Policy: Client Involvement and Empowerment
Updated January 2017

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1. Introduction

Transform is committed to involving clients and tenants to ensure that the service we offer is the best it can be and that we are supporting people to achieve their personal aims and aspirations and to maintain their independence, often after a difficult time in their lives. We understand that people may want to be involved in different ways and so our aim is to enable people to get involved in whichever way they prefer and to whatever extent they would like. Transform is fully committed to the HCA’s Involvement & Empowerment Standard and our local offer as set out in the following pages.

The organisation has recently changed significantly by merging with Cherchefelle Housing Association. Transform has nearly doubled in size and now provides home care as well as housing and support. It is important that our approach to client involvement is relevant to all those to whom we offer services.

2. How do we involve and empower those to whom we provide housing and/or support?

2.1 On a one-to-one basis both through keywork and directly:

First and foremost our objective is to agree individual goals with each and every person through keywork. This will involve regular meetings with a named member of Transform staff, who will agree goals with the person and then support them to achieve those goals and to take a pride in their achievements. Staff will also encourage people to participate in their wider community and support them to express their views about issues which affect them.
When possible, we involve people directly in the services we provide to them – for example:

- The management of their housing, including decisions about redecoration works, the timing of maintenance work etc.
- Any plans for major changes to maintain or improve their homes
- The design of new properties/projects – both before the development takes place, choosing colour schemes where possible, and afterwards by asking clients to give us feedback about the design of new properties
- Their views on the running of their home and Transform generally (through the annual satisfaction survey)
- Their views on particular issues which affect them (through the newsletter)
- Those clients who request maintenance work directly are asked their views on the quality of the work undertaken
- Any changes to the levels of service being provided

When we consulted clients about how they would like to be involved, the most popular response was that they ‘wanted to give something back’ to Transform. Consequently, many clients have supported us with fundraising by sharing their stories, allowing us to use the stories on social media and helping at events. Some have even supported us by participating in Transform’s video, which can be found on Transform’s website.

We consult with all clients in a number of ways to check that they are happy with the services and support they receive from Transform: through the annual Client Satisfaction Survey and through Exit forms when people leave Transform. When they have given consent, we also contact people several months or so after they have left a service, to establish whether the support they received has had a lasting impact. Where possible we arrange for a client to analyse our survey results to ensure they are robust and accurate.

2.2 At a service level as part of a group:

Many of our services are provided within hostels or shared houses and so we consult with clients on issues of mutual interest such as the levels of service provided and house rules. We hold regular tenants meetings and house meetings at many of our properties as a way of involving clients, providing information and seeking feedback. We also arrange regular themed meetings and invite guest speakers to local meetings talking about topics of interest to people in that particular service, such as move-on possibilities, local support networks, and so on.

We run coffee afternoons and social events, mindful of what groups of clients would like to do and arrange seasonal activities and outings. Summer barbecues are popular and some groups of clients have very much enjoyed walks in the countryside. Some groups have enjoyed craft activities; others cookery sessions and house meals.

We encourage peer support when possible, with clients and former clients supporting one another. The recovery groups in the Farnham area are a positive example of this.

In some of our services we have ‘guesting arrangements’, whereby people sample living in a scheme for a short while, so they can get a feel as to whether it is the right place for them and others already in the house can express a view as to whether that person would fit in.

Work is also in hand to develop day time activities at Hersham Road in Elmbridge, with external agencies providing advice and support around health, wellbeing and employability.
3. How do we involve and empower those to whom we provide home care?

We enable individuals in our regulated home care services to live in their own homes and to live as independently as possible. We provide a flexible local service to meet clients’ changing needs in a way that maximises their choice. We provide quality care and support according to people's personalised support plans and we place the clients' needs and priorities at the centre of the support process. We respond appropriately to any comments or suggestions both from clients and their families. We promise to be open and honest if things go wrong and we use client and stakeholder feedback to improve our services.

Where we provide support to a large number of clients in a compact geographical area (such as Ewell Village and Sunbury) we will aim to have meetings at those locations at least once a year to enable clients to give feedback in person.

