



## **South Northants Homes Resident Involvement and Community Development Strategy 2009- 2012**

### **Introduction and Background**

This strategy outlines how Resident Involvement and Community Development will help SNH deliver the corporate vision and objectives of the business.

### **South Northants Homes Mission Statement**

“To provide homes and housing services that make a positive difference to the communities in which we work”.

### **SNH Core values:**

- Be open and honest in all our dealings and maintain the highest integrity at all times.
- Provide efficient and accessible services and work continually to improve them to meet customer needs.
- Listen to customers and involve them in the development and management of their homes. Provide and maintain quality, affordable, sustainable homes.
- Respect and value equally the contribution of all people involved in our organisation, including customers, staff and stakeholders.
- Maintain a sound financial base and maximise the use of our assets and resources.

South Northants Homes Mission Statement and core values put residents at the heart of the organisation.

SNH Offer Document acts as the business plan that SNH has been working towards during the first two years of operation. This includes 6 themes that include the promises that were made to customers at the time of transfer.

These are outlined below and detailed clearly in the offer document stock promises report.

**Theme 1-** Delivery of home improvements

**Theme 2-** Service improvements

**Theme 3-** Affordable Rents

**Theme 4-** Resident Involvement in decision making

**Theme 5-** Regeneration

**Theme 6-** Delivering sustainable communities

Our Resident Involvement and Community Development strategic ambitions will underpin how this area of the business will support SNH to achieve its overall corporate objectives and promises made to customers. The strategy will also help to ensure that that Resident Involvement and Community Development runs through SNH demonstrating a Golden Thread.

### **The Strategy compliments SNH's**

Resident Involvement Statement

Resident Involvement Policy

Resident Involvement Impact Assessment

Anti-social Behaviour Policy

Equality and Diversity Policy

### **Background of SNH**

South Northants Homes was formed on 17 March 2008 as a new not-for-profit Housing Association following the transfer of over 2,900 homes from South Northamptonshire Council. A positive vote by tenants in favour of transfer took place in 2007.

SNH is managed by an unpaid voluntary board of 15 members, comprising five tenants, five Council nominees and five independent specialists.

SNH is part of Grand Union Housing Group (GUHG), and is a strong regional Housing Group with a people centred culture, delivering excellent local services. The group comprises of two other subsidiaries: Aragon Housing Association and MacIntyre Housing Association.

South Northants Homes is rurally located over the South Northants District with 2,900 affordable homes covering a total of 76 separate towns/villages. This includes the market towns of Brackley and Towcester where we have the largest proportion of properties equalling 622 collectively and smaller villages where we have very few properties for example in Whitfield and Halse which both have only one SNH property. South Northants Homes has different types of stock which include sheltered accommodation and dispersed bungalows under our Retirement Homes Service, general needs housing, leasehold accommodation and temporary accommodation.

The district has some of the most beautiful countryside in Northamptonshire and it has stretches of both the Oxford and Grand Union Canals. South Northants is the home to the British motor racing Silverstone Circuit, to the historic interest of Sulgrave Manor, which was home to George Washington's ancestors, Salcey Forest, once a royal hunting forest, and the canal village of Stoke Bruerne.

South Northants district is seen by many as affluent area which unfortunately can sometimes result in lack of funding opportunities for Community Development and Social Improvement projects. Despite this perception South Northants does have pockets of deprivation as well as other associated problems faced by rural communities including lack of services and facilities, accessibility and transport restrictions, and people living in isolation and poverty.

To overcome challenges faced by rural communities it is important that SNH works closely with voluntary and statutory organisations who operate at local levels and that creative and imaginative ambitions for the long term strategy are developed.

### **South Northants Homes Involvement structure**

The Association provides a range of opportunities for involving residents both formally and informally. This will enable South Northants Homes and residents to work in partnership to make key decisions about how housing and related services are delivered and developed.

We recognise the involvement of residents is key to the continuous improvement of housing services provided by South Northants Homes.

Prior to our stock transfer South Northants Council had a group of involved customers who supported us with the stock option consultative process. Following on from our successful stock transfer in March 2008 many of these customers have continued to be involved and other residents have become involved. Crucially we have clarified and promoted the many ways in which residents can be involved in the work of the Association.

