

Epping Forest District
Council Housing
Directorate
Tenant Participation
Impact Statement
2010



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE



Foreword

By Molly Carter – Chair of Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation

As Chair of the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, I have been able to see at first hand the difference that tenant participation has made, both in local terms and to the District as a whole.

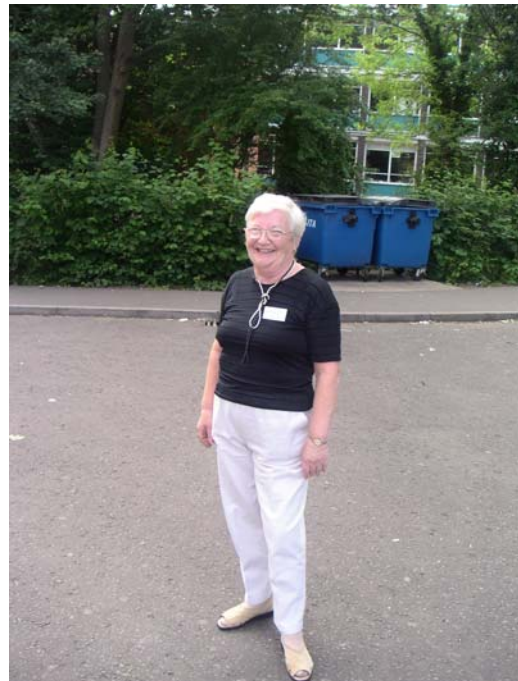
The Federation takes its role as the ‘flag bearers’ for tenant participation in Epping Forest very seriously and as a group, we are pleased to have the opportunity to be involved in so many important decisions affecting the lives of our friends and neighbours throughout the District.

It is becoming increasingly important that tenants are given more of say about how their homes and neighbourhoods are managed and we must ensure that we continue to promote tenant participation and involve as many tenants as possible in the shaping of the housing service.

This Tenant Participation Impact Statement shows a high level of tenant involvement and influence at all levels within Epping Forest and, on behalf of the Federation, I would like to thank everyone who has contributed in any way to the many projects, meetings, innovations, consultations and events that have helped to make a difference.

I look forward to the future of housing in Epping Forest with great optimism and would encourage all tenants and leaseholders to become involved in any way they can to ensure that Epping Forest District Council continues to provide us with a housing service to be proud of for many years to come.

Molly Carter



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1. Introduction

1.1 What is Tenant Participation?

- A two-way process involving sharing of information and ideas, where tenants are able to influence decisions and take part in what is happening
- All the activities and processes that the Housing Directorate undertakes that helps it to know what its residents and communities want
- All the activities and resources that enable people to be involved in shaping their Housing service
- The framework in which the participation process is delivered

1.2 What do we hope to achieve as a result of Tenant Participation?

- Feedback and influence, which will help us to improve services
- Better value for money
- Informed tenants who are able to express their views and influence the service
- More satisfied residents

1.3 How can we measure the impact of Tenant Participation?

Is Tenant Participation helping to achieve the objectives listed above? It is hard to measure all of the results of Tenant Participation. However, this document outlines the ways in which tenants/residents have made a difference.

We aim to measure this by:

- Monitoring targets in the Action Plan within the Housing Directorate Strategy on Tenant Participation
- Reviewing how tenants have influenced policies and decisions
- Asking residents about the impact of Tenant Participation
- Collecting information from staff about how Tenant Participation has helped them to improve services
- Feedback from surveys and other consultations
- Performance Monitoring

