



Future options for managing council housing Analysis of consultation responses

1. Introduction

Consultation on future options for the management of housing services across East Kent took place between 22 October and 20 December 2019.

All council tenants and leaseholders across the district were sent a letter, information sheet and questionnaire inviting them to give their views, and an online version of the questionnaire was available on the council's website.

Additionally, key stakeholders including district councillors, county councillors, MPs, Citizens Advice Bureaux, Canterbury Housing Advice Centre, Civica, Kent County Council Social Services, Kent Police and the NHS were emailed directly inviting them to respond to the consultation.

2. Questionnaire responses

A total of 843 completed questionnaires have been received. 76 of these were submitted online and 767 paper copies were returned.

In terms of who responded:

- 821 tenants and leaseholders (15% of all tenants and leaseholders)
- 4 other individuals
- 18 respondents did not say in what capacity they were responding

2.1. Level of agreement with the proposal to bring the service back in house

As shown below, 81% of respondents agree to some extent with the proposal:

	All respondents	Tenants and leaseholders
Strongly agree	60% (492)	60% (487)
Tend to agree	21% (171)	21% (167)
Neither agree nor disagree	12% (96)	11% (92)
Tend to disagree	4% (30)	4% (29)
Strongly disagree	4% (37)	4% (36)

The following comments were made by respondents who agree with the proposal:

- Unhappy with the general standard of service provided by East Kent Housing:
131 comments

- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repair and maintenance issues: 128 comments
- Lack of communication from East Kent Housing: 96 comments
- The council is more local so can deal with issues more quickly: 76 comments
- The council would be more accountable than East Kent Housing: 65 comments
- The council would build stronger relationships with tenants: 48 comments
- The council ran the service well before East Kent Housing was created: 40 comments
- It would be more cost effective if the service was delivered directly by the council: 32 comments
- Lack of safety inspections from East Kent Housing: 25 comments
- The council knows its own housing stock: 23 comments
- East Kent Housing do not provide us with a dedicated Housing Officer anymore: 19 comments
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with anti-social behaviour: 18 comments
- East Kent Housing no longer provide rent statements: 10 comments
- The council would keep better records: 4 comments
- East Kent Housing is too large so too many people are involved in managing the service: 3 comments
- Trust the council to deliver a good service: 3 comments
- Inconvenient repair times being given: 2 comments
- Strongly support returning the service to the council: 2 comments

Respondents who disagree with the proposal made the following comments:

- East Kent Housing provide a good service: 25 comments
- Concern that neither the council nor East Kent Housing would deliver a good service: 6 comments
- East Kent Housing provide a better service than the council did before East Kent Housing was created: 4 comments
- Concern costs may increase if the service is brought under direct council control: 4 comments
- The council would find the service unmanageable: 4 comments
- East Kent Housing and Canterbury City Council are both to blame for the recent failings: 3 comments
- The council would need to employ new staff who would not necessarily know the local area: 2 comments

General comments received regarding the proposal:

- No preference on who runs the service as long as it is delivered effectively: 21 comments
- Don't feel able to give an opinion: 14 comments
- Concern that if East Kent Housing staff simply transfer to the council, the service would not improve: 4 comments
- Happy for other tenants to decide the best way forward: 2 comments
- Would oppose the service being managed by an external provider (option 4): 2 comments

2.2. What the council should focus on for housing services

Respondents were asked what they feel are the three most important things for the council to focus on for housing services. The following responses were received:

