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**Tenant Report: Communication**

**September 2023**

**Summary**

This report sets out the findings of the Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes (Seaside) involved tenants in relation to the “scrutiny” of Seaside’s Communication. The following key areas were examined:

* Seaside Homes Website and social media
* Tenant Handbook
* SMS texting service
* Newsletter

**Training**

All Seaside tenants were invited to “Scrutiny Training” provided by TPAS and arranged by Seaside in June 2023. Tenants were also offered access to the resources of TPAS Connect and TPAS webinars.

**Method**

Seaside hosted an all-day, in-person tenant event on 29th August 2023, and a follow up online survey was completed by the involved tenants early in September 2023. This event was advertised to all Seaside tenants by SMS text and on the Seaside website and was open to all tenants. Nine tenants attended the event. Tenants were provided with the following information, and we were made aware that we could request more information if needed:

* The details of the SMS texting service, and all texts sent via this service in the past 6 months.
* The past four editions of the quarterly newsletter (hard copies), and details of how many tenants request the newsletter by post and how many access this online, and associated costs.
* The age brackets of Seaside’s current tenants.
* Copies of the current Tenant Handbook.
* Access to the Website and Facebook – this proved difficult to facilitate on the day and it was mutually agreed that a follow up survey would be sent about the website and Facebook page.
* Access to the staff member responsible for Seaside Communications (Tenant Engagement Co-ordinator).

This report has been drafted by the Seaside Tenant Engagement Co-ordinator based on the notes taken by tenants and staff at the event, and from the online survey. The involved tenants who were present at the event will review the draft, make any desired changes, and approve a final version. The final, tenant approved version will be presented to the Seaside Homes Board of Trustees on Wednesday 22nd November 2023.

**Accessibility**

A key concern is ensuring that Seaside communication is as widely accessible to tenants as possible. In particular, Seaside should remain mindful that not all tenants will always have access to the internet or phone credit (due to costs), and some tenants may be digitally excluded if they are not experienced at using the phone, computer, or internet.

**Recommendation:**

1. Maintain several different methods of communication with tenants to ensure that people are not excluded due to cost or skillset.

**Language**

Language choices are important when communicating to a wide tenant base. The event had been advertised by Seaside as a “Scrutiny” day and that the task was to “scrutinise” Seaside’s communication. “Scrutiny” can be an intimidating and confusing word and as it is not used widely outside of the specific context of housing and resident engagement, it can be seen as jargon and may discourage tenants from getting involved. “Scrutiny” also has a critical or negative connotation which can be off-putting.

**Recommendation:**

1. Use the terms “Engagement” or “Involvement” instead of “Scrutiny”.

**SMS Texting Service**

The SMS method of communicating raises concerns of spam and scams for tenants receiving these texts. Sometimes we have overlooked texts received from Seaside, assuming that they were not relevant to us or that they had been sent to us by mistake. People may also be concerned that links included in an SMS text may be unsafe and will be less likely to click on a link.

The SMS Texting Service is a good and useful service to provide to tenants and the sub-groups that tenants can sign up to are fit for purpose. The frequency of texts sent is suitable and Seaside should continue to offer this service. However, we feel there is too much focus on activities and events for children and Seaside could include more activities for adults.

**Recommendations:**

1. Continue to identify the sender in every SMS by beginning to message with “SEASIDE:”
2. In addition to this, begin the text with “Hi Seaside tenant”, or similar wording, to highlight that the text is relevant to the recipient. If possible, personalise this to “Hi [tenant’s name]” if the SMS platform can facilitate this.
3. Wherever possible, include all the information in the SMS so that tenants don’t need to click on a link to a webpage for more information. Where you cannot fit everything in, include an option for tenants to text back for more information.
4. Ensure that links included in an SMS are fully functioning.
5. Consider offering an email service as well as the SMS service, as it is easier to open a link to a webpage from an email.
6. Include more activities for adults, especially outdoor activities.
7. Where a tenant has texted Seaside to confirm they are attending an event, Seaside should text back to confirm receipt.
8. Seaside’s Managing Agent, BHCC, should send a reminder SMS when attending for a repair or safety check.

**Website and Social Media**

Seaside currently have a website and a Facebook page. The following narrative and recommendations are drawn from both the in-person discussions on the day, and the following online survey. The group rated the usefulness and clarity of information on the website highly on average, and said information was also easy to find on the website. The group agreed that the website provides enough information on how Seaside keeps tenants safe in their homes and how Seaside meets the health & safety regulatory and legal requirements.

We have concerns about the Facebook page and privacy, as being a Seaside Homes tenant is sensitive information, and it may be publicly visible that a tenant is following the Seaside Homes Facebook Page.

More tenant-to-tenant online interaction is desired; to have access to advice about the local area from tenants, to be able to ask questions, and access an online social support network of Seaside tenants.

The website is an important resource, but Seaside needs to be aware that online forms can be difficult for people with learning difficulties and difficulty with spelling, and that getting online can be difficult due to the costs of Wi-Fi, data, and devices. There shouldn’t be anything that tenants can *only* access/apply for via the website, there should always be ways to do this offline as well.