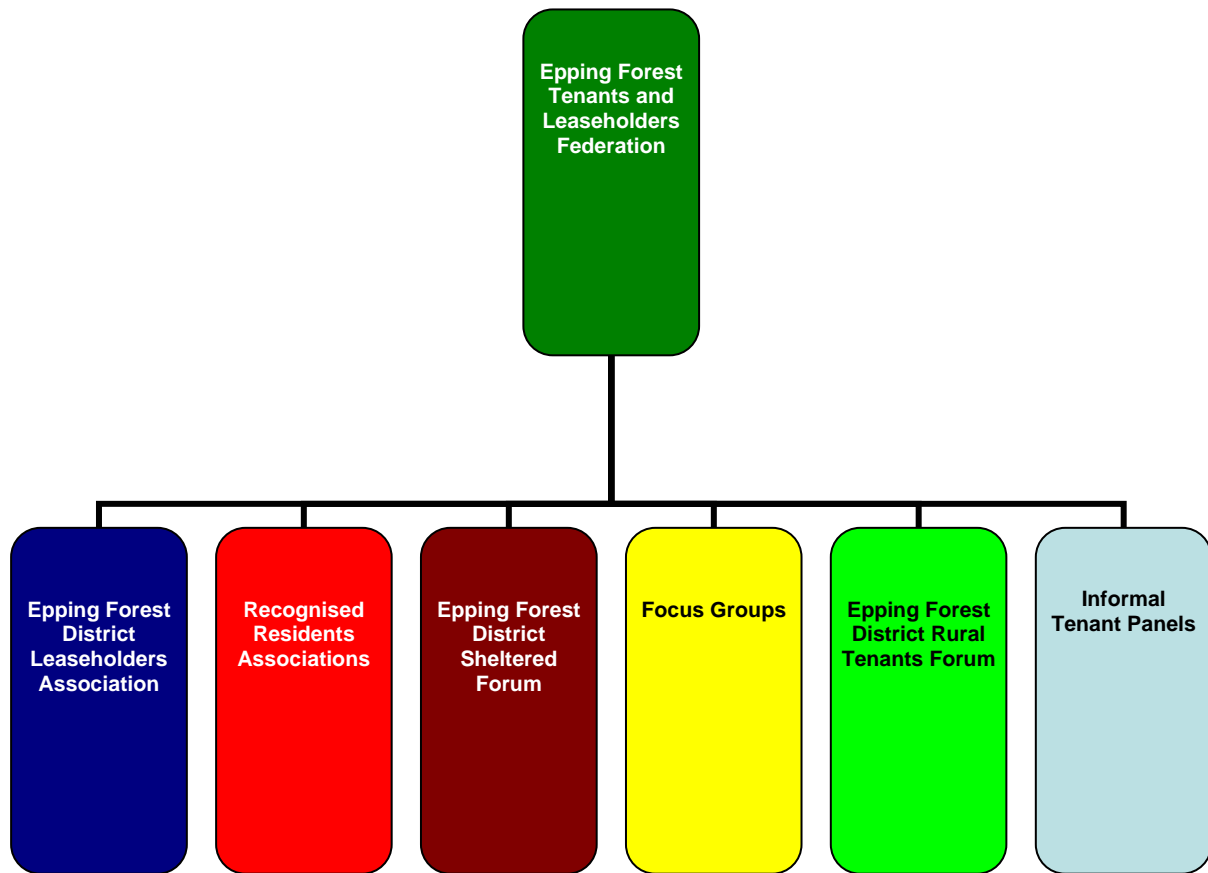
This Impact Statement shows how many tangible examples of how Tenant Participation has made a difference at different levels

- To policy

- On estates and in neighbourhoods
- To individual residents



2. How is Tenant Participation Organised in Epping Forest?



The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation meets with the Council's Housing Portfolio Holder, Director of Housing and other senior housing managers every 2 months to be consulted and informed about issues affecting the residents of Epping Forest. The Federation represents all of the Council's tenants and leaseholders and the Executive Committee is made up of 2 representatives from each of the Council's recognised Residents Associations, Tenant Panels, the Leaseholders Association, the Rural Tenants Forum and the Sheltered Forum.

The Leaseholders Association represents the Council's leaseholders and meets with Council officers quarterly to discuss issues affecting leaseholders and leasehold services.

The Rural Tenants Forum meets quarterly with Council officers and represents tenants living in Epping Forest's rural villages.

The Sheltered Forum is made up of representatives from the Council's sheltered housing and group-dwelling schemes. The Forum is held every 2 months and is attended by a number of Council officers. Issues affecting residents living in accommodation with a scheme manager are discussed and guest speakers attend each meeting.

The Council currently has 5 recognised residents associations and 2 Tenant Panels, being the Debden Tenants Panel, Loughton; Limes Farm Community Association, Chigwell; Ninefields Residents Panel, Waltham Abbey; Oakwood Hill Residents Association, Loughton; Romeland Residents Association, Waltham Abbey; Roundhills Residents Association, Waltham Abbey and Shelley Residents Association, Ongar.

A Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group has been established and the formation of a focus group to look at Housing Allocations and a Reading Group to 'Tenant Approve' Housing Directorate produced literature are in progress.

2.2 Tenant Participation Officer

The Council employs a dedicated full-time Tenant Participation Officer, whose main function is to involve the tenants and leaseholders of the District in the management of the homes and neighbourhoods, and the shaping of their housing service.

The Tenant Participation Officer works closely with existing residents groups and encourages the formation of new groups in areas without formal representation, as well as administering the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the Leaseholders Association, the Sheltered Forum and Rural Tenants Forum.

2.3 The Epping Forest District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement

The Council and the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation have entered into a Tenant Participation Agreement (also known as a Compact) which is reviewed and updated every three years.

The main aims of the agreement are to set out the intentions of the Council and the Federation in the approach they will take for;

- the provision of information to tenants and to tenant participation generally;
- the operation of the Federation; and
- reviewing the Agreement.

Similar agreements have also been made with the Epping Forest Leaseholders Association, the Epping Forest Sheltered Forum and the Epping Forest Rural Tenants Forum.

