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**STEVE BIKO HOUSING ASSOCIATION**

**Communications Strategy**

**APPROVED: 22nd February 2016**

**DATE FOR REVIEW: 22nd February 2019**

**Communications Strategy**

**PART A. Policy**

1. **Aim**

This Communications Strategy outlines Steve Biko Housing Association’s aims and objectives for communicating with our diverse audience. The Strategy continues to evolve develop to reflect personal preference, developments in communication technology and greater awareness of audiences.

1. **Scope**

The scope of the strategy includes the following;

* Key communications aims and objectives
* Our audience
* Key Messages
* Key Principles of our Communications
* Tools of Communication – Internal and External
* Methods of Communication
* Accessible Communications
* Relationship with Liverpool City Council
1. **Principles of the Policy**

To establish the process for quality communication for the organisation.

In undertaking its works SBHA will:

SBHA’s values reflect our commitment to be the best BRM Registered provider in Liverpool. Our values are the foundation of our behaviour and a key to our success

* **Listen -** Listen, involve and deliver our tenants and residents needs

and aspirations

* **Transparent -** be open and transparent
* **Non- discriminatory -**not tolerate racism and discrimination
* **Innovative -** provide services that are creative and innovative
* **Independent -** maintain our independence
1. **Legal and Regulatory Requirements.**

The Strategy takes into account requirements under the Homes and Communities Agency ‘Regulatory Code’ and the Associations rules.

#  Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

The policy will be reviewed every three years.

#  Related documents

This procedure will be linked to Steve Biko Housing Association Customer Service Standards.

This policy will be read in conjunction with Steve Biko Housing Association Equality and Diversity Policy.

Confidentiality Policy;

Data Protection Policy

Code of Conduct Policies;

Code of Governance for Board Members

1. **Key Communications aims and objectives**
* To make sure that tenants and other customers are made aware of Steve Biko Housing’s services and how they are being improved – using non jargonistic language or alternative access needs methods throughout.
* To be strategic in our approach to localised needs of our diverse customer/potential customer target groups in our delivery of marketing, PR materials and advertising to ensure materials to minimise and remove localised sensitivities.
* Where required we will provide translated information in various languages and provide interpreters to meet the needs of people for whom English is not a first language.
* To continually boost and promote tenant involvement through regular communication and feedback, using this constructively to improve our services.
* To increase Steve Biko Housing’s profile as an autonomous, dependable, top performing organisation, responsible for managing our homes and involvement in communities of interest.
* To positively engage with, support and encourage employees to communicate effectively internally and externally with tenants ensuring high standards of customer care.
* To build on existing positive and effective relationships with local, regional and national media
* To build on existing relationships with the people and groups we work with and work collaboratively for the improvement of community relationships and community cohesion.
1. **Our audience**
* Steve Biko Housing Association Tenants and leaseholders, Liverpool Residents
* Steve Biko Housing Association Board members and Employees
* Area Panel members Local Councillors and MPs
* Local, regional and national media, Liverpool City Council Contractors and suppliers
* Tenant Panels, and Groups
* Social housing Sector providers
* Public Service Providers: Job Centre, Health Providers, Police
* Local schools, colleges, Community groups, voluntary agencies, Local businesses
* General practitioners & surgeries
* Faith groups and places of worship
1. **Key Messages**

Steve Biko Housing Association;

* Will consult with, listen to and appropriately act upon the comments of our tenants and other customers – always striving to use our customer feedback to deliver the best services and improvements to their homes and neighbourhoods.
* Supports and values employees and will encourage and take on board their opinions and ideas for service improvement.
* Is an autonomous, pro-active organisation – open to a range of audiences
* Forms and maintains professional working relationships with the local community, media, partnership agencies, and the Liverpool City Council, and values the opportunity to build and nurture these relationships.

**9. Key Principles of our communications**

* Consistently encouraging tenants to shape the agenda for our communications and be involved from the outset - what they say matters.
* Producing and delivering communications in formats and style that are clear, easy to read and understandable, accessible to diverse audiences, encouraging and useful to audiences. Producing timely and relevant information for tenants and other customers, staying true to our values and objectives of being ‘tenant focused’, providing information that is ‘value for money’, ‘Embracing equality and diverse communities’ and delivering ‘top class customer services’ through our communications.

