

Report to Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel

Date of meeting: 23 March 2009

Subject: Tenant Participation Progress 2008

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Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins, Office of the Chief Executive (01992 56 4607)



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That progress made on the development of tenant participation during the period 1 January 2008 – 31 December 2008 be noted.

Report:

1. At the Tenant Participation Progress Meeting held on 23rd October 2007 and following discussion with the Director of Housing, it was agreed to provide a yearly tenant participation update to the Housing Standing Scrutiny Panel.
2. The Housing Services Strategy on Tenant Participation, which was updated in 2007, sets out the Council's approach to tenant participation and how the service will be delivered.
3. Consultation of 1,563 general needs tenants through the 2008 Tenant Satisfaction Survey showed that 62% of respondents were satisfied that their views were being taken into account by their landlord (EFDC) and only 7% were dissatisfied.

Existing Groups

4. There are currently 6 established residents associations and 2 residents panels in the District, namely:
 - Debden Tenants Panel, Loughton;
 - Limes Farm Community Association, Chigwell;
 - Ninefields Residents Panel, Waltham Abbey;
 - Oakwood Hill Estate Residents Association, Loughton;
 - Paternoster North Residents Association, Upshire;
 - Romeland Residents Association, Waltham Abbey
 - Roundhills Residents Association, Waltham Abbey;
 - Shelley Residents Association, Ongar.
5. To become established and remain 'recognised', groups must fulfil the Council's criteria for formal recognition.
6. In addition to the existing groups, there are 3 associations representing specific groups of residents:
 - Epping Forest Leaseholders Association; which has 94 members and meets quarterly.
 - Epping Forest Sheltered Forum; which has 32 members and meets bi-monthly.

- Epping Forest Rural Tenants Forum; which has 13 members and meets quarterly.

There is also an 'Umbrella' group, the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, that includes representatives of all the residents groups and meets with senior officers of the Housing Directorate and the Housing Portfolio Holder bi-monthly.

7. Each of the residents associations has signed a Local Tenant Participation Agreement with the Council, which sets out the approach each group and the Council will adopt in relation to tenant participation. These agreements are renewed on a yearly basis.
8. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, Leaseholders Association and Sheltered Forum has each signed its own participation agreement. These agreements are renewed on a three yearly basis.
9. Each of the residents associations is invited to apply for a support grant of up to £250 per annum and a minor estate enhancement grant of up to £500 per annum.

Special Events

10. During 2008, successful community consultation days were held in Waltham Abbey (Ninefields) and North Weald. It is planned to hold similar events in other parts of the district during 2009.

New Initiatives

11. It is planned to introduce Local Area Agreements, particularly in areas where no current residents group exists. This will offer the opportunity for residents in these areas to become involved in the management of their neighbourhood and could also lead to the setting up of residents groups.
12. The Tenant Participation Officer is working with the East of England Resident Involvement Group, which meets quarterly to share good working practice and to compare methods for involvement. Through this involvement a 'Mystery Shopping' exercise is planned for 2009. This is where tenants would "test" the services being provided by the housing organization, by "pretending" to be a customer in need of a service, and reporting on how well the organization deals with the enquiry.
13. In October 2008, all tenants and leaseholders were invited to complete a Tenant Talkback form, detailing areas of interest for future consultation on a variety of subjects, including Repairs and Maintenance, Estate Inspections, Equality and Diversity, and Grounds Maintenance. 98 respondents returned their form and a database of interested tenants has been set up for use in future consultation and the setting up of focus groups to discuss specific subjects.

Diversity

14. In its Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE's) the Government has identified a number of 'Hard to Reach' groups: rural communities, younger people, minority groups, families; that landlords are expected to include in the tenant participation process. The Tenant Participation Officer has been working with a number of these groups in a variety of ways, as detailed in points 15 – 18 below.

15. From information received through Tenant Talkback, 16 tenants have been invited to join the Council's Disability Equality Scheme Consultative Group.
16. In addition, 10 tenants have expressed an interest in forming a district-wide Multi-Faith group or joining the existing Multi-Faith Forum.
17. The Epping Forest Sheltered Forum represents EFDC tenants living in Sheltered or Group –dwelling schemes and properties covered by a Scheme Manager. The Forum meets bi-monthly and continues to attract new members.
18. The Epping Forest Rural Tenants Forum was set up in November 2006 and continues to expand. Twelve rural areas of the district are represented on the Forum.

Administration and Management of Tenant Participation

19. The Tenant Participation Officer holds monthly progress meetings with the Housing Resources Manager and Principal Housing Officer (Information and Strategy) and quarterly progress meetings with the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations).
20. The Tenant Participation Officer maintains an Action Plan which monitors progress of all aspects of tenant participation. Progress of the Action Plan is discussed at both the monthly and quarterly meetings.

Targets

21. A list of targets for 2009/10 is attached as appendix 1.