

Epping Forest District Council
HOUSING SERVICE STRATEGY ON
TENANT PARTICIPATION

1. Introduction

1.1 This Housing Directorate 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. Furthermore, it is a requirement of the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England that tenants are given the opportunity to influence and be involved in the provision of the service.

1.2 Tenant Participation will, in the main, be facilitated by Housing Directorate 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 groups 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 up to 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 term 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 Housing Portfolio Holder on **
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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 6,500 tenanted properties and over 900 leasehold properties. As at October 2013, there were 8 recognised tenants associations operating within the District, namely: Debden Tenants Panel (Loughton), Limes Farm Community Association (Chigwell), Ninefields Residents Panel (Waltham Abbey), Oakwood Hill Estate Residents Association (Loughton), Pelly Court Residents Association (Epping), Romeland Residents Association (Waltham Abbey), Roundhills Residents Association (Waltham Abbey) and Shelley Residents Association (Ongar). Residents of the District's sheltered schemes are represented by a Sheltered Housing Forum. The Leaseholders Association represents the Council's leaseholders. A Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group has been established to discuss the Council's Repairs and Maintenance service and a Website and Publicity group has been set up to look at the Council's website, housing information leaflets and publicity documents from a customer viewpoint.

In January 2013 a Tenant Scrutiny Panel was established to take an independent detailed look at how the Housing Directorate is performing and to carry out in depth reviews of

various aspects of the housing service.

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 the Housing Directorate, reporting to the Principal Housing Officer (Information & Strategy).

3. Coverage

3.1 This Housing Directorate 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 three year period 1st April 2013 - 31st March 2016;
- 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;
- i) arrangements for monitoring its approach to tenant participation; and
- j) commitment to the progression of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

4. Relationships with other documents

4.2 The Council has adopted a *Housing Charter* and a set of *Housing Service Standards* which set out the Council's general approach to the provision of housing services.

4.3 The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan is published annually and sets out priorities and objectives for Housing Services, including tenant and leaseholder participation and consultation.

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

4.5 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 actions

4.6 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, 2005, 2008 and again in 2011. 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.

4.7 A copy of the "*Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*" is attached as Appendix 1 to this Service Strategy.

4.8 In 2010 the Tenant Services Authority introduced its *New Regulatory Framework for*

Social Housing in England which set out the standards expected from social housing providers in England in the provision of housing services, and how these standards would be regulated. In order to meet part of these standards, the Council produced a *Tenant Participation Impact Statement* setting out how Tenant Participation has impacted on the residents of the Epping Forest District and how residents have helped influence the Council's housing policies and procedures. In April 2012, the Homes and Communities Agency took over responsibility for regulation of social housing from the TSA and introduced amended standards set out in the *Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England 2012*.

4.9 The Housing Directorate's *Annual Report to Tenants* sets out how the Housing Directorate has performed over the past twelve months. The Annual Report includes information on tenant involvement and empowerment.

4.10 The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation reports to tenants through the 'Tenants Voice' section of the Council's *Housing News* publication.

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) enabling tenants to scrutinise the Council's housing performance and make recommendations about how performance might be improved;
- f) conducting tenant satisfaction surveys to obtain feedback from tenants on the Council's performance in the delivery of housing services;
- g) responding to complaints in an effective manner and correcting failings in service delivery;
- h) encouraging, supporting and developing tenants associations;
- i) keeping the Council's tenant participation structure under review;
- j) 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;
- k) ensuring that appropriate training is made available for tenants and Council officers and members;
- l) agreeing service standards with tenants as set out in the Homes and Communities Agency's *Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England 2012*;
- m) agreeing a set of tenant-selected performance indicators with the Tenants & Leaseholders Federation to be monitored on a quarterly basis;
- n) ensuring that appropriate funding and resources are made available to support and develop tenant participation;
- o) seeking, where appropriate, Council-wide support for tenant participation in line with the Council's corporate commitment to community engagement;
- p) carrying out tenant 'profiling' to enhance the service and ensure the Council is

- meeting the needs of the diverse community; and
- q) monitoring and reviewing the Council's approach to tenant participation.

