Resident Involvement handbook
A guide for residents...
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1. Introduction

This document has been produced by Swan’s Resident Involvement and Community Development Team in consultation with residents. We are keen to explain the value we place on involving and empowering residents and how you can make a difference. This handbook sets out how you can play a key role in deciding what is important for you and your community.

We are committed to active resident involvement in the management and maintenance of all our homes. We aspire to achieving the highest level of customer satisfaction and excellent service delivery.

We recognise that the best way to achieve this is to work in partnership with our residents.

This handbook sets out the ways in which we will involve and consult with you on decisions that will impact on your home and local community. Swan’s Resident Involvement service includes a whole menu of opportunities for involvement and consultation. These range from formal involvement which includes Residents Associations, Residents’ Consultative Committees and the Regional Boards to less formal structures which include Residents Away Days, Fun Days, Focus Groups and Service Improvement Reviews.

As an organisation our aim is to assist the communities we serve to develop and maximise their potential and place all our residents at the centre of all we do.

We want this handbook to be a guide which answers your questions and tells you about the different ways you can become involved. It also focuses on Swan’s commitment to encouraging you to become involved and the aims for resident involvement over the coming year.

With your help, we will review and improve what we do on an ongoing basis. Please have a look at the handbook to find out how you can make a difference for residents in your area.

John Synnuck
Chief Executive
Swan Housing Group

2. General Information

What we will do
- consult and involve our residents on issues that affect their homes and local communities
- provide clear information to help you get involved
- provide a wide range of opportunities for you to get involved with improving services
- regularly tell you what we have done as a result of your suggestions
- actively encourage involvement from all sections of the community
- support residents who want to form residents’ groups, giving them assistance so they can run them effectively
- send residents at least four newsletters a year
- support and develop local community projects such as youth activities, football teams, gardening and lunch clubs
- provide training and development for residents
- provide financial assistance for resident led activities, community projects and involvement

What we will provide
- dedicated resident involvement staff
- a residents’ involvement budget to support involvement
- a training programme to build skills and expertise
- carers costs including child care
- travel allowances
- we also help residents to set up and run meetings, pay for meeting room hire, refreshments and any paper work residents may need copied and sent out
- further support is provided for resident representatives, such as help with IT, subscriptions to relevant publications, allowance for phone calls etc.
Our aims
- develop & deliver a time table for 2009/2012 in line with Swan’s Resident Involvement and Community Development Strategy to ensure wide promotion of methods of involvement & incentives for involvement
- complete reviews into consultation methods used by ensuring a good response from a wide cross section of residents
- hold follow up Residents’ Away Days to review progress and to feed into our Service Improvement Plans for 2009/2012
- provide training and development for Residents’ Consultative Committee representatives
- promote and publicise the outcomes of involvement via a wide range of media
- develop three new residents’ associations across the group
- increase the number of residents on the Customer Feedback Panel
- review Residents’ Associations and Involvement Structures

Service standards for meetings
- notices will give the time and date of the meeting, where it will be held and the purpose of the meeting.
- we will provide information in your required format on request
- housing Officers will take the minutes and develop an action sheet
- the action sheet of the residents meeting should be developed within 3 working days of the meeting and then circulated to all relevant staff to take the requested actions
- draft minutes will be produced within seven days of the meeting and a copy to be circulated to all relevant staff including the Chair of the Residents Association / Estate Residents Board to check accuracy and make comments prior to mailing
- the Resident Involvement Team will chase relevant staff to ensure the action points are addressed 14 days before the next meeting
- action points and minutes will be sent to the Association/ Board Members and to those who attended the meeting at least 7 days prior to the next meeting

Equal opportunities and access
To make sure we treat you fairly, whatever your needs, we will:
- ensure communication with all service users is conducted in a manner that meets their needs and they have access to all relevant services
- keep up-to-date information on the needs of different service users which is easily available and used to provide an excellent service
- monitor the needs of vulnerable service users, or people with disabilities to ensure that they are getting the right amount of support
- be aware of the diversity of its service users and will ensure that all diverse views are represented
- ensure the views of specific and minority groups and the diverse needs of service users are taken into account when developing and improving services
- do everything we can to make sure discrimination does not take place in our neighbourhoods
- encourage you to report any problems

