

Social Tenant Access to Information Requirement (STAIRs) Policy

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TWO RIVERS HOUSING: STAIRs Policy

1. Background:

- 1.1. This policy mirrors the National Housing Federation (NHF) STAIRs policy template but has been adapted for Two Rivers Housing purposes where necessary.

2. Policy Aim and Purpose

- 2.1. This policy aims to ensure that tenants can access information from their landlord.
- 2.2. The policy sets out how Two Rivers Housing will promote access to information through a formal publication scheme enabling tenants and tenants' representatives to access information proactively, and to support tenants to make information requests.
- 2.3. This policy sets out how Two Rivers Housing will comply with the government's Policy Statement entitled the Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements, or "STAIRs", ensuring transparency, openness and tenant empowerment in being able to hold their landlord to account.

3. Scope

- 3.1. This policy applies to all employees of Two Rivers Housing and third parties contracted to provide social housing management services by Two Rivers Housing as the Private Registered Provider. STAIRs covers the publication of information, responding to information requests, and reviews and complaints.

4. Regulatory Framework

- 4.1. This policy is based on the Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements ("STAIRs") introduced under the amended Transparency, Influence and Accountability ("TI&A") Consumer Standard issued by the Regulator of Social Housing ("RSH"). The Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government ("MHCLG") has issued a Direction to RSH requiring it to introduce a new Consumer Standard enabling tenants to access information held by Private Registered Providers ("PRPs").
- 4.2. Further to a consultation, RSH has issued an amended TI&A Standard under which PRPs are required to comply with the STAIRs Policy Statement, which sets out the requirements for PRPs to issue a Publication Scheme (Chapter 1) taking effect from 1 October 2026, and secondly to respond to information requests from tenants and their representatives taking effect from 1 April 2027 (Chapter 2).
- 4.3. STAIRs is designed to enable tenants and their designated representative to be able to access information which supports tenants to know more about how their services are delivered, either through information disclosed as part of a formal publication scheme or by responding to specific requests for information from tenants.

5. Policy Principles

- 5.1. STAIRs takes a principles-based approach in line with the RSH Consumer Standards. Key principles include: transparency, openness, accountability and tenant involvement in how their services are delivered.
- 5.2. Under the publication scheme within Chapter 1 of the Policy Statement, providers must proactively publish information which they hold and which fall within one or more of the classes of information set out in Table 1 of the publication scheme.
- 5.3. The Policy Statement does not provide a prescriptive list as to precisely which documents landlords are required to provide. Instead, providers retain flexibility as to what information they may provide if they take a proactive approach to publication. The emphasis of the Policy Statement is in favour of disclosure.
- 5.4. Chapter 2 of STAIRs sets out that tenants (or their designated representative) may make a request for relevant information to their provider. Relevant information is defined as information relating to the management of a registered provider's social housing.
- 5.5. Providers should proactively respond to requests within 30 days, unless there are reasonable grounds to withhold information, such as where the information amounts to a protected class of information under freedom of information or data protection (or other) laws or where the harm caused by the disclosure would outweigh the benefit in the provider disclosing the information.
- 5.6. Providers should provide information irrespective of the reasons for the request or how the information may be used following disclosure and should disregard any perceived adverse impact or negative publicity which may be caused by the disclosure.
- 5.7. The government's intention to promote transparency and accountability under STAIRs means that PRPs should take a proactive approach to the publication of documents and consider that information ought to be published unless there is a good reason why information ought not to be published.

6. The requirements

- 6.1. The STAIRs scheme has two key phases: Chapter 1 Publication Scheme and Chapter 2 Information Requests. Key requirements for each phase are set out in sections (A) and (B) below.

a Publication Scheme (Chapter 1)

Our Publication Scheme is provided at **Appendix 1** to this policy. This sets out:

- (i) The classes of information that will be published; and
- (ii) The methods by which this information will be made available.

b Information Requests (Chapter 2)

Our process for handling information requests is set out at **Appendix 2** to this policy.

- 6.2. Information available under STAIRs is generally available free of charge. Our preferred method for providing the information is through an electronic format. Two Rivers Housing is committed to ensuring that information is made available in a way that is accessible as possible for all our tenants, requests for any other formats will be reviewed when required.
- 6.3. Two Rivers Housing will maintain a log of all information requests and timelines for responding to requests for reporting and accountability purposes.

7. Out of Scope/Withheld Information

- 7.1. Two Rivers Housing is not required to create new information to comply with either the publication scheme or information requests. When considering whether the information should be published, Two Rivers Housing will consider if the information comes within the classes of information set out in Table 1 of the Policy Statement. It may be necessary to redact documents prior to publication.
- 7.2. When considering an information request under Chapter 2 Two Rivers Housing will consider whether any information may need to be withheld or redacted in response to your request. Any withholding or redaction of information must be reasonable and in line with the principles set out in paragraphs 14 – 16 of the Policy Statement.
- 7.3. Annex 2 to this policy sets out how we will respond to requests for information and how we will consider “reasonableness” when assessing whether information should be withheld or redacted.