4. How do we involve and empower all our clients and tenants at an organisational level?

We are committed to providing opportunities for all our clients and tenants to be involved in Transform at an organisational level. We have established a Client Forum which has been actively involved in a number of aspects of Client Involvement including:

- Ensuring accountability in keeping the Promises made to clients in recent years
- Reviewing key policies such as feedback and complaints, safeguarding, dealing with anti-social behaviour, what clients can expect from Transform etc.
- Helping with the development of a new Client Handbook for housing and support services
- Reviewing the recruitment policy, helping in the development of a library of questions that clients would like to ask prospective Housing & Support Officers and encouraging other ways for clients to be involved in recruitment at a local level
- Advising on the approach to digital inclusion

We aim to consult a wider group of clients and tenants via maintaining an ‘Editorial Panel’ of people who have expressed an interest in reviewing policies and practices and also by occasional roving consultation exercises, for example meeting with groups of people across the organisation to look at different sections of the new Client Handbook for housing and support services in detail. Now the organisation has increased in size, we envisage doing this more, building on the work that Cherchefelle used to do, when they met groups of tenants and clients in different locations to help inform the organisation’s newsletter and to receive feedback on service delivery.

Cherchefelle’s annual Access Day is a popular event that we have already been asked to continue with.

We have developed a series of Training Modules (another priority cited by clients) and clients have actively contributed to the Training Modules group, drawing on their own experiences to help inform the work.

For those people who live in accommodation provided by Transform we publish the housing management standards people can expect to receive (for example with regard to repairs and maintenance) and we seek feedback about the quality of service provided. We then publish our performance once a year so that people can see if we have met the required standards and, indeed, if the standards are set at the right level.
For all clients and tenants, we encourage feedback through our complaints and feedback policy and leaflet.

5. Our inclusive approach

Whether a client receives housing support, attends regular keywork meetings or is in receipt of home care, we have a range of methods to try and ensure an inclusive approach throughout the organisation:

**Accessibility:**
We aim to make key information as clear, concise and accessible as possible. In addition to standard correspondence and, where applicable, rent statements, accessible handbooks have been developed in close collaboration with clients, including an easy read version for those with a learning disability. Local notice boards provide information of relevance to local clients and stakeholders and our Feedback and Complaints leaflets and forms have been made as simple and clear as possible. We also produce an accessible ‘Value for Money’ statement each year specifically for our clients and tenants.

Key documents are available in large print and audio format, including our newly launched Transformer Newsletter and the Annual Review. Clients and tenants have been consulted about what they would like to see in their newsletter post-merger and it is anticipated that this will adapt over time.

We also keep a register of staff who are fluent in a range of languages, including British Sign Language and Makaton, to enable us to ensure that no-one is excluded from the opportunity to express their views. Consultation meetings with clients in particular services are tailored to ensure that they are engaging for the people involved.

**Use of technology:**
Mobile devices such as laptops enable staff to support clients to access the internet and to carry out key tasks on line. In addition, much information is also available on the Transform website and it is planned to enhance this over time, to supplement information provided in the handbooks when clients, tenants or their families want to find out more. In the Crescent in Woking, a new training suite enables clients to access the internet and to work with staff and others to access helpful information.

6. How do we let clients know about how to get involved?

6.1 When they first join the service
People are made aware about the opportunities for getting involved when they first join Transform. Each person is given a document outlining their rights as a client of Transform Housing & Support, the level of service they can expect to receive and the fact that they are welcome to become involved in influencing the service provision if they would like to. They are also given a leaflet and a simple form offering the opportunity to provide feedback or make complaints.

6.2 Through regular updates in our Transformer newsletter
We publish the Transformer at least three times a year. One edition each year is used to publish key performance information, so we can demonstrate to clients whether we have achieved the standards we promised to achieve. We actively promote opportunities to get involved through the Transformer.
Clients are given information through the Transformer newsletter about:

- Responses received from surveys
- The rent or charges made for different types of schemes
- Performance on maintenance response times and how quickly repairs are carried out
- The degree of success in collecting rent and service charges
- The number of void properties
- How quickly homes have been relet
- What they have been consulted about and what they said
- Diversity issues.

