



Resident Participation Strategy

Foreword

Our residents' involvement in the decisions that affect them and their Abbeyfield house is fundamental to the Abbeyfield experience.

Over the past six months, working with Lesley Baird at TPAS, we have asked residents about how we communicate. We have listened to their views. The actions proposed in this strategy are our response.

This strategy outlines what we will do to maintain and improve the involvement that is explicit in Abbeyfield Scotland's core values:

- Care in the wellbeing of residents, staff and volunteers
- Honesty in relationships, listening to and supporting residents and one another
- Openness to new ideas and better ways of working
- Respect for differing views, values, backgrounds, abilities and characteristics

We will continue to support those who work for Abbeyfield Scotland: staff, Board and volunteers; to "live" these values while meeting our statutory duty to resident involvement.

The Head of Housing Operations shall be the person responsible for ensuring that this Resident Participation Strategy is implemented.

What is resident participation?

"Resident participation is about residents taking part in decision making processes and influencing decisions about housing policies; housing conditions; and housing (and related) services. It is a two way process which involves the sharing of information, ideas and power. Its aim is to improve the standard of housing conditions and service" [from The National Strategy for Resident Participation – Partners in Participation (1999).]

What the law says

Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd, as a housing association, has a legal duty found in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to:

- develop and publish a resident participation strategy,
- provide resources to ensure the resident participation strategy is effective
- inform and consult with residents about housing services and standards and any changes to these

- consult residents on any proposals to sell, transfer or demolish our housing
- take residents' views into account when making decisions which will affect them
- have a registration scheme for resident groups/organisation to register with us and to keep a publicly available register of any registered resident organisations

Scottish Social Housing Charter

The Scottish Social Housing Charter was introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 [section 31]. The Charter sets down a number of standards for social landlords and Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd aims to achieve them when carrying out our housing activities.

These include -

Communications

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

- residents and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

This should explain how residents and other customers can make complaints and provide feedback on services, The landlord should use that information to improve services and performance, and let people know what they have done in response to complaints and feedback

Participation

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

- residents and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

This should explain how social landlords gather and take account of residents' views and priorities; how they shape their services to reflect these views; and how they help residents and other customers to become more capable of involvement.

About this strategy

Before producing this strategy the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) held meetings in each of our houses throughout Scotland and they distributed a survey to all residents to gather their views. This strategy reflects the views of residents expressed through these exercises.

Aims and Objectives

Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd recognises that resident participation and consultation is very important to us and will shape how we take our services forward into the future. We understand that this is a process which will evolve and improve over time and which allows for the sharing of information and ideas and for solutions to be jointly developed.

This strategy aims to improve Abbeyfield's housing services by ensuring that residents are involved, at a level which suits them, in developing and influencing how our services are delivered, and in ways that suit their needs.

Our objectives are

- to build mutual trust, respect and partnership between residents and Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd.
- to improve our housing services by ensuring that residents and resident groups are able to participate in decisions relating to housing services and standards
- to improve communications and feedback between residents, staff and Board members & volunteers /Friends
- to encourage resident participation to play an essential role in the way we work

We will provide a range of ways to consult and involve residents so they can choose the level and type of involvement which suits them best.

Equal Opportunities

Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd seeks to ensure equality of opportunities for all residents so they are able to participate in a way and at a level which suits them best and that no resident is excluded from the participating irrespective of personal characteristics including age, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, disability, marriage or civil partnership status, race, religion or belief.

We will seek to remove any barriers to participating including those relating to language and translation, mobility, hearing difficulties and visual impairment.

We will provide information in other formats including Braille, large print, audio tapes, DVDs and other languages, upon request.

We will seek to remove any barriers to participating and ensure that all residents, regardless of circumstances or particular difficulties, have access to the same rights and opportunities in accordance with our Equal Opportunities Policy.

Where we organise events we will take account of

- the location and timing
- the need for barrier-free meeting venues
- giving named relatives/carers the opportunity to participate

Keeping residents informed

Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd aims to ensure that residents (and named relatives) are provided with good quality information which is easy to understand. We aim to ensure that our written information is clear, written in plain English and that, when requested, it is available in other formats such as in large print, on audio tapes and will be translated.

We will use a variety of methods to keep residents informed and give and receive feedback. This will include

- personal letters
- quarterly newsletters
- information bulletins on specific issues
- annual reports
- house meetings with residents
- open days
- our website
- resident handbook.

An annual timetable of policies that are to be reviewed will be made available to residents on house notice boards, our website or on request.

Getting involved/ having a say.

All residents will have a range of opportunities to become involved, give their views and receive timely feedback on, for example, rents and service charges, any changes to our structure, our policies and procedures. This will include through:

House meetings

Staff will hold regular meetings with residents in individual houses. The residents (and named relatives) will be informed through individual letters sent at least a week

before the meeting is to take place. Residents will be encouraged to put things on the agenda for example either by letter or by informing the House Supervisor. We can provide a hearing loop for house meetings?

Themed house meetings

We will aim to have themed meetings to provide information to residents and to allow them to express their views on particular subjects, for example on rents. Residents will be consulted about any particular subjects they would like to have included. We can provide a hearing loop for house meetings?

Resident groups

Some residents may wish to make their views known by joining a resident group. We will provide support to residents who wish to set up a group.

We will provide information to residents about becoming a Registered Residents' Organisation, sometimes called an RTO which stands for Registered Tenants' Organisation. An RTO is an independent organisation set up to represent residents' and/or tenants' interests on housing and related issues. We will provide staff support and resources for any group which wishes to become an RTO. We must keep a register of any RTOs which will be publicly available [see appendix one for more information on RTOs].

