

# Resident Involvement and Empowerment Strategy 2010

## Working in Partnership with Residents

### Foreword

The 2010 Resident Involvement and Empowerment Strategy has been produced in consultation with our residents and has been approved by the Residents' Panel and the Milecastle Board.

In developing the strategy, we have taken into account advice from our regulator the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), the changing landscape of 'tenant empowerment' and our own experience of resident involvement and engagement over the past 12 months.

During September and October 2009 we consulted widely with residents through presentations and questionnaires at each of the Residents' Forums, at Roadshow events held in Prudhoe, Hexham and Haltwhistle and at our Residents' Conference.

The consultation resulted in overwhelming support for the establishment of three Service Champions' Groups focusing on Repairs and Planned Maintenance, Grounds Maintenance and Communications; the setting up of a 'Hot 100' postal/on-line Consultative Panel and measures to make the Residents' Forums more attractive and accessible.

The proposal to reduce the frequency of Residents' Forums from bi-monthly to quarterly was contentious, but a clear majority of residents were in favour of change. However, in addition to quarterly meetings, we have introduced the opportunity for Forums to meet informally.

In its document 'A new regulatory framework for social housing in England', the TSA has outlined the standards it will require social housing providers to deliver in relation to 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment'. This includes providing residents with opportunities to influence and scrutinise housing related policies and the delivery of housing related services.

We are confident that our Involvement and Empowerment Strategy not only fulfils the requirements of our regulator, but enables our residents to play a full and active role in helping us provide quality homes in thriving communities!

**Bill Tebay**  
Managing Director

## **The Involvement Framework**

The Residents' Panel is the focal point of Milecastle's involvement and empowerment structure. The Panel considers information and feedback received from all aspects of involvement activity including the Milecastle Board, Residents' Forums and Service Champions' Groups. Recommendations made by the Residents' Panel are passed on to the Board through the PRIDE Group.

In developing the involvement structure, Milecastle has considered the diverse range of communities within its large geographical operational area, each with its own identity, needs and problems. The five area based Residents' Forums are an important 'grass roots' link with residents and local communities.

Three new Service Champions Groups have been established to provide residents with greater opportunities to influence, monitor and scrutinise specific service areas. 'Service Champions' will have access to senior staff and will lead on the annual programme of work carried out by each group.

The need to involve residents who can't or who don't necessarily want to attend meetings is important to Milecastle too. We have set up the Milecastle 'Hot 100', which consists of a panel of residents who have agreed to be consulted by 'on-line' or postal questionnaire, about issues related to being a Milecastle resident. The 'Hot 100' will be refreshed annually, but any resident wishing to join the group can do so at any time.

## **How residents can get involved in 2010**

A range of involvement opportunities are available to residents to enable them to have their say about the services Milecastle provides and to help them shape their local communities.

Consultation - Residents are consulted about any major policy changes that will affect them and residents views will be taken into account before any changes are made. Residents' views are obtained through customer satisfaction surveys and questionnaires.

Newsletters - Milecastle produces a residents' newsletter, 'Milecastle @ home', which is sent to each residents' home on a quarterly basis. The newsletter provides information about what is happening at Milecastle and the wider Isos Group, together with other useful information for residents.

Residents' groups - Milecastle is keen to help and support new groups get 'off the ground'. These groups represent all residents in a local area and pass on views and concerns to Milecastle and/or the appropriate authority.

Home visits - If residents are unable to attend meetings or to join groups, their views are still important to Milecastle. If a resident prefers to speak to a member of staff on a one-to-one basis, a home visit can be arranged.