Information standards
- information on the range of involvement will be clearly presented and widely available in an appropriate format
- all information will be available in other formats if you need it. For example, we can give you information on audio tape, in Braille, in large print and in other languages (including the use of Language Line)
- we will send out information in good time. For example, if a leaflet or document contains details of a meeting or an event, we will send it to you at least 7 days before it takes place
- we will use plain English

Train all our staff to create equal opportunities
- provide interpretation and translation services, as well as information in large print, Braille, Makaton symbols or on CD, for people who need it
- appropriate transport will be arranged where required to enable anyone who is physically impaired access to meetings
Informal involvement:

Customer feedback panel
Become a member of the Customer Feedback Panel and you will be invited to get involved in a range of activities, which could include:

- focus groups
- telephone surveys
- questionnaires
- policy forum

Other informal ways of getting involved include:

- young people’s forum
- BME residents surgeries
- annual residents’ conference
- leaseholders’ conference
- Asian women’s group
- appointment of contractors
- editorial group
- estate inspections
- residents’ forums
- local community groups
- fun days
- road shows

Formal involvement

Strategic level – influencing decision making
For residents with an interest in playing a major role in Swan:

Residents’ Board Membership (London & Essex Regional Committees)
The two Regional Committees are each made up of 8 residents and 4 external representatives.
The Regional Committees are responsible for all Swan properties in their geographical area, i.e. Essex or London and oversee:

- all direct front-line service delivery and the associated budgets
- the implementation of Housing Policies and to recommend any necessary changes to the Parent Board
- scrutinising performance of service delivery
- monitoring development schemes and progress
- providing advice on design for new/refurbishment schemes
- resident involvement and training

The Committees each meet four times per year. Members of the Regional Committees are also provided with training and development opportunities to help them.

Residents’ Consultative Committee
Residents’ Consultative Committees are regional assemblies made up of resident’s representatives who are elected from either their neighbourhood or from local residents’ groups and residents associations.

Members meet regularly with staff to discuss local issues, receive reports and consider any proposed changes to policy. There are two regional committees (Essex and London) serving the interests of Swan residents. Residents groups will continue to be encouraged to elect from among their members representatives who will serve on their regional Residents’ Consultative Committee.
Getting involved in your local communities and improving services

For residents who have an interest in getting involved at a local level:

Estate Inspections - Regular estate inspections are planned and occur on a bi-monthly basis and involve local residents, resident’s representatives and housing officers. The dates of the inspections are published on the Swan Housing Group website, resident’s newsletter and on community notice boards.

Neighbourhood agreements
We will actively promote and develop Neighbourhood Agreements that will set out the service standards residents can expect in their neighbourhoods and identify priorities for action over the next year.

Residents’ groups
We work to support and develop groups that represent areas, schemes or neighbourhoods in order to effectively improve services affected by neighbourhood issues.

Residents’ associations
We work with and provide financial support to properly elected and constituted Residents’ Associations who fulfil the requirements of Swan’s ‘Recognition Criteria for Residents’ Associations and are committed to effectively promoting equality and diversity within their communities.

Involvement in policy development
We will ensure that residents are fully involved in the development of Swan’s operational policies through local residents’ forums, the Residents’ Consultative Committees and focus groups.

We will monitor changes in policies through the Customer Feed Back Panel, telephone surveys and written questionnaires.

Involvement in service delivery standards
We will ensure that residents are fully involved in the monitoring and development of service delivery standards including:

- customer care standards (telephone answering, response to letters, e-mails and voice mail)
- repairs target times
- standards for letting empty homes
- wording of standard letters and forms

Residents’ suggestion scheme
We welcome ideas from our customers about the way we deliver our services. The suggestion scheme is your chance to tell us what you think and for us to thank you for your time. We will award £50 Marks & Spence gift vouchers for the best suggestions.