6. Statutory requirements

6.1 The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2012 includes the 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard'. This is one of the four consumer standards for housing providers within the Framework. Under this standard, providers are required to provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards. They must also ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- the formulation of their landlord's housing related policies and strategic priorities;
- the making of decisions about how housing related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards;
- the scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved;
- the management of their homes;
- the management of repair and maintenance services; and,
- agreeing local offers (standards) for service delivery.

Other relevant statutory requirements are:

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) *Equality Act 2010:*

The Council has a duty to ensure the following:

- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (i.e. their age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; gender, and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it;
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low; and,
- Ensuring people from all sections of our community are given equal opportunity to participate.

c) *Localism Act 2011:*

The 2011 Localism Act gave people more power over what happens in their neighbourhood, including:

- The Community Right to Bid giving community groups the right to bid to buy community buildings and facilities that are important to them;
- The Community Right to Challenge allowing voluntary and community groups to bid to run a local authority service where they believe they can do so differently and better. This may be the whole service or part of a service;
- Neighbourhood planning measures allowing communities to shape new development by coming together to prepare neighbourhood plans;
- The Community Right to Build allowing local communities to propose small-scale, site-specific, community-led developments;

- The Community Right to Reclaim Land giving communities the right to under-used or unused land owned by public bodies is brought back into public use;

7. Client Consultation, Information & Involvement

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

- a) The *Epping Forest District-Wide Tenant Participation Agreement**
- b) The Tenant Participation section of the Council's website; and
- c) The *Annual Report to Tenants*.

*Participation agreements are also made between the Council and the Epping Forest Sheltered Housing Forum, The Epping Forest Leaseholders Association and all Council recognised tenants groups in the district.

8. General Principles

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

9. Future Developments

9.1 The following 'SWOT' analysis identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats faced by areas covered in this Strategy and was completed in conjunction with the Director of Housing, Assistant Directors of Housing, Housing sectional managers and representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

Strengths

- Knowledgeable and committed staff
- Customer Service Excellence Award
- 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
- Good track record of involvement
- Good representation across district
- Tenants know contributions are valued
- Well organised TP structure
- Dedicated TP officer
- Nice area to live – residents don't want to leave
- Tenants on our side (using complaints/compliments to make a difference)
- Good selection of existing tenant groups
- TP Officer -very experienced and has fostered good relationships with tenants
- The Federation has an excellent Chairman
- The experience of the Information & Strategy section
- Housing Management play a supporting role to TP
- Tenants are involved in policy decisions
- Proactive selection process - complainant to participant
- Good networking with other authorities
- Assists with external accreditations
- Promotes member involvement with tenants
- Provision of Training for members of tenant groups
- Mixture of urban and rural properties – not facing same pressures as inner cities
- Stock condition

Weaknesses

- Lack of tenant profiling to enable service to be tailored to tenants needs
- Lack of resources to carry out more tenant profiling and increase participation
- Good service – Tenants less likely to be involved because they are satisfied
- Some areas not represented
- Difficult to encourage membership
- Only one TP Officer (Lack of resource)
- Heavy, paper-based reports and long agendas put people off contributing or attending
- Mostly office based meetings, not easily accessible to those with disabilities
- Reluctance to embrace technology
- Can attract negative contribution or people with a personal agenda
- Lack of corporate buy in
- Mixture of urban and rural properties – not facing same pressures as inner cities – less reason to be involved

Opportunities

- Greater use of ICT systems, particularly the Council's website
- Use of other new technology as appropriate
- Continue to develop partnership working with outside organisations
- Enhance profile of Tenant Participation in conjunction with Tenants & Leaseholders Federation and recognised residents associations
- Develop tenant profiling to enable services to be tailored accordingly
- Development and progression of Tenant Scrutiny Panel
- Development of more 'issue based' focus groups
- Corporate commitment to engaging with communities
- Involvement of Repairs and Maintenance Tenant Liaison Officer
- New technology – social media, blogs
- Making people aware of support groups
- More use of members (Councillors)
- Restructure – cross directorate working
- Loyalty of involved tenants
- Less heavy reports and agendas – use of technology
- Other directorates could tap into our experience to undertake their statutory consultation
- Share TP resource with other authorities
- Tenant involvement in mystery shopping
- More use of tenant groups in estate inspections
- Tenants to select standard fixtures and fittings and specification of kitchens, etc
- Council restructure could allow for additional resource
- Need to attract a more diverse range of people e.g. there is a lack of young people willing to get involved.
- Incentives for involvement – points for participation, etc.