- Hot 100 - The 'Hot 100' has been set up to give residents who can't or don't want to attend meetings an opportunity to have their say. Over 150 residents expressed an interest in being part of this group during the Involvement Strategy Review carried out in Autumn 2009.
- Service Champions - Service Champions Groups have been established to give residents the ability to influence, monitor and scrutinise specific service areas – currently, Repairs and Planned Maintenance, Grounds Maintenance and Communications. Service Champions Groups each have five members (one per Residents' Forum) and report direct to the Residents' Panel. Service Champions Groups have their own Terms of Reference (attached).
- Residents' Forums - There are five Residents' Forums covering Hexham Town; Hexham Rural; Haltwhistle; Prudhoe and Bellingham, North Tyne and Redesdale areas. Forums meet every three months but can also hold informal meetings at other times. Forums discuss a variety of issues affecting Milecastle residents' and communities and each nominate up to three residents to serve on the Residents' Panel. Each Forum has its own Terms of Reference (attached).
- Residents' Panel - The Residents' Panel is made up of representatives of the five Residents' Forums and includes Board Members and officials. The Panel meets bi-monthly to discuss issues raised at Forums, the Board and to receive presentations and information on relevant issues. The Panel provides residents with the opportunity to influence decision-making through its link with the PRIDE Group, where residents' views are discussed with Board members and agreed actions recommended to the Board.
- The Residents' Panel has its own Terms of Reference (attached).
- PRIDE Group - The role of the PRIDE Group is to monitor performance and quality of service and to review policies and procedures to ensure continuous improvement in service delivery. A representative from the Residents' Panel sits on the PRIDE Group to ensure that residents' views are taken into account. The Pride Group monitors progress of the Isos Group Improvement Plan.
- Board members - The Milecastle Board is made up of 12 members - 5 residents, 5 independent members and 2 councillors. Board membership offers residents the opportunity to be at the heart of Milecastle's governance and decision-making processes.