We will also make sure to let you know whether we are able to act on your suggestion, and if not, why this will not be possible.

Involvement in service reviews
We have a regular programme of service reviews to ensure that we meet the needs of residents, our services are of high quality and they offer value for money. Residents can be involved in the service reviews and we will seek their views on the final recommendations.

Service user forums
We are ultimately trying to improve on how we deliver our services by involving and empowering our service users. By involving the vulnerable people we support, we can help raise their self esteem, confidence and level of independence through building key skills. Emphasis is put on the quality of the outcomes rather than focusing purely on the number of service users getting involved. Service User Involvement is as much about evidencing the change brought about by involvement in publications as it is by just involving service users in projects. All work is impact assessed in order to review the positive outcomes through involving our service users.

Residents conference
Each year, all Swan residents are invited to a conference which gives the opportunity to meet staff and partner organisations to discuss and consider the priorities for the services provided.

The event is organised to be held at a large central location and is relaxed and informal with lunch and refreshments provided. There are also lots of free raffle prizes.

Supporting our residents to get involved
To help residents get involved we will provide residents with both practical and financial resources.

We will provide:

- dedicated resident involvement staff
- a residents’ involvement budget to support involvement
- a training programme to build skills and expertise
- carers costs including childcare
- travel allowances
- we also help residents to set up and run meetings, pay for meeting room hire, refreshments and any paperwork residents may need copied and sent out
- further support is provided for resident representatives, such as help with IT, subscriptions to relevant publications, allowance for phone calls etc.

Further information on the support we provide can be found in the Residents’ Expenses Policy.

Would you like to get involved?
If you are interested in getting involved in what ever way, whether it is coming along to a focus group or joining a residents’ group, you can get more information by contacting the Residents’ Involvement and Community Development Team on: 01277 844 242 or email Involvement@swan.org.uk
Community events and fun days

The Team work with local residents, Residents Associations, Estate Boards and partner organisations in planning neighbourhood projects including community activities and fun days.

Community grants

Swan Community Grants programme offers grants of up to £500 to community, voluntary or resident groups who would like to set up a small project in a neighbourhood where our residents are likely to benefit.

If your idea falls into one of the following categories, you or your group can apply for a community grant:

- activities or projects that involve children and young people
- projects that help to improve a sense of community spirit, cohesion, pride and respect.
- projects that will help to improve the appearance of the local neighbourhood
- projects that help to make people feel safer and reduce the fear of crime
- projects that help to build the confidence and capacity of local residents to get more involved in their local community

To make it as easy as possible, there are very few conditions attached. We will want to make sure that the money is being used for the purpose intended and that the project leaders do all they can to include the whole community and reach out to those residents who have not been involved before.

How to apply

If you have never applied for a grant before, contact your Community Development Officer who will help you apply. You can get a copy of the form from your local housing office, or download from the Swan website www.swan.org.uk or ring us on 01277 844242

4. The Resident Involvement and Community Development Team

Alethea Dougall
Head of Resident Involvement & Community Development

Debbie Palmer
Service Improvement Manager

Samantha Sizeland
Equality & Diversity Manager

Kirsten Njie
Customer Feedback Co-ordinator

Kari-Ann Waldon
Resident Involvement Officer

Chris Mellor
Service User Involvement Officer

Terry Webb
Community Development Officer

Abdullah Hossain
Community Development Officer

Adeyemi Adelekan
Community Development Officer

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Adeyemi Adelekan
Community Development Officer
Training workshops for residents
Swan Housing Association have produced a brand new programme of workshops for our residents.

These exciting sessions take place in a relaxing environment where you are able to get together to learn while having fun. Whatever you ability and experience, you will be made very welcome.

All courses are free and lunch will be provided (where appropriate) for full day courses.

Swan will also help towards travel and childcare costs.

