

	Customer Involvement & Influence Policy						
	Doc No: P004						

1	Volunteering Policy	P Latham	Apr 2024	Board	Apr 2024	Apr 2024	Apr 2027
1	Customer Involvement & Influence Policy	P Latham	Oct 2024	Board	N/A	Oct 2024	Oct 2027

1. Introduction

ECBHA is committed to developing and supporting effective customer involvement. By working in partnership with our customers we aim to improve the quality of and satisfaction with our services and believe that customer involvement can maximise our accountability to customers and the communities in which we work.

ECBHA recognises that customers will want to get involved differently and will be able to commit different skills and length of time. Some customers will just want to be informed, whilst others will wish to be consulted, whilst others will want to be actively involved in the decision making process. This is why we are committed to offering a varied and flexible “menu of involvement” to suit those individual circumstances. Customers can become involved both collectively through customer groups and/or on an individual basis and can choose how, when and at what level they want to be involved.

2. Definitions

- ECBHA defines customer involvement as a process that involves:
- Any activity where customers are able to have their voices heard, recorded and are able to contribute and shape our services and how they are delivered.
- Sharing information and ideas with customers
- Offering customer’s opportunities to challenge and scrutinise our performance and services
- Offering customers, a range of opportunities to get more actively involved in shaping our services, the information we share and increasing our ability to actively listen and learning from feedback
- Reporting back and being accountable to customers

For the purpose of this document “customer” is defined as any tenant, tenant, leaseholder, or shared owner. We recognise that in some instances customers prefer to be referred to as residents which we consider to have the same meaning.

3. Policy Statement

ECBHS is committed to ensuring all customers can be involved to the level they wish both on an informal or formal basis for as long as they wish to.

We actively encourage customers to set the pace of your involvement and will endeavour to support your engagement at the level you feel comfortable with and at a pace that suits you or your group.

Active customer involvement is pivotal and vital if we are to ensure a true partnership with those that give time and energy to improving to the efficiency and effectiveness of the services we provide.

The purpose of this policy is set out how we do this and how we will support, enable and develop greater customer involvement.

4. Legal and Regulatory Framework

From April 2024 the new Regulatory Consumer Standards increased the level of expectation and scrutiny on Housing Providers in respect of engaging and involving their customers.

Specifically, the new consumer standard strengthens the regulators powers to ensure that we provide safe, well maintained homes and services that meet the diverse needs of our customers. In respect of this policy there is a clear requirement that our approach is effectively informed and scrutinised by our customers.

The Consumer Standards sets out that Registered Providers shall ensure that customers are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- The formulation of housing related policies and strategic priorities
- The making of decisions about how services are delivered and setting service standards and agreeing local offers
- The scrutiny of Landlords performance and making recommendations about how services can be improved
- The Standards also says that Registered Providers will:
- Provide customers with accessible, relevant and timely information about standards, choices, responsibilities
- Provide information about how customers can communicate with them and provide feedback
- Ensure that customers are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in setting housing policy and procedure, how services are delivered and standards set and how their homes are managed.
- Support the formation and activities of customer panels or groups and respond in a constructive and timely manner to them
- Provide support to customers to build their capacity to be more effectively involved

In 2019 the National Housing Federation introduced the Together with Tenants Charter, the aim of the charter is to ensure that all housing provider creates strong and ever-increasing opportunities for customers to have their say in a variety of ways and be actively heard about the homes and communities they live in.

5. Involvement Opportunities

We will ensure that customers have a real opportunities to become involved in the decision making in a way that suits them. To achieve this, we are committed to providing a range of opportunities for involvement.

Our “menu of involvement” is listed in Appendix One.

6. Communication

ECBHA is committed to developing and improving the way we communicate with customers and receive feedback that meets our customer's needs.

We are constantly reviewing the way we communicate and by doing this we will improve our service, our performance and encourage more customers to get involved in a way that suits their needs and interests.

We are regularly updating our data to record customers preferred method of communication and whenever possible we will communicate and seek feedback in this way.

We have increased our focus on utilising technology to innovate improved processes that transform the way we deliver service and offer to you.

Over the last few years we have increased our access and use of digital offerings and will continue to look at virtual ways to increase engagement and access to and for customers.

Our focus is to increase engagement with a wider demographic of our customer base to ensure that we are delivering our services where they are needed most and in a way that matches our customer's needs and in a way that responds to individual needs, expectations and vulnerabilities.

ECBHA operates a dedicated Communications Strategy and Action Plan to compliment this policy commitment.

7. Information

ECBHA aims to keep customers informed in a timely manner about our services and performance and will ensure that we provide good quality information in a range of ways.

We presently provide a regular newsletter, information downloads, handbooks and our annual report. We are increasing our use of social media and our website to interact with our customer base and will continue seek new ways to bring information to customers in easy to access formats.

All new customers receive information about the opportunities for getting involved. Our newsletter and website has a dedicated page that focuses on our scrutiny group opportunities and other ways to get involved on regular basis.

8. Resourcing Customer Involvement

ECBHA is committed to ensuring that we properly resource and support our customer involvement and influence activities. To ensure this we have the following:

- All colleagues having a responsibility for promoting and supporting customer involvement at all levels
- Appropriate training being made available to customers and colleagues to support and promote customer involvement and influence
- Allocated staffing resources to support customers to undertake scrutiny activities
- An identified customer involvement and influence

9. Volunteering Policy Statement

Introduction

This policy sets out the ECBHA approach to engaging, promoting and supporting individuals that volunteer within the organisation.

