



## **East Midlands Housing Association**

### **Resident Involvement Strategy 2009**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 East Midlands Housing Association is committed to community involvement. This strategy outlines our aims for resident and community involvement in the future and our actions to deliver these aims.
- 1.2 This strategy has been developed during a period of considerable change within the governance structures of East Midlands Housing Association (EMHA). In November 2008 a new group structure was established, with EMHA becoming part of the newly formed East Midlands Housing Group. These structural changes have impacted upon resident involvement in the governance of EMHA in two ways: tenant board membership has been extended; and the regional committee structure, that previously formed part of the governance arrangements within the association, has been disbanded.
- 1.3 As EMHA is part of the East Midlands Housing Group (EMH Group), this strategy statement should be read in conjunction with the EMH Group Resident Involvement Strategy. Both the EMH Group strategy and this EMHA strategy have been developed in partnership with board members, staff and tenants.
- 1.4 This strategy relates primarily to EMHA's general needs and sheltered housing services. A separate service user involvement strategy has been developed for customers accessing our wider support services.
- 1.5 This strategy should also be read in conjunction with the EMHA Youth Engagement Strategy, due for publication by June 2009.
- 1.6 Throughout this document references to the term 'residents' encompasses all tenants and leaseholders of EMHA. Where specified in the context of wider community initiatives this term also includes other people living in the neighbourhoods EMHA operates in.

## 2. Resident involvement in shaping this strategy

- 2.1 In May 2008 residents of EMHA took part in an “away day” at which they were asked their views on what they would like to see in their resident involvement strategy; on current strengths and weaknesses; and on future opportunities for involvement. Nearly 40 tenants attended.
- 2.2 Their feedback has helped shape this strategy document, and can be summarised as follows:
- 2.2.1 **Current strengths** – There was a strong sense that opportunities for resident involvement should remain as local as possible, with opportunities for people to get involved at neighbourhood or scheme level. Corporate events were also considered to be ‘a strength’, including resident conferences and specialist consultative groups looking at policy and continuous improvement initiatives. Training was appreciated and felt to be ‘a strength’. Social activities at sheltered schemes were also valued as a means of getting individuals and wider communities involved.
- 2.2.2 **What needs to be improved?** – Much of the feedback was to do with accessibility and ensuring resident involvement activities are inclusive: not everyone knows what groups are in place or what involvement options are available to them; jargon is sometimes used; younger people are often under represented; arranging adequate transport to events can prove difficult. Communication could also be improved, especially in the area of feedback.
- 2.2.3 **Opportunities for the future** – Themes included youth projects and links with local schools; projects aimed at wider community involvement; open days; establishing links with tenants of other community based landlords; establishing a network of local groups that come together to share ideas; increased choice. This includes: future residents through choice based lettings schemes; involvement in best value reviews and service improvement initiatives; tenant inspections; social events and outings.
- 2.2.4 **Overcoming potential barriers** – The key barriers identified by residents were cultural and language barriers; perceptions of lack of resources including inadequate funding and staff dedicated to resident involvement activities; distance to travel and inadequate access to transport; and overcoming apathy amongst some residents. Ideas for overcoming these were continuing to make use of the language skills of EMHA staff; avoiding holding meetings on religious days (such as Friday’s); and the provision of neighbourhood or scheme based newsletters which are of direct interest of tenants locally; video

conferencing; exploring improved transport arrangements with residents locally.