The workshops are open to all Swan residents and currently include the following topics: Basic Repairs, Food Hygiene (level 2 award), First Aid, Managing your Finances, Development & Regeneration, Understanding Swan’s Finance.

For more information and bookings, please contact the Resident Involvement & Community Development team on 01277 844242 or Email: involvement@swan.org.uk

Recognition criteria for residents groups
Swan Housing Association recognises the need to work in partnership with formal resident groups who democratically represent local residents. In order to ensure such groups are representative and accountable and that Best Value and Good Practice are adhered to, any group wishing to be recognised by Swan, must meet Swan’s recognition criteria.

For residents’ groups to be formally recognised the Association currently requires that an acceptable and workable constitution has been agreed and adopted by the represented community. Such groups qualify for an annual grant.

To apply for recognition by Swan as a representative group, the group must complete a Recognition Form and send to the Resident Involvement and Community Development team. Your Community Development Officer can help with this. The document outlines Swan’s criteria for recognising and supporting Residents’ Groups which include Residents’ Associations and Estate Management Boards.

All applications for formal recognition are decided by the regional Residents Consultative Committee.

The Community Development Officer will contact the group immediately following the Residents Consultative Committee (RCC) meeting to inform the Chair whether or not the group has been recognised by Swan and if so, when the group can expect its Start-Up grant.

Details of how to contact other recognised groups will also be sent to new groups, together with details of the Resident Consultative Committee and how the group can be represented on the RCC.
We know we occasionally make mistakes. We know you might feel unhappy about the service we provide. When this happens, making a complaint can help us solve the problem and by solving the problem, we can learn from our mistakes to make sure the same problem doesn’t happen again. This will help us to improve the services we provide you.

At the same time, when we do something well, we like to know about it. This helps us to understand what you think is a good standard of service and it means that staff know when they have done a good job.

How to make a complaint or pay us a compliment

You can make a complaint or pay us a compliment in the way that is easiest for you. You can:

- Talk to a member of staff: either on the phone or in person
- Write to us using the complaints form available at any of Swan’s offices
- E-mail or contact us through the Swan website www.swan.org.uk

If you have contacted us to make a complaint, within 3 working days we will let you know we have received it. We will try to sort out your complaint within 10 working days. If your complaint is particularly complicated, this may take a little longer. We will let you know if it will take longer for us to sort out and will keep you updated as to the progress.

5 Targets for Resident Involvement 2009-2012

- Develop pilot projects where local residents can build their skills to develop solutions to issues that arise on mixed tenure estates
- Identify help and funding which will focus on supporting community development projects that target children and young people and tackling unemployment
- The Resident Involvement & Community Development team will be a key player in taking forward Swan’s Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy
- Use information gathered from residents’ profile survey to identify the needs and aspirations of our residents including under-represented groups, BME residents and residents in dispersed homes
- Increase your opportunities to influence our services
- Review, expand and strengthen existing resident involvement methods and explore handing responsibility for setting the priorities for the estate improvement budgets to the Residents Consultative Committee
- Develop an annual training programme and personal development plan for all Residents Consultative Committee members
- Develop a skills and capacity building programme for all Swan residents
- Training residents to act as mystery shoppers
- Increasing customer involvement in identifying local issues and agreeing the appropriate solutions
- Increasing your opportunities to influence our services
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- Develop a skills and capacity building programme for all Swan residents
- Training residents to act as mystery shoppers
- Increasing customer involvement in identifying local issues and agreeing the appropriate solutions
7 Useful contacts

Head Office (Main Switchboard)
0845 612 4700

Repairs (Axis)
0800 783 2768

Swan website
www.swan.org.uk
www.web4residents.org

Essex Floating Support Offices
0845 612 2551

Tenant Services Authority (TSA)
0845 230 7000
www.tenantservicesauthority.org.uk

Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS)
0161 868 3500
www.tpas.org.uk

Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)
0300 1234 500
www.homesandcommunities.co.uk

Crimestoppers
0800 555 111

The Independent Housing Ombudsman
81 Aldwych
London
WC2B 4HN
0207 421 3800