, needs more interaction from departments/feedback etc.

Happy CEO is pushing RI for the right reasons.

Needs more training – only basic training at beginning and none since and maybe needs refresher.

Resigned to poor response – not discouraged.

Needs to know more about tenants to target areas of involvement.

No knowledge of other RSL's – to check on other methods could be helpful.

Thinks RI is a good idea and see's some value added by it. More interaction within Soha would be good, say Estate Improvement/Planned Maintenance working together on regeneration and more feedback generally.

6. Conclusions

- Staff pledges and objectives, although a good means of involving all the staff in RI, they should not be considered a substitute for a properly conceived and operated set of policies and procedures, incorporating the aims of the RI sections of the Soha Housing Compact, throughout all departments.
- Any monitoring of staff objectives should not rely on self assessment but should be restructured to become more measurable but taking into account the varying levels of opportunity for RI in their job descriptions.
- Better staff interaction possibly through staff meetings, as opposed to briefings, and an opportunity for staff to report their own RI activities and experiences so all can be involved.
- Provide better standard of feedback to tenants and tenant groups.
- Follow up staff training is considered necessary by those staff members interviewed
- Need to clearly define difference between involvement and consultation
- Need for better information on tenants.

7 Recommendations

- Prepare Tenant and Resident policy as Soha's commitment given in the Tenant Involvement Statement, as in the Housing Corporations mandatory requirement.
- All department policies and procedures to be updated to include RI aims, incorporating the RI sections of the Soha Housing Compact.

- Develop measurable monitoring procedures.
- Devise better methods for feedback both to and from staff.
- To gather more quality information on tenants who express an interest in being involved, so as to target them better, and allowing them to keep within their comfort zone.
- Review the amount and content of the documents issued in relation to RI to avoid repetition and confusion.
- Provide continuous RI follow up training to staff.
- Continuous monitoring of the progress of the Resident Involvement action plan will be required.
- Staff Resident Involvement Objectives document needs to be clearer, less repetitive and continuously monitored.
- Consider involving a customer Service Advisor in the sign up of new tenants to introduce themselves and their service.
- Explore methods to involve younger families in RI activities.
- Provide guidance to clearly define difference between Involvement and Consultation.
- Shared owners and Leaseholders should be included in RI and a method of reaching them on a more regular basis must be developed i.e. include in distribution of Home Talk & Tenants' Times.
- Tenant Forum Members should seek to acquaint themselves with staff and their job roles in Soha's various departments.

8. Appendix

Tenant Involvement Statement
 Resident Involvement Action Plan
 Staff Resident involvement Objectives
 KLOE 5

Copies of the other documents listed in section 4 can be obtained from the Resident Involvement Manager at Soha.

9. List of Inspection Team Members

James Barrett
Carole Burchett
Bertie Doy
Andy Dunsmore
Elvina Goddard
Freda Griffiths
Don Harrison
Richard Hurst
Michelle Krasner
Gerald Prior
Katie Robertson
David Robinson
Roy Sadler
Janice Trevillion

Tenant

Involvement Statement

Working with Soha tenants the following involvement statement has been developed.

Our purpose is:

To consult you on all issues which are likely to affect you. We will encourage you to get involved to improve our services, accountability and support you to develop your community.

Our aims are to:

1. Make tenant and resident involvement an integral part of our business.

Tenant and resident involvement will be at the heart of our day-to-day work.

2. Be inclusive and provide opportunities for all tenants and residents to be involved.

We will work to involve 'hard to reach' groups such as black and ethnic minority communities and look at new ways to give particular groups a voice, for example the young and those with disabilities.

We want to consult and involve as many tenants as possible. We will offer many different ways for our tenants to get involved to help improve our service.

3. Provide support to empower tenants to make a difference

We will help you access training and funding and provide dedicated staff to offer support and guidance.

4. Give value for money

We will work with you to make sure our tenant and resident involvement policy works effectively and cost efficiently.

How we will achieve our aims

We will work with the Tenants' Forum to develop an action plan. This action plan will list what we intend to do to make sure we achieve our purpose and aims. We will review, monitor and evaluate this plan every year.



Translation and Tape

If you would like this publication on tape or translated in another language please contact us on **01235 515900**

If you would like a full copy of the tenant involvement statement including the action plan (that will be developed soon) please call **01235 515900** or look on www.soha.co.uk