

Stakeholder Communications Policy

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1 Policy information

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Drafted by	Marketing & Communications Manager
Contributors	Marketing & Communications Team members
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2 Policy statement

South Liverpool Homes (SLH) is committed to proactive, open, and transparent communications with its colleagues, customers and stakeholders. For the purpose of this policy, customers are tenants and residents (including family members), and stakeholders are listed in the section 4.1 of the report.

Whoever we are communicating with, it's important that we choose channels that are appropriate for the message and use language that aligns with our corporate values. Being transparent and sharing information in an honest and clear way will give stakeholders more clarity about what our objectives are, what their role is, and how it may affect them.

We acknowledge that effective two-way communication is key to building the support, confidence and trust necessary for us to deliver our vision and strategic aims.

This policy sets out the various communication methods SLH uses to keep our customers and stakeholders informed and updated about the work we do and the services we offer. It intends to establish general principles which we will adhere to and help us communicate effectively. It does not include how customers and stakeholders get in touch with SLH.

It also sets out the ways in which we promote and protect our reputation, the use of campaigns to get large-scale messages out to our customers, and how we deal with the media.

3 Policy aims

The aim of the policy is to:

- Ensure all internal and external communications are effective.
- Ensure timely and accurate information is provided to our customers.
- Ensure our customers understand what we do and raise our profile.
- Ensure consistent communication standards are in place throughout the organisation.
- Explain our approach to dealing with the media.
- Promote and protect our brand and reputation.

4 Stakeholder communications policy

4.1. Audience – who are we communicating with?

We have a diverse audience which includes the following:

- Colleagues
- Customers i.e. tenants, local residents, family of tenants, potential tenants

- Key stakeholders. These can include consultants, board members, suppliers/contractors, local councillors/MPs, local authority, government members, The Regulator of Social Housing, community groups, media, funders and other housing associations

4.2. Messages and channels – how do we communicate?

The messaging and channels will vary depending on the audience we are communicating with and why we are communicating with them. We will provide a transparent and timely response to any communication received.

We have a number of formal and informal communication channels that we use regularly.

Colleagues

Colleagues are the ambassadors of our organisation. It is important that we keep colleagues up to date with what is going on around the business, communicating key messages with them before we promote externally.

We have a range of formal and informal communication channels that we use regularly with feedback mechanisms in place to promote an open and two-way dialogue. These communication channels include:

- Emails
- ELT brief
- Team meetings
- Operational meetings
- All-company engagement sessions
- Workplace by Facebook– an internal social media platform
- Microsoft Teams
- Intranet
- Check ins

They exist to ensure colleagues have a full understanding of SLH's vision and objectives and what they need to do to achieve these. They also provide colleagues with the opportunity to share information and best practice with each other as well as giving them the opportunity to ask questions and influence the direction of the organisation.

Customers

Customers are at the heart of everything we do, and we recognise that their needs vary. We tailor our communications depending on message and the needs of the customer.

We regularly communicate with customers through a number of platforms, using digital and non-digital methods:

- Social media – we use Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter) Instagram, LinkedIn and TikTok
- Regular subscriber e-newsletters
- Targeted e-newsletters to groups of tenants
- Bulletin magazine
- Letters
- Phone calls
- Individual emails
- Leaflets/flyers
- Consultation events
- Text message
- mySLH
- Surveys

It is important that we communicate information that is relevant to customers and their tenancy. Getting the right balance of communication is crucial to ensure that we are not 'over-communicating' with our customers, and likewise, to ensure they are not missing out on key information which is important to them.

The communication platform chosen depends on if the message is relevant to individual customers or a group of customers. It is also dependent on regulatory requirements, for example, we are required to send a letter out to every tenant to inform them about the annual rent review.

Key stakeholders

Stakeholders are people or organisations with a direct involvement or interest in SLH. So that we communicate and engage successfully, we need to understand who our stakeholders are, how they prefer to be involved and what they are interested in.

Stakeholder mapping allows us to establish interest and influence, and to identify the most appropriate communication methods and messages for our target audience.

We communicate to our key stakeholder primarily through the following methods:

- Regular subscriber e-newsletters
- 1-2-1 meetings and formal meetings
- Social media – particularly LinkedIn and X
- Individual emails
- Annual Report
- Financial statements

4.3 Tone and language

It is important that the tone and language used in all communications aligns with our corporate values and behaviours:

We Care

We Are Professional

We Are Inclusive

We Take Ownership

We Make It Happen

Guidelines and training will support colleagues.

4.4 Plain English and grammar

All written communication should be written clearly in plain English in a professional and courteous manner. Whilst writing styles may sometimes differ, content should be consistent with our letter-writing toolkit. Some general principles include:

- Use customer-friendly language - avoid using housing jargon and sector-speak. In general, our customers will not understand internal jargon or the acronyms we might use with colleagues.
- Use 'We' not 'I' – it gives a more professional approach and adds credibility to the communication without losing the personal touch.

When writing letters:

- Have a clear subject matter and call to action for the customer if appropriate. If there is no call to action and it's for information-only, make this clear to the customer.
- Ensure there is a consistent style – correct margins and font. Red/coloured text or capital letters should not be used on any written correspondence.
- Use QR codes where possible directing customers to specific SLH be pages where possible. You can request a QR code from the Marketing & Communications Team.