8. Review and Complaints Process

- 8.1. Two Rivers will handle challenges regarding information provided in response to a request, or information published as part of our publication scheme as part of our review and complaint process. A request for a review should generally be made within 3 months of receipt of the original decision. The purpose of any review will be to assess:
 - a. how we have responded to a request for information (for example, where we may not have provided information in an accessible format);
 - b. where we have not published relevant information that we may hold;
 - c. (where we have not complied with timelines for responding to requests and there is no good reason for us to have applied an extension;
 - d. where we have either withheld or redacted relevant information from disclosure and there is a disagreement regarding our decision and reasons for this.
- 8.2. We will carry out a review of how we have handled a request (an “internal review”) and aim to respond to a complaint within 30 calendar days of receipt. It may be necessary in exceptional circumstances to extend the timeline for a response. Any extension issued will be reasonable and kept to a minimum.

- 8.3. The complainant is able to escalate to the Housing Ombudsman under the terms of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme. Any complaint to the Ombudsman should generally be made within 3 months of the outcome of your review.
- 8.4. Only matters relating to STAIRs (i.e. the publication of information under Chapter 1 or information requests under Chapter 2) can be addressed as part of a STAIRs review process and then by complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

9. Data Protection and Security

- 9.1. Where we consider that your request amounts to request for personal data we will process your request in line with our subject access requests policy. For further information as to how we handle your personal data, see our privacy policy.

10. Responsibilities

- 10.1. All staff are required to familiarise themselves with the wording and obligations listed under this policy.

11. Monitoring and Review

- 11.1. Overall responsibility for this policy lies with the Data Protection Officer; day to day implementation of this policy lies with the Information Governance Officer.

Appendix 1

Publication Scheme

This Appendix sets out the basis on which Two Rivers Housing will proactively publish information relating to the management of its social housing function. We are committed to being open and transparent about the way we work, the services we provide and the decisions we make.

The information covered by this scheme falls into the following classes of information:

- Governance and Decision Making
- Finance and Spending
- Housing Stock Management
- Performance
- Housing Services and Tenant Liaison
- Lists and Registers
- Social Housing Management

This is a non-exhaustive list of classes of information we routinely publish. Much of the information may already be freely available on our website.

We publish information within each class which is up to date and correct as at the date of publication and for the previous two financial years, unless stated otherwise.

This Scheme will be reviewed at least on an annual basis.

How will relevant information under STAIRs be published?

Information will be available on our website, www.tworivershousing.org.uk/contact-us/information-sharing-and-requests/ and will be regularly updated.

Formats other than online

We are committed to making information listed in our Publication Scheme available free of

charge online. If information is required to be provided in an accessible alternative format, we also commit to providing a single copy of this information free of charge.

However, where an individual requests additional copies of information, we may apply charges strictly to cover the actual costs incurred in providing additional copies.

Charges may apply for additional copies in the following circumstances:

1. Printed or Hard Copy Documents

Black and white printing/ photocopying: charged per sheet. Quotes on request.

Colour printing/photocopying: charged per sheet. Quotes on request.

Postage charged at Royal Mail rates. Quotes on request.

1. Alternative Formats

If information is requested in an alternative accessible format (e.g., large print), we will provide the information free of charge.

2. No Charge for Inspection

Information may be inspected at our offices by appointment free of charge. Please contact us to arrange an appointment.

Tenant Feedback on this Publication Scheme

Tenants can provide suggestions for improvements to this Scheme via:

Email to Stairs@2rh.org.uk

Tenant panels/meetings or via your Neighbourhood Manager.

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Reviews

Should you consider that we have not included information in our publication scheme, or that we have unduly redacted information which you consider ought not to be redacted, please request a review at Stairs@2rh.org.uk.

We will normally complete a review within 30 days.

Appendix 2

Responding to Information Requests

Who can make requests?

Two Rivers Housing will respond to Information requests that are made either by a registered tenant with us, or by their designated representative (the scheme is not open to either former or prospective tenants). Two Rivers Housing will only respond to requests where it can confirm the identity of the requesting tenant and their representative (where appointed). There are no restrictions on tenants as to whom they may choose as their representative.

We will accept requests that are made in writing, including either by email, text message and social media, if we can identify who you are.

Your request does not have to specifically mention “STAIRs” for it to be considered under the scheme, if the request is made in writing and we are able to identify you.

