

Manningham Housing Association
Neighbourhood Policy
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Background

Manningham Housing Association (MHA) is a registered social housing provider. The Association provides general needs, sheltered and supported housing for rent and shared ownership. MHA provides housing for people in need in a way that leads to sustainable and balanced communities where people want to live, work and play.

Our mission is to empower communities to be successful and vibrant. We focus on quality, making a difference and fairness in the way we provide housing services in the communities we serve.

This policy sets out how we will work towards ensuring our homes are prosperous places and cohesive neighbourhoods. We have taken account of the following legislation and publications:

- The Local Government Act 2003
- Firm Foundations: The Government's Framework for Community Capacity Building – 2004
- The Barker Review - Delivering stability: Securing our future Housing Needs - March 2004
- The Gershon Report - Releasing Resources to the Front Line - Independent Review of Public Sector Efficiency - July 2004;
- Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005
- The Eddington Transport Study - December 2006;
- The Leitch Review of Skills - Prosperity for all in the global economy - World Class Skills -December 2006
- John Hills Review - Ends and Means: The Future Roles of Social Housing in England – February 2007
- The Lyons Review - Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local Government - March 2007
- Communities in Control – Real People, Real Power - 2008

We are aware that the new regulator of tenant services is the Tenant Services Authority (TSA). The TSA will in due time publish their own standards to replace Housing Corporation standards.

Aims of Our Neighbourhood Policy

Our neighbourhood policy is designed to achieve the following outcomes:

- Create more mixed neighbourhoods
- Tackle worklessness in the locality, through LEGI activities, financial incentives, working with employers, reforms to processing housing benefit, training for skills and better childcare
- Tackle homelessness, particularly, overcrowding
- Improve our housing stock
- Improve the environment
- Balance residential and recreational needs
- Ensure cleaner, greener and safer localities
- Tackle anti-social behaviour much more through community leadership approaches, in line with our Anti-social Behaviour Policy and procedure

Manningham Housing Association
Neighbourhood Policy
DRAFT

- Empower residents to take more control in shaping and, where applicable, managing our housing services

Through this policy we seek to integrate our housing services with economic development and the built environment. Therefore, we will:

- Offer our residents the choice to own, part own or rent; and, when their housing circumstances change, we will consider the best options for them whether to stay or move; we will adopt the “whole market approach”, that is, we will be prepared to consider all forms of tenure that may be suitable for our residents
- Offer our residents the opportunity to own a home irrespective of their current tenure through the Right to Acquire or Social Homebuy, or any other affordable home ownership proposed by the government
- Consider allowing all our residents to part-rent and part-own the home they currently rent from us, except those who are living in temporary supported accommodation, subject to our asset management strategy
- Ensure that our maintenance and repair programmes focus on meeting the decent home standards recommended by the government, and that the service promotes sustainable neighbourhoods in the sourcing of our materials and in carrying out our repair contracts

Re-modelling Local Communities

We are aware of the history of social housing as a tenure of last choice due to perceived and real problems with its quality, its allocation processes and its location. However, as the various reports cited by this strategy have shown, the situation is changing. Therefore, by working with other change agents, our housing services will seek to re-model local communities into places where people have:

- A decent home that they can afford in a community where they want to live and work
- A choice between owning, part-owning or renting a home and a choice whether to stay in their current location or to move and, thereby, given the chance to acquire housing assets and narrow the wealth gap
- The chance to develop their skills and interests
- Access to jobs and excellent services
- The chance to get engaged in their community and make a difference

In line with the principles of the housing market renewal agenda, we will seek to prevent:

- Our housing stock becoming unwanted, where homes are no longer attractive to existing or potential residents because the tastes, aspirations or income levels of local residents have changed;
- Surplus housing stock, arising from depopulation, where more affluent people have moved out of the area completely or moved to the suburbs;
- Unpopular neighbourhoods, where deprivation, high levels of crime and a poor environment mean neither existing nor potential residents want to live there.

Play and Recreation

MHA provides large family homes mostly and most of these homes are located in inner city wards, in small numbers and between large estates of former local authority housing, private rented housing and owner-occupied stock. As a result, a significant number of children are concentrated in small areas where opportunities for recreation and play are often lacking.

Accordingly, we will develop partnership arrangements with the Local Authority and other stakeholders to provide play and recreation facilities for local residents, wherever we can. We will seek to provide an annual programme of recreational activities in conjunction with local sport and art groups, or cultural and community groups to address the needs for play and youth activities at neighbourhood level.

Sport, Arts and Culture

Our work with Bradfactor, the Shipley Cricket Club and the Bangladeshi Youth Organisation has shown that introducing aspects of sport, arts and culture into local areas can have a positive impact in creating community cohesion, developing skills and improving the environment.

We will develop a focused approach to our current ad-hoc partnership work with local agencies in relation to using sports, arts and culture to promote community cohesion.

