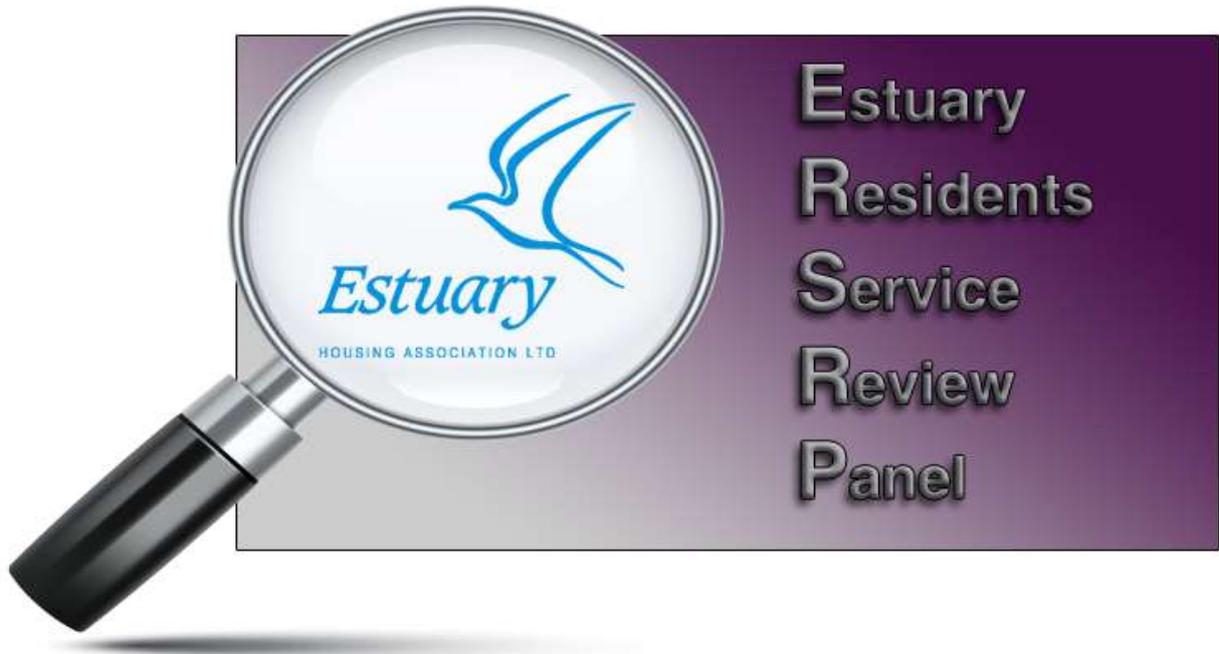


## Estuary Residents Service Review Panel



## Communication 2016

## Light Touch Report

## **Acknowledgements**

ERSRP wish to thank the staff for all of their co-operation during this exercise and acknowledge the contribution made by them.

## List of Abbreviations

EHA	Estuary Housing Association
ERSRP	Estuary Residents Service Review Panel
HA's	Housing Associations
VfM	Value for Money
CET	Customer Engagement Team

# Communication

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“We have acknowledged the need for flexible resources to support tenants and residents...and provide quality services” (EHA Business Plan 2014-17)

## Introduction

This report is a light touch report on Estuary’s forms of communication to residents and how residents can communicate with Estuary. This report looks at the ways in which EHA communicates and interacts with its tenants, in particular it looks into:

- The Estuary website
- The Estuary News publication
- Estuary’s Contact Centre – telephone enquiries
- Estate Noticeboards
- ‘MyEstuary’
- Rent Statements – Letters
- Email enquiries
- The methods of communication that residents use in their daily life and their contact preferences.
- What forms of communication is Estuary not utilising?
- What forms of communication are other Housing Associations using that EHA are not?

This project looks briefly into the above and has the potential to lead onto an in-depth report in the future. The panel hope that EHA will welcome this report and agree on an action plan to deliver the recommendations which will lead to further service improvements in this area.

