

# WELFARE RIGHTS STRATEGY.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Partick Housing Association is committed to the provision of a welfare rights service for the benefit of the community of Partick. This service is free and confidential and not confined to tenants of the Association. The investment in a welfare rights service underlines our commitment to social inclusion and regeneration of the Partick area.
- 1.2 This strategy outlines the broad aims and aspirations of the welfare rights service. The supporting Action Plan sets out the practical measures we will take to ensure implementation of these strategic aims and effective monitoring and evaluation.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 Our primary objective is the provision of an effective Welfare Rights service to the community of Partick. Within this broad objective there are various subsidiary objectives:
  - 2.1.1 To provide high quality information and advice on the full range of welfare benefits;
  - 2.1.2 To ensure equality of access to the welfare rights service;
  - 2.1.3 To promote the service to ensure that a high profile is achieved;
  - 2.1.4 To provide representation at formal appeal tribunals (social security);
  - 2.1.5 To provide advice and training to Housing Association staff on benefit-related issues;
  - 2.1.6 To establish effective liaison with appropriate outside agencies (Department of Work and Pensions, Housing Benefit office, Pensions Centre, etc.);
  - 2.1.7 To ensure that Housing Benefit overpayment issues are dealt with consistently and correctly;
  - 2.1.8 To promote uptake of welfare benefits by organising targeted campaigns;
  - 2.1.9 Where appropriate, to contribute to the development of our policies and procedures to ensure a welfare rights/anti-poverty perspective is fully considered;
  - 2.1.10 To assist in achieving rent arrears "targets";
  - 2.1.11 To maintain a current working knowledge of social welfare law issues; and
  - 2.1.12 To ensure that effective recording systems are in place in order that the welfare rights service can be properly monitored and evaluated.

## 3. BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 This strategy has been developed in line with our key business objectives ***"to develop and deliver an expanding quality customer-driven housing and related service, which is efficient, effective and subject to continuous***

*improvement.” and “to build the capacity and improve the opportunities of the local community to participate both in our activities and community inspired initiatives”.*

#### **4. LEGISLATIVE & STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

4.1 Through the operation of this strategy the Association will demonstrate compliance with the following pieces of legislation:

- The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (Secure Tenants)
- The Housing (Scotland) Act 1988 (Assured Tenants)
- The Children’s Act 1989
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Data Protection Act 1998
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1999
- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 (Scottish Secure Tenants)

#### **5. PERFORMANCE STANDARDS AND GOOD PRACTICE**

5.1 We will, through operation of this strategy and supporting action plan, demonstrate compliance with performance standards as jointly published by Communities Scotland, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) and CoSLA. In doing so we will adopt relevant good practice as promoted by the SFHA, the Chartered Institute of Housing and any other relevant practices which, in our opinion, enhance service delivery to our residents, potential residents and the wider community.

#### **6. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

6.1 The Association is opposed to discrimination in any form and at all levels and it is committed to taking all steps within its power as a service provider to counteract it. Through the operation of this Strategy and supporting action plan the Association will seek to ensure that no one receives less favourable treatment or is disadvantaged by conditions or requirements which cannot be shown to be justified.

6.2 The Association will seek to ensure it provides those affected by this strategy full, clear and accurate information which allows them to make properly informed decisions. Information can be provided in a format which meets various needs. For example, key languages, Braille and audio tape.

6.3 The Association will strive to ensure that it complies with its equal opportunities policy and provide equality of access to its services for all. We will strive to ensure that all groups have equal access to the welfare rights service and that no group is excluded because of age, disability, ethnic origin or sexual orientation.

## **7. COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

- 7.1 The Board is responsible for the adoption of this Strategy and for ensuring staff comply with it. Staff have sole responsibility for managing the service.
- 7.2 Individuals represented on the Board have a duty under Schedule 7 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to declare any interest or conflict they may have in delivering or managing the welfare rights service. Confidential procedures are in place to allow members to declare such an interest.

## **8. COMPLAINTS PROCESS**

- 8.1 Anyone can complain if they feel that the Association has not complied with its welfare rights strategy and procedures.
- 8.2 The complaints process is outlined in the Association's publication "How to Comment, Compliment or Complain" which is available from our offices.

## **9. MONITORING AND REVIEW**

- 9.1 Service provision is monitored in several ways including:
  - Bi-monthly meeting between the Welfare Rights Officer and the Customer Services Manager;
  - Monthly planning meetings between the Director and the Customer Services Manager; and
  - Analysis of reports presented to the Board on a quarterly basis.
- 9.2 The action plan to implement this strategy will be subject to review annually in March. The outcomes from this will be used to inform future key performance indicators and targets.
- 9.3 The Association has agreed to provide this service until April 2007. The Board will discuss the continuation of the service as part of its budget and business planning discussions which are scheduled to commence in November 2006.