With the support and influence of our involved customers we are working hard to deliver the 'Offer Document Promises'. These promises were set out by tenants as the result of consultation prior to transfer, undertaken by SNC in partnership with South Northamptonshire Tenants Panel. Our SNH customer forums have now taken forward the work and are regularly consulted on the programme of work and progress being made. Customer Committee monitors our performance in delivering the promises.

We put residents at the centre of decision making, providing a range of opportunities for residents to be involved at governance, strategic and local delivery level.

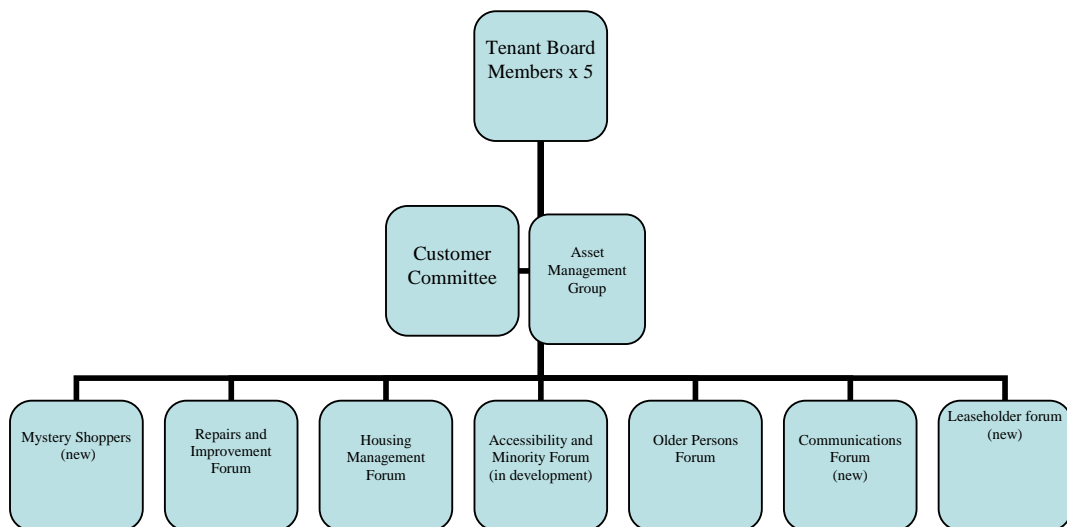
A Resident Involvement review was undertaken in July 2009 which analysed the current involvement structure, forum membership and the terms of references. The key findings of this were that we have some dedicated involved customers who have been fantastic in the support they have given to SNH ranging from their involvement in our forums up to the roles in Governance including our tenant Board member and Customer Committee

However, the review also raised the following:

- There is a relatively small group of involved members are spread across a number of forums;
- The purpose and responsibility of the forums needed to be made clear, that they are consultative and not decision making;
- Improved communication was needed between the customer committee and the customer forums;
- Agendas were arguably too long for enough time to be devoted to all the items;
- Personal issues were sometimes brought to the meetings which in most cases is not appropriate or productive;
- It needed to be clearer about which issues will be discussed at each forum;
- Further recruitment is needed to get full membership of both the existing forums and the development of the new forums.

Since the forum review, work on addressing the above issues has been undertaken and as part of our strategy it is vital all staff in SNH try and encourage new members to get involved so we don't continue to have the same faces spread out between all our involved member opportunities. This would help us to be better represented across the communities that we serve and also so we don't overload our current involved members with too much responsibility.

### Involvement structure flow chart



## **Residents Associations and community Groups**

In addition to the involvement structure chart, South Northants Homes aims to support and encourage the development of Residents Associations and Community Groups out in the district. These will be an important tier to our involvement structure and will give tenants and residents, living within a specific area a forum to come together to take up issues of community concern and to represent the views of tenants and residents to SNH, other landlords, local authority and other agencies. Once set up they will make campaigning for local communities more effective, keep residents informed, and greatly assist community-building.

Three areas have been identified as areas where a Residents Association would be both beneficial to the local community as well as a benefit to South Northants Homes as they will be an active consultative forum that will be in place to help support SNH with future consultations around planned activities that could have an impact on the local areas. The three areas that have been identified to set up a residents group are Hesketh Crescent in Towcester, Spencer Gardens and Churchill Way in Brackley.

