



COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Issue No	2 (Updated June 2014 to Group Policy)
First Approved	November 2004
Last Reviewed	December 2007
Review date	August 2013
Date of Next Review	December 2018
Review Requirement	5 Yearly

ORE VALLEY GROUP

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Policy Purpose

Ore Valley Housing Association is the parent company of the Ore Valley Group, which has 3 subsidiary companies, namely Ore Valley Enterprises, Fife HARCA and Cardenden Heat and Power (CHAP).

The purpose of this document is to set out the Association and its Subsidiaries strategy for communication at all levels, within the Group, with external agencies and with individual service users bringing together a clear statement of policy with more detailed procedures.

This communications strategy Policy and Procedures is intended to provide best practice to employees, volunteers and Board members, as to how effective communications can:

- help us achieve our overall organisational objectives;
- engage effectively with our customers;
- demonstrate the success of our work;
- ensure people understand what we do;
- change behaviour and perceptions where necessary.

Policy Statement

The Ore Valley Group embraces the belief that effective communication is central to the delivery of high quality services.

Service delivery to our customers is our primary reason for existence, therefore activity related to the delivery of service, either direct or supporting, is of critical importance.

To be effective, communication must be appropriate, be clearly presented, in a consistent and non-discriminatory manner.

The Ore Valley Group's communication strategy Procedures sets out the manner and standard in which we will communicate with each other at all levels.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

OV Group Procedure

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Communication Strategy Procedures

Boards and Committees

Board and Committee meetings are scheduled in advance.

Meeting agendas & papers will be prepared and circulated to Board Members, one week in advance of the meeting to allow adequate time for members to review papers in advance. Occasionally papers may be tabled at the meeting, in these circumstances the Board will decide whether to consider the paper or defer consideration to the next meeting.

Copies of all non-confidential Board and Committee papers will be circulated to staff with copies of these also being available within an accessible directory. Non-confidential minutes of Board and Committee meetings will also be placed in the Association's reception area for customers and members of the public to read.

Board and Committee Papers detailing policies and procedures relating to Housing Management and Property Maintenance issues, which will impact directly on our customers, will be considered by the appropriate Board from where they will be referred to Fife Federation of Tenants & Residents Associations, (FFOTRA), for review and comment.

As part of its Tenant Participation Strategy, the Association has entered into a service level agreement with FFOTRA, to support the delivery of that strategy through ongoing open dialogue, to ensure that we maintain direct input from an organisation which supports the tenant movement in Fife.. FFOTRA will elect a minimum of one representative to serve on the Association's Board.

The Board will have an annual away day to which staff may be invited; the aim of the away day will be to discuss strategic direction in a less formal environment. It is likely that these discussions will be related to delivery and review of the objectives of the Business Plan.

Staff, Volunteers and Board Members

The Ore Valley Group needs good Board - Management-Staff relations in order to function at a high level. Poor communication means that individuals feel left out of decision making and are much less likely to put in that extra effort.

Striving to have good communications equals a happier and more productive workplace, good communication helps the Association operate as a whole rather than a collection of parts.

Regular Contact - One of the best ways to encourage communication is keeping a channel open through regular contact. For line managers and their teams, it is achieved through weekly team meetings, which provide a channel for communication at set, predictable times that people can plan for and count on. The CEO will attend these meetings on an ad-hoc basis. The minutes from these meetings will be circulated to all staff with a copy being placed on the system at General/Staff Information/Minutes of meetings.

The Importance of AOCB - AOCB is the abbreviation for Any Other Competent Business on a meeting's agenda. To encourage a good two-way flow of information, leave time open for members to raise other issues or general discussion.

Staying Well-Balanced - Gaps between management and staff can widen if communications become narrow or stereotyped, such as only discussing performance targets or problem areas, or being forever cheery and upbeat. Adding a few balancing questions can make communications more well-rounded and keep people engaged. A meeting focused on problems can be balanced by an interest in people's successes.

Being Open and Realistic - While it might not be feasible to be completely transparent about everything all the time, it's better to say outright if you aren't in a position to talk about something than ignore an elephant in the room. Similarly, being open about what can't be done or guaranteed, is better than offering promises or assurances that may not materialize.

Making communication worthwhile - The aim of communication is to understand one another, but people also need to feel that the talk has been worthwhile. Managers and Staff can become discouraged and close off, if they consistently leave meetings empty handed, especially for issues that are causing them concern. Sharing possible solutions, brainstorming different options or offering suggestions can assist the individual work their way through a challenge.

Following Up - Following up on what's been discussed is important for showing care and interest. It can be an occasional update or printout of a relevant article, but follow-ups will always have a more positive impact if offered unsolicited i.e. without having to be chased or reminded.