2.4 Local Tenant Participation Agreements

Each recognised residents group enters into a Local Tenant Participation Agreement with the Council. These agreements take a similar form to the District-wide agreement and are reviewed and renewed annually.

2.5 Financial Support to Residents Groups

The Council provides the following financial support to its residents groups:

- Initial 'Start-up' funding of £100
- Support Grant of £200 on formal recognition of the group
- Annual Support Grant of up to £250
- Annual 'Minor Estate Enhancement Grant of up to £500

Certain reasonable costs are also met for the hire of halls and printing of literature.

2.6 Training opportunities

The Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Association and other recognised residents groups are regularly offered a programme of training opportunities through organisations such as the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), InStep and Capita. In house training sessions on Housing Law and Housing Finance have also been held.

Through its work with the East of England Resident Involvement Group, Epping Forest District Council has joined a Training Consortium which will offer value for money resident training, in partnership with other member organisations. The training subjects will be selected in consultation with residents groups throughout the member organisations.

3. Profile of involved tenants

The Housing Directorate's Tenant Participation network is spread throughout the District giving all tenants and leaseholders the opportunity to be involved.



Residents in the South of the District are represented in Chigwell by Limes Farm Community Association and in Loughton by the Debden Tenants Panel and Oakwood Hill Community Association.

In the West of the District Ninefields Residents Panel, Romeland Residents Association and Roundhills Residents Association represent residents of Waltham Abbey.

The East and North of Epping Forest are mostly comprised of rural villages and tenants in these areas can be involved through the Rural Tenants Forum. Residents of Shelley, Ongar have their own representation through Shelley Residents Association.

Tenants of the Council's sheltered and group-dwelling schemes are represented through the District's Sheltered Forum. Sheltered Schemes are situated in Buckhurst Hill, Epping, Loughton, Nazeing, North Weald, Ongar and Waltham Abbey.

The District's leaseholders are represented by the Epping Forest Leaseholders Association. All new leaseholders are invited to join the Association. A number of Community Consultation events have been held across the District in Roydon and Sheering villages; North Weald; Ninefields Estate, Waltham Abbey; Debden Estate, Loughton, Shelley Estate, Ongar and Oakwood Hill Estate, Loughton.

4. Consultation

4.1 Regular Consultations

The Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation is consulted on a regular or periodic basis on the following:

- 17 Housing Directorate Service Strategies are renewed tri-annually following consultation with the Federation.
- The Council's Housing Strategy is reviewed and updated tri-annually.
- The Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation Tenant Participation Agreement is reviewed and updated Tri-annually.
- All petitions received by the Housing Directorate are discussed at Federation meetings.
- The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan (including Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan) is considered annually by the Federation, prior to formal consideration by the Council and includes the comments of the Federation.
- Progress with the HRA Business Plan is considered and reviewed by the Federation every six months.
- Council's performance against 21 tenant-selected indicators is considered quarterly.
- Performance against the Council's Housing Service Standards and proposed changes are considered annually.



5. Residents influence on policy and procedures

The Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation is consulted on all draft reports to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Council committees involving new or varied housing policies, plans and strategies. The Federation's comments are either included in the final report, or reported orally, depending on timing. In many cases, the Federation members are consulted on their views at a much earlier stage, prior to any reports being drafted.

5.1 Housing Directorate Service Strategies

The Housing Directorate has the following 17 Housing Service Strategies:

- Home Ownership
- Rent Arrears
- Rent Collection and Administration
- Homelessness
- Under-occupation
- Housing Information
- Tenant Participation
- Private Rented Sector
- Housing Management Services
- Older Peoples Housing Services
- Housing Allocations
- Housing Advice
- Empty Properties
- Energy Efficiency
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Harassment
- Diversity and Equality

Each strategy is produced to a common format, and provides detailed information on the subject matter, including an action plan. All strategies are updated and renewed every three years in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.

5.2 Housing Service Standards

The Housing Directorate has developed a full set of service standards in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation covering:

- General Housing
- Homelessness
- Housing Register and Allocations
- Housing Management
- Repairs, Maintenance and Improvements
- Disabled Adaptations
- Sheltered Housing and Careline
- Home Ownership
- Leasehold Services
- Tenant Participation

The Service Standards were provided to all tenants when they were initially produced and to all new tenants subsequently.

5.3 Housing Revenue Account Business Plan

The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, which incorporates the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan, sets out the Housing Directorate's aims and objectives for the housing service in the medium term. The Business Plan is developed in conjunction with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and a 'special' meeting of the Federation is held each year consider the draft plan and to agree the Federation's comments for inclusion in the final published plan.

5.4 Housing Strategy 2009-2012

The Housing Directorate's Housing Strategy 2009 -2012 was developed following intensive consultation with partners, including all of the District's Residents Groups. The Housing Strategy assesses the District's housing needs and sets out the Council's approach to meeting those needs. In addition, the Strategy sets out the Council's vision for housing in the District, the key housing objectives and the aims and objectives relating to individual issues. An action plan explains how the Council intends to achieve these aims and objectives.