**10. Tools of communication**

Evaluation reports

Minutes of meetings with residents

Website

Customer contact at Reception

Advertising

Employee briefing notes

Email

Reports and minutes

Team meetings,

Appraisals,

One to one supervision

Good practice guidelines

Policy and Strategy documents

Performance Reports

Team Development days

**11. Internal Communications - Board and Managing Agents**

It is essential to ensure smooth and efficient running of our business. Information needs to flow between the Director and the Board and Staff team, and also between the Association and our Managing Agents.

It is the Directors and managers responsibility to ensure a close, open and effective working relationship exists between Board members and staff team. This will ensure that all parties time is spent productively and that energies are channelled into constructive and mutually agreed business matters.

**Chairperson/Director Liaison**

* The Director has regular formal contact with the Chair.

**Board Staff Away Day**

* The Annual Board Staff away weekend is an important event for the Association. It is used to debate the key strategic issues and to set the future direction of the Association.

**Board Meetings**

* These are held every 2 months and serve as the main debating chamber for making corporate decisions. The Director and Managing Agents service them jointly.

**Board Training and Development**.

* The context within which housing Associations operate is constantly changing. A board Development Plan is developed and will be reviewed annually. Future Board Development will be made available to the Board to ensure that Board is kept updated with any regulatory or technical requirements.

**Events**

* Events such as opening new schemes, or promoting Steve Biko Housing Association work are important avenues by which Board members can get involved and contribute to the business. The Director will ensure that Board members are briefed with details to ensure that they are able to participate fully.

**12. The following outlines a range of internal communications such as**;

**Staff -** Steve Biko Housing Association will support internal communications systems consistent with a culture that encourages the interest, pride, respect, and ownership of all Employees; to maintain this culture employee involvement is necessary. For staff two-way and team communication needs to be relevant, continuous and effective. Senior staff should make themselves available to listen and to actively encourage their staff to contribute. SBHA will promote and build on effective leadership throughout the organisation. The following is a range of communication required;

* Employee consultation that will help us to continually reassess the aspiration, attitudes, concerns and support needs of our customers
* The Website will generate awareness and understanding about the organisation and staff will be encouraged to contribute to news issues and to become readers of the site.
* Shared ownership of the wider Performance Management Framework is important. Expectations of each service area staff need to be clear and they need to understand how their work is contributing to delivering Steve Biko Housing Association objectives
* There should be a strong awareness of the roles and responsibilities of individuals within the Association with clear lines and protocols of communication.
* Staff will continue to be invited to become directly involved in helping to shape and deliver effective communications across the Association.
* Staff will use communications to make themselves aware of training and development opportunities and to take advantage of them.

**Managing Agents – NWHS For Repairs/Maintenance and Finance services**

**Managing Agents/Director Liaison.**

* The Director will meet with Senior Managers from NWHS and SBHA on a regular basis to ensure quality delivery of service
* Staff are trained to use policies and systems that support housing services communication

**Management Agreement**.

* The Association enters into a Management Agreement on a 3 year basis. The Board will be notified 3 months prior to the end of the Agreement to enable the Board to review the performance and requirements contained within the Management Agreement and to participate in the negotiation of future agreements.

**Tenant Communication**

* The Association understands the importance of listening and understanding

 Its customer’ requirements.

* Central to the Associations work is its Tenants Engagement and Communication Strategy, and approach in delivery customer services.
* The Association will endeavour to ensure profile data of tenants is kept up to date including preferred methods for communication including email and mobile phone contacts.

When we communicate with our Tenants we must ensure the following:

* Letters and verbal information is clear, precise and understandable and communicated in understandable formats
* All communications must be meaningful and in a form that is user friendly
* We use plain language to explain fully to the tenant e.g. legal language used in letters
* Interpreters and translate will be used where required
* We will provide opportunities and encourage feedback so as to build views and preferences into future communications and the development of services and policies.

**Tenants Meetings**

* A key vehicle to give and receive feedback from our tenants is at Tenants meetings. Meeting are held bi-monthly (a minimum of 4 per year)

**Newsletters**

* Will be produced quarterly, with positive news stories, information about Steve Biko Housing Association, details of local news, articles of interest to be overseen with tenants involvement in considering and approving content of a range of publications.

7.0 **External Communications**

* Guidelines will be provided to ensure a consistent and appropriate use of Steve Biko Housing Associations’ corporate branding across the organisation, and provide guidelines for use of logo by other organisations.