It is also important to recognise both Resident Involvement and Community Development and the important link between the two. Through our Community Development work we aim to build trust and mutual respect with our customers and hope that by doing this we will help encourage more residents to get involved with the work of the Association.

### **Resident Involvement at South Northants Homes has achieved the following:**

- The successful recruitment of a full time Community Development Manager and Resident Involvement Officer;
- 5 Tenant Representatives on our Board of Management;
- The creation of our Customer Committee with 10 tenant representatives and one Leaseholder;
- Service improvement work since transfer with 3 Customer Forums; Older Persons, Repairs and Improvements and Housing Management;
- Resident consultation which has helped to shape the repairs service and includes changes to operation times;
- Residents on the Repairs and Improvement Forum were involved in the selection process of major improvement contractors which resulted in Mears, BSG and Crispin and Borst being selected;
- Residents on the Housing Management Forum helped produce the tenants handbook and shaped the estate inspections;
- Residents on the Older Persons Forum helped to shape new support plans and the Handypersons service;
- The recent introduction of a Communications and Leaseholder forum;
- A programme of estate walkabouts for 2009/10 covering all villages;
- Regular Retirement Scheme resident's meetings;
- 4 editions of South Northants News;

- 2 residents' calendars with details of key events and activities and performance data;
- Equality & Diversity training delivered for our involved members;
- Residents have helped shape our new Housing Association and the way services are delivered and developed;
- Residents have more knowledge about South Northants Homes and the way in which we operate;
- Residents are better informed and understand the level of service they should expect from staff;
- Residents recognise that their views are important to us and they can see how their involvement has made a difference.

**(For a full breakdown of what Resident Involvement has achieved please see our Resident Involvement Impact Assessment.)**

## **Resident Involvement and Community Development Ambitions for Strategy 2009-2012**

### **Understanding Resident Involvement and Community Development**

SNH have a dedicated Community Development Team - however it is vital that *all* staff recognise the importance of Resident Involvement and Community Development and their role in ensuring that it is genuine and meaningful and that a culture of Resident Involvement and Community Development is firmly embedded into SNH.

### **2009-2012 Ambitions**

#### **We will do this by:**

- Promotion to staff on the role of Community Development and Resident Involvement and its purpose and structure;
- Building in Resident Involvement and Community Development targets into individual service areas and personal objectives;
- All staff will be appropriately trained and supported to ensure that they can achieve their individual Resident Involvement and Community Development objectives;
- Encouraging service managers to work directly with customers on their service delivery plans.

### **Enabling Resident Involvement and Community Development**

We will encourage, motivate and empower our residents to be involved in the work of the Association. We will provide the training and support that both individuals and groups need in order to contribute to their communities and to the success of SNH.

## **2009-2012 Ambitions**

We will do this by:

- Analysing and developing the capacity and skills of residents so they gain the confidence and skills required to be involved;
- Developing a training programme for new and existing involved customers;
- Developing opportunities and initiatives which encourage and engage younger households and harder to reach groups for example developing the Accessibility and Minority Forum;
- Providing travel expenses and other associated costs to enable people become involved.

### **Ensuring residents have the opportunity to influence service delivery**

We will provide a range of different opportunities for residents to be involved in the activities of the Association. We ensure equal access to all our customers (for example younger and older customers), in order to ensure that all our customers have influence. We recognise our customers are in the best position to tell us which services work well and where we can improve.

## **2009-2012 Ambitions**

**We will do this by:**

- Collating customer profiling data in order to understand who our customers are so we can tailor our services in accordance with their needs and directly target harder to reach groups;
- Analysing the outcomes of customer satisfaction surveys and status surveys around Resident Involvement to provide indicators for setting targets and objectives;
- Offering a range of ways in which residents can be involved, from attending estate walkabouts to membership of our Board of Management;
- Raise the profile of the role of our Customer Committee members which is to represent tenants in the local communities.
- Consulting our residents on our Major Works programme including selection and monitoring of contractors and specifications of materials to be incorporated within the works;
- Involving residents with the re-development proposals for example the proposed options for non-traditional homes;
- Continue to deliver the programme of estate walk abouts;
- Extend and strengthen our forum membership;
- Introduce new forums and new ways for customers to get involved;
- Introduce an Accessibility and Minority Forum;
- Encourage involvement from our younger tenants;
- Involve residents in the setting of standards and the demonstration of continuous improvement;

- Involve residents with setting targets for Resident Involvement and Community Development;
- Profile our communities in order to understand the areas that SNH operates in.