We will consult with any resident groups before making changes to policies, services and rents and service charges.

We will support and resource groups of residents who do not wish to formally register as an RTO but who wish to engage with us over an issue etc.

Register of interested residents

We will seek to establish a register of interested residents where there is sufficient interest. We will consult with those residents in a method of their choosing for example by writing to them, by survey, by phone, in person or discussion groups on a range of issues when the need arises. We will inform them of other projects or initiatives where they could get involved.

Residents can let a member of staff know if they wish to have their names added to the register or they can contact the Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd office or any of our Area offices.

Surveys

We will carry out resident surveys to gather residents' views on areas such as our service standards, how well we keep residents informed, opportunities to participate and be involved in decision making. Surveys will be carried out at least every two years.

Satisfaction Slips

We will provide satisfaction slips to be completed by residents when repairs or improvements have been carried out to provide us with feedback on the standard of service received.

Satisfaction 'boxes'

We will provide each house with satisfaction 'boxes' to allow residents to provide feedback or raise concerns in a confidential manner.

Other methods

Residents can raise any concerns or issues individually with members of staff visiting the houses or with the House Supervisors. These will be noted and the resident will be provided with feedback.

We will ensure that adequate time is given for residents to consider the issues properly. We will regularly consult with residents on existing and possible new ways of consulting and involving them in the work of Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd.

Feedback

When we carry out a consultation exercise and ask residents for their views, we will always provide feedback on any changes made or actions taken that have been based on resident views and we will provide reasons if we have not made these changes. Feedback will be provided, for example, at house meetings and in the newsletter. We will also use the "You said. We did." format to report back to you.

Membership

Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd will encourage residents to become members of the organisation.

This entitles members to attend all general meetings of the organisation, elect Board members and stand for election to the Board. We will inform new residents of becoming a member of Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd and will regularly provide information on becoming a member in our Newsletter.

Training

Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd will ensure that all staff including House Supervisors and other appropriate staff receive:

- training to increase knowledge and understanding of resident participation
- training to enable staff to develop the skills required to develop resident participation practice
- training on Abbeyfield Scotland's resident participation strategy
- regular updates and information in relation to resident participation

We will consult residents and resident groups on training they would like or need to support their participation. We will develop a training programme to meet their needs taking account of the any particular needs residents may have. This may include attending conferences and seminars.

We will provide training to any resident groups established to ensure they have the knowledge and understanding to organise a resident group effectively.

We will ensure that all residents are informed of and consulted on the resident participation strategy.

Resources

Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd recognises that, for meaningful consultation and successful participation to develop, proper resourcing and support should be made available.

Resources required to ensure that this strategy is implemented include:

- staff time
- Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd wide consultations events including venue hire, catering, and transport /travelling expenses for participants
- publications and bulletins
- stationery and postage
- payment of expenses for residents to attend meetings which may include travel, carer/named relative costs and out of pocket expenses
- grants and support to formal groups [RTOs] and informal groups
- staff and resident training
- surveys
- Independent advice - If required we will ensure that residents can access independent advice from, for example, the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) or the Tenants' Information Service (TIS).

Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd will carry out an assessment of the resources required to ensure that the activities detailed in the strategy can be carried out. The required resources/budget is reviewed annually

Monitoring and reviewing

Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd will monitor the progress of the strategy and will review the strategy including resources for resident participation, every three years.

We will monitor

- the number of house meetings and themed meetings held each year and the number of residents attending
- the number of residents on the Register of Interested Residents
- the number of formal (RTOs) and informal resident groups
- the number of responses to resident surveys and the subject of the surveys
- any changes to policies, services or service standards which resulted from resident consultation and involvement
- training in relation to resident participation undertaken by staff, residents and the Board
- any other specific outcomes arising from resident consultation and participation activities

The outcome of the monitoring exercises will be reported to Abbeyfield Scotland's Board, staff and residents annually.

We will consult with residents the best methods of involving them in reviewing the strategy.

Appendix one

Registered Tenant Organisations

Registered Tenant' Organisations (RTOs) are formal tenant/resident groups that usually represent residents' interests in relation to housing and related matters.

To become an RTO a group has to meet certain legal requirements [set out in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001] and they have to apply to Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd if they want to become registered. We have a legal duty to consult RTOs and we must keep a register of RTOs which is available for public inspection.

We encourage residents to set up RTOs and will offer assistance to residents with this process and any resident groups can apply to become an RTO.

To become registered with Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd the residents' group must have:

- A name
- A written constitution
- A clear description of the geographic area covered

The group must hold an inaugural general meeting which is publicly advertised which will appoint office holders (chairperson, secretary and treasurer) and to agree the constitution.

A copy of the constitution has to be provided and should be submitted to Abbeyfield Scotland Ltd which will be made available for public inspection.

The constitution should contain the following information:

- The name of the group
- The group's area of operation
- Rules of membership
- A statement on the office bearer positions held and how the committee will conduct its business
- An explanation of procedures at meetings and how decisions will be taken
- A commitment to holding regular, advertised, meetings in a local space, accessible to all residents or residents in the area of operation
- A statement of how funds will be managed and audited
- The procedure for making changes to the constitution
- A statement supporting equal opportunities
- A statement setting out arrangements for the dissolution of the group

We will provide a start-up grant to cover out of pocket expenses such as travel costs, postage and stationery.

Start-up grants will be awarded according to the area and number of residents the group represents. The minimum start-up grant awarded will be £100 and the maximum £500.

Staff will support, communicate, consult and provide advice and assistance to RTOs.