* Ensuring that all written communications are assessed and approved by the appropriate Manager or Director to verify they are ‘Tenant friendly’.
* To promote Community Regeneration Service and activities to tenants and communities using a range of methods including social media, Facebook and Twitter.
* Ensure the website is effective in navigation, usability and Accessibility, and create a high impact site that is attractive to the public. Equally we must continually review the quality and relevance other content and measure customer satisfaction.
* To ensure Steve Biko Housing Association’s presence at ‘appropriate’ events.
* The Tenants Handbook is on the Website providing useful information on;

 Tenancy Issues, Access to services and service standards. It will be kept

Under review and sections can be added and/or updated in consultation with tenants.

**13. Dealing with the Media, Problems and the Press**

* A protocol for establishing effective relationships with the media to actively promote Steve Biko Housing and manage to mitigate the impact of a negative news stories.
* All formal press releases appertaining to the Association must be approved by the Director. (Press releases will be precise, have impact, and as far as possible be current rather than historic – contact names and telephone for further information should always be provided).
* Board Members are not permitted to speak freely to the Media without permission from the Governing Board.
* Use of photographs must be with the consent of individuals in the photograph.
* Target editors are those who sit within housing and regeneration press and local newspapers.
* The Associations policy is to refer all requests for information from the media to the Director. This is important in instances of negative publicity. The Director will ensure that a consistent response is given and wherever possible a detailed and explanative press release will be issued to clarify the facts to show we are in control.
* The “NO COMMENT” solution will only fuel speculation and ensure the worst case is portrayed. However, there may be instances, where no comment is made until all the facts of the case have been ascertained.
* Dealing with the media under these circumstances should be kept simple:
* Inform the Director
* A press release will be prepared
* Do not fabricate or give false information
* Only the Director or designated Board members should talk to the press

**14. External communication tools include the following;**

* Quarterly Tenants Newsletter
* Tenants’ Handbook and service standards
* Steve Biko Housing Association website www.stevebikoha.org
* Individual branded literature (leaflets)
* Press releases and media coverage
* Letters and emails
* Tenant Audit forms
* Conferences, seminar and events
* ‘*What you said, what we’ve done’* feedback bulletins
* Information available in various formats (languages/large print etc.)
* Promotional and marketing products and displays at offices/events
* External signage
* Text messaging
* Face Book – other social media as agreed
* Annual report
* Resident panel reports
* Tenant Surveys
* A survey of tenants’ satisfaction with the service will be undertaken (every 3 years) as well as a number

of more targeted and service specific surveys. The number of surveys sent out to tenants each year will

be coordinated and controlled in order to maximise the greatest return and avoid ‘survey fatigue’.

**15. Communications Methods**

The following outlines the methods used by Steve Biko Housing Association. This means communicating our messages to the right people at the right time and at the right price (Value for Money Considerations) while striving to be innovative and encouraging our audiences to get involved as part of the wider picture.

The following are key responsibilities of the Association: -

* Design, print, production and distribution of all customer literature
* Supporting internal communications with staff
* Writing and creating Northwards focused literature
* Press and Media relations
* Website and intranet content
* Advice and support with event management
* Photography and design
* Building effective relations communication
* Researching and utilising good practice from similar organisation
* Securing Value for Money from these activities
* Keeping abreast of advances in communications
* Awareness and development of environmentally friendly communications
* Organisation and management of the Tenant Communications Forum

**16. Social Media**

SBHA provide guardrails for employees so they can safely and successfully engage in social media practices. Employees are able to seek help and guidance when they are considering launching a blog. SBHA will provide them the resources they need.

* **Developing new guidelines:** Include staff/organisation bloggers in the process of developing corporate use of social media including blogging guidelines. SBHA policy will extend to other new and emerging communications technologies such as podcasts and video, etc. Once published, distribute guidelines to all.
* **Responding to comments:** Agree a mechanism for responding to every comment that requires a reply.
* **Acknowledge mistakes:** Acknowledge mistakes and fix errors on your blog in a timely and open manner.
* **Deleting confidential information:** If information needs to be deleted because it is confidential and was posted in error, delete the information and state why the information has been deleted.
* **Podcasts and videos:** Make sure employees understand that the mp3 files associated with podcasts are permanent and that it is not possible to remove mp3 files in the same way it is possible to take down blog content. The same permanent nature applies to video files.
* **Protect privacy:** SBHA will consider, define and clearly communicate to employees what information is appropriate or inappropriate to disclose.
* **Respect your audience:** Respect your audience’s privacy
* **Don’t break confidentiality:** Don’t write about confidential conversations.
* **Communicate this policy clearly to employees:** Err on the side of caution. SBHA Employees are informed that if they believe a conversation might have been considered confidential, check with the person/people prior to publishing.

