

RESPONSE FROM BIRDWOOD AVENUE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

25/03/01

Tenants Compact

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TENANT PARTICIPATION COMPACT

AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL AND ITS TENANTS

This agreement has been drawn up jointly between the Council and.....
Affiliation of Tenants. This agreement aims to give all residents of council houses and estates in a say in the services they receive, and how they are planned and paid for. The agreement is built on years of tenant involvement and informed on current government thinking. But we also see this as a renewed commitment to provide the best possible services, which reflect the requirements of our areas. We will achieve this by working together.

We want to help create communities where people want to live.

SHARED PRINCIPLES

*We want to involve residents and communities in the services they receive so that we can encourage personal and community development. By doing this we can improve the quality of those services and the outcomes produced.

*We support and encourage tenant involvement at a level and pace set by residents themselves.

*Tenant involvement goes beyond Landlord/Tenant relationships. It is about identifying and helping to set the agenda and working in partnership on issues concerning their houses, neighbourhoods and environments.

RELATIONSHIP WITH BEST VALUE

This agreement will form part of a 'Best Value' process in developing our Tenant Compact. It will be a challenge to our existing arrangements and we will involve tenants fully and look at how we can deliver tenant participation effectively.

THE COMPACT

In signing this agreement we are showing our shared commitment to working in partnership, to achieving this under the guidance of these principles and to keeping to the working practices shown in this agreement.

Signed:.....
(Chair of Housing)

Signed:.....
(Director of Housing)

Signed:.....
(Leader of the Council)

Signed:.....
(Tenants Association)

TENANT PARTICIPATION POLICIES

The Council will publish its policies for getting tenants involved and aims to respond to tenants needs.

THESE POLICIES COVER THE HOUSING NEEDS AND AIMS

Deciding how money is spent
Working with residents to look at issues affecting life in their area
Setting Budgets, Finance, Rents
Overseeing Housing Services (contracts etc)
Tenancy Agreements and Rents
Leaseholder Issues and Charges
Antisocial Behaviour Policies
Monitoring Services and Performance Standards
Looking at action if performances fall short
Neighbour issues that affect tenants' houses
Environmental Work
Handling Complaints
Repairs, Maintenance and Voids
Housing Benefits
Sheltered Housing Services
Proper upkeep of play areas and fields
Traffic Control where needed (20 mph)
Crackdown on dog fouling

IN SHORT THE MAIN NEEDS OF TENANTS ARE...

To be able to be proud of their homes, to live in safety
Council Contractors to give full value in cleanliness of their areas/estates
i.e. Rubbish Collection, Road Cleaning, Grass Cutting.
A good standard of cleaning in flats
To see everything possible is done to ensure that our Senior Citizens can live in peace
in their homes and be protected from harassment.

LSVT

If the Council ever went down the line of suggesting the 'Sale of Council Houses':

TENANTS WOULD REQUIRE...

That Council officials would NOT be involved in encouraging tenants to vote 'Yes' to selling their homes ...By producing literature or by any other means

That no employees of the Council be sent to tenants' homes to encourage them to sell

That Consultants and purchasing housing body should be the only ones involved in this task

FINANCE

This would be at great expense to the H.R.A. and should be kept as low as possible.

Tenants should be allowed finances equal to that of Consultants and Purchasers and then tenant's bodies be free to employ their own 'TOTALLY INDEPENDENT ADVISERS' of their own choice.

The ultimate decision must be the 'TENANT'S CHOICE' AND 'VOTE', free from intimidation from any outside body other than Consultants and Prospective Buyers (Association)

THE ROLE OF THE COUNCIL

The Council will involve the tenants in making decisions and any other matters by agreement.

The Council will make sure that all tenants realise the arrangements for tenant involvement and encourage tenant organizations to participate.

THE TENANTS' ROLE

Tenants should meet their responsibilities under the tenancy agreement.

Tenants organizations will work with the Council to identify issues of concern including how services and facilities could be misused.

Tenant organizations will tell the Council of any concerns they have with housing services before they take any independent action.

Tenant representatives will work according to the agreed code of conduct.

INFORMATION

All information supplied by the Housing Department will be in plain language, timely and relevant to tenants' needs.

THE HOUSING DEPARTMENT WILL PROVIDE INFORMATION ON...