**2.2.5 Nurturing a culture of involvement** – residents were asked what “buzz words” they would like to see shape their resident involvement strategy and that might influence the kind of organisational culture they would like to see within EMHA. The key words identified are listed below:

- Future shaping
- Two way communication & exchange of information
- Well resourced
- Vocal
- Accessible – broaden the circle of those involved
- A partnership
- Community based
- Fun
- Culturally sensitive
- Fair
- Influencing – “having teeth”
- A voice to the Board
- Diverse - not “one size fits all”
- Group wide framework with local flexibility

**2.2.6 Governance arrangements** – Proposed changes to the governance arrangements within EMHA, outlined above, were presented to tenants and their feedback was invited. Tenants were generally supportive of the proposals and welcomed the stronger tenant representation on EMHA Board. The following issues were raised by residents:

- **Local accountability:** There was some concern that the new structure might prove too centralised with insufficient opportunity for local involvement. A local network of tenants forums was suggested as a possible option to help overcome this concern. It was also thought that these local groups should retain some link with board members in order that they do not become too remote from tenants.
- **Selection of resident board members:** Whilst it was accepted that election should be the default position for resident board member selection, it was felt that this can be superficial if all tenants are involved in the election process as the candidates can be “just names on a piece of paper”. It was also felt that the ability to stand as a tenant board member should be limited to those tenants who have been “active” in some way within the organisation.
- **Learning & development:** Residents felt that there should be a clear code of conduct, training and the opportunity to learn about what board membership involves in practice before standing for election.

### 3. Aims

Through the implementation of its Resident Participation Strategy, EMHA aims to:

- Provide a resident involvement structure that is effective, flexible to local needs, inclusive, culturally sensitive and fair.
- Provide effective mechanisms for residents to participate and influence the governance of EMHA, giving residents a “voice” that is able to help shape the activities and future direction of the organisation and, where appropriate, the EMH Group.
- Ensure that it has a wide range of options for resident involvement, encouraging as many residents as wish to, to participate at a level that suits their circumstances, preferences and aspirations.
- Work in partnership with residents to review and continuously improve the service they receive, responding to their priorities and providing them with genuine opportunities to influence quality and choice.
- Encourage neighbourhood management initiatives that contribute positively to the future sustainability and cohesion of communities and neighbourhoods.
- Contribute to the personal development and help build the capacity of individuals to make a difference to their own lives and those of others.
- Promote good two way communication ensuring that feedback is consistently given to residents letting them know how their views have been taken into account.
- Provide clear, accessible information services.
- Ensure service decision making, priorities and monitoring reflect the wishes and aspirations of residents.
- Effectively target resources to encourage resident involvement initiatives, ensuring that their impact is measured and that they demonstrate high quality outcomes for customers and value for money.
- Promote a positive attitude towards involvement and an organisational culture that is “can do”, “open to ideas” and, when appropriate, “fun” for all involved.

3.2 The structures and means by which these aims are to be put into practice are set out in the sections below. Where appropriate, references are made to arrangements set out in the EMH Group Resident Involvement Strategy. These two documents are complementary and need to be read alongside each other.

## 4. Proposed Resident Involvement Structures within EMHA

4.1 **Appendix 1** of this strategy sets out a formal structure for resident involvement within EMHA.

