

**COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

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| **Date of Policy** | **January 2021** |
| **Date approved by Management Committee** | **28 January 2021** |
| **Next Review Date** | **January 2024** |
| **Date of review** | **January 2024** |
| **Date of next review** | **January 2027** |

# 1. Purpose

1.1 This communications strategy has been developed to ensure that all internal and external communication and feedback is effective, meaningful and relevant and provides a successful mechanism for two way communication. Our Strategy sets out the ways in which we will communicate and feedback to our customers. It identifies the standards and methods we will use to provide information, the types of information we will provide and how we will provide feedback. Good communication and feedback is the responsibility of all staff and will meet the standards outlined in this document.

1.2 Communications can be verbal or non-verbal, formal or informal. Our aim is to ensure that customers and staff of Ruchazie Housing Association (RHA) have a wide range of opportunities to provide and receive information relating to matters which affect them.

1.3 The strategy aims to allow for information about RHA to be open and accessible.

# 2. THE LAW AND GOOD PRACTICE

2.1 **Equality Act 2010** the Equality Act 2010 bans unfair treatment and helps achieve equal opportunities in the workplace and in wider society.

2.2 **Housing Scotland Act 2001** the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 created a legal framework for tenants who have a Scottish secure tenancy or short Scottish secure tenancy to take part in the way their housing is managed. Landlords must develop a tenant participation strategy and put it into practice. Landlords must also support and consult with Registered Tenant Organisations (RTO’s) and hold a register of these organisations.

2.3 **The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 - Scottish Social Housing Charter** the Charter was introduced by the Scottish Government in 2012 as a tool to enable tenants to monitor the standards and the performance of the services that their landlord provides. It is also used by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) to monitor the performance of Registered Social Landlords, like RHA. The first Charter came into effect on 1 April 2012 and was reviewed during 2016. This revised Charter was approved on 5 October 2022 and became effective from 1 November 2022.

This outcome covers all aspects of landlords’ communication with tenants and other customers. This includes using a range of non-digital and digital communications in accessible formats that meet individual needs. It also covers making it easy for tenants and other customers to make complaints and provide feedback on services, using that information to improve services and performance, and letting people know what they have done in response to complaints and feedback. It does not require landlords to provide legally protected, personal or commercial information.

2.4 **The Data Protection Act 2018** governs the protection of personal data in the UK and sits alongside the GDPR. The GDPR is the [General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016R0679&from=EN) and sets out the key principles, rights and obligations for most processing of personal data.

2.5 **The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004** give people the right to ask for, and be given, information from Scottish public bodies. From November 2019, this legislation extends to cover Housing Associations like RHA.

2.6. RHA has developed a Publication Scheme and associated Guide to Information which reflect good practice and which seek to maximise the information which we make publicly available.

2.7 We will ensure that this publication scheme remains relevant and up to date, and we will ensure that we respond to FOI/EIR requests within both the spirit and terms and of the legislation / regulations and any existing or new Codes of Practice.

# 3. OBJECTIVES

3.1 This strategy aims to set out the framework and standards on: -

* How customers can provide feedback on our services
* How we will communicate with customers
* How we will respond to customers
* What we will do with feedback received
* How we communicate with staff
* How we respond to feedback from staff.

* 1. We aim to conduct our affairs in an open and transparent manner and make information publicly available, unless there are justifiable reasons for not providing it. We will comply with the terms of the Freedom of Information legislation, and will publicise information in accordance with our Publication framework.
  2. We will provide opportunities for our stakeholders to be involved in or to influence the decision making process. Our key stakeholders will be our tenants, our owners, our applicants and service users, our members, partners and our staff.
  3. We will seek to adopt best practice and achieve equality for all and value for money.

# 4. IMPLEMENTING OUR OBJECTIVES

## 4.1 How Customers Can Provide Feedback on Our Services

4.1.1 We aim to provide a range of flexible options which give customers choice and opportunities to provide feedback to us.