Housing strategies, policies and priorities
Housing investment plans
Plans of work on tenants' homes and areas
T/P Compacts
Use of the Newsletter for information
Meetings between Council and Tenants Association

CONSULTATION – THE HOUSING DEPARTMENT WILL...

Publicise all its meetings
Make sure no representatives have to pay expenses for going to meetings
Make sure that it holds meetings at appropriate times
Give reasonable notification of meetings
Arrange that meetings be properly chaired
Give clear aims
Arrange that all meetings are recorded and reported back

COMPLAINTS

The Council will make sure that tenants know all about its Complaints Procedures.

Where possible, any disagreements relating to issues of tenants taking part should be sorted out by those concerned.

If they cannot reach agreement, the department will provide independent arbitration.

SUPPORT FOR INVOLVING TENANTS

The Council will ensure that its policies are supported by procedures, staff and other resources when involving tenants.

The Housing Committee, by working with tenants, will provide a budget each year to support tenant participation activities and give tenants information they need to negotiate the budgets available for activities involving the tenants.

SUPPORT ALSO INCLUDES

Financial support for recognized tenant groups
Facilities of access to meeting rooms
Premises and photocopying
Advice and support for groups
Training for groups

THE COUNCIL SHOULD GIVE INFORMATION ON...

Council Officers who are responsible for delivering specific points in the strategy
Council Officers who can be contacted.

REVIEWING POLICIES AND REPORTING ON PERFORMANCE

The Housing Committee, together with tenants, will review the policies for getting tenants involved regularly, and changed if necessary by agreement of all involved.

The Housing Department will make sure it takes account of tenants' views and reflect them in the Director of Housing's annual report to the Council.

THE COUNCIL AND TENANTS WILL ...

Assess the benefits of the compact against expectations.
See if changes are needed to be made
Assess performance against what others (areas) are doing

This compact is drawn up between Dover District Council and its Tenants/Leaseholders in support of the main 'Draft Document'

DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL

TENANT PARTICIPATION COMPACT

AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL AND ITS TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS

This agreement has been drawn up jointly between the Council and tenant/leaseholder members of the Tenant Participation Working Group. The agreement aims to give all residents of Council houses a say in the services they receive, how they are planned and how they are paid for. This is built on years of tenant involvement and informed by current government thinking. This is also a renewed commitment to provide the best possible services, which reflect the requirements of our communities. We will achieve this by working together. All references to "tenants", are intended to include leaseholders.

SHARED PRINCIPLES

- We want to help create communities where people want to live.
- We want to involve residents and communities in the services they receive so that we can encourage personal and community development and help improve quality of life.
- We support and encourage tenant involvement at a level and pace set by the residents themselves.
- Tenant involvement goes beyond Landlord/Tenant relationships. It is about identifying and helping to set the agenda and working in partnership on issues concerning homes, neighbourhoods and environments.

RELATIONSHIP WITH BEST VALUE

This agreement and development of the Compact will form part of the "Best Value" process for housing and community services, challenging existing arrangements, involving tenants fully and looking at how tenant participation can be most effective.

THE COMPACT

In signing this agreement we are showing our shared commitment to working in partnership, guided by the Shared Principles and keeping to the agreed working practices.

Signed:

.....

Leader of the Council

.....

Portfolio Holder (Community)

.....
Director of Health and Housing	Birdwood Avenue Residents Association
.....
Buckland Residents Association	Elvington Forum
.....
The Fairway Residents Association	The Gateway Residents Association

Aims of the Compact

Before working on the Compact a statement of joint aims was agreed between tenants, staff and Councillors, working through the Tenant Participation Working Group. It was agreed that Council tenants and leaseholders should be given the best possible opportunities to become involved in decision making affecting their homes and communities, by developing existing arrangements for tenant participation, to achieve the following:

- (a) Increased tenants awareness of involvement in delivery of housing services;
- (b) Training for tenants groups in appropriate skills to achieve the level of participation desired;
- (c) A flexible framework to allow tenants to increase involvement where they choose;
- (d) A framework linking neighbourhood representation to a Council-wide forum which represents associations at Council level and has an input into monitoring housing services and influencing decisions on policy and strategy;
- (e) Equality of opportunity, which may require special arrangements for particular people, including young tenants, the elderly, tenants in special needs housing and those in an ethnic minority; and
- (f) Facilities and procedures to encourage the fullest possible participation.

