

1. Introduction

1.1 This Housing Service Strategy relates to the Council's approach to tenant participation, and how tenant participation will be delivered. This is an essential part of the Council's housing service since the main recipients of the service are the tenants themselves. The Council aims to provide housing services that are effective, relevant and responsive to tenants' needs. It is beneficial, therefore, if tenants are informed and consulted on the provision of the service.

1.2 Tenant participation will, in the main, be undertaken by Housing Services on behalf of the Council. However, the Council will seek the support of the Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation (see paragraph 1.3) and recognised tenants associations to help with tenant participation. Where appropriate, the Council will also seek the assistance of appropriate contractors and consultants, especially those specialising in tenant participation.

1.3 The Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation is a democratic organisation, recognised by the Council. It includes two representatives from each recognised tenants association and may include other co-opted members at the discretion of the Council and the Federation. The Federation represents the views of the tenants associations and acts as a consultative body for the Council on a range of housing issues. It has an Executive Committee to co-ordinate its activities.

1.4 Although this Service Strategy refers to "tenants", this includes the Council's leaseholders.

1.5 This Housing Service Strategy was formulated in consultation with representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and approved by the Council on 28 September 2004.

2. Background to the Service

2.1 The Council's Tenant Participation Service embraces all of the housing services that the Council provides to its tenants. The Council has a good track record of consulting with tenants and keeping them informed of issues that are important and of interest to them. However, the Council will continue to strive to improve its approach on a continuous basis.

2.2 The Council has around 6,800 tenanted properties and over 700 leasehold properties. As at March 2005, there were 6 recognised tenants associations operating within the District, namely: Limes Farm Community Association (Chigwell), Oakwood Hill Estate Residents Association (Loughton), Paternoster (North) Residents Association (Waltham Abbey), Roundhills Residents Association (Waltham Abbey), Shelley Residents Association (Ongar) and Buckhurst Hill Residents Society. Residents of the District's sheltered schemes are represented by a Sheltered Housing Forum. The Leaseholders Association represents the Council's leaseholders.

2.3 The Council appointed a dedicated full time Tenant Participation Officer (TPO) in April 2000. The TPO is based within the Housing Resources Section of Housing Services, reporting to the Principal Housing Officer (Information/Strategy). However, the importance attached to tenant participation by the Council is illustrated by the fact that the Head of Housing Services is responsible for the Council's overall strategy on tenant participation.

3. Coverage

3.1 This Housing Service Strategy covers the Council's;

- a) commitment to tenant participation;
- b) general approach to providing information to tenants;
- c) general approach to tenant participation;
- d) approach to developing and supporting recognised tenant associations;
- e) plans for the development of tenant participation for the two year period 1st April 2005 - 31st March 2007;
- f) general approach to the operation of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation;
- g) plans to assist with the development of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation;
- h) Tenant Participation Agreement with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation; and
- i) arrangements for monitoring its approach to tenant participation.

4. Relationships with other documents

4.1 This Service Strategy forms part of the Council's overall Housing Strategy, which is set out in the Council's *Housing Strategy Statement 2004-2007*, and the HRA Business Plan, which is updated on an annual basis.

4.2 The Council has adopted its *Housing Charter*, which sets out, in simple, clear and precise terms the Council's general approach to all of its housing services.

4.3 Following consultation with residents, the Council publishes an annual *Best Value Performance Plan*, which explains the Council's current performance and how the Council intends to continuously improve its services. Part of the *Best Value Performance Plan* covers tenant participation.

4.4 During 2000/01, the Council published its *Community Plan*, which sets out the Council's longer term plans for the development and delivery of its services for the following five years. This Service Strategy complements, and indeed informs, the proposals on tenant participation within the *Community Plan*.

4.5 In March 2005, the Government published its *National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts* which sets out the minimum standards that the Government expects local authorities to adopt in undertaking tenant participation. This Housing Service Strategy, and the accompanying *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*, complies with the National Framework. The Council and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation believe that the use of the word "Agreement" is more familiar to tenants than "Compact" and has therefore adopted this phraseology.

4.6 In March 2000, the Council's Housing Committee undertook and approved a comprehensive *Review of Tenant Participation*, attached as Appendix 1, following consultation with all the Council's tenants and leaseholders and the District's former Tenants Forum (since replaced by the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation).

4.7 The Review;

- a) raised issues and questions relating to the approach of the Council and the Tenants Forum on specific aspects of tenant participation;
- b) established the position at that time ("the baseline"); and
- c) identified around 130 action plans.

4.9 In conjunction with the Review, in March 2000, the Council and the Epping Forest District Tenants Forum formulated, approved and signed the first *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*. Following the establishment of the present Epping Forest District

Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the Agreement was reviewed and updated in 2002. It sets out the intentions of the Council and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation in the approach they will take to;

- a) the provision of information to tenants and to tenant participation generally;
- b) the operation of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation;
- c) the development of tenant participation generally; and
- d) reviewing the Agreement.

4.10 A copy of the "*Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*" is attached as Appendix 2 to this Service Strategy.

5. Aim & Objectives

5.1 The aim of the Council's Housing Service Strategy on Tenant Participation is:

"To enable the Council's tenants and leaseholders to participate in the delivery of their housing service through the receipt of good quality information, adequate and appropriate consultation on relevant housing issues and opportunities to provide feedback to the Council in accordance with the *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*".