## Scope of Report

ERSRP wanted to investigate how effectively EHA communicates with their tenants and whether the communication mediums utilised could be improved or changed in order to engage with a wider tenant base.

In order to do this, ERSRP investigated the methods utilised by EHA to communicate with their tenants. We then compared this with how other HA's and similar organisations successfully communicate with their end users and also by how residents prefer to communicate currently.

Due to all members of the panel being EHA tenants they have all experienced some form/s of communication with EHA and several panel members were willing to share their experiences in order to help compile this report.

A set of survey questions with regard to tenants preferred methods of communication and their experience of EHA's communication methods (see Appendix 1 – Communications Consultation) was compiled by the panel and sent to residents via email. The CET trailed a free website application called *MailChimp* in order to design an attractive email for customers to click which led to the *Survey Monkey website* to complete the survey. The survey link was sent out to all of the residents that had provided EHA with an email address (1514). This means we have the confidence level of 95% and the confidence interval of  $\pm 7.54\%$ .

Consulting residents in this way meant that we did not incur any cost to consult with our residents. This also enabled ERSRP to gather information from a wide tenant base quickly. A total of 152 responses were received within 3 working days. This is an impressive response from one communication method. *Survey Monkey* and *MailChimp* then evaluated all of the feedback into an Excel format with easy to read graphs. By using *MailChimp*, we were able to see which residents had opened the email, which residents had then clicked through the link to get to the survey and how many residents clicked onto the link that led to the Estuary website. We were very impressed with how quickly we received the 152 responses using this method.

The panel also researched the various mediums of communication utilised by other organisations (see Appendix 2) and, after comparing the data, the panel then looked at how EHA could improve, and in some cases, change their methods of communication.

In order for EHA to develop a successful communication strategy several questions needed to be addressed;

- Are EHA's communication methods currently efficient and cost effective (VfM)?

- What forms of communication work well already?
- Which means of communication would a majority of people prefer?
- What sources of communication do tenants have access to and use regularly?
- Can EHA adjust/change their communication methods to engage a wider tenant base?

## Conclusion

An effective approach to tenant communication will contribute to their general perception of the HA. Communication is changing in today's world and EHA seems to be very far behind. Many tenants surveyed felt that EHA do not listen to them or communicate with them in an adequate manner and feel 'left in the dark' with regard to decisions that are made which directly affect them. More often than not the changes have been communicated to the tenants but not in a manner that has been easily understood or has stood out.

Communications should, ideally, be targeted according to respondent type. A communications strategy is only truly effective if the imparted message is matched to suit those with which the communication takes place. Thanks to our own survey and the Performance teams 'Getting to know you' survey, we now have up to date correct intelligence on communication methods. Now we need to use it.

To develop an effective means of communication with residents, EHA needs to think about what outcomes they are hoping for and tailor this communication to the target audience to achieve this.

Determining the reasons for communication, and understanding what is to be achieved, are best done in consultation with the intermediate and end users. It is also important to determine which communication pathways and media products are suitable to develop.

Tenants are becoming more discerning customers, demanding increasingly sophisticated and personalised communication channels to engage with their landlord.

Due to the change in nature of modern communication methods and the rise in digital-savvy, socially-conscious "generation Y" resources, the housing providers need to work hard to attract and retain their attention. Tenant engagement and empowerment is a high priority in the social housing sector and this means that they have to embrace the inclusion of digital communications.

The main challenge for social landlords today is to effectively utilise technology that delivers business transformation whilst meeting stringent regulatory requirements set out by the HCA VfM standard. Finding effective ways of using advanced communication technologies will be key to the success of housing providers, providing the foundation for responsive and seamless communications within the organisation, as well as externally with tenants, service providers and other key parties.

## Equality and Diversity

ERSRP made every effort to not single out any resident intentionally to ensure a fair and unbiased consultation. The table below show the statistics of the residents that were consulted following the seven equality and diversity strands.