**Recommendations:**

1. Explore if there is a way to ensure that it is not publicly visible that people are following the Facebook page, for example making the Page private.
2. Raise awareness of the website and Facebook page to tenants.
3. Raise awareness of the Decorating, Gardening and New Possibilities Schemes.
4. Ensure there are always alternatives to using the website. Do not make it mandatory to contact Seaside via the website, or apply to schemes via the website. It’s good to have this as an option, but it is exclusionary for this to be the only option. Offer phone and face-to-face communication. Make sure it is really clear that there alternative routes.
5. Explore if there is a way to create a private tenant forum on the website or social media so that tenants can communicate with one another and build community.
6. Make the Seaside Homes office hours clearer on the website.
7. Add information on Housing Officers on the website, including contact details.
8. Review the information provided about the Gardening, Decorating and New Possibilities Schemes to ensure these are clear, simple, easy to understand, and easy to apply.
9. Add recommendations about local health and support services contributed by tenants.
10. Make sure tenants receive a confirmation email when we have submitted an online form so we know it has been received, especially when signing up to an event.
11. Include more information on the Facebook page about Seaside’s performance against targets, Local and national housing news topics, and advice on how to move-on from Seaside to permanent accommodation, health and safety information about your home,

**Tenant Handbook**

The Tenant Handbook is a good resource and that the contents are all relevant and helpful. We do not want to take anything out of the Handbook but suggest making some additions.

**Recommendations:**

1. Include an A4 or A5 flyer in the welcome pack just outlining the Decorating, Gardening, and New Possibilities schemes, as some people don’t read all the info in the handbook and may miss out on these opportunities.
2. Consider posting out a flyer to all tenants outlining these schemes, as longer-term tenants may not be aware.
3. Consider posting out a new copy of the Handbook to all long-term tenants whose copies may be very out of date.
4. Run a competition in the Newsletter for tenants to design a new Front Page of the Handbook.
5. Add information on housing officers to the Handbook, including contact details.
6. Add out of hours contact details for Managing Agent.
7. Add more information on gas and electric meters, including what to do when you move in. For example, British Gas meter cards are only accepted at the Post Office, and if the Post Office is closed you can’t top-up.
8. Add more information about fire alarms and what to do when the alarm goes off but there is no fire.
9. Make it clear in the Handbook that you can request the quarterly newsletter by post, and how to do this.
10. Move the Tenant Engagement section closer to the beginning of the Handbook.
11. Pages 47 and 48 are very helpful. Increase the size of the table on these pages of the handbook so that tenants can write in these more easily.
12. Add more information on Homemove and bidding. Including what the jargon and logos mean on the Homemove website what happens when a bid is accepted, how are we informed?

**Newsletter**

The quarterly Newsletter is a good way to keep tenants informed, especially those tenants who may not regularly visit the website. The tenant contributions – articles, poems, reviews – and the interactive elements of the photography and recipe competitions, are important and help to create a feeling of community. Announcing new staff and board members in the newsletter is good, and the performance information included in each edition is good. We’re pleased to see the resident impact information in the Newsletter; it was good to see shared issues being explored and solutions being proposed and followed through on.

We have concerns about how the Newsletter is formatted on the Seaside website. It is currently uploaded as a PDF flip book, which works well on a laptop or computer, but is difficult to read on a smartphone. Lots of tenants won’t have access to a laptop or tablet and Seaside should format the online version of the Newsletter for a phone screen.

The paper copy of the Newsletter is better than the online version, and Seaside need to make sure that all tenants are aware that they can request the Newsletter in hard copy.

**Recommendations:**

1. Consider sending the Newsletter in hard copy by post to all tenants aged 30+.
2. Send one edition of the Newsletter to all tenants by post (hard copy) to ensure all tenants are aware of the Newsletter and the option to receive it by post.
3. Explore if there is a cheaper way to produce the Newsletter that will facilitate sending it by post (hard copy) to all tenants. For example, its currently very high quality, glossy paper and it would be acceptable to print this on thin, matt paper if this allows Seaside to send it in hard copy to more tenants.
4. Make sure that tenants are aware they can request the Newsletter by post, advertise this by SMS, email, and social media.
5. Change how the newsletter is displayed on the Seaside website. It is easier if the information is formatted so that it fills the screen, and we can scroll through the newsletter.
6. Continue to offer tenant contributions and competitions in the Newsletter.
7. Include more information about local services such as food banks, doctors, dentists and charities in my area.
8. Include information on the opportunities available to tenants, such as the Gardening, Decorating and New Possibilities Scheme, the Tenant Panel and Engagement opportunities.
9. The QR codes are useful, however not everyone has a smartphone so ensure that other options are available – such as a phone number to ring for more information.
10. Include tenant contributed gardening ideas to inspire tenants.

**Conclusion**

Seaside offer a good standard of communication to tenants through several different methods. It’s important that Seaside continue to offer a diverse range of communication methods and ensure that tenants aren’t excluded due to the costs or skillset of digital and online communication. The key issue for Seaside is to raise awareness of what they are offering to make sure that all tenants are aware and can access these. We hope that Seaside consider our recommendations and implement them wherever possible, and we look forward to hearing Seaside’s response to this report.

**Appendix 1: Recommendations**

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