5.5 Housing Stock Options Appraisal

In 2003, The Council undertook an extensive Stock Options Appraisal. The Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation played a key role throughout the appraisal process in reporting information to tenants and attending meetings and presentations. The Federation was consulted at every stage of the process and were a major influence in the Council's decision to retain its housing stock without the need to ballot its tenants.

5.6 Tenant Selected Performance Indicators

The Tenant Services Authority's (TSA) new Housing Regulatory Framework makes it clear that tenants (or more appropriately, tenants' representatives) should be encouraged to monitor their landlord's performance throughout the year, and provide feedback to their landlord. As the Housing Directorate has around 175 different housing performance indicators it currently monitors, it was agreed that the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation choose a smaller number of indicators, that it considered to be of particular interest to tenants, to monitor on a quarterly basis. At its meeting held on 17th May 2010, the Federation agreed 21 Housing Indicators to be monitored quarterly and reported on by the Council in its new Annual Report to Tenants by 1st October each year.

5.7 Repairs Advisory Project Group

The Repairs Advisory Project Group was set up to oversee the restructuring of the Council's Building Maintenance Works Unit and Housing Repairs Service. Two members of the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation were elected to the project group whose functions included the selection of an external Management Contractor to manage the service.

5.8 Housing Scrutiny Panel

The Housing Scrutiny Panel, which is made up of elected Council Members, considers many issues in detail and monitors progress with a number of activities. Most of the activities are reported to the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, prior to the Scrutiny Panel meeting. For this reason, the Chair of the Federation is a co-opted member of the Housing Scrutiny Panel and attends every meeting.

The following pages show further examples of how residents have influenced housing policies and procedures through tenant participation.



5.9 Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation

The Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation meets regularly with the Housing Portfolio Holder, the Director of Housing and other senior housing managers, to be consulted on issues affecting all tenants and leaseholders including **all** draft reports to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Council committees involving new or varied housing policies, plans and strategies that affect tenants in any way.

The Chair of the Federation is a co-opted member of the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel.

The following table shows a number of ways in which the Federation's involvement in decision making has impacted on residents of the District.

Date	Subject	Decision or Outcome	Outcome or Impact
13 March 2008	Building Maintenance and Housing Repairs Review	To combine the Housing Repairs Team and the Building Maintenance Works Unit, reducing the number of craft workers but retaining a core to undertake a proportion of the day-to-day ad hoc repairs to the Council's housing stock, and those to void properties, with the balance of the work being externalised.	Repairs staff and craft workers now on same premises making communication easier. Reduction in repairs completion times. More repairs done by appointment. Reduced costs and better value for money. Greater customer satisfaction.
20 May 2008	Careline Review	Extending the routine repairs reporting service for tenants from 5pm to 8pm on each working day by using existing Careline facilities and staff.	Tenants and Leaseholders now able to report repairs outside of 'normal' working hours. Greater customer satisfaction Value for money as existing resources used.
20 May 2008	Rent free weeks for new lettings	To introduce a rent-free week for new tenants who sign up for a tenancy on Thursday or Friday for a tenancy starting on the following Monday.	Reduction in costs for new tenants. Greater customer satisfaction.
20 May 2008	Policy on de-designated dwellings	To let properties to younger people that were previously designated for older people, on the basis that they are 'difficult to let'.	Reduction in waiting list times for younger people
22 July 2008	Void property re-let standards	Adoption of Void Property re-let standards and a questionnaire to be completed by new tenants.	Better customer involvement in lettings process. Greater customer satisfaction Reduced costs and better value for money.

23 September 2008	Housing Allocations Scheme	Annual review of Allocations Scheme and adoption of changes agreed with Federation	Greater clarification to Housing applicants with regards to banding
24 March 2009	Housing Revenue Account Business Plan (including Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan)	Approved the Business Plan and agreed with the objectives, key housing priorities and the action plan for the coming year.	Tenants have clearer understanding of the Housing Directorate's aims and how funding is spent.
24 March 2009	Housing Strategy 2009-12	Agreed Council's plans for the development of the Housing Service for the period 2009-12	Tenants aware of Council medium-term priorities for the service

5.10 Epping Forest District Sheltered Forum

The Epping Forest District Sheltered Forum meets bi-monthly with Council officers to discuss issues affecting residents of the Districts Sheltered Schemes, Group Dwelling Schemes and dwellings visited by a Scheme Manager. The following table shows a number of ways in which the Forum's involvement in decision making has impacted on residents of the District.