Table L

Equality Strand	Count	Percentage	All GN Tenants
	Count of Gender	Percentage	
<b>Female</b>	105	66%	51%
<b>Male</b>	47	34%	31%
<b>(blank)</b>			18%
Grand Total	<b>152</b>		
2	<b>Count of Disability</b>		
<b>Blank</b>	131	86%	84%
<b>No</b>	3	1%	7%
<b>Other</b>	9	6%	7%
<b>Yes, affecting mobility</b>	7	5%	
<b>Yes, Mental Ill-Health</b>	1	1%	
<b>#N/A</b>	1	1%	
Grand Total	<b>152</b>		
3	<b>Count of Ethnic Origin</b>		
<b>African</b>	2	1%	
<b>British</b>	112	74%	
<b>Caribbean</b>	1	1%	
<b>Do not want to disclose</b>	9	6%	
<b>Irish</b>	1	1%	
<b>Other Chinese or Other Ethnic</b>	1	1%	
<b>Other White</b>	4	2%	
<b>(blank)</b>	22	14%	27%
<b>White</b>			57%
<b>BME</b>			16%
Grand Total	<b>152</b>		
4	<b>Count of Sexual Orientation</b>		
<b>Did not disclose</b>	8	5%	
<b>Heterosexual</b>	75	49%	29%
<b>Homosexual</b>	1	1%	1%
<b>(blank)</b>	68	45%	70%
Grand Total	<b>152</b>		
5	<b>Count of marital status</b>		
<b>Did not disclose</b>	34	22%	
<b>Co-habiting</b>	7	5%	18%
<b>Divorced</b>	13	8%	3%

Equality Strand	Count	Percentage	All GN Tenants
<b>Married</b>	33	22%	32%
<b>Single</b>	54	35%	47%
<b>(blank)</b>	10	7%	0%
<b>Widowed</b>	1	1%	1%
Grand Total	<b>152</b>		
6	<b>Count of Age</b>		
<b>18 to 24</b>	1	1%	3%
<b>25 to 34</b>	17	11%	
<b>35 to 44</b>	36	23%	
<b>45 to 54</b>	51	33%	
<b>55 to 64</b>	31	20%	
<b>65 to 74</b>	14	9%	
<b>75 or older</b>	1	1%	
<b>(blank)</b>	1	1%	
<b>25 to 55</b>			66%
<b>Over 55</b>			30%
Grand Total	<b>152</b>		
7	<b>Count of Religion</b>		
<b>Christian (all denominations)</b>	47	31%	16%
<b>Muslim</b>	1	1%	1%
<b>No religion</b>	31	20%	14%
<b>Prefer not to say</b>	2	1%	
<b>Other religion</b>			1%
<b>#N/A</b>	12	8%	
<b>(blank)</b>	59	39%	68%
Grand Total	<b>152</b>		

- More women than men responded to the survey
- A higher number (13%) of respondents had a disability compared to 7% of tenants.
- 82% of respondents were white but only 14% had not declared their ethnicity compared to 27% of all tenants.
- A slightly lower number, 1%, of respondents are under 25 compared to 3% of all tenants who are under 25.
- More respondents, 61% stated their religion compared 68% of the rest of tenants who have declared a religion.

In conclusion the panel needs to engage with more tenants under 25 and men.

## Recommendations by ERSRP

Recommendation	Explanation	Lead Staff	Management Response	Decision	Agreed Deadline	Follow Up Action	VFM
<b>1a</b>	For the Association to look into a telephone call back service such as the one Amazon utilises.	ADCS/ADP	A recent analysis showed waiting time for Central Services and Repairs were 11 sec and 97 sec respectively. Our target time for repairs is 60 seconds.  The organisation will look into the feasibility of a call back system.	FA	<b>30 Nov 16</b>		Increase resident satisfaction as sometimes residents cannot hold on.
<b>1b</b>	Introduce a message when the customer is on hold to advertise the uses of our website.	ADCS/ADHC/ADP	Estuary has commenced the use of messages but will develop a suite of timely messages for when the caller is on hold.	FA	<b>30 Nov 16</b>		Move people to website reduces the numbers of calls through your switchboard
<b>2a</b>	Combine an Estuary News with the Annual report and replace it with a calendar.		We aim to move to an on-line platform and increase the number of	NA			Save the cost of an extra publication (the annual report).