## **Communication**

Communication will be key to ensuring that everyone is kept informed of the work of the Association and that there is a constant flow of information between management, staff and all levels of involvement. All minutes of meetings will be circulated and where appropriate forum chairs will be invited to attend Customer Committee meetings and vice-versa. All minutes will be available on the internet and feedback will be given in SNH news. All tenant Board members are elected from Customer Committee and many members sit on more than one forum which helps keep the communication flowing through all tiers of involvement and keeps the links strong.

SNH working with our customers we will aim to continually improve communication and the quality, clarity and range of information we provide – such as service statements, leaflets, publications including our residents' newsletter and our website.

## **2009-2012 Ambitions**

We will do this by:

- Working with the new Communications forum which has been set up as part of the strategy which will be pivotal in ensuring sound and productive communication with our customers;
- Producing 4 publications a year in line with regulatory requirements;
- Exploring with residents new ways of working together using information and communication technology;
- Continue the development of our website involving tenants in the process;
- Introduce a suite of literature including service leaflets where customers have been involved in setting the standards;
- Work with our new Retirement Homes editorial group to introduce our first Retirement Homes newsletter;
- Continue to produce an annual calendar that publishes information on how SNH is performing;
- Consulting with tenants on new housing development opportunities;
- Hold our first Customer Conference.

## **Community Development**

Community Development Exchange defines Community Development as:

“The process of developing active and Sustainable Communities based on Social Justice and Mutual Respect. It is about influencing power

structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives.

Community Development practitioners facilitate the participation of people in this process. They enable connections to be made between communities and with the development of wider policies and programmes.

Community Development expresses values of fairness, equality, accountability, opportunity, choice, participation, mutuality, reciprocity and continuous learning. Educating, enabling and empowering are at the core of Community Development.”

### **Community Development; what this means to SNH**

We want to develop Community Development programmes and initiatives that will help build strong relationships with our residents. We want to have actively engaged and empowered individuals working along side us to ensure that all our services are designed and delivered to the very highest standards and meet the needs of the communities we serve.

### **Community Development at SNH had already achieved the following:**

- ✓ Supported two local schools with their healthy living initiatives by creating allotments for them to grow their own fruit and vegetables.
- ✓ Worked with a local school on an inter-generational project which has helped to break down age barrier perceptions and promoted digital inclusion for older residents.
- ✓ Working in partnership with our contractors 'Mears Ltd' to provide work experience opportunities for local young people and two have been offered an Apprenticeship.
- ✓ A programme of SNH Drop Ins which have now joined the Safe and Sound Partnership to hold regular events out in the community.
- ✓ Developed good partnerships with local voluntary and community organisations and has become a member of support networks with other Registered Social Landlords to share good practice and join forces on initiatives for the benefits of our customers and the communities in which they live.
- ✓ Partnership worked with local youth provision to help organise two youth events where young people can sound off their views at Sound Box.
- ✓ Consulted Retirement Homes Service around computer training and scheme activities.
- ✓ Installed computers with internet access in our 9 sheltered schemes with a volunteer training programmes established.

Community Development will continue to raise the profile of SNH as a community focused Housing Association which invests in the areas where our customers live and recognises the importance of our customers feeling safe and secure both in their homes and in the communities that they live.