We are aware of the positive impact of cultural activities on building community cohesion at neighbourhood levels. The use of cultural activities is a highly effective means of getting local residents involved in understanding and experiencing the rich diversity of their neighbourhood. This helps to create an enhanced sense of community cohesion and enables information to be exchanged between the participants. We will support cultural activities in specific locations on annual basis in conjunction with residents and other stakeholders. Moreover, we will contribute towards the Bradford Merla.

Extending services to other residents

We recognise that there may be owner-occupiers struggling to maintain their homes in the neighbourhoods where we have our housing stock. In addition, there may be previous residents who, having become part or full owners, require affordable quality maintenance and repair service or are unable to invest in the upkeep of their house and gardens. We will consider the possibility of extending our repairs and maintenance services, including grounds maintenance, to such residents. Whilst this will have to be offered at a viable charge, residents will be able to benefit from a cost which is less than the market rate, due to economies of scale, and from a guaranteed quality standard.

Re-modelling our Community Initiatives Grant

We are aware that one reason that tenants may choose not to involve themselves in resident involvement activities is a perceived lack of control in relation to the delivery of our housing services. We will work with local residents to consider environmental improvements which can be funded from our current budget for community initiatives.

Increasing Work-relevant Skills

As is typical with social housing residents, many of our residents are unemployed. This can be due to health, age or caring responsibilities. However, there also many residents who are eligible and able to work but find it difficult to obtain or retain employment because their skills are not sufficiently developed. It is in the interest of those households for skills levels to be increased so as to improve their access to employment and reduce dependence on benefits.

We will consider supporting our residents to gain basic literacy and numeracy skills and on-the-job training in appropriate employment sectors. We will use our partnership with PATH to encourage our residents to train in housing and other sectors.

Social Enterprise

We are aware of the various initiatives under the Local Economic Growth agenda of the Local Authority, including the training offered to young people not in education, employment or training.

Along with the development of basic skills, we will also work with residents and other stakeholders to develop social enterprises. These are defined by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) as businesses with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners. This approach will support the potential ability of individuals who are willing to develop and operate within an independent business environment.

In the short term, because of our contacts within the construction and home maintenance sector, we will concentrate on enabling residents to develop their skills and possibly businesses in this sector.

We will develop a Social Enterprise Plan by October 2009.

Decent Homes Standard

We are committed to maintaining our homes to the Decent Homes Standard. This is covered substantially in our Asset Management Strategy. We believe that good quality homes contribute significantly to the well-being of residents, as well as neighbourhood well-being.

Where adaptations are required to existing dwellings, we will work with appropriate agencies to ensure the needs of individuals are fully understood and are reflected in appropriate aids and adaptations.

Our work will be guided by the sustainable communities agenda. For new dwellings, we will aim to meet the Very Good Eco-rating standard and Secure by Design principles. We will provide adequate parking spaces for residents and their visitors, especially, in-curtillage parking, and ensure that communal areas are well-designed and maintained in a way that fosters community cohesion. We will address quickly any potential hazards through regular inspection of communal areas and facilities. We will provide measures which deter the use of communal areas for crime and anti-social behaviour.

Estate Management

Currently, our estate management service offers MHA's residents communal cleaning and landscaping, the removing of graffiti, litter, illegal parking and community safety patrols. We will consider extending this service, in partnership with relevant agencies in the neighbourhoods, to other residents within the neighbourhood.

Moreover, we will consider adding local transport needs, for instance, road calming measures, adoption and maintenance of non-adopted roads, strategic pathways and alley-gates, etc to enhance community safety.

Working in Partnership

Working in partnership is key to the effective delivery of our Neighbourhood Policy.

We will organise our housing services teams to build relationships with other service providers within the neighbourhoods in which we work. As such, our housing officers, estate teams, maintenance personnel, and lettings staff will be required to demonstrate effective partnership working across all our schemes.

We will establish a multi-agency steering group in-house to assist in developing and monitoring partnership working. We aim to establish effective links with both the voluntary and the private sectors. We are particularly interested in fostering partnership working to deliver sustainable solutions to issues in social care, employment and community infrastructure.

We will review job descriptions, where applicable, to ensure that partnership working is fully reflected. We will reflect the commitment to neighbourhoods in staff training and development. We will aim to integrate partnership working within all aspects of MHA's housing services.

Fostering A Neighbourhood Approach to Housing Services

In order to enable staff to adopt a wider perspective in the way they discharge their job responsibilities, we will focus on their ability to work as part of a multidisciplinary team, inspire their imagination for innovation and encourage their willingness to work flexibly and independently.

We will focus the supervision and appraisal process on performance management and evaluation, including an evaluation of our staff's understanding of diversity and equality issues. We will encourage our staff to develop short and medium term outputs and outcomes, and not merely targets.

We will provide relevant training and information which can help to clarify the performance objectives which fully reflect the Association's neighbourhood focus.

