

Community living policy

Version 1.0

Pending adoption at Board Meeting February 2023

Date of next review February 2024

Introduction

SCLT has adopted this Community Living Policy as a positive document promoting Community Living.

We understand living cooperatively as fostering behaviours of mutual support and respect and as a sensible guard against isolation and anti-social behaviour. As a community we seek to promote the principle of equality, and any form of harassment, violence or inappropriate behaviour, which could be considered discriminatory, is incompatible with Community Living.

In particular this policy seeks to instil the Community values of self-help, self-responsibility, and solidarity in how we live together. In the first instance and where appropriate, we hope members will take responsibility for their role within the Community and in making it a comfortable and mutually beneficial space for members to live.

We recognise, however, that issues will arise that cause problems for those living in our SCLT properties, and that having clear procedures in place to deal with them is a first step in mitigating issues.

We recognise that problems may be exacerbated by the world we live in; issues around shortage of money, jobs, and the emotional and health toll of living under capitalism will affect members even as we take control of our housing situation through SCLT.

As such, we have adopted a policy that balances collective and individual responsibility and positive expectations with clear procedures for dealing with issues that go beyond this.

Purpose of this policy

1. To establish the aims, principles and values of Community Living. This takes a positive view of shared expectations, and puts these in place;
2. To establish the principles and policies which will be followed when it is necessary to intervene to promote Community Living. This will involve:

- Support to victims;
- Taking swift, firm action;
- Mediating and negotiating in areas of dispute;
- Working in partnership with other agencies;
- Helping to create safer, more attractive environments for co-operators.

Definition

Community Living is understood loosely as:

- Being respectful and considerate of fellow members and neighbours;
- Being willing to engage in good faith when there are instances of lifestyle clashes (noise, use of communal space etc);
- Communicating calmly and respectfully around the community, in communal spaces, and in meetings;
- Engagement in the life and running of the community through engagement in Working Groups (as per membership policy).

We understand that these things may break down, as discussed above.

Examples of people failing to live as part of a Community can be defined as “behaviour which conflicts with accepted norms and standards which adversely affects the quality of life of others.”

This threshold will have different levels. But examples of failing to live cooperatively may include:

- Violence;
- Threats;
- Vandalism and graffiti;
- Insulting and abusive behaviour loud music and noise;
- Nuisance caused by animals;
- Abandoned cars and car repairs;
- Drug and alcohol problems;
- Litter and rubbish dumping;
- Use of residential premises for commercial activity;
- Criminal activity;

- Harassment of individuals or groups.

Mediation Officer

SCLT will have a Mediation Officer, who will be provided with training in mediation and will be elected annually at the SCLT AGM.

In addition to dealing with breaches of Community Living, the Mediation Officer will be expected to nurture positive experiences of community living through a range of initiatives.

Community expectations of this policy

The Community is committed to the eradication of nuisance and harassment and will ensure that effective procedures are under constant review to provide victims with a comprehensive service, offering practical solutions towards the peaceful enjoyment of their homes. We recognise that some people will not change their behaviour, and that as a last resort we will use eviction where conciliation and negotiation have proved unsuccessful.

The Community will work and liaise with the local authority and other agencies in providing support for victims. Complainants and residents will be involved in implementing the Community Living Policy and performance in this area will be reported to the Mediation Officer. These recommendations will be enacted and reported to the Board. Performance Indicators will be included in the annual report.

Actions

The action taken at each stage can vary according to the severity of the case and the reactions of the parties involved.

Appropriate remedial action may include:

- Cooling down periods;
- Mediation Service;
- Acceptable Behaviour Contracts;
- Anti-social Behaviour Orders;
- Collecting further evidence;
- Legal action for possession;
- Injunctions;
- Requests for priority for a transfer.

If an issue cannot be resolved the Mediation Officer must be consulted.

In cases involving children or vulnerable adults the Mediation Officer will cooperate with social services and inform them if there is any likelihood of eviction.

Victim support

Throughout the nuisance procedure, support for the victims is an essential part of the Community's role. The needs of each case will vary, but the following may be appropriate:

- Advice and support in considering legal and housing options;
- Liaising with the police on behalf of victims;
- Regular contact and updates on the current position;
- Referrals to other victim support agencies;
- Providing emergency contact phone numbers;
- Treating damage to property as urgent repairs, re-charging later if appropriate;
- Removing racist or obscene graffiti within 24 hours;
- Liaising with Crime Prevention on security issues;
- Exploring temporary or permanent rehousing options;
- Liaising with school services and Education Departments on the possibility of escorting children to and from school;
- In court action, providing witnesses and transport where necessary;
- Working with local complainants and community groups to provide support to victims;

At all stages of the process the Community will aim to minimise the distress caused to victims.

Monitoring

The Mediation Officer will receive regular reports on cases where complaints have been received. An annual review of nuisance and harassment cases will be prepared.

Operational Procedure

This is the procedure to be followed as and when remedial action proves insufficient:

1. Initial complaint to be made in writing, with diary sheets to the Secretary of SCLT.
2. The Secretary will then contact the Mediation Officer.

3. Arrange to visit the complainant within 7 days of receipt to investigate their complaint. The visit will be carried out by two people who will ideally be an Officer of SCLT and the Mediation Officer.
4. A record to be made of
 - a. the nature of the nuisance;
 - b. Frequency and duration;
 - c. Any witnesses.
5. Go through the following checklist:
 - a. Has the complainant spoken to the other party?
 - b. Does the complainant think this might help matters?
 - c. Does the complainant wish the officer to visit the other party?
 - d. What reasonable outcome would the complainant like to see?
6. If the complainant agrees to speak to the other party, give basic advice about how to deal with the meeting:
 - a. Stay calm;
 - b. Don't shout or swear;
 - c. Be clear about the problem;
 - d. Explain what would be acceptable as an outcome.
7. All present at the visit should agree and sign the notes of the meeting.
8. If the complainant wishes the officer to visit the other party alone, discuss with the complainant what information they are willing to divulge. If the complainant wishes to remain anonymous, guarantee confidentiality whilst explaining that the identity of the complainant may be obvious to the other party.
9. This will be recorded on the interview sheet and the complainant asked to sign it.
10. Arrange a meeting with the other party within 7 days.
11. During the interview with the other party, explain the allegations and ask for their response. Record this on the interview sheet.
12. If a successful outcome can be negotiated this will also be recorded and the other party will sign the notes of the meeting.
13. Details of the outcome will be provided to the person who made the complaint.
14. The notes of the meeting will then be placed on the complainant's file and, if appropriate, on the other party's.
15. A report of the incident will be made to the SCLT Membership Group.
16. The Membership Group will then monitor the process and recommend action where appropriate. This will involve approving action against either party if necessary. Prior to making a decision the mediation officer will invite both parties to submit a statement in writing.

17. The Mediation Officer who assists in the investigation of the incident will report to the Membership Group their findings and recommendations. The investigating Officer will not participate in the decision-making process of the Membership Group.
18. An Officer of SCLT will enact recommendations from the Membership Group speedily. The Membership Group's recommendation will be reported to the next meeting of the SCLT concerned to be noted.
19. The Membership Group does not have the power to enact a warrant for eviction. Should the Membership Group feel that this is an appropriate course of action they will prepare a report of the case and present it to the Board of SCLT.