5.2 This aim will be met by;

- a) complying with the commitments set out in the *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*;
- b) providing information to tenants that is timely, in plain language, expressed clearly, of good quality and tailored to both the general and individual needs of tenants;
- c) recognising the special needs of certain tenants and responding positively to those needs;
- d) consulting tenants on housing issues that are important to them, in the most appropriate way, which will be different depending on the issue concerned;
- e) obtaining feedback from tenants, in a variety of ways, on the Council's performance in the delivery of housing services;
- f) responding to complaints in an effective manner and correcting failings in service delivery;
- g) encouraging, supporting and developing tenants associations;
- h) keeping the Council's tenant participation structure under review;
- i) encouraging, supporting, consulting and developing the Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, and working in partnership with the Federation to maximise the benefits that can be achieved from tenant participation to improve the delivery of housing services;
- j) ensuring that appropriate training is made available for tenants and Council officers and members;
- k) ensuring that appropriate funding is made available to support and develop tenant participation; and
- l) monitoring and reviewing the Council's approach to tenant participation.

6. Statutory requirements

6.1 Generally, most issues relating to tenant participation are not statutory, but are nevertheless good practice. However, there are some relevant statutory requirements, as follows:

- a) *Housing Act 1985*:
 - Provision of information about tenancies (*Section 104*)
 - Consultation on matters of housing management (*Section 105*)
 - Information about housing allocation (*Section 106*)

- Consultation before disposal to a private landlord (*Section 106A*)

b) *Local Government Act 1999:*

- Consultation on the way in which local authorities fulfil their duties to secure best value (*Section 3*)
- Consultation on the undertaking of service reviews (*Section 5*)
- Inclusion of a Consultation Statement within the *Best Value Performance Plan*, commenting on the forms and types of consultation carried out over the previous year, the numbers and types of groups, bodies and individuals involved and an analysis of the results (*Section 6*)

7. Client Consultation, Information & Involvement

7.1 The way in which tenants will be consulted, informed and involved is set out in:

- a) The action plans within the *Review of Tenant Participation*; and
- b) The *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*.

8. General principles

8.1 The detailed general approach that the Council will take, on an ongoing basis, is set out in Sections 6, 7 and 9 of the *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*.

9. Action Plans

Action	Lead officer	Timescale	Resource Implications
To set up a Forum for resident representatives in rural areas	Richard Jones	June 2006	Within existing resources
To set up a 'road show' to promote Tenant Participation throughout the district	Richard Jones	December 2005	Within existing resources
Set up regular training sessions for members of residents associations using internal and external training resources	Richard Jones	Ongoing	Within existing resources
Inform all new leaseholders about the Leaseholders Association	Richard Jones	Ongoing	Within existing resources
To set up 2 new residents associations from an agreed list each year	Richard Jones	Ongoing	£100 per new association 'start-up' funding. £200 per new association recognition grant.
Carry out surveys as required as part of Resident Involvement KLOE	Richard Jones/Chris Sobey	As required	Within existing resources
Update Local Tenant Participation Agreements	Richard Jones	Annually	Within existing resources
Update Epping Forest Tenant Participation	Richard Jones	November 2005	Within existing resources

Agreement			
Administer the provision of support grants for recognised residents groups	Richard Jones	Annually	Within existing resources. £50 - £250 per association
Administer the provision of minor estate enhancement grants for recognised residents groups	Richard Jones	Annually	Within existing resources. £50 - £500 per association

10. Resourcing the Strategy

10.1 The Council has received a specific allocation of £71,820 within its Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Subsidy to help fund tenant participation initiatives in 2005/06, with a similar amount expected in 2006/07.

Employees	£41,410
Transport	£700
Premises	£100
Supplies and Services	£15,170
Support Services	£14,440
Total	£71,820

The tenant participation budget in 2005/06 and 2006/07 will fund:

- a) a full time dedicated Tenant Participation Officer;
- b) a dedicated budget of at least £71,820 per annum, including up to £5,000 per annum in grants to recognised residents association;

10.2 In addition, other existing housing budgets will be used to fund associated tenant participation activities and issues (eg "Housing News", photocopying and printing etc).

10.3 The current and projected staff resources for tenant participation are as follows:

	Staff Resource Projections			
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Av no. staff to provide service (FTE p/a)	1.26	1.26	1.26	1.26

10.4 As a guide, the proposed breakdown of staff resources for tenant participation in 2005/06 is as follows:

Staff Resource Breakdown - 2005/06	
Post(s)	FTE
Head of Housing Services	0.01
Asst Heads of Housing Services	0.09
Housing Resources Manager	0.05
Principal Housing Officer (Strategy/Info)	0.1
Tenant Participation Officer	0.9
Other staff	0.09

Total	1.26
--------------	------

11. Key Targets & Performance Monitoring

11.1 The Council's key targets for performance on tenant participation are as follows:

Key Targets & Performance					
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Performance Indicator	(Actual)	(Act/Est)	(Target)	(Target)	(Target)
Funding for Tenant Participation, including grants to Residents Association	£60,438	£71,820	£73,920	£77,520	£79,620
No. of recognised tenants associations in District	6	8	10	12	14
% of tenants very/fairly satisfied with opportunities for participation in management and decision making on housing services (<i>Best value Performance Indicator</i>)	70	70	70	70	70

11.2 The level of tenants' satisfaction with opportunities for participation in management and decision making on housing services will be assessed through an annual survey of all tenants in "Housing News".

11.3 The Council will monitor the performance of this Housing Service Strategy as set out in Section 13 of the *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*.

12. Reviewing the Strategy

12.1 The *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement* will be reviewed around June 2005, and renegotiated with the Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation with effect from the 1st December 2005.

12.2 This Housing Service Strategy will be reviewed in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation no later than April 2007. However, an earlier review will be undertaken if required, especially in the light of the review and monitoring of the *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*.