

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

APPROVED BY HHP BOARD:
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hebridean housing
partnership

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INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy outlines how HHP communicates with tenants, staff, partners, and the public. It ensures that all communication is clear, consistent, inclusive, and aligned with our values and strategic goals.
- 1.2 It applies to all staff, board members, contractors, and anyone communicating on behalf of the association, across all platforms and formats.

AIMS

- 2.1 Our aims are to:
- Increase Hebridean Housing Partnership's profile as a trustworthy, top performing organisation, responsible for managing and improving our homes to the highest standard;
 - Build trust and transparency with tenants and stakeholders;
 - Ensure timely and accurate information sharing;
 - Promote tenant engagement and feedback;
 - To enhance and expand the already positive and effective relationships with local, regional, and national media;
 - To strengthen and expand our existing relationships with the people and partners we collaborate with, working together to enhance the community;
 - Protect the association's reputation and brand; and
 - Comply with legal and regulatory requirements (e.g. GDPR, FOI, Equality Act).

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

- 3.1 The principles of good communications are detailed below:
- **Tenant-Centred:** Communications should be accessible, relevant, and responsive to tenant needs.
 - **Inclusive:** Use plain language and provide translations or alternative formats where needed.
 - **Consistent:** Ensure messaging is aligned across all departments and channels.
 - **Transparent:** Share information openly, especially around decisions that affect tenants.
 - **Respectful:** Treat all audiences with dignity and professionalism.

OUR AUDIENCE

- 4.1 Effective communication relies on understanding your audience. By gaining a deeper insight into our audiences, we can tailor our messages to ensure they reach the intended recipients. We have identified four key audience groups we aim to engage with.
- Our Tenants
 - Our Board and Employees
 - Stakeholders and Partners
 - Our wider community, community/resident groups and local business'/charities.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION – EMAIL AND TEAMS

- 5.1 All communication should be written clearly in plain English in a professional and courteous manner. Whilst the written style may sometimes differ, the general content should be consistent with other forms of written communication.
- 5.2 When addressing sensitive or confidential matters, employees should carefully consider the most appropriate method of communication. Written communication (such as email or letters) may not always be suitable, due to the risk of misinterpretation or interception. Wherever possible, sensitive issues should be discussed in person or by phone, in a private and confidential setting, to ensure clarity and discretion.
- 5.3 Copies of information relating to tenants received via e-mail should be filed in the house or most appropriate file. If staff are uncertain whether an item ought to be filed, guidance should be sought from the Data Protection Officer (DPO) or their Line Manager if appropriate.
- 5.4 Check an individual's status prior to calling them on Teams. If they are 'in a meeting', 'busy' or 'away', consider sending a Teams message in the chat function to agree a convenient time to make contact and mutually agree a video call via Teams.
- 5.5 We encourage open and honest communication and adhere to guidance issued on the use of e-mail or Teams chats.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

- 6.1 Some channels of communication that staff may use or encounter in the course of their work, or by consequence of their work, are detailed below:
- **Tenant Communications:** Letters, newsletters, SMS, email, Tenant Portal, home visits.

- **Digital:** Website, social media, email bulletins.
- **Media:** Press releases, interviews, crisis statements.
- **Internal:** Staff briefings, SharePoint, team meetings.
- **Consultation & Engagement:** Surveys, focus groups, tenant panels, public meetings.

Social Media Platforms

- 6.2 As a Housing Association, we should be present on social media on a corporate level. We recognise the importance of these platforms as a business tool to assist us to participate in online conversation with our tenants and other customers.

We use Facebook, LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram.

- 6.3 Where possible we will restrict the ability for public comments to be left on social media posts, where this is not possible, or we allow comments to be left, moderation will be in place to ensure inappropriate comments are deleted.
- 6.4 Social Media pages will at times feature posts and news articles relating to HHP, as is the nature of social media, this can lead to discussion in the comment section. We will not routinely engage in discussion via the comment section of any Social Media platform and where necessary will ask that any communication with us should be carried out through our official communication channels.
- 6.5 Any social media posts brought to our attention in relation to HHP will be monitored, and dependant on the nature and engagement of the post the Executive Team will determine whether an official response is required and what form this should take.

Communicating with Customers

- 6.6 Our in-house Tenant Engagement Officer works to enhance and improve communication and gather feedback from our customers.
- 6.7 When we inform our tenants of notices and events we will do so through our social media channels, Tenant Portal, send out a press release and update our website.
- 6.8 If there is something specific to update in a particular area to address, we will send out letters to every tenant.
- 6.9 When we need an urgent message distributed, we will update our social media and website and send out a press release.
- 6.10 We will keep our customers updated with news stories through our newsletter which is circulated three times a year and our social media channels.