Recommendation	Explanation	Lead Staff	Management Response	Decision	Agreed Deadline	Follow Up Action	VFM
	taken by residents in the form of a competition to increase tenant involvement. To ensure we are still keeping residents up to date. Move Estuary News online to ensure information is at residents fingertips.		editions whilst at the same time saving on costs. We will not produce a separate calendar due to the cost but we will introduce an annual on-line photography competition for residents.				By moving Estuary News online, we are saving the cost of printing and postage attached to this service. Approx - £7000 for each edition of Estuary News.
<b>2b</b>	Do not reduce the amount of Estuary News publications. Move Estuary News online and send residents an email version.	Comms team	We aim to move to an on-line platform and increase the number of editions	FA	<b>31 Mar 17</b>		E-mail or on-line reduces the postage costs which is the largest cost. Regular contact should improve tenant satisfaction.
<b>2c</b>	To consult with ERSRP and the FER on the Annual Report to Tenants.	Comms team	Agree to consult with residents on the content of the Tenant Annual Report.	FA	<b>Started</b>	A paper was presented to FER July 2016 to consult with on the content.	

	Recommendation	Explanation	Lead Staff	Management Response	Decision	Agreed Deadline	Follow Up Action	VFM
<b>3a</b>	Ensure letters of a sensitive nature are received by residents by Thursday.	This gives residents time to contact EHA if they have an enquiry and/or need to speak to a member of staff.		A review of letters shows that letters are sent throughout the working week so we do not accept that sensitive letters are deliberately sent at the end of the week. However while letters do have a place we are looking to use the most cost effective options e.g. e-mail and will look to communicate online instead, allowing the tenant more time to contact us.	NA		Some teams have channelled shift. H&C is monitoring the number of letters sent every month and comparing this to last year. Saving will be reported to ERSRP.	Currently nearly £40k pa is spent on postage any reduction can be measured as well as the number of letters posted.
<b>3b</b>	To ensure that the rent statement are a true reflection at the time of the tenant receiving the rent statement. We recommend	EHA currently pay for 3 pages of printing for rent statements for each tenant, this could be cut down to a double sided print if the ways to pay	ADHC	It is accepted that previous statements went out late  We have reduced the rent	FA	<b>April 17</b>		Reducing the size of rent statements from 3 pages to 2 reduces both paper usage and the costs

Recommendation	Explanation	Lead Staff	Management Response	Decision	Agreed Deadline	Follow Up Action	VFM
	<p>were in smaller print, saving money on both printing and paper costs.</p>		<p>statement letters to two pages maximum.</p> <p>It is our intention to stop sending out rent statements by encouraging residents to access their rent statement through their My Estuary account and will have an up-to-date statement.</p> <p>Where necessary residents can ask for a copy of their rent statement and this will either be sent via email or posted to them</p>				<p>involved.</p> <p>Persuading tenants to access their rent account on line and Stopping the issuing of rent statements would reduce costs significantly .</p>
<p><b>4</b></p>	<p>Where this does not already exist ensure we acknowledge email correspondence with a standard</p>	<p>ADCS/ADHC/ADP</p>	<p>Accepted – Where there are no acknowledgement emails we will rectify this. We currently offer 10</p>	<p>FA</p>	<p>All email addresses to have tailored acknowledgement emails by <b>31<sup>st</sup> December 16</b></p>	<p>Drive up customer satisfaction because they know when they can expect</p>	