Moreover, we will also seek to establish more localised points of access for MHA's services. This may be developed in a number of ways, including:

- Improvements to MHA's website to ensure on-line transactions can be made in real time, and that the information is up to date and accurate;
- Establishment of local surgeries for community access points;

Manningham Housing Association
Neighbourhood Policy
DRAFT

- Use of existing facilities such as Churches and Mosques, community halls and offices, and schools to host meetings/events for the wider community;
- Establishing local office bases/community facilities.

We will be prepared to deliver our housing services in response to the needs of local residents. In effect, we will always seek to customise the delivery of our services to the needs and preferences of our customers, wherever possible. We will ensure that we establish more localised points of access for MHA's services.

Equality & Diversity

We are a BME housing association. However, increasingly, we are widening our services to non-BME residents through the location of our stock outside traditional BME areas.

We are committed to ensuring that our services reflect the needs of, and are equally accessible to, all our tenants and service users. Our focus on neighbourhoods will, therefore, reflect better the issues relating to people's homes, social networks and the environment.

We will use the information from census data and ward profiles, our tenant satisfaction surveys, housing application forms, ongoing contact with our tenants, and from key partners to structure our services in a way that removes any barriers to access for any customer.

We are particularly committed to working with emerging communities, especially, refugee households, Eastern European migrants and the traveller community.

We are aware of the increasing number of residents with particular physical and learning disabilities. Additionally, we are aware of the increasing number of older people within our stock. We will work with all our vulnerable residents in line with our Supporting Tenants (in general needs housing) Policy, ensuring that we support them in their own homes where this is appropriate, and enable them to move to more suitable accommodation where independence is no longer an option.

We will work closely with the Local Authority to identify the needs of people and groups within the neighbourhoods we serve. We will also develop partnership arrangements with statutory and voluntary sector agencies to ensure a co-ordinated approach to resource usage and service delivery to deliver the most effective outcomes.

We will, take firm action against perpetrators of anti-social behaviour based on race, gender, disability, etc. as detailed in our Anti-social behaviour Policy and procedure. We will take action against perpetrators of racial harassment.

Asset Management

Our Neighbourhood Policy is fully compatible with our Asset Management Strategy which is focused on managing our housing stock in line with the government's sustainable communities agenda. Our Asset Management Strategy will assist in preventing and tackling low demand properties and declining neighbourhoods, whilst promoting mixed neighbourhoods.

Our knowledge and experience of working within neighbourhoods will be used to maintain and manage our assets, including appropriate void control and allocations. We will ensure that our dwellings are of a good quality and available to let, and that we strive to achieve the maximum occupancy and good rental yield throughout the life of our dwellings.

Anti-social Behaviour

We have overhauled our Anti-social Behaviour Policy and procedure to ensure our residents can enjoy the peace and quiet they should have in their neighbourhoods.

We will take speedy and decisive action to resolve situations where anti-social behaviour is being perpetrated. We have both a strategic and operational approach to addressing antisocial behaviour. We emphasise community leadership in tackling ASB which can be achieved through partnership working, preventative measures, and proactive response to reported incidents.

Allocations & Lettings

We have reviewed our Lettings Policy and procedures to ensure it accommodates choice-based letting (CBL) which is a key plank of Government policy, and to tackle overcrowding. We will work with the Local Authority and our other housing association partners to ensure that our customers benefit from the main requirements of choice-based letting by:

- Extending choice;
- Promoting sustainable communities;
- Continuing to house people based on need, especially, with a view to tackling homelessness and overcrowding;
- Ensuring efficient letting of MHA's property;
- Reducing the number of hard-to-let properties;
- Local lettings policies, where applicable, in conjunction with local residents.

In these ways, we will offer people more choice in where people want to live, in order to increase the likelihood that they will be more settled, feel more engaged with the locality and remain for longer. A stable community is more likely to be sustainable and to create a vibrant neighbourhood.

Through our CBL we will ensure that we balance the need to re-house people from various walks of life with the need to focus on those in the greatest need, for whom there is little or no choice other than social housing.

Neighbourhood Action Plans

Where applicable, we will develop Neighbourhood Action Plans (NAPs) to document issues identified by local residents as necessary for the quiet enjoyment of their homes. The NAP will comprise a series of actions, together with responsible officers, key milestones, target dates and reviewing mechanisms.

Each NAP will be subject to the Association's resources and will influence the operational objectives of our housing staff. NAP will be used to monitor the Association's success in responding to neighbourhood issues.

Manningham Housing Association
Neighbourhood Policy
DRAFT

In general, NAPs should assist MHA to generate improvements in the following areas:

- Responsive repairs;
- Void turn-around times;
- Reduction in rent arrears;
- Reduction in hard to let dwellings;
- Reduction in the costs of dealing with anti-social behaviour.

Monitoring and Review

We will monitor and review this policy in conjunction with residents to ensure its effectiveness and relevance to the Association's stated aims and objectives.

The Director of Housing has overall responsibility for the on-going monitoring of the policy through the work of frontline staff, particularly those engaged in resident involvement directly. The policy will be reviewed annually by the Director of Housing.