## **2009-2012 Ambitions**

### **We will do this by:**

- Attending and organising local events to raise the profile of SNH and improve engagement in the wider community;
- Developing a partnership approach. We will work with local communities, parish councils and other voluntary and statutory organisations on a range of Community Development projects that will help to create safe and sustainable communities;
- Carrying out research in the district to identify and map community partner organisations;
- Community profiling to understand local communities so that Community Development activities are developed around the neighbourhood priorities to ensure that the support and initiatives are directed where they are needed;
- Promoting our Charitable and Community Donations to support local initiatives which are awarded by involved customers on the Customer Committee;
- Providing the resources required through a dedicated Community Development team, involved customers and a specific Community Development budget;
- Developing Residents Associations with a specific budget for set up costs, as already stated in the involvement structure these will be initially be targeted at three areas; Spencer Gardens, Churchill Way and Hesketh Crescent;
- Developing Community Development activities at Normandy Lodge, which will provide involvement opportunities for our residents living in temporary accommodation;
- SNH Estate Walkabouts out about in the community identifying the local area priorities;
- SNH Drop in events out in the community including Community Connections events with the Safe and Sound partnership and targeted SNH specific events;
- Continuing to developing and support initiatives that support economic, environmental, social and healthy sustainable communities;
- Offering annual school work experience programmes;
- Exploring further Apprenticeship opportunities for young people from the district.

### **Equality and Diversity**

“SNH will be committed to equality of opportunity and meeting the diverse needs of the Community”.

SNH is committed to developing an organisational culture, involving all sections of the community and acknowledging the contribution each individual can make to our work.

SNH has a responsibility to ensure that equality of opportunity and effective management of diversity are at the core of its business and to deliver services that are both responsive to the needs of communities and individuals and promote social inclusion. We are committed to taking positive steps to ensure that equality of opportunity and effective management of diversity are reflected in all of our activities.

South Northants Homes has a relatively high proportion of elderly tenants and tenants who have disabilities. By carrying out customer profiling will give us up to date information of who our customers are so we can ensure we are:

- Treating people fairly and with respect;
- Actively tackling discrimination and the barriers that some groups of people face;
- Promoting fair and equitable access to services and involvement opportunities;
- Listening to the views of customers and treating complaints seriously and professionally;
- Celebrating diversity and cater for the variety of needs of our local community;
- Encouraging the involvement of discriminated against groups in the planning and development of services through our Accessibility and Minority Forum;
- Collecting and collating customer data recording where there are needs for alternative format information and ensuring that systems are in place to meet these needs.

### **Resources to support Resident Involvement and Community Development**

SNH are committed to ensuring that there is all the support needed to get involved. The following support mechanisms are in place:

- ✓ Leaflets and literature to promote our services.
- ✓ Resident Involvement budget.
- ✓ Computer facilities for involved tenants to use at 9 different locations in the community.
- ✓ Tenant expenses paid including travel and child care.
- ✓ A capacity building training programme designed around both individual and group needs.
- ✓ Support and funding for involved members to attend external conferences and training events.
- ✓ A dedicated Community Development Team.
- ✓ A charitable and community donations fund.
- ✓ Specific budget for the formation of residents groups

## **Reviewing and monitoring Resident Involvement and Community Development**

South Northants Homes will work with involved residents to monitor Resident Involvement activity and the Community Development Strategy.

We will monitor the strategy through:

- Customer Committee who will have terms of reference outlining the role, influence and responsibilities of this forum including mechanisms for consideration of performance and target setting;
- Using Status and other customer satisfaction surveys and feeding outcomes and priorities for action back to Customer Committee;
- Holding reviews with our customers which will also serve as impact assessment opportunities;
- Customer Committee Appraisals;
- Equality Impact Assessments which include impact of involvement, equality impact and value for money;
- Promoting and celebrating the impact of involvement;
- Developing a project that will monitor and measure systems for impact assessments of Resident Involvement and Community Development for example this may include purchasing specific software such as T.P Tracker or other monitoring equipment.

## **Evaluation**

We are coming to the final quarter of year 2 in the history of SNH. This strategy outlines both achievement and future ambitions for Resident Involvement and Community Development at SNH.

Future plans referred to in this strategy include significant consultation with customers, staff and partners of the organisation. Further details of the processes for involving those identified will be provided with a delivery action plan developed with active residents using SMART principles. The Delivery Action Plan will be the key tool for monitoring and reviewing this strategy.

The role of the new social housing regulators, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) will be critical to this strategy and its future development. At present there are indications of regulatory risk-based assessment of landlord performance on resident involvement which may consider accreditation schemes and arrangement for resident led scrutiny. The TSA is currently finalising consultative information and is likely to disseminate firmer information in terms of its requirements by the end of this calendar year. If this happens then a review of this strategy will be required to take into consideration any changes that will impact on the strategy or delivery of the strategy.