	Recommendation	Explanation	Lead Staff	Management Response	Decision	Agreed Deadline	Follow Up Action	VFM
	email stating that the tenants email has been received and that the matter is being looked into.	This should hopefully cut down on those emails that are wasting both the tenant's and EHA's time due to tenants feeling that EHA is dealing with the matter in hand.		working days to reply, we will review this and ensure the automatic responses are relevant to the service area contacted. We understand that sometimes the acknowledgement email may go into the enquirer's junk mailbox. A note needs to be added for residents to see to know to check this mailbox.				a response.
5	Noticeboards to be fitted in areas that don't have any. A noticeboard audit to be carried out by members of ERSRP and Estate Services. There should be a database showing where the noticeboards are	Some noticeboards are in spaces that have very little footfall. Notices are not displayed in an efficient manner and overlay and obscure each other.	ESMM	Accepted – An audit will be carried out along with ERSRP members to ensure noticeboards are placed in the best areas of each Block/street. There will be an	FA	<b>By 30 November 16</b>		EHA across the services will be able to utilise the noticeboards if they knew where they were and how to gain access. For example ERSRP could

Recommendation	Explanation	Lead Staff	Management Response	Decision	Agreed Deadline	Follow Up Action	VFM
	and who holds keys for each noticeboard. .		agreed format for noticeboard and we will explore what other landlords do.				advertise events and important information that tenants would find useful.
<b>6a</b>	Look into utilising social media including Twitter, YouTube and Facebook in order to communicate effectively with tenants.	EDO	Will look into the feasibility of using some form of social media, in particular a one-way twitter account maybe trailed and what impact it has on our resources.	FA	<b>31 Dec 16</b>		Social Media Has little/ no cost just time for departments to maintain it. It potentially will lower the amounts of calls to EHA therefore saving money. EHA to monitor annual call stats and compare this
<b>6b</b>	A focus group to be set up with residents to look into all forms of communication including social media.	Comms Team	A focus group to be set up to constantly ensure EHA have the most effective forms of communication for residents. The	FA	<b>Next one May 2017 annually thereafter</b>		

Recommendation	Explanation	Lead Staff	Management Response	Decision	Agreed Deadline	Follow Up Action	VFM
			group to meet annually.				
<b>7</b>	Tenants should be given the choice of how to be communicated with where possible; some prefer text rather than letter. We understand EHA can input customers preferred method of contact onto CRM but ensure this being utilised.	ADCS/ ADHC and other AD's as appropriate	EHA have advice staff to ensure they ask the communication method and check details are correct on every call/point of contact. The customer profile information will also be used to assist us.	FA	To be introduced from <b>31<sup>st</sup> October 16.</b>  ERSRP will carry out mystery shopping exercise December.		This would save EHA a lot of money with regard to printing and paper costs when it is not the residents preferred method of communication.
<b>8a</b>	Make the website as easy to use and as user friendly as possible.	Comms team	At least once a year the Comms team will consult with ERSRP and or other residents on the use and look of the Estuary website.	FA	<b>Next one Sept 2017 Annually thereafter</b>		This will be VFM as this will increase the website use rather than other costly communication methods.
Housing Officer	To ensure all useful	ADHC		FA	<b>As and when changes are</b>	Website is up-to-date	

Recommendation	Explanation	Lead Staff	Management Response	Decision	Agreed Deadline	Follow Up Action	VFM
details to be available on the website.	information and documents are available on the website. To improve EHA transparency.		Housing Officers details should be kept up to date on the website.		<b>required</b>		
<b>8b</b> Enable an online chat service.	Enables advisors to communicate with more than one person at a time.		We are not ready for online chat at this moment in time.	NA	<b>To be reviewed in 18 -24 months.</b>		
<b>8c</b> Insert drop down lists on the tabs and increase the text size on all pages.		Comms	A redesign of the website and mega menu is being implemented. Text size will be enlarged. The ability for user to increase text size will still be available.	FA	<b>31<sup>st</sup> October 16</b>  <b>Mar 2017</b>		
<b>8d</b> The website welfare reform pages to be kept up to date.		PACEM	The welfare pages have recently been reviewed due to the amount of information contained and are updated every month.	NA			
<b>8e</b> The website to publish the planned		ADP	Performance Information	FA	<b>1<sup>st</sup> April 2017</b>		