It is recognised that volunteering, particularly within community based organisation setting, can bring significant benefits for the both the individuals and the organisation. However it is also recognised that, due to the organisations scale, it is not able to provide dedicated resources for the recruitment, development and management of its volunteers and therefore a proportionate approach is required.

The delivery of the ECBHA Involvement and Engagement Strategy will potentially lead to an increased number of customer volunteering.

Definitions

ECBHA has adopted the National Council for Voluntary Organisations definition for volunteering:

‘We define volunteering as any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual’

Volunteers are not simply seen as a ‘free resource’ and it is recognised that for volunteering to be undertaken successfully training, support and management is needed alongside an understanding of the volunteers motivations. Individuals who wish to spend time volunteering within ECBHA may wish to do so for various reasons

Policy Statement

The policy is driven by:

- The necessity to support and empower interested individuals to volunteer via a fair and consistent approach.
- Ensuring that volunteers have a meaningful experience benefiting both them and the organisation.
- Ensuring recognition of volunteer contributions.

To achieve this we will:

- Have a short application form for volunteers to complete to ensure that we have consistent information of those volunteering, an understanding the volunteering they are interested in and the time commitment that they can realistically make.
- Ensure that all volunteers have an agreement document in place to provide clarity of expectations for both parties.
- Ensure that all volunteers have a consistent baseline induction alongside any more detailed training relating to the topic area of the volunteering.
- All volunteering arrangements will be reviewed at least quarterly to ensure that they are still appropriate for both the individual and the organisation.
- Reimburse reasonable expenses provided that they are agreed and approved prior to being incurred.

All voluntary activities must be:

- Aligned to ECBHA values and must not create a direct conflict with the organisations business aims and remit.
- Approved and overseen by the Chief Operating Officer or Chief Executive Officer.
- Adhering to all relevant ECBHA policies and procedures. Volunteers will have awareness of the key policies before they can start their volunteering, including Health and Safety, Equality and Safeguarding.

It is the volunteer's responsibility to ensure that their benefits and work searches are not affected by their volunteering commitments.

Customers may only be involved in volunteering related to co-regulation if they are considered compliant with their tenancy agreement or other contractual agreements.

ECBHA will also:

- Promote volunteering opportunities through staff, customers, and its external communication channels.
- Not use volunteers to fulfil a role within the agreed company staffing structure; volunteers are to support and enhance business and service delivery.
- Keep records of volunteering to facilitate evaluation of opportunities provided and participated in.
- Utilise guidance from organisations such as:
 - National Council for Voluntary Organisations
 - Volunteering England Good Practice Bank

ECBHA reserves the right to not engage an individual as a volunteer, in such circumstances the individual will be notified of this decision in writing at the point of application and will have the opportunity to appeal this by writing to the Chief Executive Officer within 14 days of receiving the decision.

10. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

We are committed to promoting equal opportunities for all everyone will receive equal treatment regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partner status, pregnancy or maternity, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

This policy supports ECBHA commitment to treat all people with fairness and respect. We aim to foster good relations within our communities. When applying this policy, we will act sensitively towards the diverse needs of individuals and to reduce discrimination and harassment.

We will be inclusive and help ensure representation of diversity in our communities in our imagery and content.

11. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years unless changing circumstances or an incident trigger an earlier review.

Appendix 1 - Menu of Involvement

Our menu of involvement includes:

Resident Board Members

The ECBHA Rules makes specific provisions for the ECBHA Board to have numerous Resident Board Members. The association encourages customers to take up these resident Board member positions and can provide training, support and equipment to facilitate this.

Customer Scrutiny Group

A group of ECBHA customers who have made themselves available to undertake facilitated scrutiny activities across a range of topic agreed with the Executive and the Board with the aim of testing, verifying and improving services. The group provides conclusions and recommendations to the Board. Their work is closely aligned to regulatory and legislative requirements or sector good practice.

The group is independent and there is a separate scrutiny model document that supports its operation.

Customer Groups

ECBHA encourages the formation of customer groups around particular shared interests and topics and aims to support these groups in appropriate ways.

Independent Living Services

We currently operate three schemes providing specific accommodation to older people. We seek to support and facilitate customers living within those schemes to come together to provide activities and services within schemes as a collective group and use these events to discuss regular items of interest or to consult on a specific issue or interest.

Satisfaction Surveys

On a regular basis we consult and engage with customers through surveys. These are:

- Formal Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) surveys undertaken by an external organisation in line with the requirements outlined by the Regulatory of Social Housing.
- Informal customer satisfaction surveys seeking feedback on specific service areas, for example repairs or complaints, often after a recent service delivery experience. These surveys help us to collect information about the effectiveness and efficiency of the services we are providing and how these can be improved.

Where possible, the results of surveys are benchmarked with the wider housing sector and reported in our newsletters and on our website with any learning opportunities.

Village Walkabouts

Colleagues from ECBHA regularly carry out village walkabouts which all customers are invited to take part in, either in full or in part. The purpose of walkabouts is to get on the spot feedback from customers about their home and neighbourhood.

Suggestions, comments, complaints and compliments

We are always asking for suggestions for making improvements and actively encourage customers to complain if they are not happy with our service or feel there is a different way, we can do things. All feedback is good feedback and we will use all information shared to help shape a better service.

Themed Social Events

ECBHA, through its Communications Strategy, commits to providing a range of themed social events through the year that seek to provide an opportunity to grow customer interaction with ECBHA and provide informal opportunities to influence our homes and services.

Customer Conference

Annually, we work with the Community Housing Associations North West (CHANW) group to provide a Customer Conference. This conference is an opportunity for involved customers from across 21 housing associations, to share experiences, hear about best practice and work constructively with their landlords to seek to improve services.