

SP35 Communications Policy



Scope of policy

The Communications Policy explains what communication standards everyone can expect. The policy applied to any person who communicates internally or externally on behalf of Soha, including full or part-time employees; contract or temporary staff; Board members; Members' Forum; residents representing Soha in discussion with other Housing Associations, such as Scrutiny, Audit and other co-regulator residents; committee members; suppliers; and partners.

All types and channels of communication are included in the terms of this policy including, but not limited to: social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X), publications, newsletters, leaflets, email, phone contact (voice, video and text), webchats, letters, Teams communications, press briefings, website, radio interviews, television, off-site screens and face-to-face meetings; whether started by Soha, or as an addition to others' communications.

The content of policy extends to all Soha policies.

Aim

All communications should be support Soha to achieve the aims and objectives of the current Corporate Plan. All communications should also be in line with Soha's vision, as explained in the Corporate Plan.

Good communication plays an essential role in our aim to provide secure, comfortable homes and efficient services to our residents. Our communications must always be:

- relevant and clear
- consistently and responsively engage with, and keep informed, our residents, staff and stakeholders
- raise awareness of opportunities for residents to get involved and positively influence outcomes
- use a variety of channels, styles and methods appropriate to different stakeholders, depending on the purpose and content
- ensure Soha is trusted as a partner of choice by key local stakeholders
- ensure Soha's voice is trusted and sought for national or local campaigns
- meet all regulatory and statutory requirements around information.

Policy Statement

Soha is committed to providing an open and honest approach to communicating with residents, staff, the media, suppliers and other stakeholders. This proactive and positive policy aims to help Soha continue to improve its support for existing and future tenants and enhance the reputation of the organisation using these guiding principles:

- **Inclusive** Accessible and inclusive communications that reflect both the nine protected characteristics for equality and diversity, and in the manner of communication preferred or requested (where possible to do so)
- **Responsive** Listen to residents, stakeholders and staff and act on their feedback
- **Manage and enhance Soha's corporate reputation** Be prepared, proactive and responsive
- **Contribute to the wider conversation** Post, type or speak in public when we need to, or when we have something meaningful to say
- **Timely** Communication should be delivered in a timely manner
- **Consistent** with our messages and corporate branding
- **Transparent** Open and honest in all communications
- **Clear** We aim to use Plain English in our communications
- **Cost effective** Provide high quality communications at best value for money
- **Professional, empathetic and simple** Be professional yet empathetic in tone, whatever the method of communication, whilst using simple and clear language
- **Limit jargon** Communication should be without "industry jargon", opting for layman's terms unless specific wording is required by law.
- **On brand** All communication should align with the Soha Housing Brand Guidance
- **Compliant** Use resident's personal data responsibly and with a clear purpose, always compliant with relevant laws, including UK GDPR, and in line with Soha's Data Protection Policy.

Implementation

Setting the tone

The Communications team will oversee any external communications (including and digital and print publications) to ensure they are consistent with this policy. Press releases and statements are to be issued by the Communications team. Any press or media enquiries must be put through to the Communications team.

Specific guidance and procedures, such as a brand document for tone, and the role of Generative Artificial Intelligence in supporting staff to communicate internally and externally, are included at the foot of this policy. It is the responsibility of the Communication team to make this information available to the organisation.

Surveys

Where relevant, any department may send a survey to gather feedback from residents or partners. Our lawful basis for collecting this data falls under the Legitimate Interest section of the UK GDPR. A Legitimate Interest Assessment for surveys has been completed with our Data Governance team.

External surveys

Soha's surveys will be accessible, relevant, compliant, transparent, and impactful.

Each resident-facing survey must:

- have a clear purpose which benefits residents
 - be necessary to achieve the purpose
 - not duplicate or cross over with any other existing survey
- have an identified audience
 - consider the accessibility needs of this audience
 - consider the relevance and impact of each question on the audience, especially when asking EDI questions
- have a clear lifespan
 - communicated at point of data collection
 - with a timeframe for how long data will be collected
- have a timeline for secure storage, if data is exported
 - stored on SharePoint, with limited access to the data.

To ensure the above is consistent, staff **must follow the [Survey Procedure 2026](#)**. This is referenced at the end of this document, and includes:

- [filling in a form](#) to be reviewed by the Communications and Data teams – the link to this is in the SohaHub quick links
- co-creation with the Communications team to ensure the correct tone
- design within our survey provider (at the time of writing, SurveyMonkey), as it has an opt-out option.