Date	Subject	Decision/Outcome	Outcome/Impact
13 August 2008	Tenant Support Plans	Adoption of Tenant Support Plans containing vital information on individual tenants.	Council able to provide greater support to tenants. Increased welfare provision for tenants. More practical use of staff resources leading to increased value for money.
11 Feb 2009	Review of Older Peoples Services	Adoption of 'Hub and Spoke' and 'Floating Support' models of working for scheme managers and 'tenure neutral' housing related support	Better service provision. More efficient allocation of resources. More residents able to access services.
24 February 2010	Careline Information Pack	Introduction of a Careline Information Pack, providing new users of the Careline service with essential information.	Tenants using Careline able to access services quicker and easier. Increased independence for users of Careline. Value for money as tenants have the information required to access services directly without always involving a staff member. Staff time 'freed up'.

5.11 Epping Forest District Leaseholders Association

The Epping Forest District Leaseholders Association meets with Council officers on a quarterly basis to discuss issues affecting the District's leaseholders. The following table shows a number of ways in which the association involvement in decision making has impacted on leaseholders in Epping Forest.

Date	Subject	Decision/Outcome	Outcome/Impact
26 February 2008	Leaseholders Handbook	Introduction of a Leaseholders Handbook providing essential information for the District's leaseholders.	Leaseholders able to access services more easily and directly. Reduction in staff time dealing with queries that can be answered through the handbook. Staff time now spent enhancing the service elsewhere. Increased value for money due to less enquiries, etc.
19 August 2008	Leaseholders Survey	Profiling information gathered about leaseholders circumstances. Specific issues raised by leaseholders	Able to provide information to specific leaseholders in large print meaning they are now able to access services more easily. Able to deal with specific issues as identified by survey. Increased customer satisfaction.
18 February 2009	Home Ownership Staffing Resources	Increase in staffing resources for Home Ownership Section by 1 part-time post funded from surplus in Leasehold Administration Account. Fixed Management Fees	Improved service to Leaseholders. Fixed Management Fees meaning leaseholders able to budget more easily Efficiency savings as staff able to dedicate more time to debt recovery.

6. Informal Involvement

6.1 Mystery Shopping

During November and December 2009 tenants of South Essex Homes (Southend) undertook a Mystery Shopping exercise on behalf of Epping Forest District Council. Twenty scenarios were used to look at all sections of the Housing Directorate:

- Housing Options
- Housing Management
- Housing Resources
- Housing Assets
- Older Peoples Services
- Building Maintenance and Repairs
- Private Sector Housing

The results of the exercise were then fed back to section managers and suitable action taken to make improvements to the service where necessary and compliment staff as appropriate.

Future Mystery Shopping exercises will be undertaken by Epping Forest District Council's own tenants, who will be trained by South Essex Homes.

6.2 Satisfaction Surveys

Tenant Satisfaction STATUS Survey

A survey undertaken by the National Housing Federation in 2008 showed the following:

- Overall satisfaction with the Housing Directorate was 84% - 12% above peer group average
- Overall satisfaction with the final outcome of contacts with the Housing Directorate was 75% - 10% above peer group average
- 62% of tenants were satisfied that their views were being taken into account – an increase of 14% on the 2006 survey

Following the survey, the National Housing Federation concluded that:

“The Council and its staff have every right to be pleased to learn that, overall tenant satisfaction with the landlord service that the Council provides remains high and significantly above that reported by most other landlords. Key driver analysis showed that satisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service and satisfaction with the outcome of their contacts with staff have the greatest impact on overall tenant satisfaction. Importantly, the survey identified that the Councils' repairs service and the customer service provided by its staff are both particularly strong aspects of the Council's overall service. The high level of tenant satisfaction with these two key services underpins the unusually high level of overall satisfaction amongst Epping Forest District Council's tenants.”

HomeOption User Survey

In May 2008, following the introduction of a Choice Based Lettings allocations scheme (HomeOption), a user survey was undertaken to assess the following:

- Did applicants receive enough information about the scheme and find the user guide easy to follow?
- What method did applicants use to express an interest in a property?
- Were the freesheets easy to obtain and use?
- Were staff knowledgeable and helpful?
- Overall satisfaction with the scheme

The survey helped identify any difficulties applicants were having in using the scheme and why certain applicants were not using the scheme.

Applicants having difficulties were contacted by a member of staff or by letter giving detailed information on how the scheme works.

Applicants not using the scheme were contacted and offered advice. Vulnerable applicants were identified and are now regularly assisted with making expressions of interest.

Repairs Satisfaction Survey

A Repairs Satisfaction Survey form is sent out following every repair. Tenants are asked to rate the standard of service they have received in terms of the following:

- Notice period given for access to carry out work
- The overall quality of work
- Helpfulness and politeness of the contractor
- The way any complaints were dealt with
- Helpfulness of the council officer, or his representative in charge of the works
- The overall service

The data collected is then used to make improvements to the service where necessary.

Tenants expressing "poor satisfaction" are visited by a Repairs Manager to discuss the reasons and to rectify any problems.