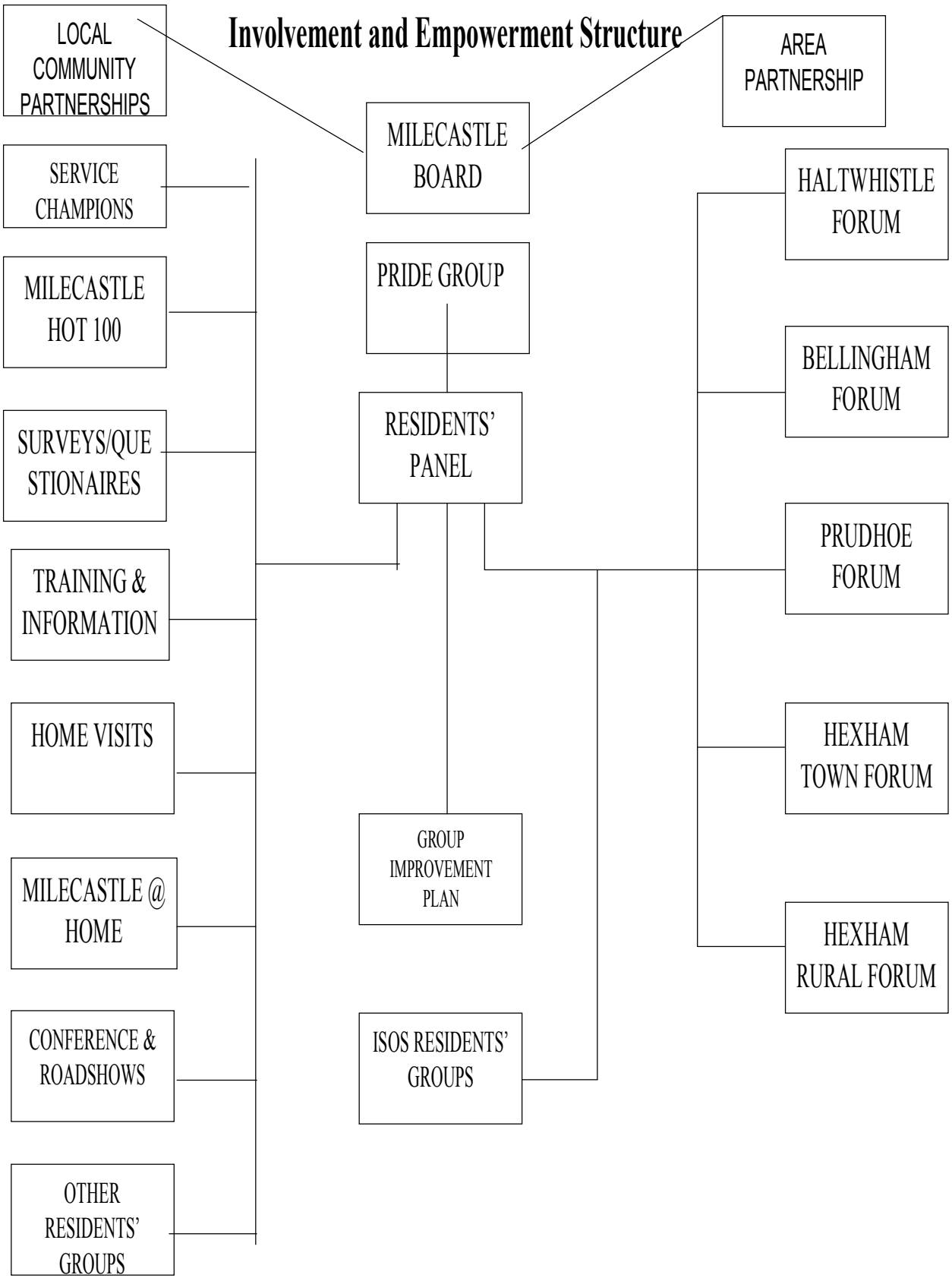
## Group

Improvement Plan - Staff from across the Isos Group work to establish how current service delivery compares to the standards outlined in the Audit Commission 'Key Lines of Enquiry' (KLOE). This information is used to identify good practice and to develop the Group Improvement Plan. Residents' views and feedback have contributed to the development of the Group Improvement Plan.

## Isos Residents' Groups

Milecastle resident' have been instrumental in the development and success of Isos Group Resident Involvement, through active participation in the 'Isos Involvement Group', 'Procurement Specialists Group' and the recently launched 'Customer Reviewers Project'.

# Involvement and Empowerment Structure



In addition, residents can get involved in 'scheme specific' activities via the Hexham East Regeneration Project based at 28 Derwent Road and through day care activities delivered at Milecastle's new extra-care sheltered housing scheme at The Manors in Prudhoe.

### **Training, resources and support**

Milecastle is committed to providing appropriate training, resources and support to residents who participate in any aspect of the involvement and empowerment structure.

All reasonable costs incurred by residents will be reimbursed, expenses will be paid to those using their own transport and assistance with transport arrangements will be made by staff on request.

Milecastle will provide training and support to build residents' capacity to be effectively engaged, involved and empowered. An annual 'audit' of training needs of residents involved in the Residents' Panel and the Service Champions Groups, will be carried out.

### **Community Support Funding**

Milecastle has established a Tenant Option Budget to fund local projects and initiatives that offer benefit to Milecastle residents and communities. The Tenant Option Budget initiative is widely advertised through 'Milecastle @ home', the Milecastle website and the Residents Forums.

During 2009/10, the Tenant Option Budget has provided financial support to a number of community projects and initiatives including repairs to Barrasford Village Hall – a vital rural community hub; a 'Silver Surfers' IT initiative involving residents from two sheltered schemes; a Children's Safety Education Foundation initiative at Haltwhistle Community Campus; a bulb planting project organised by local people in Hexham East and an incentive scheme for Milecastle Residents' to join the Northumberland Credit Union.

Applications for support from the Tenant Options Budget are considered by a group of five residents drawn from Milecastle's Residents' Panel.

### **Key areas of success and improvement in 2009**

A number of successful events were undertaken during 2009 that provided residents with opportunities to comment on and influence service provision, contribute to debates on issues about the national housing agenda and to have some fun too! Here is a flavour of some of the successful initiatives undertaken during the year.

Residents' Activity Day - held on 4<sup>th</sup> February in Hexham, this event attracted 110 residents who were entertained by local comedian Brendan Healy and the 'Silver Belles', a group of local singers based at The Sage, Gateshead. Residents engaged in a variety of practical activities including a 'health and wellbeing session', 'gentle exercises' and 'healthy food preparation'. Residents also received a presentation on 'Money Matters' from our in-house Welfare Benefits team of advisers.

Hexham East - A newly established residents' group has been set up in Hexham East, comprising Milecastle residents and owner-occupiers. During 2009, the group has gone from strength to strength and works closely with the community police officer, the Hexham East Children's Centre, the local county and town councillors and the Hexham East Regeneration Project.

Tenant Services Authority (TSA) - Amanda Newton from TSA gave a presentation on the role of the TSA, the new social housing regulator and provided some initial feedback from the first phase of the 'National Conversation'. Held in Hexham on 8<sup>th</sup> April, the event attracted 40 residents.

National Tenant Voice (NTV) - Gateshead Civic Centre was the venue for an information session about the National Tenant Voice (NTV) a new national body which will champion tenants issues. Staff from the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) facilitated the event which attracted 35 residents.