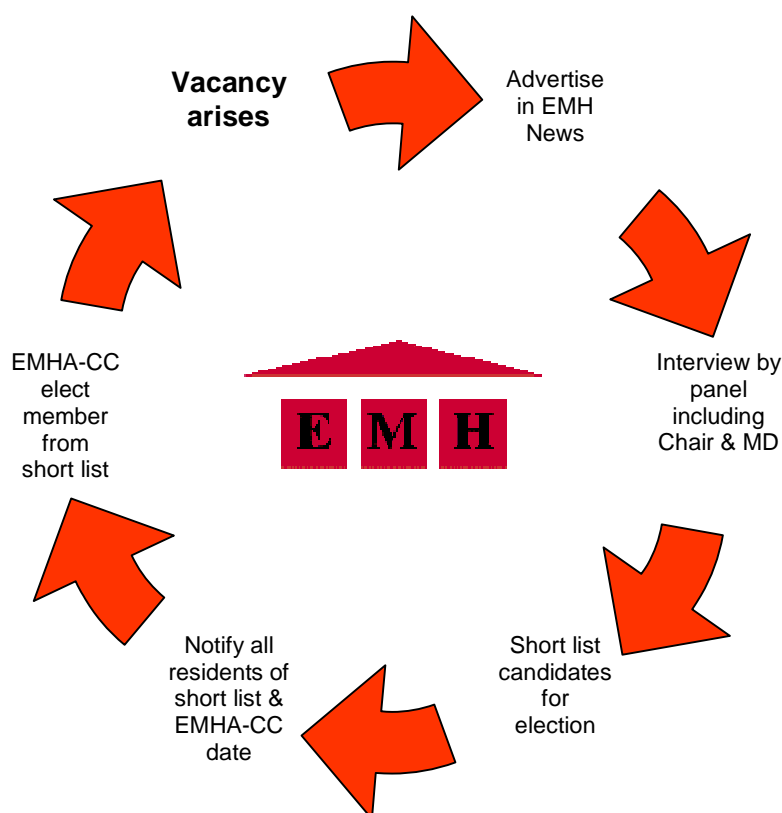
- 4.2 Through this structure, EMHA aims to respond to residents' wishes to ensure that a flexible network of local groups is established, whilst establishing an effective residents' council that is accessible to all; has clear links to EMHA Board; and is able to influence the activities and direction of the EMH Group.
- 4.3 Draft terms of reference for an EMHA Customer Council (EMHA-CC) are contained in **appendix 2**. These will be formalised following discussions with the EMHA-CC when it meets (target date January 2009). An EMHA-CC Code of Conduct will also be developed and agreed with its members.
- 4.4 Whilst membership of the EMHA-CC is open to all residents, it is anticipated that the council will include representatives put forward by other groups within the formal structure. These groups are set out below:
  - 4.4.1 A scrutiny panel is to be established as a sub-group of the customers' council to focus on the performance of EMHA and to scrutinise policy development initiatives.
  - 4.4.2 A Best Value review of leasehold management within EMHA conducted in 2008 identified the need for a forum to discuss issues relating to home ownership. An EMHA Leaseholder Forum is therefore being established as a sub-group of the resident council to respond to this need.
  - 4.4.3 A network of local area panels is to be established, each with representation on the tenant council. The servicing and development of these local area panels is the responsibility of Area Managers within EMHA, supported by the association's neighbourhood liaison officers. Terms of reference for these groups have yet to be developed.
  - 4.4.4 The formation of Residents' Associations is contained within EMHA's menu of options for involvement below. Where formally constituted residents' associations are recognised by EMHA, they will form part of this formal resident involvement structure and will be invited to put forward representation on the EMHA-CC.
- 4.5 An EMH Group Customer Council (GCC) is also proposed, including nominations from the EMHA-CC plus each of the other partner associations within the EMH Group.

## **5. Resident Involvement in the Governance of EMHA**

- 5.1 All residents of EMHA are eligible to be considered for membership of the Board. The Board membership has to have a balanced skills base and prospective new members will be asked to complete a skills audit. In line with the Board Membership Policy, consideration will also be given to the governance related diversity targets set out in our Kaleidoscope strategy.
- 5.2 In line with EMHA residents' wishes set out in section 2 above, EMHA resident board members are to be recruited through the EMHA-CC. As the EMHA-CC is open to all residents, this should not present any barriers to those residents not directly involved in any other form of resident involvement activity within the association.
- 5.3 Recruitment arrangements for EMHA resident board members will be as follows:
- 5.3.1 At the point that it becomes apparent that there is likely to be a resident vacancy on the EMHA Board, an advertisement will be placed in the EMHA resident newsletter inviting expressions of interest. Expressions of interest will also be actively sought from the EMHA-CC, its sub groups and from any residents actively involved in the association through other means set out in this strategy document.
  - 5.3.2 Any tenant wishing to be considered will be asked to submit an application form setting out their skills and experiences.
  - 5.3.3 Interviews will then be undertaken by a panel including the EMHA Managing Director and Chair of the Board to explain to potential candidates the role of resident board member and to further explore their potential skills.
  - 5.3.4 A short-list of suitable candidates will be produced, and the EMHA-CC will be invited to elect their preferred candidate. Details of these short-listed candidates and of the date of the EMHA-CC meeting at which the election is to take place will be advised to all residents in good time (usually via the residents' newsletter) with an open invitation to attend and vote should they so wish.
  - 5.3.5 Those candidates not successful, but who have demonstrated suitable skills, may be held on a reserve list and may be invited to attend some Board meetings, as observers, so that they become familiar with how the Board works. Should a vacancy then arise, an election will again be held.