6.3 Via our website

We have a special page dedicated to Client Involvement in the client area of our website, where we highlight some of the ways in which people can get involved. We review it regularly to ensure that it is up-to-date.

6.4 Through house meetings, or theme meetings

These face-to-face meetings with groups of people provide opportunities to consult about local project issues, community issues or broader organisational issues concerning Transform.

6.5 Active client involvement is encouraged in the following ways:

- Through regular keywork sessions. In addition, individual support reviews are carried out when individuals will have the opportunity to comment on the service they receive and make suggestions for changes.
- A client satisfaction survey is given to all clients and tenants annually. Staff respond to individual comments wherever this is requested. The results will be analysed and any changes suggested will be considered and implemented where appropriate.
- Each year regular events are organised. Whilst essentially social in nature (for example, barbecues), senior staff and Board members attend in order to give people an opportunity to comment on the services they receive and raise issues.
- Staff will support clients in forming groups, where views will be sought on matters affecting them. Groups may be ad hoc and set up to look at particular matters affecting them at a particular time.
- Those who complete support plans are encouraged to complete a form stating how they would like to be involved. Clients who complete the form are then approached for their views on policies and procedures, and a whole range of other things.
- Groups of clients living in the same house are encouraged to attend regular house meetings to discuss all aspects of the management of their accommodation.
- Themed meetings provide an opportunity to engage with clients over a range of issues, both in respect of Transform and the wider community.
- Looking forward, in collaboration with tenants and clients, we will be looking at new ways to involve people, such as holding bespoke meetings for older people in the sheltered schemes where there are a large number of people receiving care and support or, perhaps, focused sessions for particular client groups, such as people with a learning disability.

7. Providing feedback

It is vitally important to provide feedback so that people know that their input is making a difference. This will be achieved in a number of ways, depending upon how each person was involved in the first place. Keywork is clearly important, as are house meetings, when views
have been sought at those meetings. Other feedback can be provided on a one-to-one basis, through the Transformer newsletter, or via the website as appropriate.

8. How can we be held accountable?

There are a number of ways in which clients and others hold us accountable – not the least the Client Forum having oversight of the promises and commitments that we make. The Management Board have a representative attending the Client Forum and the Board receives a brief report on Client Involvement at every quarterly meeting.

In addition, there are a number of specific measures to ensure that we are accountable:

- The Feedback & Complaints process - any complaints received about Transform are logged and reports provided to the Senior Management Team and Board
- There is a robust staff supervision and appraisal system in place, which ensures that all staff perform to the level expected by Transform
- Clients have a right of access to their files, in accordance with Transform's policy
- Leaflets and the Client Handbook sets out the standards clients and their families or advocates can expect to see, for example about being treated fairly and with respect
- Clients have the ability to provide feedback through annual questionnaires, exit questionnaires, maintenance feedback requests, and so on.
- Clients who attend keywork meetings have regular support reviews where they have an opportunity to give feedback on the support and/or accommodation they receive.
- Clients are involved in the recruitment of new staff, whether by suggesting questions to be asked at interview, or meeting prospective staff as part of the recruitment process.
- Statistical results of our performance are published in the Annual Review, client newsletter and Value for Money report
- Policies and procedures are reviewed regularly and scrutinised by the Client Forum.

Transform is also accountable to external regulators: the Care Quality Commission in respect of home care services and local authority funders in the case of support services. We are also accountable to the Homes and Communities Agency to ensure we meet regulatory requirements and to our funders to ensure contractual compliance. Investors in People accreditation is also an independent means of ensuring our performance is in accordance with stated standards.

9. Policy review

Recognising that this is a period of change, it is proposed that we use the next year, in close collaboration with the Client Forum, to review how client involvement is working in practice, with a view to checking that the policy is still fit for purpose in April 2018.