Milefest - Something of a first for a social housing provider – Milecastle organised a rock concert featuring three local young rock bands. Over 40 young people from across Tynedale attended the gig held in Hexham on 14<sup>th</sup> August. The event was organised with the help of local partners and the active involvement of residents too. It is hoped that further initiatives of this type will be developed during 2010.

Residents' Conference - Held on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> September, the Conference attracted over 120 residents, including 15 children. The event included a short presentation on the 'involvement strategy' and a number of workshops and break-out sessions including 'Eat Well 4 Less'; 'Growing vegetables in pots and containers' and 'Energy Efficiency in the Home' presented by the Energy Saving Trust. The event ended with a performance from 'The Sunshine Panners', a steel band comprising pupils from Haydon Bridge High School.

Customer Reviewers - Along with Isos Group colleagues, Milecastle residents have been instrumental in the development of the 'Customer Reviewers' project. Six residents have been recruited to join with the staff Peer Review Team to carry out in-house inspections of service areas across the Group. The Customer Reviewers participated in training delivered locally by the Just Housing Academy and plan to carry out their first 'inspection' in mid-March 2010.

## Priority Actions for 2010

Milecastle will work with residents to deliver the following priority actions during 2010. Progress on each action will be reported to the Residents' Panel during the course of the year.

- Local standards - To work with residents on the establishment of 'local standards' in line with the requirements of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA).
- Customer Reviewers Project - To involve Customer Reviewers in two Peer Review 'inspections' and to deliver a programme of training appropriate to the individual needs of each Customer Reviewer.
- Impact assessment of Resident Involvement - To ensure that the opportunities available to residents to be engaged in the delivery and scrutiny of housing related services are working effectively.
- Training and capacity building - To provide a programme of training and support to build residents' capacity to be effectively engaged, involved and empowered.
- Young People - To deliver and/or participate in appropriate events and activities to increase engagement with young people (aged 18 – 25 years).
- Roadshows - To deliver four 'roadshow' events in Milecastle communities, working with local partners and stakeholders.

## Contact Information

If you would like to know more about Milecastle's Involvement and Empowerment Strategy, please contact:

John Temple  
Resident Involvement Officer

Milecastle Housing  
Beaufront Park  
Anick Road  
Hexham  
Northumberland  
NE46 4TU

Tel: 01434 611 447  
Email: [john.temple@milecastlehousing.co.uk](mailto:john.temple@milecastlehousing.co.uk)  
[www.milecastlehousing.co.uk](http://www.milecastlehousing.co.uk)

## TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR RESIDENTS' PANEL

### 1. Introduction

- The Residents' Panel will ensure there is open communication between residents, officers of the company and the Board
- The Residents' Panel will not have executive powers and will report to the Board by making recommendations to the PRIDE Group.

The objectives of the group are:

- To build on the good work and relationships developed through resident involvement so that Milecastle Housing's services are customer focused and influenced by residents' views
- To further good practice and the working relationship between residents and the landlord for the good and benefit of all residents of properties owned or managed by Milecastle Housing
- To develop more extended relationships between the staff, residents, board and other relevant parties
- To give residents a voice in how their homes are maintained, their welfare protected and their communities improved.
- To take account of equality and diversity and to promote equality between groups wherever possible.

### 2. Membership

2.1 Membership of the Residents' Panel will be as follows:

- Up to three resident representatives from each Residents Forum
- One Independent Board Member
- One Tenant Board Member
- Milecastle Housing's Managing Director
- Milecastle Housing's Resident Involvement Officer
- Milecastle Housing's Head of Building and Property Services will attend when there are relevant agenda items
- Milecastle Housing's Head of Housing, Care and Support will attend when there are relevant agenda items

Other members of staff from Milecastle Housing and other organisations will be invited to attend meetings as appropriate.

2.2 The resident members of the panel will elect a chairperson and vice-chairperson at the January meeting of the Panel.

- 2.3 The chairperson and vice-chairperson will be residents but not board members, to serve for a period of twelve months.
- 2.4 The chairperson and vice-chairperson can be re-elected for a maximum period of three years. The vice-chairperson will be offered the role of chair if it becomes vacant.
- 2.5 Nominations will be proposed and seconded by residents and should have the consent of the nominee. Only resident members of the Panel will vote on nominations.

