



Cobalt
■■■ Housing

**RESIDENT
INVOLVEMENT
POLICY**

Lead Director	Director of Operations
Reference	Pol 46

1 Introduction & Aim

This policy supports Strategic Objective 6.1 of the Tenant and Customer Experience Strategy – ‘Customers will be central to decision making’. It sets out the principles of our approach to Resident Involvement, see section 3 below. Cobalt works with residents within the communities it serves, the key aim being for them to communicate their views and to integrate these where possible into decisions about how Cobalt undertakes its service activities. This document refers to ‘Tenants’ and ‘Residents’. Many of our involvement activities will be for tenants of the organisation only, but due to the wider community work we do we will engage with and listen to residents in the area who are not our tenants.

2 Policy Statement

Cobalt is a community based, tenant focused organisation. Leaving a group structure in October 2017 reinforced this position and allows us to focus fully on the needs and aspirations of our neighbourhoods and communities. Resident involvement is a key part of who we are and what we do. We work in a challenging environment where encouraging good levels of involvement and then working with residents to deliver is vital for the business and for the communities we serve. The aims and aspirations of the organisation are tied closely to those of our communities. Effective resident involvement links into all of our Corporate Plan objectives but if we consider two of them specifically;

To support people to create thriving communities
To deliver high quality services that meet our customers’ needs

We cannot be successful and know we have done the right things unless we are engaging our customers effectively and meaningfully.

This policy sets out principles through which we will deliver this commitment and empower our residents to engage meaningfully with the organisation. It is a starting point for our involvement offer. We want to excel and be the best we can. We would like to push boundaries and to be recognised by our peers and national bodies as an organisation that gets this right, achieving accreditation and eventually showcasing our approach to our sector and beyond. We have made a positive start and been accepted to be an early adopter of the National Housing Federation ‘Together with Tenants’ project.

3 Policy Principles

There are six principles that capture our approach to facilitating, encouraging and learning from resident involvement;

3.1 Residents will have, and will be aware of, a range of opportunities for engaging with Cobalt, both formally and informally.

Cobalt will have clear and accessible methods of Resident Involvement and will embed these throughout our communities and our teams. These will be promoted and delivered through a variety of methods, matching the communication needs of our varied customer base. Cobalt will encourage new ways of engaging with our communities and will offer support to encourage residents willing to try different methods of involvement.

Cobalt will;

1. Produce a fully defined and inclusive resident involvement offer that covers all of the standards and allows engagement at local and corporate levels. As part of this approach we will identify underrepresented groups and actively seek their views.
2. Effectively promote our core involvement offer to increase overall awareness of engagement opportunities by neighbourhood and also by issue group
3. Create and deliver Neighbourhood Plans that reflect the thoughts and opinions of local residents and achieve real outcomes for them
4. Improve our approach to Social Media and wider digital technology, improving communication which in turn forms a significant part of our involvement offer.
5. Deliver a local approach that brings officers and residents closer together and allows a better flow of information.
6. Create a range of Involvement opportunities that are easy to access and allow people to dip in and out according to other commitments, appetite and time.

3.2 Ensuring residents meaningfully influence service delivery

Cobalt will enable resident input into the development and monitoring of key service delivery and will measure the effects and improvements on our approach.

Cobalt will;

1. Effectively support Scrutiny Panel in scrutinising performance and act on their recommendations
2. Provide support to Consultative Panel in looking at new ideas and initiatives and implementing their ideas where possible in new services.
3. Ensure direct customer input and influence in all customer service related strategy and policy reviews
4. Carry out an Annual impact assessment to monitor outcomes and changes to services as a result of involvement, reviewed by HNC.
5. Measure satisfaction and dissatisfaction, positively reflecting on high satisfaction areas but primarily acting on dissatisfaction and bringing change to address this.
6. Deliver a set of activities based around service delivery that measure and publicise our approach, such as the annual report, our annual self-assessment against the regulatory standards, performance statistics and the effectiveness of our service standards and neighbourhood/local offers.
7. Provide regular feedback to residents for discussion on value for money and our social value/responsibility activities

Outcome

The above measures will ensure that tenants have an opportunity to input at various levels of the organisation and for that input and its effects to be measured and assessed.

3.3 Enabling & Resourcing Resident Involvement

Ensure that all residents are supported and encouraged to involve themselves in Cobalt's service delivery and community based activities and to remove barriers that may prevent the engagement of groups and individual residents with Cobalt. This will be achieved by providing support that includes funding, staffing and training, taking account of the diverse needs of the community.

