



Providing choice



Addressing inequalities



Improving life opportunities

Resident Involvement Strategy

2013 – 2016

Unity is committed to delivering high quality, affordable housing and related service which promote sustainable neighbourhoods, choice and the wellbeing of Black & Minority Ethnic communities in Leeds.

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Accompanying document: Involvement Action Plan 2013 - 2016



Our values



BME led

Reflected in our governance, management and staffing composition arrangements.

Commitment

To provide services to meet the needs of our tenants, local people and local neighbourhoods.

Pride

In the way we deliver our services.

Respect

In the way we treat people, service users and each other.

Integrity

Being honest, decent and sincere with strong principles.

Promises

What we say is what we do, as an organisation and as individuals.

Flexible

In how we work for the benefit of our tenants, other people, the organisation and each other.

Investment

In our staff, their development and their wellbeing.

Equality

In the way we understand needs, deliver our services and in our governance arrangements and employment practice.

1. Introduction

This 2013-2016 Resident Involvement Strategy sets out how Unity intends to engage with and involve its residents and the people from the communities in which they live.

Unity's previous resident involvement strategy was written during a time of great change in the regulatory environment. The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) took over from the Housing Corporation in 2010, but had a short reign as its functions were taken over by the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) in 2012. However, during its short lifetime, the TSA transformed the resident involvement agenda. It established six new national standards for Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and introduced the principle of 'co-regulation'.

In April 2010, the TSA published ***The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing***. This framework was adopted by the HCA and sets out the standards for social landlords to follow. The ***Tenant involvement & empowerment*** standard sets out the expectations for resident involvement.

Combined with the 2011 Localism Act, the effect has been that landlords are now expected to work in close partnership with their tenants on a strategic level. Instead of regulation being carried out in a top-down manner by government agencies, the onus is put on tenants to regulate their landlords through close co-working and scrutiny. The HCA is now focussing on governance, financial viability and value for money. They regulate according to the following principles.

"While we set consumer standards, the primary responsibility for resolving issues with these is between landlords and their tenants at a local level. We will only intervene in cases of serious detriment that have caused, or are likely to cause, harm."

HCA website, 2012

Unity has embraced the principles of co-regulation and resident scrutiny. By setting up structures and ways of working that suit our structure and our tenant base, we have created an effective range of options for tenants to get involved at a level that suits them.

The purpose of this strategy is to set out our approach to resident involvement and to show how we intend to develop it over the next three years, whilst complying with the following regulatory requirements.

- Consult with tenants at least once every three years on the best way of involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of the organisation's housing management service. This was last done as part of the *'Your views'* surveys in February 2012.
- Publish an annual report to tenants, which enables them to scrutinise our performance and gives them information on repair and maintenance budgets.