### **3. Functions of the Residents' Panel**

- 3.1 The role of residents on the Panel will be to bring forward issues raised at their local Residents' Forums that affect a number of residents in their area.
- 3.2 The wider remit of the Panel will be to establish where there are issues that are common across the operational area and others that may only be a priority in a particular area or community. The Panel can then make recommendations about prioritising service development, taking account of the needs and aspirations of all residents.
- 3.3 The Residents' Panel will nominate one member as their representative on the PRIDE group, who will provide feedback from the Panel on specific issues and service areas discussed. The nomination will be agreed annually at the January meeting of the Panel.
- 3.4 The approval of the Residents' Panel will be required prior to the re-appointment of Tenant Board Members, in accordance with the rules approved by the Milecastle Board.
- 3.5 Applications for financial support from Milecastle's Tenant Option Budget will be considered by a group of residents drawn from the Residents' Panel, comprising one representative per Resident Forum.
- 3.6 The role of the board and staff members on the Panel will be to highlight financial implications, areas of conflict, legal requirements, feedback from consultation exercises, etc. which may affect the development of services.
- Staff members of the Panel will also have responsibility for ensuring that the appropriate officers are made aware of recommendations made by the Panel
  - Staff will provide administrative support for the Panel
  - Board members of the Panel will have responsibility for ensuring that the Board is made aware of the work of the Residents' Panel and keeping Residents' Panel informed of discussions at Board meetings
  - Resident members of the Panel will have responsibility for ensuring that feedback is provided from their respective Residents' Forums and provide feedback to their respective Residents' Forums of matters discussed at Panel meetings

## **4. Reporting Procedures**

- 4.1 The minutes of the Residents' Panel will go to the Board with appropriate recommendations.
- 4.2 Formal reports from the Residents' Panel will be presented to the PRIDE Group by the nominated representative.
- 4.3 Copies of minutes of Board meetings will be circulated to residents on the Panel.

## **5. Meetings**

- 5.1 Meetings of the Panel will be held bi-monthly to:
  - discuss feedback from Residents' Forums
  - to receive feedback and consider recommendations from Service Champions Groups, as appropriate
  - to receive feedback from the Milecastle 'Hot 100', as appropriate
  - keep residents fully informed of the company's activities
  - give residents the opportunity to raise any issues of concern they have that they would like the company to take up
- 5.2 The Managing Director shall be responsible for making appropriate arrangements to service the Residents' Panel.
- 5.3 Minutes of meetings will be circulated to all members within 7 calendar days.
- 5.4 Agendas will be circulated to all members at least 7 calendar days prior to meetings. Any requests from Residents' Panel members for items to be included in the agenda will be forwarded in time for agendas to be prepared and circulated.
- 5.5 Members of the Residents' Panel are committed to achieving their objectives and developing a better working relationship. In doing so, members agree to abide by the following Code of Conduct:
  - Regular, prompt attendance at meetings – any member not attending or sending apologies for three consecutive meetings will lose their place on the Panel

- Communicate effectively with other Panel members and those they represent
- Participate effectively in meetings and work with other members to achieve the aims and objectives of the Panel
- Not use the Panel as a forum for personal issues or to 'fast-track' services
- Participate in training events in the interests of developing the activities of the Panel.
- Share contact information to enable members of the Panel to communicate effectively

5.6 Expenses will be reimbursed within 14 calendar days of meetings

November 2009

## TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR RESIDENTS' FORUM

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 There are five Residents' Forums for residents of properties owned or managed by Milecastle Housing which have been set up to allow residents to communicate with the company about services and local issues. (Insert name of Forum and the communities served by the Forum).
- 1.2 The objectives of the group are:
- To continue to develop strong links between residents and the company through resident involvement so that Milecastle Housing's services are customer focused and influenced by residents' views
  - To develop more extended relationships between residents, the company and other partners in the community
  - To give residents a voice in how their homes are maintained, their welfare protected and their communities improved.
  - To take account of equality and diversity and to promote equality between groups wherever possible.

### 2. Membership

- 2.1 Membership of the Forum is open to anyone who is a resident of a property owned or managed by Milecastle Housing within the area covered by the Forum.
- 2.2 Staff from Milecastle Housing will attend meetings to offer support to the forum and ensure its sustainability.
- 2.2 The resident members of the Forum may elect a chairperson and vice-chairperson who are residents of a property owned or managed by Milecastle Housing and will serve for a period of twelve months.
- 2.4 The chairperson and vice-chairperson can be re-elected for a maximum period of two years.