As with so many things, good communication between staff depends as much on quality as quantity.

With the above said, there is a balance to be found between discussing issues and then getting the work done to attend to that issue.

Monthly Full Team Meetings - will be held when the whole staff team of the Association is present, the purpose of these meeting is to provide on the organisation and agree priorities for the way forward, as well as offering an opportunity for the exchange of information and a forum for bringing forward new ideas.

It is anticipated that team meetings will last approximately 2 hours, during which time; the office may be closed to the public.

Communication is something we do reflexively -- like breathing. We talk to our family friends without giving much thought to how we're doing it. It might seem easy, but communicating effectively takes a conscious effort. Choosing the right words, listening with our minds instead of just our ears, and getting our message across are skills that we all need to work on.

At home and in social settings, miscommunication can lead to arguments. In the workplace, the repercussions can be far more serious; ineffectiveness and demotivated employees.

To contribute to healthy communication within our teams and throughout the Ore Valley Group, we need to adhere to a few easy but important aspects of our philosophy and practice.

Our interface with each other on a day to day basis is a crucially important aspect of our working relationship. In all communications, however difficult, and in

whatever form, they must be conducted in a courteous and polite manner and in an appropriate and non-confrontational tone.

To prevent small conflicts from escalating into major crises, the issue should be addressed right away. The Board and Staff are responsible for creating a safe environment in which we all feel comfortable being honest and openly voicing our frustrations. All conversations held within our office, must remain completely confidential.

If you are required to respond to a conflict, do so with an open mind and a non-judgmental approach. That means absolutely no personal attacks, ask questions and really listen to the responses, so you understand how each person in the dispute feels, you can help the two parties reach a resolution that's acceptable to everyone. Finally, if you feel that an Ore Valley HA policy is responsible for the issues, pass your thoughts onto your line manager with some suggested policy changes.

All Board, Volunteers and Staff members should be familiar with the [Dignity at Work Policy](#) and be proactive at integrating this into how they present themselves whilst engaged in Ore Valley work.

On an individual basis, any member of staff will always have the opportunity to raise and discuss particular issues with their Manager or the CEO at any time. This is in addition to the Annual Appraisal Process.

There will always be occasions where it is necessary to communicate information on an ad-hoc basis, which will sometimes involve the use of memo or e-mail and in other cases may be as simple as a quick discussion between individuals or groups.

Customers

Our interface with our customers on a day to day basis is probably the most important relationship we have. In all communications, however difficult, and in whatever form, they must be conducted in a courteous and polite manner and in an appropriate non-confrontational tone.

Generally our main contact with our customers will be through either their visit to our office, our visit to their home, their writing to us, contacting us by phone or through the Association's Web Site.

Where we are meeting people face to face or by telephone, we must keep a proper record of our conversation including any advice given, action taken and any follow up required.

Where a customer requests a home visit, we will accommodate the request within a two week period. Timing of the visit will be dictated by the urgency of the matter to be discussed. Staff carrying out home visits must always show their Association ID and must also follow the Association's procedure on personal safety at work.

Contact via e-mail or web-site e-mail will be forwarded to the OVHA e-mail address. This is the first instance will be replied to by the Corporate Support Team. Logs of all incoming and outgoing responses are held on the system [here](#).

All written correspondence and supporting information received must be responded to, the information given or sought must be clear and concise. Information will be produced in large print, on audio tape or translated into another language on request.

General

ITEM	TARGET
Response to written enquiry	5 working days
Acknowledgement of written enquiry if full response cannot be given within target time	3 working days
Acknowledgement of request for permissions	3 working days
Response to request for permissions	28 working days
Telephone calls to be answered	Within four rings
Response to contact through web site.	3 working days

The Association will produce four tenant's newsletters per annum, which will be distributed to all tenants.

All tenants will receive a handbook when they sign up for their tenancy, the handbook will be produced in a format which can be easily updated whenever required.

Tenant's views will be sought on a regular basis through the completion of full tenant satisfaction surveys using independent consultants to complete the survey and associated reports. Mini surveys may also be completed seeking the views of particular groups.

Tenant's views will be sought in relation to the completion of every repair through the use of a tear off section of the works order, which is sent to the tenant.

Additional surveys of tenant's views will be carried out following the completion of every major works contract.

An annual consultation exercise will be conducted in relation to the level of rent increase and the associated service.

The Association aims to hold a Tenant Conference each year in conjunction with the AGM.

Other Agencies

We will co-operate with other agencies whenever we can in the interests of our respective organisations and service users. We will be professional in all of our dealings and ensure that information or support given is accurate, clear and meets timescales requested. Where we are unable to meet requested timescales we will advise the other agency and agree an alternative target date.