4.5 Promoting and protecting our brand

We provide relevant, timely, accurate information about SLH's achievements, performance and successes on our website, social media channels and the bi-monthly SLH newsletter. We proactively approach the media with timely news stories where appropriate.

We are happy for stakeholders to promote and share our news stories, however SLH is required to sign off any news stories that mention South

Liverpool Homes before they are shared with the media or are released in the public domain.

To protect our reputation, it is equally important to acknowledge when things go wrong, to be open and transparent in these circumstances, to handle the situation with empathy, and to take responsibility for the mistake.

We will monitor, manage and analyse comments on our social media platforms, online reviews and monitor community social media pages such as Speke Past and Present and Garston Past and Present.

4.6 Personal social media accounts

Colleagues play an important role in raising awareness of SLH and increasing our social media reach. We encourage our colleagues to actively share our social media posts among their networks. We aim to empower colleagues to be good ambassadors by giving guidelines for appropriate behaviour and suggestions on how to share SLH's good work without risk of reputational damage.

We value colleagues' freedom of expression but also understand that what they post on their personal social media accounts can have a negative impact on SLH's reputation.

Colleagues should not discuss any aspect of SLH's work that is not in the public domain, or any information that might threaten the privacy of our customers.

Colleagues should not use their private social media accounts to engage in conversations on SLH subjects that are not their specialism, instead referring the conversation to someone with specific knowledge and responsibility.

Colleagues should not engage in conversation about SLH on community Facebook groups and other social media community groups without seeking the advice of the marketing and communications team first.

Colleagues must seek permission from colleagues before posting images from any SLH events on their own social media accounts.

4.7 Campaigns

Campaigns are planned messages over a period of time that aim to deliver a defined and measurable outcome.

We use multi-media campaigns for a number of different reasons. It could be to inform customers on matters that affect them and their tenancy, to encourage people to change their behaviour or to inspire people to get involved with SLH or their community. We will continue to deliver insightful campaigns that deliver clear and engaging messages. All campaigns will involve the relevant manager and will be measured throughout.

4.8 Confidentiality

Colleagues and key stakeholders will be made aware of the need to treat information gained through their relationship with SLH as confidential and should not disclose any information which may be of a sensitive nature to any unauthorised person.

4.9 Dealing with the media

All enquiries from the media should be directed to the Marketing and Communications Manager or, in their absence, the Executive Director of Culture and Communications. Colleagues should not contact the media directly, all proactive correspondence with the media should be done through the Marketing and Communications Team. All SLH senior colleagues will be receive appropriate media training.

4.10 Customer surveys

Different teams across SLH regularly carry out surveys so that they can get customer's feedback on the services we deliver, their home or their community. All colleagues who wish to carry out a survey are required to follow the survey process; this involves completing an online form which is approved by ELT. ELT will consider the purpose of the survey, the intended audience and what SLH will do as a result of the feedback.

4.11 Inclusive communications

One size doesn't fit all and our communications must be tailored to meet the diverse needs of our customers. We will meet customer needs by providing information in accessible formats. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Plain English
- Large print
- Audio
- Braille
- Language translations
- Coloured paper for people with dyslexia or other learning difficulties
- SLH website that is accessible and WCAG compliant (Web content accessibility guidelines)
- Alt text on social media images where possible
- Face to face conversations to explain complex information

When we are communicating with customers or colleagues, we will ask them if they have any communication needs and work with them to meet their needs.

We will ensure that the language we use is inclusive to everyone and no-one feels misrepresented in our communications. This will be covered in our guidance.

Details on inclusive and accessible communication will be covered in more detail in the Interpretation Policy.

5. Standards and performance monitoring

The Marketing and Communications Team will be involved in monitoring this policy to ensure consistency of communications.

The following performance measure will apply:

- Guidance on written and digital communication
- Periodic checks of customer letters to ensure they align with our brand and values
- Internal communications survey
- Customer surveys
- Monthly communications report
- Quarterly communications summary

We will monitor the success of this policy thorough a number of measures including, but not limited to, social media engagement figures, website views, performance figures and employee retention figures.

In reviewing this policy, we engaged with SLH colleagues. The results of this feedback informed any amendments to the policy.

6. Policy review considerations

The policy has been reviewed in line with SLH Policy Review Toolkit ensuring relevant actions under this toolkit, including risk assessment and value for money, have been completed.

7. Equality analysis

An Equality Analysis was completed when developing this policy to ensure any barriers to the policy are identified and actions put in place to either remove or reduce the impact of any barriers.

8. Statutory and legislative framework

SLH has developed this policy in line with the regulatory framework and legislative framework. This includes:

- Equality Act 2010

- Data Protection Act 2018
- Communications Act 2003
- Malicious Communication Act 1988
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Health & Safety Act 1974

9. Links with other policies & documents

This policy should be read and will be supported by the following documents:

- Social media guidelines
- Digital communications guidance
- Written communications style guidelines
- Equality, diversity and inclusion policy
- Customer feedback policy
- Maintaining professional boundaries policy
- Information security policy