



Communication Policy

Policy Details	
Date Completed	Jan 2013
Next Review Date	Jan 2015
Overall Responsibility	Chief Executive
Author	HR Co-ordinator
Approved By	TBC
Date Approved	TBC

Checklist	
Consultation	yes
Best practice	Yes
Equality Impact Assessment	Pending
Plain English	Yes
Arial 14	Yes
Notify HRC of policy training needs	Yes

1.0 Why is communication Important?

Effective communication is essential for us to deliver a good service and to run a successful business. We need to be able to deliver up to date information, both internally and externally, that is accessible to everyone.

Our communication should be in line with our Service Standards:



Where you see this symbol throughout this policy, we are referring back to our Service Standards which are our levels of service agreed with our residents and published in early 2011. There are specific Service Standards that relate to different types of communication.

2.0 Who do we communicate with?

We need to communicate effectively with all of the following groups of people:

- Current residents
- Potential residents
- Those living and working in our agency managed properties
- Our staff
- Our Board Members

- Our contractors and consultants
- Other agencies in the local area
- Our regulators and commissioners
- The communities within which we work

3.0 How we do we want to communicate?

Communication must be a two-way process which includes feedback and consultation. We will be guided by the following principles around our communication:

Our communication will:

- ✓ Be written in Plain English.
- ✓ Be clear and transparent.
- ✓ Be timely.
- ✓ Be in line with our Equality and Diversity Policy.
- ✓ Be in line with our 3 star aspirations.
- ✓ Be in line with our Resident Involvement Strategy.
- ✓ Be up to date.
- ✓ Develop good relationships so residents can influence the service they receive and make the best use of it.
- ✓ Be monitored through our Key Performance Indicators Satisfaction surveys and mystery shoppers.

Our Service Standards say that we will:



Give you information in the way that is best for you and in another language if you need it.



Always be polite when responding to queries



Always try and resolve your query the first time you contact us

4.0 What methods do we use to communicate?

Below are all of the types of communication we might use, and the things that we need to remember when using them:

4.1 Letters



Our Service Standards say that we will:

Respond within 5 working days to a letter from you

Write to you using Plain English

Give our contact details when we send you information

Translate letters into other languages when needed

4.2 Surveys

Theses will be regular and easy to access, and tell you how we will feed the results back to you.

4.3 Events

We will make sure we get involved in local events such as Information days or community meetings and build our profile in the local area.

We will use events to build relationships with other agencies that could be useful to our tenants.

4.4 Website

We will keep the website content up to date.

We will make sure information is clear and easy to find.



We will include resident feedback in its design and content.

The website also has interactive translation.

4.5 Emails



Our Service Standards say that we will:

Respond within 5 working days to an email message from you.

Send an automatic acknowledgement for emails sent to the main Solon address, so that you know the email has reached us.

Our emails will be in line with our Code of Practice for use of the Internet and internal and external Email. (See Section 6.3 of this policy).

4.6 Telephone



Our Service Standards say that we will:

Respond to telephone messages within 1 working day or use voicemail to tell you when we will be back

Always call you back when we say we will

Always give our name when we answer the telephone

Always leave our name and job title when we leave you a message

4.7 Notice boards

We will make sure these are clear, up to date and relevant whether they are in the office or communal spaces in our properties.

4.8 Newsletters and magazines



Our Service Standards say that we will:

Tell you how your involvement has influenced or changed our service by providing details in the resident newsletter.



4.9 Media

We will make sure we respond to media enquiries quickly to make sure we are transparent and open with the communities we work in.

We will also use the media to raise the profile of the organisation, enhance our reputation, attract clients for support services and attract new business opportunities.

4.10 Meetings and Internal Working groups

We will use meetings internally and externally to:

1. Work on projects
2. Talk about any issues
3. Make sure we are communicating well with the wider community, stakeholders and regulators.

Wherever possible, we will seek resident involvement in these meetings and ensure minutes are made available for those who wish to see them.

We will hold these meetings in different areas so that they are easier to get to.

4.11 Annual reports



Our annual report will contain clear performance information which tells you how we are doing. Residents will be involved in the design and content of this report.

4.12 Leaflets

We will:

1. Make a wide range of leaflets available
2. Review our leaflets regularly
3. Develop our leaflets in consultation with residents
4. Make them available in a variety of ways.



4.13 Face to face:

We will make sure that you can communicate with us face to face in a pleasant environment with translation services available if needed.

5.0 What else do we need to consider?

5.1 Value for Money

We will always spend our money wisely when planning our communication. We will make sure that we involve residents in decisions about our communication- such as our Customer Survey and our Annual Report, to make sure we take Value for Money is into account.

5.2 Review and Innovation

We will always look for new and innovative ways to communicate with you, and we will keep reviewing our methods to make sure they are effective and relevant.

5.3 Solon Style

We want to present a professional image at all times. With this in mind, we will make sure our communication follows our Solon style. The Solon logo should be used on formal documents and communication, all staff should use the corporate greeting and email signature and headed paper should be used for all written communication.

6.0 Communicating with stakeholders about Solon's work, activities and performance, and ensuring influence over, or involvement in planning and decision making

6.1.1 Solon aims to operate in an open, accountable way. We recognise the importance of being accountable to our stakeholders, and making sure that they have sufficient information about the association's activities and services and that each group, where relevant, has the appropriate influence over, or involvement in, planning and decision-making.

6.1.2 Solon's key stakeholders, to whom we are most accountable, comprise: residents, the Housing Corporation, local authorities – particularly Bristol City Council and South Gloucestershire Council – and the communities the association works with.