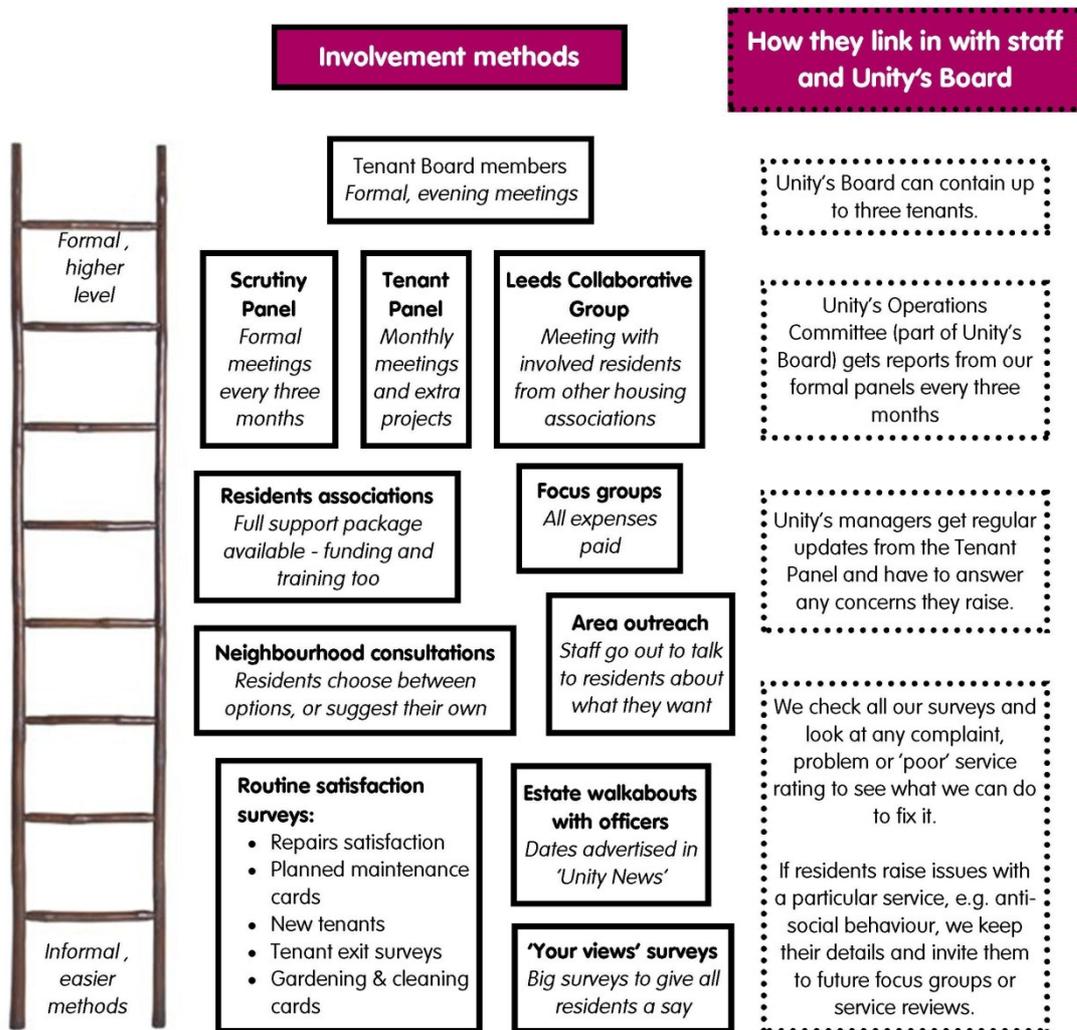
2. Background

2.1 Unity

Unity is a Leeds-based, black & minority ethnic housing association. As of December 2012, we manage 1181 properties, which include 1054 rented and 64 shared ownership homes. Unity does not have large estates of homes. Four-fifths of our rented properties are new-build in small schemes of 4 – 50 homes and around a fifth are miscellaneous rehabs.

Our residents are demographically younger than typical housing association tenants and over two-thirds of Unity’s household heads are black & minority ethnic.

2.2 Our ladder of involvement methods



3. Current involvement structures

Unity's resident involvement structure has always reflected the different preferences of our typically younger, BME tenants. Because of our relatively small scheme-size, our approach has always been flexible and adaptive, rather than the residents' association-based focus that many larger organisations have.

We favour a menu of involvement that has a simple structure of formal tenant panels, backed up by issues-based reviews, regular surveys, and intensive work in neighbourhoods.

Tenant Panel

This panel has been established since September 2010 and is open to all tenants. Current membership is 17 tenants, with a demographic profile that matches Unity's tenant base. Members meet on a monthly basis and have the opportunity to feed into Unity's services in a practical way, including on-site inspections, contractor interviews, scrutiny exercises and joint working with other organisations. They gradually build up their knowledge levels through training sessions and with high-quality information updates on issues like welfare rights or planned maintenance.

Tenant Panel members have the right to report to Operations Committee on a quarterly basis. They are currently choosing not to do this as they are satisfied with the current arrangements. However, we need to ensure that their opinions, decisions and scrutiny activities are fed back to the Board in a structured way.

Scrutiny Panel

This panel was set up in July 2012 to create a formal structure for the regular scrutiny of Unity's performance indicators, and to make the Board more accountable to tenants. It currently has seven members and meets every three months. It aims to make high-level scrutiny opportunities accessible to Unity's tenants and to train them in the skills that they would need to be effective Board members. The group is still becoming established and we need to focus on developing it into an effective co-regulation tool.

Leeds Collaborative Group

Tenants from six Leeds housing associations attend this regular forum, supported by involvement officers. It is currently attended by one Unity tenant and the Tenant Neighbourhood & Involvement Officer (TNIO). The group has led to joint working exercises in areas such as kitchen specifications, estate services and service charge costs.

Local offers

Unity has a suite of local offers that have been set in conjunction with the Tenant Panel following consultation with the wider tenant base. They are regularly reviewed by the Tenant Panel and are continuously updated in line with demand.



4. Involvement activities

We use a range of different activities to involve Unity's tenants and the communities in which they live.

Engagement at a neighbourhood level

In recent years, Unity has concentrated on 'priority neighbourhoods'. Our success in these areas means that we are now free to move away from this specifically targeted approach and can engage more widely with residents. However, we will continue to use mechanisms such as informal feedback, anti-social behaviour reports and structured surveys to keep a finger on the pulse of our neighbourhoods.

Engagement at a strategic level

We provide varied opportunities for tenants to take part in the scrutiny agenda, in a way that suits them. Our strategic Scrutiny Panel meets quarterly to look at Unity's performance in key areas. Its terms of reference are contained in the TESSA (Tenant Empowerment & Service Standards Agreement) document.

The Scrutiny Panel's work is complemented by the practical, hands-on approach of our Tenant Panel. They meet monthly and have the opportunity to take part in site inspections, contractor liaison and joint working with other associations. They have a direct input into housing management and maintenance procedures.