The results for 2009/10 were as follows:

- Quality of Repair – Good or Satisfactory - 98.5%
- Polite/Co-Operative Workers – Good or Satisfactory - 99.75%
- Works Completed on Time – 99%
- General Standard of Service – 99%

Other Satisfaction Surveys

All tenants having planned/cyclical maintenance are invited to complete satisfaction forms.

All tenants are given satisfaction forms in respect of gas breakdowns at the time of the visit. The Council uses two separate contractors to carry out this work, Graceland and Kinetics.

The results for 2009/10 were:

- Overall Satisfaction – Graceland – 100%
- Overall Satisfaction – Kinetics – 97%

All tenants having disabled adaptations carried out are given satisfaction forms.

The results for 2009/10 were:

- Tenant Satisfaction with Disabled Adaptations (Major) – 96.7%
- Tenant Satisfaction with Disabled Adaptations (Minor) – 95.75%

During 2010/11 it is planned to introduce regular tenant satisfaction sampling of residents in sheltered housing and Careline users, in respect of the service provided.

6.3 Continuous Improvement Meetings

Results of all satisfaction surveys are considered at Continuous Improvement Meetings, attended by the Director of Housing, Assistant Directors of Housing and relevant Housing Managers, where any required resultant action is discussed, agreed and recorded.

7. Residents improving life in their home or neighbourhood

7.1 Springfields Improvement Scheme

During the period November 2007 - August 2009 work was undertaken to carry out essential improvements to 96 Council flats in Springfields, Waltham Abbey.

Residents were involved in the process from the outset through:

- Design of initial survey to establish residents' priorities
- Establishment of residents focus group to represent residents
- Two resident representatives on the Council's internal project team
- Continuous liaison with the local Residents Association (Roundhills RA) throughout the project
- Two resident representatives involved in contractor selection process
- Choosing of colour scheme for external rendering and new front doors



7.2 Limes Farm Community Hall

Limes Farm Community Association undertook a survey of residents in December 2006 to gain residents' views on potential improvements to Limes Farm Community Hall and the adjacent Drop-in centre. At the time, the hall was managed by Chigwell Parish Council on behalf of the Epping Forest District Council. Residents were given a number of options for the future of the hall and asked to choose which option they favoured.

The majority of residents who replied were in favour of the hall being completely refurbished and extended and suggested the following to be part of any future improvements:

- New kitchen and toilet facilities
- A Youth Centre to replace portable drop-in centre
- Space for pre-school activities
- Activities for Primary aged children
- Space for Older Peoples Group
- Use of hall as a Community Hub

The hall was returned to the District Council's management from 1 April 2009 and plans were drawn up in consultation with Limes Farm Community Association to carry out the necessary work in line with the original residents' survey. Some external funding was secured and approval to start the work was given by the Council's Cabinet on 19 April 2010.

7.3 Ninefields Community Hall

Following a successful Community Consultation event held in March 2008 the Ninefields Residents Panel was formed and, in response to residents' comments, a youth group (We Don't do Bored) was set up by the Council's Community Development team.

At the initial meetings of the residents' panel, much of the discussion centred around youth nuisance and the fact that there was nothing for young people to do. Since the formation of the youth group, discussion about youth nuisance at meetings of the residents' panel has become minimal. Indeed, residents have commented on how much things have improved.

Following on from the success of the youth group, funding was sought and secured from Essex Community Cashback to improve the façade of the Community Hall which was in need of attention. The youth group worked with a local sculptor to design a new façade for the hall, based on the community activities that take place there. A number of designs were created and presented to the residents' panel on 4th February 2010 to choose the final design. The work was completed on 16 June 2010.



Ninefields Community Hall 'Before and After'



Further examples of residents improving life in their neighbourhood include:

- Creation of a new communal allotment at Parsonage Court Sheltered Housing Scheme
- Improvements to patio area at Buckhurst Court Sheltered Housing Scheme
- Oakwood Hill estate drying areas
- Grove Court tree removal scheme
- Ninefields tree removal programme
- New refuse area at Grove Court Group-dwelling scheme
- Rochford Avenue fencing replacement scheme
- Gladway tree replacement scheme
- Shelley open space
- Duck Lane shrub and bush Removal Scheme

Details of the above schemes can be found in the Epping Forest District Public Consultation Register