In addition to our Governing Body and any sub-group arrangements, we also have a Tenant Scrutiny Panel, where tenant members help us to improve our overall services by:

* Acting as a critical friend
* Acting as a voice for other tenants
* Being tenant led and independent

4.1.2 There are other ways to provide feedback, such as:

* Taking part in surveys or consultation by post, email, Web, in person or via the telephone
* Attending meetings, conferences and seminars
* Open days/ gala and fun days/ wider community events/ road shows
* Becoming a member of RHA
* Or simply by contacting is with any concerns, suggestions or ideas regarding our services here: <https://www.ruchazieha.co.uk/compliments-complaints/>

**4.2 How We Will Communicate With Customers**

4.2.1 We will use a wide variety of methods to communicate information to customers including:

* Letters and emails
* Telephone calls and texts
* A quarterly Tenants newsletter
* An Annual General Meeting and Financial Report
* Our Annual Performance Report on the Charter
* Via our website, Facebook, Twitter and social media
* Face to face contact
* Our staff attending local meetings
* Press releases
* Leaflets and posters at the RHA office

4.2.2 Our written communications can be made available in a range of formats including large print, alternative language and braille.

4.2.3 We will use plain English or provide explanations of any necessary jargon used in our communications.

4.2.4 Though our membership of “Happy to Translate”, we can provide translation support to those customers where English is not their first language.

**4.3 How We Will Respond to Customers**

4.3.1 We aim to respond to customer enquiries by their preferred communication method e.g. letter, email, telephone, through a third party (where authorised to do so) or in person

4.3.2 We will answer telephone calls promptly, identify ourselves and will call back within 24 hours if we cannot answer the enquiry immediately or if the member of staff you wish to speak to is not available.

4.3.3 We will aim to respond to all written and email communications within 5 working days, and to write to customers again if it will take longer to investigate more complex enquiries.

4.3.4 Full information on the standards of service customers can expect are detailed within our **Service Standards document**

4.4 **What Will We Do With Feedback Received?**

4.4.1 Feedback from consultation and reviews is, firstly, used to assist Senior Staff and, ultimately the Committee to make informed decisions about any changes in the way that we deliver services. All comments received remain confidential.

4.4.2 Periodically, we will publish feedback to our customers on what changes we have made or are considering as a direct result of feedback received. We will use a variety of ways to ensure that as many customers as possible have access to feedback from RHA e.g. newsletters, performance report, website etc.

4.4.3 We will make available minutes of our RHA Committee meetings in accordance with our Publication Scheme. This gives our customers the opportunity to understand our decision making process.

**5. Performance management**

5.1 We have developed a performance framework to ensure that targets are measured. Our performance is reported in our Landlord Report and our Performance Report on the charter, which is published each year. A copy of the Landlord and Performance Reports is also available on our website [www.ruchazieha.co.uk](http://www.ruchazieha.co.uk) and is available on request from our offices.

5.2 We will provide information on our performance via various newsletters and our annual report on the Social Housing Charter issued to our customers and staff.

5.3 Performance against indicators are reported to our Committee and staff are updated on current performance at our regular staff meetings.

5.4 **Scottish Social Housing Charter**

The purpose of the Charter is to help improve the quality and value of the services that social landlords deliver to their tenants and other customers. It provides tenants and other customers with a clear statement of what can be expected from us. It focuses our efforts on achieving the outcomes that matter to our tenants and other customers.

The Charter provides the basis for the Scottish Housing Regulator to assess and report on how well we are performing. This allows the Scottish Housing Regulator, our tenants and other customers to identify areas of strong performance and where improvement is needed.

Our annual Performance report on the Charter provides more details on our performance throughout the year, against the Scottish average, against our local partners and against our performance trends. It will provide more information on where performance needs to improve.

It is our aim to consult the Tenants Panel on the charter outcomes and all other and all customers are invited to provide feedback on this report at any time.

# 6. Tenant engagement

## 6.1 Our Tenant Engagement Strategy supports us to:

* Review opportunities for tenant participation and involvement
* Raise awareness of Tenant Participation
* Remove barriers that may prevent people from getting involved

* 1. We have a Tenants Handbook and a selection of general information leaflets available from our website or from our offices.
  2. Comprehensive Tenant Satisfaction Surveys are undertaken on a 3 yearly cycle, with the next one due in 2026/27. There are also a number of periodic mechanisms for seeking tenant’s views across many of our activities including repairs, rent charges, allocations etc

## 7.4 Newspapers, Radio, Professional Journals and Other Media

Senior Staff deal with all RHA media enquiries. Any requests for formal information will be dealt with via our Freedom of Information Policy & Procedure.

