

Review Date 31/3/2017

Engaging with Residents

Ascham Homes aims to make sure decisions taken are fair and that they take into account customers opinions.

When do we consult with residents?

In general, Ascham Homes will consult with residents when we are making big changes that will affect them. There are some situations when we would always consult with residents.

- If the landlord is thinking of making changes to the management, maintenance, improvement or service provision of properties or thinking of demolishing properties or if there will be any changes that are likely to have a big effect on tenants
- Leaseholders must be consulted before landlords enter into long term agreements with contractors where the costs are more than a certain amount and/or before entering into a contract to carry out works costing more than that amount.

There are also some documents which we have said that we will always consult with residents on:

- The tenancy agreement
- The tenant or homeowner handbook
- The lease
- The transfer agreement
- Any other contract we have with residents.

Consultation can take many forms and be formal or informal.

The reason that we consult with residents is to try and get a better understanding into how the changes affect different groups, especially when the change could have a big effect on residents who need extra help.

When changes to **supported/sheltered housing** are being considered we will always consult.

Laws around consultation

There are laws around how consultation is carried out set out. There are 4 main rules set out which are reflected in the 'Ascham Homes Code of Practice':

1. Consultation must take place at an early stage in planning and must take place before a decision has been made
2. There must be enough information and the reasons for the changes must be clear so that residents know what is happening and clearly understand all the options
3. Time must be given for the plans to be understood and for views to be given
4. The results of the consultation must be taken into account before plans are finalised

Minimum typical consultation periods

Ascham Homes will generally hold consultation for at least twelve weeks. Occasionally it will be suitable to consult for less time but not because of urgency. Ascham Homes will generally allow at least a month for customers to respond; if more time is needed that will be considered and if incorrect information is provided, more time will be given for consultation. Consultation can take place in different ways and will be delivered in a way that suits the people taking part. What is

essential is that everyone being consulted is able to take part, whether in person, via residents' meetings, in writing (including by e-mail) or by telephone.

Where another organisation is involved

If another organisation is involved in the process, they might want to introduce their own timings. Ascham Homes must be clear to the other organisation about how much time we need because we need to consult. We also need to ask the other organisation what their plans for consultation are.

There needs to be a plan in place

We will put in place an action plan or timeline before consultation begins which sets out who we plan to consult, what we will consult about, the timescale and what the results might be. When there are changes as the plan takes shape we will inform people of what those modifications are and any changes to the timescale.

Fairness to all - considerations

It is important that people are treated fairly; particularly on grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. The effect that the proposal has on those groups should be taken into account and the consultation methods should be suitable for these groups, the most hard to reach or the most vulnerable. If the proposal has a big impact on people who speak a different language, translation may be required.

There must be enough information given and the reasons for the proposal must be clear and easy to understand.

A consultation document should be easy to understand and clearly set out the proposals, giving the real reasons for them being considered. Also, it should be obvious which Ascham Homes' favourite option is and alternatives should be given to that option. The finances, reasons and stage that the process is up to should be clear and accurate.

It is also important that someone is a point of contact for queries, requests for more information and/or complaints about the consultation process. That person's contact details should be available and they should be contactable in a variety of ways.

If the plans change a lot because of consultation then there could be a requirement for new consultation around the new plan.

Customers should be made aware of the consultation through various methods e.g. leaflets, posters, meetings.

Availability of consultation papers

Documents should be made available to as many relevant people as possible, not just those attending a meeting. The documents should be available through both electronic and paper copies and other suitable methods. Customers should never be prevented from taking part in a consultation exercise because they are not internet users.

Face to face consultation

It is important that face to face communication takes place when consulting because it builds the relationship and also means that people who may not respond to written communications can take part. Notes should be taken about what was said in face to face meetings and made available to the customer.

Surveys are useful but should be used alongside other consultation methods.

The decision making process

Responses to the consultation should be considered fairly and with an open mind and all responses must be taken into account. The results should be made easily available along with the reasons for the decision. Once the decision has been made, residents should receive in writing what the decision is, the reasons why it was made and how their views were taken into account. The board will take the opinions from the consultation into account. However it is important to understand that proposals could still proceed even though our residents may have differing views about it.

When looking at the responses it never simply a matter of counting votes. Factors considered include:

- Possible new approaches to the question(s) being consulted on
- Extra information on what the outcomes of the proposal may be, especially if there is a concern that the proposal could have a negative effect impact
- Levels of support among particular groups
- Any new information which might come to light

As wide a range of residents and stakeholders as possible should be consulted. A pressure group with a single aim must not dominate the debate.

Notes of both formal and informal responses should be kept on record to make sure that everyone's views are taken into account.

If you have any queries about resident consultation please contact Ascham Homes on 020 8496 4197.



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