The Communications team will have annual responsibility for clearing data and surveys from SurveyMonkey which are no longer in use.

Surveys could arrive through text, email, or could even be through a QR code on a poster. At events, drop-ins or door knocks, staff may fill in a survey on behalf of a resident or partner.

Internal surveys

Where surveys and polls are conducted internally with staff, staff may use Microsoft Forms, and are expected to follow the internal survey guidance within [Survey Procedure 2026](#).

Communication methods and timeframes

Services' response times vary between departments due to the different policies in place. These can be found on individual [service standards pages](#) on our website. When these change, the department head or service manager must inform the Communications team so changes can be reflected in the service standard published on the website.

At the point of writing this policy, the following table shows current communication methods and timeframes that residents can expect from us. These default methods of communication are not the only ones the teams use. Where specific communication preferences or needs are communicated to us, we will make the requested reasonable accommodations.

Service	Default proactive communication method	Default response communication method	Response time
Customer services	Telephone, email	Phone, email, webchat, Meta Messenger	We will aim to respond to: • all written correspondence within 3 working days • calls (including being in the call waiting queue or selecting the 'call back' option whilst in that queue) on the same day • urgent call backs from any Soha team below within 24 hours • non-urgent call backs from any Soha team below within 72 hours
Complaints	Email	Email We will not respond to complaints via social media, but will contact you through email or telephone	Stage 1: We will acknowledge or respond within 5 working days. If the case is more complex we will tell you, and can take a further 10 working days to respond Stage 2: We will acknowledge stage 2 requests within 5 working days of receipt. A final written response will be sent within 20 working days of the acknowledgement. (This can be extended to 40 working days in extraordinary circumstances or for complex cases.)
Data Protection	Email	Email	Respond within 3 working days of receipt
Estates maintenance	Email and letter via post	Email or letter via post	Respond to all written correspondence within 7 days of receipt

Extra Care	Letter and telephone	Telephone, letter via post	Respond to all written correspondence within 7 days of receipt
Independent Living	Email and telephone	Telephone, email, letter via post	Respond to all written correspondence within 7 days of receipt
Lettings	Letter via post, email, telephone	Telephone, email, letter via post	Respond to all written correspondence within 2 working days of receipt (post within 7 working days)
Neighbourhoods	Email and letter via post	Email and letter via post	Respond to serious anti-social behaviour reports within 1 working day; all other anti-social behaviour reports within 5 working days
Planned maintenance	Letter via post	Letter via post, telephone	Respond to all written correspondence within 7 days of receipt
Rental income	Email and telephone	Telephone, email, letter via post	Respond to all written correspondence within 7 days of receipt
Responsive repairs	Telephone, text message	Text, email, phone	Response targets for work completion are emergency repairs within 24 hours; urgent repairs within 7 days; and routine repairs within 28 days
Sales and home ownership	Email, telephone	Email, telephone	Respond to all written correspondence within 1 working day of receipt

Providing alternative accessible forms of communication

The Communications team can arrange accessible communication methods within the following timeframes:

Communication form	Time frame	Delivered by
Advocacy	Conditional on availability of advocacy services used by the county council within residents' county	By registered provider used by the county council within the resident's locality***
Audio narration	Same day	In person by staff member(s)
Audio transcription	10 working days	External provider**
Braille	10 working days	External provider
Interpretation (BSL plus approximately 200 languages) by audio or video on a staff member's device*	Same day (spontaneous)	Online provider who we subscribe to, and pay for service by the minute when required
Interpretation (BSL plus approximately 200 languages) in person	10 working days	Registered provider used by the county council within the resident's locality
Written translation	10 working days	External provider

**This service is not just for those who experience deafness. Residents with a hearing loss and/or speech difficulty can access the services of Relay UK for free (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) to support making their call <https://www.relayuk.bt.com/>. For example, autism may affect speech, and this service could help support communication.*

***Audio transcription is provided as a matter of course on YouTube for our publications, and USB stick by request*

****Some residents already have advocates from money management divisions within County Councils; where appropriate, these will be used.*

From 2026, key resident-facing policies or guides will have an Easy Read version available. These documents take several weeks to create. If there is a key document which you think should be available in Easy Read format, please email communications@soha.co.uk or call 0800 014 15 045 and ask for the Communications team.