Threats

- Major changes in legislation
- Transfer of housing stock
- Financial restrictions
- Only one TP officer – succession planning
- Possible conflict between Federation and Tenant Scrutiny Panel
- High representation of older tenants. What happens when they move on?
- Financial cuts
- Major dispute between Federation and EFDC
- Loss of key staff
- Lack of attendees/business
- Managing expectation
- A resource (TP Officer) that is responsible for so much
- Potential reduction in public spending, TP could be seen as a luxury

10. Action Plan

Action	Lead officer	Timescale	Resource Implications
Undertake a survey ('census') of all tenants to update their details, as well as collecting and recording diversity data	Chris Sobey	August to October 2013	Within existing resources
Develop and progress the Tenant Scrutiny Panel to ensure continuous recruitment and relevant training is maintained and to ensure that qualitative feedback on housing services is provided	Lyndsay Swan/Richard Jones	On-going	Extra resources may be needed depending on training required
Set up regular training sessions for members of residents associations using internal and external training resources	Richard Jones	On-going	Within existing resources
Inform all new leaseholders about the Leaseholders Association	Richard Jones	On-going	Within existing resources
Develop a programme of estate walkabouts in liaison with Housing Management	Richard Jones	Annually	Within existing resources
Update Local Tenant Participation Agreements	Richard Jones	Annually	Within existing resources
Update Epping Forest District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement	Richard Jones	June 2014	Within existing resources
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
Set up Estate Level Agreements or recruit block/street voices in areas not represented by residents associations to increase participation and improve services	Richard Jones	On-going Dependent on resources	Increase in resources required
Establish, through recruitment and training, a group of EFDC tenants to undertake future 'mystery shopping of the Council's housing services'	Richard Jones	March 2014	Within existing resources

Develop TP area of Council's website to include contributions from tenants groups.	Richard Jones/Chris Sobey/Website & Publicity Focus Group	March 2014	Within existing resources
Carry out 're-branding' of TP function in liaison with Website & Publicity Focus Group	Richard Jones/Chris Sobey	March 2014	Some extra resources required for publicity and promotional materials
Continue to investigate use of new technology to engage with tenants	Richard Jones	On-going	Possible extra resources needed
Develop use of social media to engage with tenants	Richard Jones/Website & Publicity Focus Group	On-going	Within existing resources
Continue to expand cross-boundary working with neighbouring authorities	Richard Jones	On-going	Within existing resources

11. Resourcing the Strategy

11.1 The Council has a specific budget of £87,200 within its Housing Revenue Account in respect of tenant participation initiatives in 2013/14, with an increased amount expected in 2014/15*. (This figure includes the costs of staffing and support services)

Employees	£60,570
Transport	£790
Supplies and Services	£4,800
Support Services	£21,040
Total	£87,200

The tenant participation budget in 2013/14 and 2014/15 will fund:

- a) a full time dedicated Tenant Participation Officer;
- b) a dedicated budget of at least £87,200 per annum, including up to £3,000 per annum in grants to recognised residents associations;

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

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

	Staff Resource Projections			
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Av no. staff to provide service (FTE p/a)	1.24	1.24	1.24	1.24

11.4 As a guide, the proposed breakdown of staff resources for tenant participation in

2013/14 is as follows:

Staff Resource Breakdown – 2013/14	
Post(s)	FTE
Director of Housing	0.01
Asst Directors of Housing	0.07
Housing Resources Manager	0.05
Principal Housing Officer (Strategy/Info)	0.1
Tenant Participation Officer	0.9
Other staff	0.11
Total	1.24

12. Key Targets & Performance Monitoring

12.1 The Council will monitor performance on tenant participation through:

- a) feedback from the Tenants & Leaseholders Federation;
- b) feedback from all other representative groups;
- c) the results of tenant satisfaction surveys;
- d) regular update meetings with senior housing officers;
- e) consultation with residents at district-wide or local events; and,
- f) feedback from the council's website.

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

13. Reviewing the Strategy

13.1 The *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement* will be reviewed around May 2014 and renegotiated with the Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation with effect from the 1st November 2014.

13.2 This Housing Service Strategy will be reviewed in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation no later than November 2015 for renewal in June 2016. 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*.