7.4 Community Consultation Events

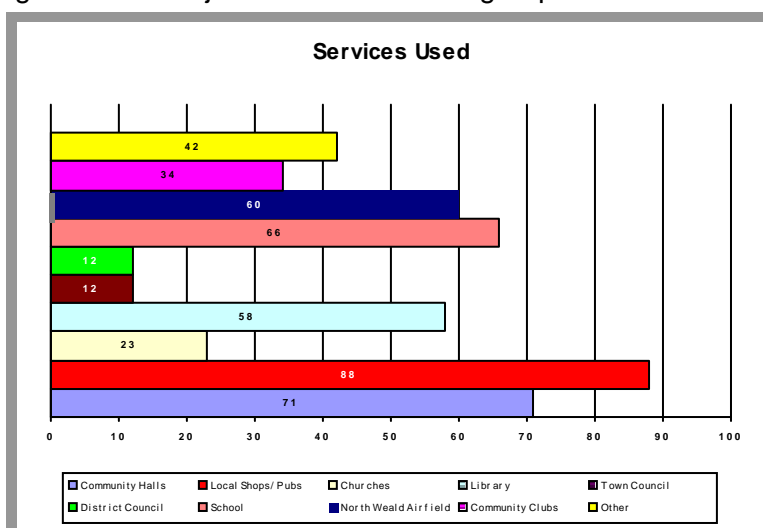
Since December 2006 EFDC Housing and Community Development have jointly held the following Community Consultation Events:

- Sheering Village – December 2006
- Roydon Village – April 2007
- Ninefields, Waltham Abbey – March 2008
- North Weald – May 2008
- Debden, Loughton – May 2009
- Shelley, Ongar – March 2010
- Oakwood Hill, Loughton – May 2010

The events are structured to enable residents to give their views on local issues and services in an interactive and fun way via a series of giant wall mounted questions, using coloured sticky dots and post-it notes. Local groups and in particular schools, are encouraged to become involved and local service providers attend to offer advice and information.

Following the event, the results of the consultation are collated and residents invited to attend a follow-up meeting to discuss them and agree a course of action with Council officers. Residents are encouraged to form or join a local residents group to ensure continued involvement.

Through this type of consultation and participation the Council is able to tailor resources to areas as required to improve the lives of residents. Other areas of concern are passed to the relevant service providers.



7.5 Accompanied Estate Inspections

The Council's Housing Management Teams carry out regular estate inspections throughout the District and residents are invited to accompany Housing Officers on these inspections. The inspections are used to identify any issues of concern to residents such as:

- Abandoned vehicles
- Dumped rubbish
- Grounds maintenance, trees, shrubs
- Repairs to communal areas
- Poorly maintained properties or gardens
- Graffiti



Residents and Officers before the Ninefields Estate 'Walkabout' May 2010

8. Value for Money

The Council's Tenant Participation Service has identified a number of ways in which it can operate cost effectively:

- Partnership working through the Eastern Region Resident Involvement Group. Sharing of good practice and information
- Joint training sessions through the Eastern Region Training Consortium
- Partnership working with EFDC Community Development Team to hold community events and consultations.
- Mystery Shopping carried out by tenants
- Meetings held in EFDC venues where possible to reduce hire costs.
- Use of Epping Forest Community Transport to take residents to and from meetings and events

In the HouseMark Value for Money Benchmarking Summary – 2008/9 the service ranked overall first in the top Quartile for direct cost per property of resident involvement.

The overall budget for the Tenant Participation service is currently £80,370 per annum.

All recognised Residents Associations are invited to apply for Support grants of up to £250 per year and Minor Estate Enhancement grants of up to £500 per year.

Although taxis can be provided to enable residents to attend certain meetings, residents are encouraged to provide their own transport, for which an allowance is paid, and to car share. Costs are further reduced by the use of Voluntary Action Epping Forest Community Transport to take residents to and from meetings.

9. Diversity and Equality

The Housing Directorate has introduced two relevant housing service strategies relating to diversity and equality:

- The Housing Service Strategy on Harassment
- The Housing Service Strategy on Diversity and Equality

The Service Strategy on Diversity and Equality sets out the Housing Directorate's approach to promoting equality and diversity in line with the Council's corporate equality schemes and its statutory duties as a public authority to promote equality. This includes actions designed to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote equality of opportunity
- Recognise and value the needs and contributions of individuals and identifiable groups within the wider community served by the Council
- Ensure that everyone who needs housing advice and services is fully able to access them
- Promote understanding and tolerance of different cultures and good relations within the communities served by the Council.

In addition, a Customer Impact Assessment (sometimes referred to as an Equalities Impact Assessment), including an action plan has been produced for Housing Information and Tenant Participation.

The District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement and all other Tenant Participation Agreements contain a Diversity and Equality Statement.

9.1 Diversity Profile of the Council's Tenants

In 2008/9, the Housing Directorate undertook a full Census of its tenants and collected data on a variety of diversity and equality information, which helps the Council to shape its service.

From a response rate of 3,808 (58%) the following information was obtained:

Gender	60% of occupants are female; 40% are male.
Disability	1,081 occupants (23%) consider they have a disability.
Hearing Problems	30 occupants (0.6%) have a hearing problem; 5 occupants read sign language and 25 lip read.