Press releases are issued when appropriate to the local press and professional journals keeping them informed of our successes and news stories.

A good relationship with the local press is essential, and will continue to be developed.

The Report of the Governing Board and Financial Statements are published on RHA’s website following a report by our external auditors to our members at each year’s AGM.

7.5Our landlord report is published by the Scottish Housing Regulator each year and is available on our website as well as the Regulator’s website. It provides some key performance data against the Scottish average. These reports are available electronically on the website and in paper format where requested.

7.6 The dates and venue for our Annual General Meeting (AGM) are published in our tenant’s newsletters, on our website and all members are sent invitations. We normally hold our AGM in the local area and ensure that the venues are accessible to the needs of our members. A report on the AGM will feature in the tenants’ newsletter and a press release will be issued prior to and following the meeting.

7.7 We continue to use social networking as a form of customer contact and feedback. The advantages of this form of communication is that it provides an efficient, effective and cost effective way of engaging on-line and gives RHA a broader reach beyond traditional communication methods. This includes Facebook and twitter. We will also respond to negative comments and provide more detailed information where appropriate or invite customers to speak directly to staff where the issues are perhaps more serious or sensitive.

**8 Complaints**

8.1 We have implemented a Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure which has been based on model documentation from the Scottish Ombudsman and approved by the RHA Management Committee. Staff and Committee will receive regular complaints training.

8.2 The RHA Management Committee receives a report on the outcomes and actions taken in dealing with complaints. Statistical information on our complaints is published in our Annual Performance Report and is part of our Social Housing Charter statistical return.

8.3 Our complaints handling procedure reflects our commitment to valuing complaints. It seeks to resolve customer dissatisfaction as quickly as possible at the first point of contact.

Impartial and fair investigations of complaints are undertaken so that, where appropriate, we can make evidence-based decisions on the facts of the case.

8.4 Working with tenants or other members of the community who have complaints is extremely important to us. One of the aims of the Complaints Handling Procedure is to identify opportunities to improve our services.

8.5 A copy of the Complaints Handling procedure leaflet is available at all of our offices and on our websites.

8.6 Complaints can be made in person at our offices, by telephone, in writing, by email or by using our complaint form available on our website.

# 9 Data protection

## 9.1 All employees, and members of our committees are required to respect our Confidentiality and Data Protection Guidance and annually sign up to our approved Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct outlines the behaviours we expect staff and Board members to abide by and it is also used to ensure the highest standards of probity and honesty, transparency and accountability. Where conflicts of interest are required to be registered, this is completed annually.

## Information gained through involvement with us should be treated as confidential and should not be disclosed, for example:

* Commercially sensitive information;
* Information that concerns an individual customer;
* Information that concerns staff members (for example, employment details, remuneration, health etc.);
* Information which may have long-term legal implications or contain legal advice;
* Tender information and contracts;

Information such as that described may be covered by confidentiality agreements within contractual terms and conditions as well as statutory provisions which prevent its disclosure or third party use.

The general rule that should be adopted is a position of non-disclosure, unless required by FOI/EIR (and not exempt from publication).

GDPR and the Data Protection Act is a complex landscape and sets out principles which we must comply with when obtaining, keeping or processing any personal information. The Act only covers information which is classified as personal data and does cover property or any other aspect of BHA.

We have a separate policies which cover data protection and how we process the personal data we hold.

**10 Consultation and Review**

10.1 Our stakeholders for the purposes of this strategy are people or organisations with a direct involvement or interest in our operation or performance, including:

* Tenants
* Owners
* Applicants, or anyone who receives a service from us
* Our staff.

10.2 Tenants, service users, customers, staff employees and RHA Management Committee will be informed of all major decisions via face to face meetings, Workplace, Tenants Newsletters, press releases, Website updates, staff newsletters, updates, team meetings and Tenant Scrutiny Panel as appropriate.

10.3 This strategy will be reviewed at least every 3 years or earlier should any new practices are introduced.