6.1.3 Other stakeholders include partners such as the Sovereign Consortium, Aster Group, Bristol 5 housing associations, supported housing managing agents and main contractors. The extent of our accountability to these partners is generally defined by respective contractual relationships.

6.1.4 Solon supports the NHF Code of Governance and also works in partnership with the NHF.

6.2 Provision of information to stakeholders

6.2.1 Solon will provide the following information to its stakeholders:

- An annual report detailing the association's activities and annual performance for circulation to all residents, members and other stakeholders including local community, faith and other groups.
- Annual accounts for circulation to all members, residents and other stakeholders.
- Published criteria and procedures for becoming a member of the association for circulation to all residents and other stakeholders via the annual report.
- All necessary prescribed reports on the association's finances for the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA).
- Circulate reports, assessments and judgements from the HCA to local authorities and provide summary information to residents via the annual report, Residents' Newsletter or other channels.
- Circulate any appropriate self-assessment, including the annual value for money assessment to local authorities and provide summary information to residents.
- Publish regular Residents' Newsletters providing information about Solon's activities and seeking involvement and participation from residents.
- Provide residents with regular explanatory information about services and entitlements.
- Publish arrangements for consulting residents and other stakeholders.
- Always give explanations for decisions affecting individuals.
- Give interested parties access to internal procedures and guidance notes on request.
- Make copies of non-confidential board papers available on request.

6.3 Information not to be made available

6.3.1 Solon will not provide information under the following circumstances:

- Where disclosure may prejudice the commercial or financial interests of the association or a third party.

- Where the information is subject to legal professional privilege or a statutory requirement, or is likely to lead to legal proceedings being taken.
- Where the information is not in an easily available form.
- Where the information relates to, or identifies, a third party who has not given their consent to the disclosure.

6.3.2 Disclosure of personal information outside the association concerning residents, staff, Board Members or any other individuals will not be made without the informed consent of the individual concerned.

6.3.3 The only exceptions are:

- To comply with the law (e.g., the police, Inland Revenue and Council Tax Registration Officer) or a court order.
- To comply with section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. This act gives organisations the power to share information with other agencies in order to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- Where there is a clear health or safety risk to a resident or another person.
- Where there is evidence of fraud or criminal activity.
- In connection with court proceedings or statutory action to enforce compliance with tenancy conditions (e.g., application for possession or for payment of HB direct).
- The name, address and contact number of a resident to contactors or other agents providing services on Solon's behalf.
- The name of a resident and the date of occupancy to gas, electricity and water companies.
- Anonymously for bona fide statistical or research purposes, provided it is not possible to identify the individuals to whom the information relates.

6.3.4 For further details, please see the Confidentiality and Data Protection Policy and Policy for Access to Personal Information.

6.4. Engagement with stakeholders and the wider community, including access to meetings and influence over, or involvement in planning and decision making

6.4.1 Solon will:

- Hold regular Residents' Forum and Maintenance Action Group meetings to consult residents on proposals, encourage involvement in policy and decision-making, and feed-back on activities, performance and progress.
- Hold residents' consultation panels on issues of importance such as the running of maintenance and housing services to encourage involvement in policy and decision-making.
- Ensure the development of the new Maintenance Action Group which is a key forum designed to achieve direct and effective resident input into and control over the way maintenance services are run.
- Consult with members of wider communities where the association works and who have an interest in its activities.
- Hold regular consultation meetings with local authorities and other agencies and stakeholders who have a relationship with the association, or an interest in its work. Attend and contribute to meetings arranged by these stakeholders and encourage their input and influence.
- Hold or attend regular meetings with HCA regulatory and investment staff.
- Hold general meetings that are open to members of the association.
- Meet Councillors, groups of residents and community groups to explain and justify policy or activities on request.
- Listen to feedback or proposals from residents and other stakeholders and seek to implement them where they improve the association's services or contribute positively to meeting local housing or other community needs.
- Actively participate in initiatives such as Neighbourhood Management and seek to meet their needs and those of their local communities.

6.4.2 The Chair will consider requests from interested parties who have particular reasons for attending all or part of meetings of the Board as observers. A report of key decisions at Board Meetings will be published in the Residents' Newsletter.

6.5 Making information available

6.5.1 Solon will:

- Designate staff members to be responsible for providing information to stakeholders and the wider community.
- Set target timescales for making information available where appropriate.
- Train staff on giving explanations for decisions about individuals and making procedural instructions and other organisational information available.
- Make increasing use of the association's website to disseminate information and encourage stakeholder involvement.

6.6 Charges

6.6.1 Solon will not normally make a charge for simple requests for information, but may make a small charge for requests that involve significant work extracting, collating or copying information.

7.0 What other policies does this link to?

7.1. Translation and Interpretation Policy- this sets out how we will make information available in other languages and formats such as large print, Braille and audio tape and how residents can request this.

7.2. Complaints policy- complaints can be a useful tool for our residents to communicate with us. Our complaints policy sets out how we deal with complaints, what our deadlines are for responding to complaints and how we handle a complaint once it has been made.

7.3. Code of Practice for the use of Internet and Internal and External Email
- It sets out what rules we must follow.

7.4. Data protection Policy- this policy sets out what we will do with personal information, including anything that contains details of where we have communicated with other people or organisations.

8.0 How will we monitor how effective our communication is?

We will monitor how effective our communication is by:

- Reviewing the outcome of our mystery shopping.
- We will also look at Key Performance Indicators to make sure we meet deadlines.
- We will use our Satisfaction Surveys to make sure that our customer feedback is showing we have communicated in line with this policy.

All of this feedback will be used to improve the services we provide.