5.3.6 Each board member shall be elected for a fixed period, usually of three years, expiring at the end of an annual general meeting. At the end of this term of office, resident members may put themselves forward for re-election following the process set out above. In line with EMHA’s membership policy, Board Members may service for a maximum of three consecutive terms of office i.e. 9 years (this being three year terms and a maximum of three terms in office).

5.4 Arrangements for resident board members recruitment are summarised in the diagramme below:



5.5 Details of how to be considered for membership of the EMHA Board will be publicised in newsletters, on the EMHA web pages and in the EMHA Tenants’ Handbook.

## 6. Menu of Options for Consultation and Involvement in EMHA

6.1 EMHA is committed to ensuring that tenant and resident involvement is open to all. In order to encourage people to get involved, EMHA have

developed a menu of options for consultation and involvement that go beyond those set out in the formal structure described above. This menu includes the following options, some of which are facilitated by EMHA and some by the EMH Group:

- **Resident Sounding Board** – telephone/postal consultative group of residents expressing an interest in getting involved in a range of topics or activities.
- **Residents' newsletters** – including consultative articles inviting feedback and participation. The newsletter will be produced at least four times each year and residents participate in its editorial panel.
- **Customer Research & Surveys** – residents can take part in a range of telephone, internet, text and postal surveys plus focus groups to help assess residents' views and measure performance. Surveying of the wider community will also take place to understand the aspirations of neighbours and the impact our services have on wider neighbourhoods.
- **Residents' associations** – groups formally recognised by EMHA's board will be affiliated to the EMHA-CC will receive funding and support.
- **Appointment and selection of contractors for major works** – EMHA actively involves residents in the prioritisation of programmes of major works programmes and in the selection, appointment and monitoring of key contractors.
- **Mystery Shopping** – tenant involvement in helping assess the delivery of the services promises set out within the customer care policy
- **Website consultations and discussions** – residents will be invited to participate in decisions over the content and development of the EMHA website. Electronic feedback on the content and structure of the website itself and on the activities of the association is encouraged via email links from the site.
- **EMH Group resident conference** – annual event open to all tenants and leaseholders within the EMH Group
- **Fun days and social events** – organised locally for EMHA residents
- **Training** – Annual training plans will be agreed with the EMHA-CC including access to reduced rate training via the Learning Equals Partnership
- **EMHA-CC and sub group membership** – open to all residents of EMHA. Open meetings held regularly and widely publicised to encourage wider involvement. This group is able to nominate members to attend the EMH Group Customer Council. The EMHA-CC also has a range of resident sub groups including a Scrutiny Panel, Local Area Panels and a Leaseholder Forum.
- **Tenant led improvements** – budget devolved to a panel of residents to decide on support for projects “bid” for locally by other residents
- **Youth projects** – to encourage younger residents to become more active within communities and to help build capacity through mentoring and sponsoring them and rewarding their involvement

- **Community Groups** – providing resources to support existing and develop new community groups and involving those groups in the work of EMHA.
- **Incentive schemes** – the development of schemes to reward involvement and residents who consistently meet their tenancy terms (EMHA Gold).
- **Competitions** – the use of competitions to encourage involvement and raise awareness of services available to tenants
- **Neighbourhood Inspections** – residents joining with staff, the police and local councillors to carry out estate inspections and develop local action plans for neighbourhood improvement and crime reduction
- **Diversity User Groups** – including a disability user group and other resident groups to support the delivery of the EMH Group Kaleidoscope Strategy.
- **Best Value and Continuous Improvement** – residents are invited to participate in a range of EMHA and EMH Group best value review and quality initiatives designed to promote excellence and continuous improvement.
- **Tenant Management Organisations** – providing support, encouragement and guidance to residents who want to explore Tenant Management options.