- 2.5 Nominations for chairperson and vice-chairperson will be proposed and seconded by residents and should have the consent of the nominee. Residents of properties owned or managed by Milecastle Housing will vote on nominations.

### **3. Functions of the Area Forum**

- 3.1 The purpose of the Forum will be to discuss Milecastle Housing's services, communities and local issues. Forums are not intended to be used for reporting individual repairs or routine matters, these should be reported direct to the appropriate member of staff or department.
- 3.2 The Forum will nominate three of its members to represent the group on Milecastle Housing's Residents' Panel. The Residents' Panel is made up of nominees from all five Forums, staff and board members and meets to discuss issues raised at Residents' Forums and by the Board. Nominees should attend Forum meetings regularly and have a clear understanding of local issues and matters discussed by the Forum.
- 3.3 The Forum will nominate one representative to serve on each of Milecastle's Service Champions Groups (Repairs and Planned Maintenance; Grounds Maintenance; Communications).

### **4. Reporting Procedures**

- 4.1 The minutes of Residents' Forums shall be circulated to all attendees and relevant Milecastle Housing staff no later than 14 working days after the conclusion of the meeting.
- 4.2 The nominated representatives shall report to the Residents' Panel on behalf of the Forum and report back to the Forum matters discussed at Residents' Panel meetings.
- 4.3 Other organisations shall be contacted on behalf of the group where appropriate.

### **5. Meetings**

- 5.1 The Forum shall meet every three months and the dates, time and location of meetings shall be agreed at the Forum meeting held during the last quarter of the preceding calendar year.
- 5.2 Residents will have the ability to hold informal meetings and to refer issues for inclusion on the agenda of the next formal meeting, as appropriate.
- 5.3 The Resident Involvement Officer and the appropriate Area Housing Team Leader will make arrangements for the administration of the Forum.

5.4 Members of the Residents' Forum are committed to achieving their objectives and developing a good working relationship. In doing so, members agree to abide by the following Code of Conduct:

- Regular, prompt attendance at meetings
- Communicate effectively with other Forum members and those they represent
- Participate effectively in meetings and work with other members to achieve the aims and objectives of the Forum
- Not use the Forum to advance personal issues or to 'fast-track' services
- Participate in training events in the interests of developing the activities of the Forum.

November 2009

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR SERVICE CHAMPIONS' GROUPS**

### **1. Introduction**

Three Service Champions Groups will be established as part of Milecastle's Resident Involvement Structure and each group will focus on one the following policy/service areas:

- Repairs and Planned Maintenance
- Grounds Maintenance
- Communications

### **2. Purpose**

To provide residents with the opportunity to:

- influence housing related policies and how housing related services are delivered
- be involved in scrutinising performance in delivering housing related services

### **3. Composition of Groups**

- Service Champions Groups will consist of five residents (one per Resident Forum), to be elected directly by the individual Residents' Forums.

### **4. Meeting arrangements**

- Service Champions Groups shall meet at least three times per year
- An annual programme of work will be agreed by each group in consultation with appropriate officials
- Service Champions Groups will elect a 'convenor' from amongst its resident members, who will chair meetings of the group.
- Senior staff will attend meetings of Service Champions Groups to provide appropriate information and to facilitate the effective functioning of the Groups.

- Milecastle's Resident Involvement Officer will attend meetings and will be responsible for the administration of the Groups.
- Agendas will be circulated to all members at least 7 calendar days prior to meetings.
- Notes of meetings will be circulated to all members within 7 calendar days of the date of the meeting.

## **5. Reporting Arrangements**

- Service Champions Groups will report direct to the Residents' Panel.

## **6. Responsibilities of Group members**

- Regular, prompt attendance at meetings – any member not attending or sending apologies for two consecutive meetings will lose their place on the Group
- Communicate effectively with other Group members and those they represent
- Participate effectively in meetings and work with other members to achieve the aims and objectives of the Group
- Not use the Group as a forum for personal issues or to 'fast-track' services
- Participate in training and information sessions in the interests of developing the work of the Group.
- Share contact information to enable members of the Group to communicate effectively
- Maintain absolute confidentiality at all times
- To take account of equality and diversity and to promote equality between groups wherever possible.

November 2009