Cobalt will;

1. Provide a budget and staffing resource to deliver and support key involvement activities
2. Create and fund training opportunities to increase resident skills and confidence
3. Assist with recruitment to tenant bodies, both 'corporate' and local
4. Promote how tenants can become a member of the various involvement groups
7. Use community insight to work flexibly and reach all diverse members of our community
5. Incentivise and support involvement to remove barriers and promote residents getting involved, taking reasonable steps to prevent exclusion.
6. Deliver an approachable local Neighbourhood team engaging with residents on a daily basis to capture real time opinion and concerns and respond to them
7. Have effective systems that capture the views of those who are not satisfied and addresses these concerns effectively.
8. Organise a regular Tenants' Conference including reasonable adjustments to make the event as accessible as possible.

The above will enable tenants to fully engage with the organisation at a level and in ways that suit them.

3.4 A clear information flow between our Board, Committees, tenants and communities

Ensure that Board hear the unfettered voice of tenants and communities to guide business activity to support our communities. We will go above and beyond regulatory expectations, we will develop ideas and deliver best practice. We will develop a two way information thread between customers and the Board so that each remain informed by the other.

Cobalt will;

1. Provide Board and HNC with 'front line' updates containing themes and messages from our tenants and communities
2. Develop plans for those aspiring to become Board and Committee members
3. Secure Tenant Membership of Homes and Neighbourhoods Committee (HNC)
4. Produce a structure of involvement that ensures customers have a direct route into Board, most notably through the HNC and that their messages will be unfettered.
5. Seek regular opportunities for direct engagement between Board and Committee members with tenants, developing routes to hear the unfettered voice of customers
6. Produce a Board bulletin, released to tenants, advising on Board activity. This will be available in multi formats to reach as many tenants as possible.
7. Update Board members on key activities and incidents as they occur so that they can evaluate the organisation's response to tenant concerns.

3.5 Engagement on major changes in management or regeneration projects

Ensure where the organisation is suggesting major changes to the way we deliver our services, or undertaking large projects, such as the redevelopment of Stonedale in Croxteth, that we have effective methods of involving the local community in in depth discussions. Cobalt will ensure resident thoughts, opinions and concerns are fully considered by Board/Committee and we will build this into all projects to support our success, in stock option appraisal / rationalisation and development / redevelopment /major changes to delivery of services.

Cobalt will;

1. Produce a project plan, drafted with resident consultation which identifies the change or regeneration activity, key involvement activities and named officers who will facilitate them.
2. Have clear explanations of our goals and aspirations and perceived benefits to residents and the community
3. Make reasonable adjustments to communicate in various formats that reach as many local residents as possible, including those who are harder to reach
4. Provide formal and informal ways to input into discussions, consultations and decision making with a publicised timetable of meetings/events, main contact points and use of varying advertising media.
5. Produce a final set of project delivery plans that demonstrably reflect customer as well as business priorities
6. Provide named customer liaison officers during the delivery phase where appropriate.
7. Carry out sensitive one to one and collective consultation and engagement where homes may be lost to demolition or projects with a similar impact

3.6 Promoting Positivity and Challenging stigma – creating resilient and sustainable communities

Ensure that our communities are positive and sustainable and that this is visible. Cobalt supports the national drive to challenge stigma in social housing. Cobalt understands the need to organise, encourage and promote positive news and activity from our communities and to challenge several years of largely negative images and messages about our neighbourhoods. We see lots of positives about our communities and we will work with our residents to promote this.

Cobalt will;

1. Develop our 'Together with Tenants' offer, producing a Charter or Charters for each of our neighbourhood areas
2. Develop brochures for each area with resident input to showcase the many positive things about our neighbourhoods and publicise
3. Consult widely to create neighbourhood plans which reflect the needs of customers and deliver improvements that move us away from negative images, messages and perceptions.
4. Support and instill neighbourhood pride
5. Organise or support local events that promote community cohesion and bring residents together to deliver our shared goals
6. Have local teams who are visible, will listen and act on concerns, feeding back to those who raise issues on comments made
7. Partner with other agencies and the community to deliver interventions or pre-emptive work to improve or protect the community.
8. Agree standards for estate inspections, grounds maintenance, improvements to communal areas and our approach to management that create a cleaner, more inviting environment.
9. Support and empower local Tenant and Resident Groups to lead their own challenge to Stigma in their areas.
10. Employ flexibility and creativity in our approach where this will resolve issues in an estate or area and will be open and honest in discussions with residents about what we can and can't do.