## **7. Ensuring equality of access & cultural sensitivity**

- 7.1 The EMH Group resident involvement strategy sets out the steps that the Group and its partner associations will take to ensure that resident involvement is accessible to all and that the individual needs of residents are understood and where possible, met.
- 7.2 As the need for cultural sensitivity was a particular need identified by EMHA residents at the away day at which this strategy was discussed, guidance for staff has been produced in a document entitled “Celebrating Diversity”. This has been published on Pitstop, the EMH Group’s Intranet, and on the EMH Group’s website ensuring that it is accessible to residents who might wish to organise resident involvement activities.
- 7.3 Diversity related targets for resident involvement within EMHA and arrangements for their monitoring are contained within the EMH Group Kaleidoscope Strategy.

## **8. Future Resident Involvement Activities within EMHA**

- 8.1 EMHA will continue to work with its residents to establish their aspirations and the continued development of effective mechanisms to influence services. An action plan, setting out the resident involvement activities

agreed with the EMHA-CC will be developed and reviewed annually. Progress in its delivery will be reported to future EMHA-CC meetings.

## **9. Review of this Strategy**

8.1 This document will be reviewed annually. Its impact and the organisation's performance against targets will be reported to the Board of Management once per year and to the EMH Group Board.

8.2 We are committed to measuring the impact of resident involvement in our activities and, reporting this back to residents. This will be done via an annual report to all EMHA residents outlining:

- the impact that residents' views have had on our choices during the year;
- the number and nature of complaints received in the year, their outcomes, and lessons learned;
- a progress report on the Association's Service Review and continuous improvement programmes;
- key performance indicators for the association;
- a summary of feedback from customer surveys and questionnaires completed during the year;
- a summary of feedback from any mystery shopping research undertaken during the year.