**Exercise good judgment**

* Refrain from comments that can be interpreted as slurs, demeaning, inflammatory, etc. The Internet is full of varied opinions, and it's okay to share yours, but you never, want to be branded as discriminatory or narrow-minded or an unstoppable hot-head.
* SBHA employees should understand that companies can and will monitor employee use of social media and social networking web sites, even if they are engaging in social networking or social media use away from the office. Employees should always think twice before hitting ’send‘; and consider what could happen, if what the employee publishes on the Internet reflects not just on the employee, but also the company.
* Bottom line: good judgment is paramount regardless.

## Understand the concept of community

## The essence of community is the idea that it exists so that you can support others and they, in turn, can support you. You need to learn how to balance personal and professional information, and the important role that transparency plays in building a community. Your community shouldn't be an environment where competition is encouraged or emphasised, but rather a platform where your customers or users feel comfortable sharing, connecting, and receiving help.

**17. Accessible communications**

* All of Steve Biko Housing Association publications will be available in a range of formats upon request for example in a range of community languages –for e.g. Somali, Arabic, Chinese, Polish, and Urdu etc. Steve Biko Housing Association is committed to providing services to customers in accordance with its Equality and Diversity Policy. In order to achieve this we will:
* Promote Equality across the nine protected characteristics, as set out under the Equality Act 2010. (Public Sector Equality Duty 2010)
* Steve Biko Housing Association will consider Equality implications in all we do and publish information to demonstrate compliance with the general duty. This information will include in particular, information relating to people who share a protective characteristic who are its employees and people affected by its policies and practices.
* Publicise our commitment to providing equality and diversity in service delivery
* Provide training and guidance to staff on a regular basis on changes to the law and our policy
* Provide training for staff and Board members to raise awareness of customers’ needs from different background and how to respond to them.
* Staff will have access to additional resources to assist with translation

 and interpreting needs of customers

* Offices will be welcoming, appropriately signed and provide access to a range of information via posters, leaflets, access to Information technology and a private interview room.
* Staff will have access to additional resources to assist with translations Internal staff support, The Big Word.
* Local offices will be welcoming, appropriately signed and provide access to a range of information via posters, leaflets, access to IT and a private interview room.
* Service standards will be monitored to ensure face-to-face and telephone communication is consistent and of a high quality. Written communication such as letters or reports will be subject to regular quality checks to ensure they are of a high standard, consistent, written in a professional tone and in non jargonistic language.
* Complaints will be valued and handled sensitively within the guidelines of the Complaints policy
* Staff will have access to internal and external resources to assist with Access needs of customers including translation and interpreting services.

**18. Relationship with Liverpool City Council**

* Steve Biko Housing Association will work in partnership with Liverpool City Council and ensure effective working protocols are in place so that our communications are timely and consistent with the Council’s Housing and Community Strategies.
* This will be supportive of the wider framework for the regeneration of Liverpool and may include joint or shared communications as appropriate.
* Steve Biko Housing Association will comply with the legal requirements concerning communications and publicity during the period of local elections and regularly review the any Service Level Agreements (SLAs) between Steve Biko Housing and Liverpool City Council to ensure future services are of a high quality, offer value for money and continue to meet the needs and priorities of the Association and its customers.

**19. Partners and Stakeholders**

Ensure a positive profile for SBHA through effective relationships with partners and stakeholders including sharing of information.

**20. Data Protection Policy**

* All communications will be conducted in line with the policy and procedures of Steve Biko Housing Association
* Staff are provided with training in Data protection operational duties
* Customers are informed of Data Protection and confidentiality within the Your Rights section of the Tenants Handbook

**21. Risk**

Continous Monitoring and Annual review of the policy allows the organisationto assess whether existing processes and systems are adequate and to make adjustments as necessary.