Commitment

- The Council will involve tenants in the decision making process and any other matters by agreement.
- The Council is committed to offering tenants the opportunity to be involved in the decision making process affecting management of their homes, at a level and pace which they choose themselves, and respect those who do not wish to become involved.
- The Council will inform all tenants about the arrangements for tenant involvement and encourage tenant groups to participate.

- The Council will offer support for tenant involvement to enhance housing services, whilst encouraging personal and community development.
- The Council will support initiatives for tenants to promote partnership working on housing and housing related issues.
- The Council will ensure that all staff recognise the importance of tenant involvement, involving both day to day issues and wider strategic decisions which may affect their lives.
- The Council will provide staff support to stimulate and sustain tenant involvement.
- The Council will actively encourage involvement from tenants who have not previously had the opportunity of being involved.
- The Council will involve tenants in making decisions on housing matters and any other matters, by agreement. This involvement may be through formal or informal arrangements, tailored to meet the needs of tenants and local circumstances.
- The Council will ensure that tenants are kept informed about its Complaints Procedures, wherever possible aiming to resolve disagreements in a positive manner.
- Tenants representatives will work with the Council to identify issues of concern, including how services and facilities could be misused and improved.
- Tenants representatives will discuss any concerns with the Council before taking any independent action.

Communication

- There will be an annual report to all tenants and leaseholders.
- A minimum of four editions of the Tenants Newsletter will be published each year.
- Tenants and tenant groups will have the opportunity to contribute to and become involved with editorial decisions concerning the Tenants Newsletter.
- Individual tenants or groups will receive information which is likely to affect them within their homes or neighbourhood.
- All information will be provided in plain language, timely and relevant to tenants' needs.
- The Council will provide information about:
 - Housing strategies, policies and priorities;
 - Housing investment plans;
 - Tenant Participation Compacts;
 - Meetings with Tenants and Residents Associations;
 - Use of the Newsletter; and
 - Plans of work affecting tenants' homes and surrounding areas.
- The Council will publish its tenant participation policies.

Tenant Participation Structure

As a result of reviewing existing arrangements for tenant participation and introduction of new political structures at the Council a new structure for tenant participation has been developed, involving two levels of representation.

Area Tenants group

- Four groups covering Deal, Dover, Sandwich and Rural areas.
- Each group having six tenant representatives drawn from Tenants and Residents Associations or elected from areas without such groups. Representation to be as balanced as possible, taking account of housing stock numbers in the Area.
- Each group having three Ward Councillors, representing the current political balance of the Council.
- The purpose of the Group is to monitor local housing services and manage a delegated budget to carry out estate environmental works, each group having responsibility for a share of the district-wide annual budget, in proportion to the number of Council properties in the area.

Officers responsible: Mike Larkin, Estates Manager and Geoff Robinson, Tenant Participation Officer.

District Tenants Group

- Three tenant representatives from each of the area groups.
- Cabinet Member holding the Community Portfolio, plus two other Councillors, representing the current political balance of the Council.
- The purpose of the Group is to provide tenant representatives with the opportunity to work with officers to develop any new services or policies resulting from new legislation, local initiatives and issues raised from the tenants movement. Regular information will be provided to the Group concerning the full range of housing services. The Group's input will be crucial for preparing, operating and revising the Housing Business Plan. The Group will also be encouraged to participate in developing the Council's wider Community objectives, including Community Planning, neighbourhood renewal and local strategic partnerships.

Officers responsible: Tony Stickels, Chief Housing Officer and Mike Larkin, Estates Manager.

In order to develop understanding and experience and assist contact with specialised officers, it is proposed that six tenant representatives identify with the following Portfolios:

1. Estate Management, Rents and Finance-
 - Tenancy agreement and enforcement action
 - Anti-social behaviour policies
 - Neighbour issues that affect people's homes and lives
 - Grass cutting, other grounds maintenance, rubbish collection, street cleaning and dog fouling
 - Cleaning of common areas
 - Setting budgets and rents

- Rent collection and arrears
 - Housing benefits
2. Repairs, Maintenance and Improvements –
 - Tenants homes
 - Common areas and services
 - Environmental work
 3. Vacant homes and lettings –
 - Repairs and security
 - Speed of re-letting
 - Lettings policy
 4. Housing Strategy and Business Plan
 5. Supported housing –
 - Sheltered housing
 - White Cliffs Careline
 - Adaptations for disabled people
 - Ensuring senior citizens can live in peace in their homes and be protected from harassment
 6. Leasehold management –
 - Leaseholder consultation, services and charges
 - Leasehold rights

In order that both levels of representation are able to influence policy making decisions meetings will be arranged to suit the timing of meetings of the Cabinet and Policy and Services Committee.