Sight Problems	216 occupants (4.7%) have a sight problem; 1 occupant reads Braille 209 occupants would prefer to read documents in large print and 6 occupants would welcome information in audio form.
Ethnicity	4,293 occupants (96%) of those who stated their ethnicity are White British. The next highest ethnic group are White Irish, Asian and other White races (2.6%).
English not 1 st Language	28 occupants (0.6%) do not have English as their first language. The second most common first language after English is Turkish, which is spoken as a first language by 8 occupants (0.17%). Seven other languages are the first language of the remaining 20 occupants (0.43%) who do not have English as their first language.

The Housing Directorate has introduced a number of initiatives to involve tenants in communities perceived as 'Hard to Reach'.

9.2 Epping Forest District Sheltered Forum

The Epping Forest District Sheltered Forum has been established to represent tenants living in the Council's Sheltered Housing Schemes and Group-dwelling Schemes.

9.3 Epping Forest Rural Tenants Forum

The Epping Forest Rural Tenants Forum was set up after consultation with local Parish Councils to represent tenants living in the Districts outlying villages, which are often too small to generate interest in individual residents groups.

9.4 Limes Farm Pampering Event

In November 2008 a 'Pampering Event' was held on the Limes Farm Estate in Chigwell. The purpose of the event was to enable the Council to engage with the young women, who make up a large proportion of the residents in the area. Residents were offered free 'pampering' by way of nails, make-up, reflexology and indian head massage and in return were asked to complete a questionnaire about issues affecting residents of the estate. A free crèche facility was also provided. The information gathered was used to better tailor services to residents' needs.

9.5 Tenant Talkback

Following a survey of tenants through the Housing Directorate's Housing News newsletter, which is delivered to all tenants, a database of tenants was set up to establish Focus Groups to look at specific Housing services. Among the groups the service is looking to set up are a Diversity and Equalities Focus Group and a Disabilities Focus Group.

10. SWOT Analysis

The following SWOT analysis sets out the current position with regard to Tenant Participation in Epping Forest

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Knowledgeable and committed staff ○ Charter Mark for customer service excellence ○ District-wide network of tenant involvement ○ All, tenants, leaseholders and applicants receive up to date news and housing information via a dedicated section of a District-wide tenants newsletter ○ All tenants receive a Tenants Handbook, which includes a section on Tenant Participation ○ Information about Tenant Participation available on-line ○ Regular progress meetings held between Tenant Participation Officer, Section Managers and Service Heads. ○ Partnership working with EFDC Community Development Team ○ Good working relationship between staff and tenants/leaseholders ○ Partnership working with other local Housing providers through the East of England Resident Involvement Group 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of detailed tenant profiling to enable service to be tailored to tenants needs ○ Limited scope for development of Housing Section of EFDC website
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ More consultation through development of 'Talkback' panels ○ Greater use of ICT systems, particularly the Council's website ○ Use of other new technology as appropriate ○ Develop partnership working with outside organisations ○ Enhance profile of Tenant Participation in conjunction with Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and recognised residents associations 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Major changes in legislation ○ Transfer of Housing Stock ○ Financial restrictions, likely to be severe in future years

11. Action Plan/Continuous Improvement Plan

This plan sets out how the Council intends to improve its Tenant Participation service over the next twelve months

Action	Target Date	Expected Outcome/Impact
Undertake a survey of all tenants and leaseholders to collect and record details of their diversity profile	March 2011	Up to date information on tenants to enable services to be tailored accordingly
Set up further Talkback Panels to provide qualitative feedback on the following housing services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabilities • Allocations • Information 	March 2011	Establishment and operation of panels Increased customer feedback to aid future service provision
Establish, through recruitment and training, a group of EFDC tenants to undertake future 'mystery shopping' exercises on the Council's housing services	Dec 2010	A team of suitably trained mystery shoppers, able to assess how housing officers deal with enquiries and recommend action to improve services where necessary
Set up Estate Level Agreements in areas not represented by residents associations	March 2011	Increased tenant participation and tailoring of services to reflect local needs
Introduction and implementation of Local Housing 'Offers' as set out in the Tenant Services Authority New Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England	October 2010	More empowered and informed tenants leading to increased participation and accountability
Consult on and agree the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2011/12 with Tenants and Leaseholders Federation	March 2011	HRA Business Plan agreed and published More informed and knowledgeable tenants Transparency and accountability
Update and renew the following Housing Directorate Service Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenant Participation • Housing Information • Empty Properties • Energy Efficiency • Private Rented Sector • Rent Arrears • Anti-social Behaviour 	March 2011	Strategies agreed following consultation with Tenants and Leaseholders Federation Tenants aware of Directorates medium - term aims
Introduction of two new Housing Directorate Service Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value For Money • Continuous Improvement 	March 2011	Strategies agreed following consultation with Tenants and Leaseholders Federation Tenants aware of Directorates medium - term aims
Review and Update the Housing Allocations Scheme in consultation with Talkback Panel	October 2010	Updated Allocations Scheme to comply with agreed changes. More efficient use of Housing Stock



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