Recommendation	Explanation	Lead Staff	Management Response	Decision	Agreed Deadline	Follow Up Action	VFM
	maintenance plan.		regarding the planned programme will be published annually with an outline of the current programme.				
<b>8f</b>	The website to publish the Management Board minutes		Minutes of Board meetings will be available to residents upon request following the Board meeting	PA	<b>30<sup>th</sup> November 16</b>		
<b>8g</b>	The website to publish FER minutes.	PACEM	Minutes of FER meetings will be available on our website	FA	<b>30<sup>th</sup> November 16</b>		
<b>9</b>	Update the current Text messaging service so all services can use it for updating residents.	ICTM/ appropriate AD's	The organisation intends to enhance our customer service delivery by utilising texting in all of our services.	FA	<b>1<sup>st</sup> April 2017</b>		This would remove the cost of letters and paper surveys, printing posters etc....

Recommendation	Explanation	Lead Staff	Management Response	Decision	Agreed Deadline	Follow Up Action	VFM
<p><b>10a</b> Ensure new tenant’s sign up to <i>MyEstuary</i> upon sign up with the Housing Officer. Show the resident how to use it and where to find important and useful information on the website.</p>	<p>surveys on a recent EHA service experience.</p> <p>This would increase the amount of residents using the <i>MyEstuary</i> service online and therefore be able to resolve issues through this route.</p> <p>The Housing Officer can take their mobile working device with them to sign up to give a short introduction to the website and sign them up to <i>MyEstuary</i>.</p> <p>Turning this service into an App would increase its use and save resident and staff time.</p>	<p>PACEM</p>	<p>HO’s on sign up will show the tenant how to use <i>My Estuary</i> and make sure they sign up for an account.</p>	<p>FA</p>	<p><b>30<sup>th</sup> November 16</b></p>	<p>In the long run this would save staff time and make EHA a more efficient landlord. EHA to monitor take-up and usage.</p>	
<p><b>10b</b> Look into turning <i>MyEstuary</i> into an App for residents to download.</p>	<p>Apps are accessible and often used by many companies including social landlords. It helps landlords to push</p>	<p>ICTM</p>	<p>We feel that we are not ready for an App but will look to adopt it in the future if still viewed beneficial.</p>	<p>NA</p>	<p><b>To be reviewed Jan 2018</b></p>		

Recommendation	Explanation	Lead Staff	Management Response	Decision	Agreed Deadline	Follow Up Action	VFM
	messages out and keep tenants informed.						
<b>10c</b>	Expand the repair logging service with more options and enable to upload photos. Make sure the form has mandatory fields to ensure all information has been provided. Also include appointment option included.	ADP	We should help residents provide us with all the information so that we don't have to contact them again. We will use the facility for tenants to upload photos as well as state their preferred appointment slots.	FA	<b>31<sup>st</sup> December 16</b>		This would increase the amount of residents using the <i>MyEstuary</i> service online and therefore be able to resolve issues through this route. It is a more effective use of staff time.
	<b>Management recommendation:</b> Recommend that ERSRP review this report in 18 – 24 months time.		We are not ready for some of the suggestion but this could change in the next 18 – 24 months time.				

**Key**

ADCS	Argiri Papatthos	ADHC	Kevin Turnpenney	PACEM	Janice White	FA	Fully accepted
ADP	Peter Mercer	ESMM	Caroline Creasey	EDO	Ian Martin	PA	Partial accepted
Comms	Joanne Jones	ICTM	Dave Parks			NA	Not accepted