Involving Tenants in the Housing Service

The "National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts" sets out areas of the Housing Service in which tenants should be involved. The Council will respond to and consult with the District Tenants' Group concerning the following:

- Developing the Councils housing policy and strategy, including identifying and appraising investment options, monitoring and review;
- Drawing up capital and renovation programmes;
- Developing and implementing regeneration and improvement programmes;
- Budgets, finance and rent setting;
- Allocations, lettings and voids;
- Anti-social behaviour;
- Repairs, maintenance and improvements;
- Tenancy conditions and agreements;
- Leasehold management;

- Supported housing services;
- Council services and performance strategies; and arrangements for monitoring and reviewing Council performance, addressing shortcomings and remedial action;
- Setting, monitoring and reviewing services, performance standards and targets for Housing Management and neighbourhood services;
- Neighbourhood issues which affect tenants' homes or the management of the housing service;
- Equality policies, including race equality policies and policies on racial harassment;
- Customer care;
- Environmental works;
- Arrangements for providing information for tenant consultation and involvement, including handling complaints and remedial action.

Participation and feedback will also continue to be encouraged by:

- Individual and neighbourhood consultation on significant issues, policy changes and proposals affecting the service;
- Liaison meetings between Area Housing Officers and the Associations in their area, and appropriate consultation on significant issues;
- Tenants being invited to repair contract meetings and having sanction over the contractors who are asked to tender in their particular area;
- Tenants being consulted individually on the types of materials to be used in their homes, or as a group where colour choices or materials affect a block of flats;
- Tenants being given a choice of when work is to start through an appointment system and being advised of progress or any likely delays;
- Tenant consultation on major projects, such as comprehensive improvements, Howard/Airey houses and sheltered housing improvements;
- Close monitoring of satisfaction levels on day to day repairs, major repair/improvement work and disabled adaptations;
- Leaseholders' wishes being accommodated, for example, by the development of specific contracts to meet their needs;
- The Responsible Tenants scheme, through which tenant representatives work closely with the Repairs team, to provide the best possible estate repairs and cleaning services.

Support for Tenant Participation

Financial Help and Facilities

The Council will:

- Allow basic travelling expenses for tenants attending Area Group and District Group meetings, other consultation meetings and training sessions. Wherever possible transport will be offered for tenants without a vehicle and when public transport is not practicable;
- Provide each Area Housing Group with a delegated budget for estate environmental works;
- Meet the cost of suitable venues for Area and District Group meetings and meetings of Tenants and Residents Associations;
- Meet photocopying costs for Tenants and Residents Associations;
- Agree the annual budget to provide advice, support and training for tenant participation with the District Tenants Group.

Advice Support and Training

The Council will:

- Provide specialised officer and administrative support to Area and District group meetings, as required;
- Provide support, advice and help to all tenants and residents associations and Area Group members;
- Subscribe to the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), in order that associations can access free impartial advice and support;
- Provide opportunities for tenant representatives to receive appropriate training, including policies towards equal opportunities, racial equality and racial harassment;
- Support the joint training of staff, tenants and Councillors wherever possible;
- Enable tenants representatives to spend time with Housing staff to find out more about the work they do;
- Employ a Tenant Participation Officer to help support and promote tenant participation.

Meetings

The following standards are to be applied to Area and District Group meetings:

- Agendas to be made available at least seven days prior to a meeting. An attendance list will be circulated;

- Meetings should be held at suitable times and in accessible places to take account of members personal circumstances;
- Meetings will be properly chaired, have clearly stated aims and be recorded;
- A meeting feedback bulletin will be provided to members of the Group;

Monitoring and Review

The District Tenants Group will:

- Review policies, practice and performance at regular intervals;
- Monitor arrangements for tenant participation and consider adopting different approaches suggested by good practice elsewhere;
- Monitor tenant representatives and Groups to ensure they continue to carry out their roles in accordance with the Group's constitution;
- Work to ensure that tenants from all parts of the community are consulted and involved effectively;
- Support, promote and assist the process of Best Value;
- Actively encourage views and comments from all tenants to ensure that services comply with the principles of Best Value;
- Conduct an annual review of performance and achievements in the operation of the Compact.