Community regeneration

We reach out to the wider community through engaging with local people and residents' groups. We use methods like working closely with local residents when developing new housing schemes in the areas in which they live, or by supporting the work of organisations like Chapeltown Development Trust. We are involved in local partnerships like the Chapeltown Housing Investment Programme, in which six different social landlords work together to regenerate the area in a coordinated, cost-effective way. In addition, our Employment service provides tailored support to assist local residents back into work.

Keeping homes modernised

The 5-year planned maintenance programme comes to an end in 2013/14. It was set following thorough consultation with residents about their preferences, and we want an equally robust process to inform the 2014/15 – 2018/19 programme. We anticipate that this will be the primary focus for the Tenant Panel in 2013.

Welfare reform issues

The Welfare Reform agenda will be bringing a considerable number of challenges, which have the potential to bring Unity into conflict with its tenants. Unity has already been extremely proactive about trying to protect tenants from the impact of the changes and needs to continue this. In an environment where money will be increasingly tight, we need to ensure that we communicate with tenants in a timely, sympathetic and constructive manner and use the 'local offers' framework to tailor services appropriately.

5. Aims & objectives of the strategy

We have always aimed to have a varied menu of involvement that reflects Unity's special status as a BME organisation and that complements our size and the dispersed nature of our housing. It is important to recognise and respond to the current regulatory emphasis on tenant co-regulation and scrutiny. However, we also need to focus on our unique identity. Our strengths come from our multi-ethnic nature and from our creative approach to increasing the positive options for residents of the communities in which we are based.

This strategy has the following aims.

- To improve our services and ensure that they provide value for money.
- To empower our residents to have a real influence over the services that they receive.
- To improve our relationship with our tenants.
- To have a positive influence in the communities in which our tenants live.

Our objectives are as follows.

Keeping it simple

We will continue to keep our formal involvement structure simple and will develop it in line with our tenants' needs and preferences. We will recruit through regular advertising and by using our neighbourhood activities and community consultations to identify tenants who are keen to be more actively involved.

Involving more tenants

Our Tenant Panel is well-established, but needs constantly refreshing with new faces, who will bring in new issues and new perspectives. We originally envisaged that the Panel would have up to 15 members, but now that we have a core of trained & experienced Panel members, we can increase this number to 20.

Formal panels do not suit the majority of tenants, so we need to record and report back on our other involvement activities, to demonstrate the wide variety of active tenants that we have.

Emphasis on scrutiny and co-regulation

We will continue to have a strong emphasis on the scrutiny function. We will balance the Tenant Panel's practical, hands-on approach with the performance-focussed work of the Scrutiny Panel, to ensure that they provide a varied & complementary range of scrutiny options.

We will develop our Scrutiny Panel by capacity-building with participating tenants to increase their independence. We will provide ongoing coaching and relevant training to all our actively involved tenants, to ensure that they have the skills and confidence to be effective participants in co-regulation.

We also need to ensure that there are stronger links between our formal tenant scrutiny structures and the Board. We will do this by ensuring that Operations Committee receives a quarterly report on the work of our formal tenant panels and their comments & recommendations.

Keeping abreast of tenant satisfaction and expectations

We will keep our finger on the pulse of residents' opinions with our annual or bi-annual tenant satisfaction surveys. By ensuring that we target harder-to-reach groups, we will get to the heart of what our tenants think and track their satisfaction with our services. This process will feed into our local offers and neighbourhood strategies.

We are planning to carry out the following major tenant surveys.

- 2013:** Unity's next 5-year planned maintenance programme
- 2014:** Tenant satisfaction and ideas for improvements
- 2015:** Tenant satisfaction and views on tenant involvement in scrutiny and governance

A visible presence in our communities

We will be increasing our presence out in the community by spending more time reaching out to our tenants where they live. We will start this process by focussing on Beeston in 2013.

Increasing the flexibility of our services through local offers

Where our tenants are in agreement about changes that they would like to see, we will use 'local offers' to tailor our services and to provide our tenants with the best possible value for money. We envisage that this will include reducing service charges by giving tenants the opportunity to adapt or take over services.

6. Implementing the strategy



We will work our Tenant Panel and other active tenants to set an annual Involvement Plan. The actions required to implement this strategy will be co-ordinated by the Tenant Neighbourhood & Involvement Officer, who reports to the Operations Committee of the Board and to the Scrutiny Panel.

We will communicate the service improvements that arise from this strategy by making sure that they are visible and well-publicised to tenants and staff. Its success will be demonstrated by the satisfaction of our tenants and the extent to which they choose to become involved in initiatives where they live.

We will review our involvement activities on an annual basis, to assess whether they have been effective in producing beneficial outcomes for our residents at a reasonable cost in terms of time and other resources.

This strategy will be reviewed in 2016.