Communication methods and response times within Awaab's Law

Soha, along with all other housing associations, has a legal responsibility to respond to reports of emergency hazards within 24 hours of receiving them. Due to these strict time limits, at the time of writing this policy we will only **accept hazard reports by phone**:

- Call 01235 515 900 or 0800 014 15 45 (Freephone)

We cannot accept hazard reports through social media or email, as comments, posts and emails are only monitored 8.30am-5pm on weekdays (excluding bank holidays).

We acknowledge that offering other methods of receiving and acting upon emergency hazard reports would be desirable. We are actively pursuing this. However, at the time of writing this policy, conducting a live telephone call with the resident is the only way we can be sure that we're acting within the statutory emergency timeframes, and offering the resident the appropriate reassurance.

Residents with hearing loss or speech difficulty can access the services of Relay UK for free (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) to support making their call

<https://www.relayuk.bt.com/>. This service is not just for those who experience deafness. For example, autism may affect speech, and this service could help support communication. Staff are on hand during office hours to explore communication services like textphone or Relay UK with residents, to support choice and control over how they report.

Resident involvement

This policy acknowledges the importance for Soha to maintain a good reputation for resident involvement. We aim to ensure communications are relevant and useful to residents, and support the aims of the SP25 Resident Involvement Policy, by:

- keeping residents informed of Soha's services and activities using multiple channels, as well as publications
- developing and improving communication through resident feedback and complaints
- facilitate platforms where Soha residents can be part of online community groups, and explore new opportunities with residents to do so
- collaborate with residents in the design and production of relevant publications and event
- ensuring that communication is two-way and transparent.

Responsibility

How we communicate reflects on us as an organisation and as individuals. It is the responsibility of each individual or third party to ensure that communications representing, or associated with, Soha follow the principles in this policy. Only an authorised individual, group or third party is permitted to undertake Soha's internal and external communications.

External communications made by Soha should be made in line with the policy and in conjunction with the Communications team. All staff and Board members have a responsibility to communicate sensibly, professionally and lawfully, in a way that is respectful and consistent with their duties.

Chief Executive has ultimate responsibility for all communications made by and on behalf of Soha Housing

Directors and Senior Leadership Team must ensure that managers and team members in their departments, and any contractors they commission on Soha's behalf, follow this policy

Managers must ensure that team members in their departments follow this policy. Managers should manage and monitor information under their area of responsibility to ensure that the content is up to date, relevant and compliant with the policy. Changes to messaging and website must come through the Communications team

Staff members all staff must follow the information in this policy when communicating internally and externally

Board members all Board members must follow the information in this policy when communicating internally and externally.

Board Members, Directors and Senior Leadership are all responsible for authorising this policy.

Monitoring and review

The Communications team will constantly monitor communications output from all areas of Soha. They will work with SLT and managers to instil the principles of this policy amongst all staff, through regular reminders, updates and training where required.

Teams should review regularly whether their 'standard' communications are being understood and engaged with by stakeholders and to submit these to the Communications team for review and refresh as necessary. Communications will spot check teams' communications twice a year to spot patterns and improve tone.

This policy will be reviewed in three years or sooner if the operating environment changes or there are updates to legislation.

Context

This policy is designed to be consistent with current legislation including, but not limited to, Data Protection, EDI and Copyright. It should also be read in the context of the following Soha strategies, policies and guidance:

- SP18 Aids and Adaptations Policy
- SP21 ASB Policy
- SS07 Communications Strategy
- SS03 Communities Strategy
- SP07 Complaints Policy
- SP06 Data Protection (UK GDPR) Policy
- SP01 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- SS01 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
- SP45 IT & Security Policy
- SS02 Organisational Development Strategy
- SP52 Reasonable Adjustments Policy
- SP25 Resident Involvement, Support & Incentives Policy
- Soha Disaster Recovery plan
- Survey procedure 2026
- Soha Housing brand guidance
- Soha Housing Corporate Plan 2025-30
- Soha Housing service standards
- Soha Housing privacy notice

The communication principles of this policy apply to all other Soha policies.

Version number - 2			
Members' Forum approved	Via e-decision on 16 March 2026	SLT approved	Via e-decision on 13 March 2026
EIA completed	Feedback on EIA and policy received from EDI Steering Group. Feedback incorporated in January 2026	Board approved	Via e-decision on 25 March 2026
DPIA Checklist completed	Approved by DPA on 20 August 2025. Rechecked and updated feedback incorporated in February 2026	Review due date	By March 2029