4 Risk Management

The key risk associated with non-delivery of this Policy is:

Risk Register Ref:	Risk:
<p>SD 06 Standards of Tenant Involvement and Empowerment.</p>	<p>Failure to deliver, leading to non delivery of this policy and/or breaches our regulatory requirements.</p> <p>Failure to consult, involve and empower residents participate in service delivery could lead to mistrust, poor services and lower sustainability of communities.</p> <p>Reputational risk of not engaging residents</p>
Risk Consequences:	Management and Mitigation:
<p>Regulator Intervention for serious detriment if Board make decisions without having full site of resident opinion</p> <p>Loss of income/sustainability leading to neighbourhood and community failure - becoming unsustainable</p> <p>Opportunity lost through poor reputation</p>	<p>Full training and empowerment of staff to deliver this policy Local teams delivering local activities and engaging residents</p> <p>A set range of formal and informal involvement opportunities</p> <p>Regular comms through a specialist marketing and comms team</p> <p>Monitoring levels and outcomes of involvement by formal tenant groups, surveys and feedback staff, Board and Committee</p>

Key Risk Indicators and Control Limits

We will develop KPIs to monitor to ensure Board and Committee capture the activity level and outcomes of our involvement activity, including any drop in resident involvement The annual impact assessment of involvement and the annual compliance audit of compliance with regulatory standards between tenants and Board, will straddle over the year to ensure we pick up early warning signs and report these to HNC and EMT.

5 Regulatory & Legislative Compliance

It is a regulatory requirement for Registered Providers to have meaningful resident involvement, including in a co-regulatory capacity, exerting direct influence on services. It is also a requirement that tenants are made aware of these opportunities. This is reflected in the regulator's Tenant Involvement and empowerment standards;

Registered providers shall ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- the formulation of their landlord's housing related policies and strategic priorities
- the making of decisions about how housing related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards
- the scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved
- the management of their homes, where applicable
- the management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed with landlords, and the sharing in savings made agreeing local offers for service delivery

In addition we have the following responsibilities;

- to produce an annual report
- to consult on any major changes in management or large projects
- to have an effective complaints process, which is captured in our Complaints Policy

The Housing Green Paper 2018, as well as general movement within the sector may require tweaking of this policy moving forward. We will review the document regularly and ensure any regulatory, compliance or best practice guidance changes are incorporated into our future approach.

6 Links to Other Key Documents

- Cobalt Resident Involvement Offer document
- Tenant and Customer Experience Strategy
- Communication Strategy

7 Governance of this Policy

Equality and Diversity	EIA was complete in May 2019 and led to some minor changes in terminology, largely around taking reasonable steps to avoid exclusion.
Financial and Links to VfM	A well functioning RI system assists the organisation to design services that meet the needs of the community and often drive efficiency and effectiveness. If we get this wrong the organisation can spend lots of money correcting things. Resident Involvement should be central to ensuring we are spending our money in the right way and in many respects is a 'spend to save' budget.
Privacy and Data Protection	This policy has not required the gathering and use of personal or sensitive data.
Health and Safety	The policy has no major health and safety implications. Resident Involvement can help us to make communities safer.
Development and Consultation	<p>Tenant consultation took place with the consultative panel in November 2018 and all revisions of this policy have been sent out for further comment since. There was general agreement with the fundamental aspects of the policy.</p> <p>During discussions tenants expressed the following additional requirements for the policy, which we have incorporated;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estate walkabouts and a more visible service • The importance of engaging the wider community (schools etc) • Early identification of problems before they escalate. • Effective use of IT but with an understanding that not all tenants can use this. • Annual events in each locality • Access to funding for TRAs and a clear application path • A tenants Conference • A closed Neighbourhood group on Facebook <p>Residents are aware that their comments will be viewed by Board as part of the approval process.</p> <p>Staff have also been involved in developing the policy, particularly the Customer Leads who also attended the tenant session.</p>
Customer Profiles and Accessing Services Data	The data used in this policy was information provided by residents, best practice from the sector and particularly feedback in the annual tenant impact assessment which takes place in April every year.
Monitoring and Review	We will measure the levels and outcomes of resident involvement regularly and have initiated a spreadsheet where all engagement is recorded. Our most formal review is the annual impact assessment which we will continue to carry out in April.
Roles & Responsibility	<p>Head of Neighbourhoods – Overall design and implementation of the policy.</p> <p>Customer Insight Manager – Oversee the Scrutiny function to ensure our services are being adequately scrutinized.</p>

The outcomes of the annual impact assessment for Resident Involvement are recorded in the shared drive and open for scrutiny.

8 Definitions

HNC – Homes and Neighbourhoods Committee – Committee delegated by Board to oversee service delivery.

Residents – Any person living in the vicinity of our communities. In this document 'residents' will primarily but not solely refer to tenants of the organisation.

EMT – Executive Management Team – Directors of Cobalt Housing