- 6.11 Where appropriate, to gain customer feedback we will issue surveys and consultations.
- 6.12 In instances where we report to tenants on specific areas of the business such as accounts, clear, plain English explanations should be provided to assist with interpretation of jargon or industry specific terminology.
- 6.13 Our Housing Management System can identify tenants with accessibility needs and tailor communications accordingly, ensuring that required information is accessible to all.

Personal Social Media Accounts

- 6.14 We respect the right to a private life and that includes employees joining any social media platforms. Employees must not, however, disclose confidential information relating to HHP, or make any remarks that could potentially bring the Partnership into disrepute. Any such actions could result in disciplinary action, including dismissal.
- 6.15 Employees should be aware of the language and content of their posts, where employees have an association with their employer, for example, listing HHP as their employer. We do not prohibit employees from listing HHP as their employer, however it is advised against, with the exception of professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn.
- 6.16 The use of photographs taken on Partnership premises or at Partnership events, which depict Officers, Board Members, tenants or other connected persons, is expressly forbidden without the permission of the individuals concerned. Any such actions will result in disciplinary action, which could include dismissal.

PRESS AND MEDIA

- 7.1 Enquires from the media should be sent to Info@hebrideanhousing.co.uk inbox marked '**Press Enquiry**' which will be referred to the Chief Executive in the first instance.
- 7.2 If the media wish to attend any of our events they should contact us on 0300 123 0773 and be directed to the Executive Office.
- 7.3 Only authorised spokespeople may speak on behalf of the association. Media statements must be approved by senior management.

CRISIS AND EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION

- 8.1 In the event of a crisis such as an extreme weather event, cyber attack or any other major incident affecting HHP, tenants or partners:

- A Crisis Communications Plan will be activated;
- Clear, co-ordinated messages will be issued through agreed channels; and
- Tenants and staff will be kept informed of developments and support available.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 9.1 A Communications Working Group comprising of staff from across HHP will meet on a quarterly basis to review communications plans, brand, performance and processes as well as strategising for any upcoming events.
- 9.2 All internal and external communication will be overseen by the Communications Working Group including but not limited to:
- Social media content and campaigns;
 - Planned press releases;
 - Consultations;
 - Tenant newsletters;
 - Communications surrounding official openings; and
 - Advertising campaigns.
- 9.3 Performance indicators will be collected on a quarterly basis to allow for scrutiny and reflection on the effectiveness of both internal and external communications.
- 9.4 All external communications should be reviewed and approved by the Chief Executive.
- 9.5 Staff are required to follow communication standards in regular interactions, and a protocol is available to guide staff.

RELATED POLICIES

- 10.1 The Communications Policy is supported by our related policies and procedures and should be read in conjunction with, but not limited to, the following:
- Privacy Policy;
 - Openness and Confidentiality Policy;
 - ICT Security Policy;
 - Engagement Policy; and
 - Codes of Conduct.

MONITORING AND POLICY REVIEW

- 11.1 An Annual Plan will be prepared every March outlining the communications throughout the year. This will be updated every year when reviewing the effectiveness of the plan.

- 11.2 It is the responsibility of the Chief Executive to conduct a review of the Communications Policy.
- 11.3 This policy will be reviewed every two years or sooner if required by changes in legislation or organisational needs.

INTERPRETATIONS & ABBREVIATIONS

The following interpretation and abbreviations are used in this policy:

WORD	INTERPRETATION
<i>HHP or Partnership</i>	Hebridean Housing Partnership
<i>Board</i>	The Board of the Hebridean Housing Partnership
<i>Board Members</i>	All Members of the Board including co-opted Members
<i>Working Days</i>	This excludes Public Holidays and the Christmas break period when the HHP offices are closed (usually 24 December – 2 January inclusive but dates can change).
<i>GDPR</i>	General Data Protection Regulations
<i>Written Communication</i>	Letters, emails and web responses
All references to the masculine gender in this policy shall read as equally applicable to the feminine gender	



HHP is a registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, Registered Number: 2644R(S), Registered Office: Creed Court, Gleann Seileach Business Park, Willowglen Road, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis HS1 2QP. It is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number: SC035767, registered as Registered Social Landlord with the Scottish Housing Regulator, Registration Number: 359 and registered as a Property Factor, Registration Number PF000183

Email: info@hebrideanhousing.co.uk

Web: www.hebrideanhousing.co.uk

Phone: 0300 123 0773