We recognise that certain tenants may require additional support to make a request, and we will ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to support all tenants to be able to exercise their rights under STAIRs.

How long will it take us to respond?

We will provide an acknowledgement of receipt of your request within 5 working days of receipt.

We will respond to your request within 30 calendar days from receipt of your request, or where the request requires clarification, 30 days from receipt of the clarification. Two Rivers Housing will take reasonable steps to assist tenants and their representatives where any request requires clarification.

In exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to extend the timeline for a response. Where this is necessary Two Rivers Housing will inform you at the earliest opportunity. Every effort will be made to respond in a reasonable timeframe where any extension is required.

If there is likely to be any delay in providing a response, we will ensure that we provide you with a reason for the delay together with our best estimate as to when you may be likely to receive a response.

Obtaining information from third parties

It may be the case that the requested information is held by a third party responsible for the management of social housing on our behalf.

If this is the case, Two Rivers Housing will use all reasonable endeavours to obtain the information, taking account of our duty to comply with the requirements balanced against the need for a proportionate approach and the availability of resources. We will keep logs of our contacts where it is necessary to reach out to third parties for the information.

Refusing to respond to Information Requests

We may refuse to respond to an information request where:

- It is reasonable to withhold the information from disclosure.
- Disclosure of the information may cause harm (where we have reasonably balanced the factors favouring disclosure against the likelihood of any harm arising from that disclosure).
- Your identity (or that of your representative) cannot be established.

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- The meaning of the request is not clear, and you have not responded to our reasonable efforts to seek clarification.
- The information requested is excluded on the basis that it is not relevant information (i.e. does not come within the scope of an information request under STAIRs).
- The work involved in responding to the request would exceed 18 hours of staff time.
- The request is excessive, in that it is repeated (including where we receive repeated requests from multiple tenants acting in coordination or seeking the same information).
- The request is offensive or communicated in an abusive manner or is clearly intended to otherwise cause disruption to our organisation.

We may also redact information where it is appropriate and reasonable to do so.

What does “reasonable” mean when responding to requests?

When considering whether it is reasonable to withhold any information in response to your request we are required to have “due regard to” freedom of information and data protection laws (and any other relevant statutes). We are also required to balance factors favouring disclosure against the likelihood of any harm arising from the disclosure.

In having “due regard” a provider must ensure that it considers whether the information falls within a class of information under freedom of information and data protection laws and whether releasing the relevant information could cause harm.

“Due regard” means that a provider must consider or take account of a legal principle or legislation, but it does not mean that a provider must follow that principle automatically. Providers should be able to justify why they consider that protected class under FOIA (or

other relevant laws) may apply to the request and record their reasoning.

We will start with the presumption that the information should be disclosed in response to a request unless the information is such that the factors in favour of withholding (or redacting) the information outweigh the benefits of making the information available.

Factors we will consider when considering the likelihood of harm being caused by the disclosure will include:

Type of harm – physical, mental, financial, or operational / commercial.

Severity – how serious could the harm be?

Likelihood – is harm speculative, possible, or reasonably likely?

Harm to third parties – e.g., other individuals, third party organisations, whether the information is in the wider public interest to disclose or withhold.

For example, there is often a reason of public interest in withholding information on the basis that there is a:

- Need to ensure confidentiality around formulation of decisions and pipeline discussions or protect a negotiating position.
- Need to ensure value for money and maintain competitive position in a market.
- Need to ensure the health and safety of any individual or prevent disclosure of information which could prejudice any investigation.

We are also required to consider where the relevant information was provided by or relates to a third party, the registered provider must consider the views of that third party regarding the likelihood of any harm. When assessing the risk of harm, our approach is that the

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reference to “third party” here means any third party or individual (i.e. not solely a body responsible for the management of social housing instructed on our behalf).

In addition, we are not obliged to disclose information under STAIRs where we already provide disclosure of relevant information pursuant to other statutory provisions (for example, we are legally required to provide Companies House information about our corporate activities, such as the filing of our annual return).

What other factors will we consider when disclosing information?

When considering whether to disclose relevant information we will not consider the identity of the tenant nor any purpose to which that information may be put as relevant factors as to whether the information ought to be disclosed.

Nor will we take account of any reputational risk or negative public interest for us which may be either caused or inferred by reason of any disclosure. Two Rivers Housing will ensure that information is published in the spirit of openness and transparency as laid down by the scheme.

Where we either withhold information from disclosure, or we provide information but with redactions we will explain our reasons for this as part of our response.

If it is necessary to extend the timelines for a response where we need to consider whether withholding or redacting information is required, we will let you know as soon as possible, together with our likely timeline to provide you with a response.

When disclosing information, we will take all reasonable steps to ensure that information is provided in a format which is accessible to you