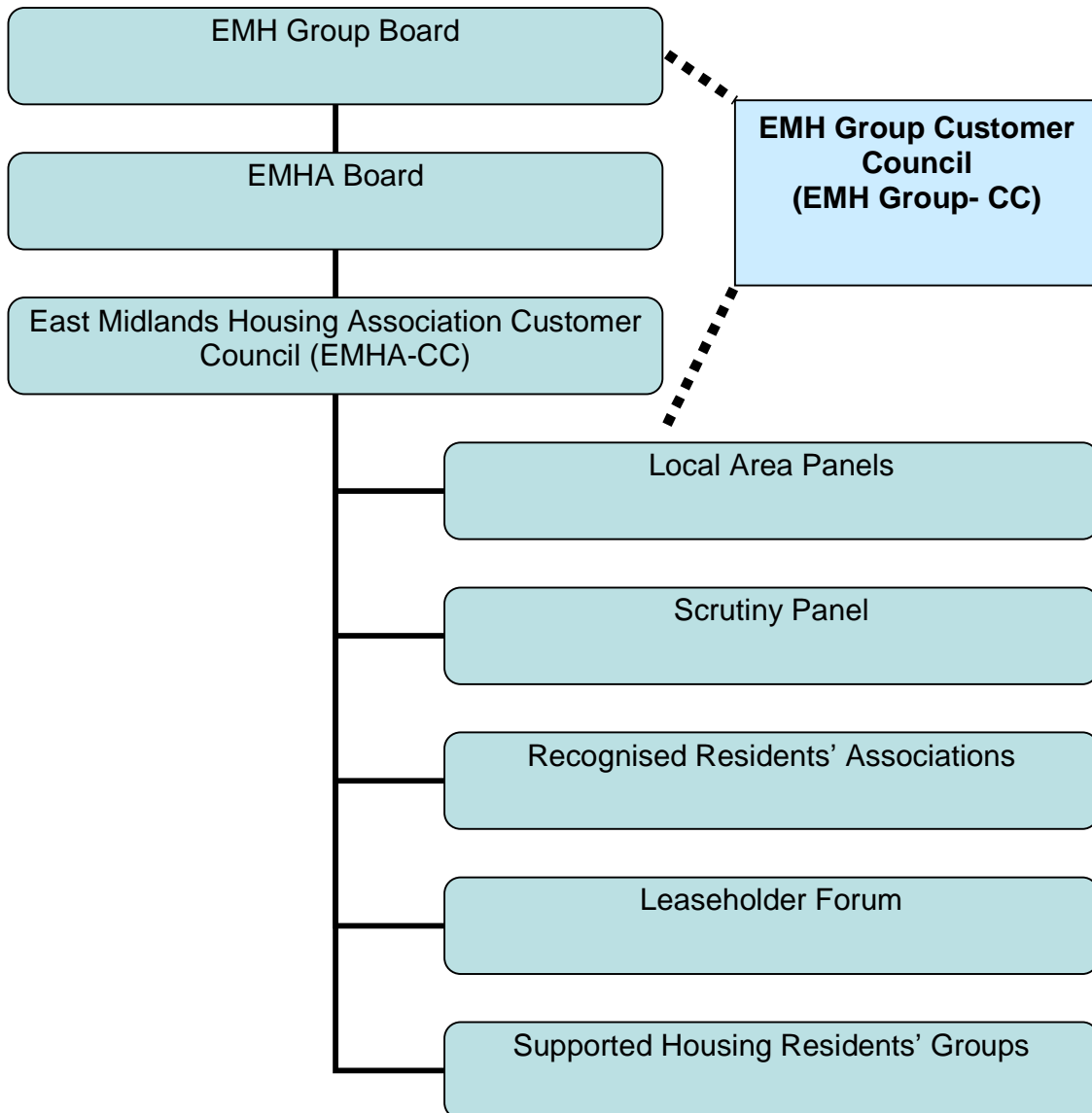
8.3 Further details of the EMH Group approach to resident involvement impact assessments are set out in the EMH Group resident involvement strategy. A copy of this is available on request or can be downloaded from the EMH Group website [www.emhgroup.org](http://www.emhgroup.org).

## **9. Associated Documents**

9.1 This strategy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- EMH Group resident involvement strategy
- EMHA Supported Housing Service User Involvement Strategy
- EMHA Youth Engagement Strategy (due for publication June 2009)
- Guide to resident involvement within EMHA
- Guide to setting up a residents' association within EMHA
- Kaleidoscope: Access for All (diversity) strategy
- Membership policy of EMH Group
- Board Members' Code of Conduct

### Proposed Resident Involvement Structure within EMHA



**Draft Terms of Reference for the East Midlands Housing Association Customer Council (EMHA-CC)**

1. To act as a consultative body on all matters relating to the development and provision of customer services.
2. To monitor performance in key areas of customer service and involvement.
3. To contribute to the identification of business priorities for EMHA.
4. To drive the development of customer service standards and continuous improvement.
5. To report to the Board on key outcomes and influence decisions relating to service delivery and performance.
6. To respond to policy initiatives locally, regionally and nationally.
7. To contribute to the development of neighbourhood management and community cohesion strategies and initiatives.
8. To provide a pool of residents willing to attend events and forums designed to extend the organisation's understanding of government and regulatory requirements.
9. To help promote diversity within the association.
10. To elect customer representatives to the Board.
11. To nominate members to the EMH Group Council.
12. To participate in appropriate learning and development activities.
13. To establish service and service appropriate sub groups.
14. To monitor the EMHA-CC Code of Conduct.