Dealing with repairs and maintenance	79% (667)
Dealing with anti-social behaviour	32% (271)
Providing value for money for your rent and service charges	32% (269)
Building new council homes	26% (215)
Estate services (such as grass cutting, cleaning communal areas etc)	24% (205)
Dealing with customer enquiries and complaints	30% (252)
Involving and listening to residents	22% (189)
Other: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve estate services x2 • Focus on capital works x2 • Improve parking x2 • Bin store needs to be installed x1 • Provide help with decorating and carpeting x1 • Build more sheltered housing x1 • Improve street cleaning services x1 • Provide more support to tenants seeking to move x1 • Install electric vehicle charging points x1 • Focus on front door replacements x1 • Focus on employing staff with knowledge of the local area x1 • Focus on maintaining staff levels x1 • All of the above x1 • Provide more practical support to residents who are unable to maintain their homes and gardens x1 • Improve security at sheltered housing schemes x1 • Improve accountability x1 • Provide more support to residents with mental health issues x1 • Allow tenants to make more improvements to their homes themselves x1 • No details given x3 	3% (24)

2.3. Resident involvement

Tenants and leaseholders were asked if they would like to be more involved in the management of their council homes. 127 tenants and leaseholders said they would, and provided their contact details.

2.4. Other comments

The following additional comments were received:

- Not enough attention is given to maintaining council estates: 27 comments
- Parking problems: 7 comments
- The council needs to listen to tenants: 7 comments
- Make it easier for tenants to contact the housing service: 6 comments
- Desire for a greater Independent Living Manager presence: 5 comments
- The council needs to build more homes: 4 comments
- Concern over contractor performance: 4 comments
- Concern over how leasehold service charges are calculated: 4 comments
- Procedure for tenants wishing to transfer to another property is complicated: 4 comments
- Would like follow-up visits from council officers to check repairs have been completed correctly: 3 comments
- Concern over the criteria for ensuring properties are suitable for prospective tenants before they are allocated: 3 comments
- Too many properties on council estates are now Houses in Multiple Occupation: 2 comments
- The council needs to undertake a full audit of its housing stock: 2 comments
- Concern the council would reduce service levels and/or staff if option 2 is implemented: 2 comments
- Concern the council would try to use the service to make a profit if they managed it directly: 2 comments
- Concern about potential data loss if services transfer back to the council: 1 comment
- Concern over the length of time taken to deal with aids and adaptations: 1 comment
- Letters sent by East Kent Housing are difficult to understand as they are not in plain English: 1 comment
- Query over whether the council would use the same contractors as East Kent Housing currently use: 1 comment
- Feeling that East Kent Housing was set up to fail: 1 comment
- Concern tenants would have to sign a new tenancy agreement if the service is brought under direct council control: 1 comment
- Concern rents would increase if the service is brought under direct council control: 1 comment

3. Events

3.1. Drop-in events

3.1.1. Spring Lane Neighbourhood Centre, Canterbury, 4 November 2019

This event was staffed by Sarah Randall, Alexis Jobson, Mike Bailey and Jon Crwys-Williams and 5 residents attended. Two residents who are members of the Tenant Consultative Group also attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Support bringing the service back in house: 4 comments
- Concerns over contractor performance: 3 comments
- East Kent Housing no longer provide a dedicated Housing Officer: 2 comments
- Feeling tenants are not properly involved in decision making: 2 comments
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repair and maintenance issues: 2 comments
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with anti-social behaviour: 1 comment
- Lack of communication from East Kent Housing: 1 comment
- Lack of resident involvement from East Kent Housing: 1 comment
- Grounds maintenance issues: 1 comment
- Proposal for a committee structure for the new service to consist of 50% tenants/25% non-management staff/25% management staff: 1 comment
- Concern that the council would not necessarily deliver a better service than East Kent Housing: 1 comment

3.1.2. Baptist Church, Herne Bay, 9 November 2019

This event was staffed by Alexis Jobson, Mike Bailey and Tasha Love and 4 residents attended. Councillor Dekker and one resident who is a member of the Tenant Consultative Group also attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Support bringing the service back in house: 3 comments
- Lack of communication from East Kent Housing: 3 comments
- Issues with fire prevention works not being completed as per what was originally promised to residents: 3 comments
- Concerns over contractor performance: 2 comments
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with anti-social behaviour: 2 comments
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to enforce fire regulations: 2 comments
- Unhappy that East Kent Housing no longer provide a dedicated Housing Officer: 2 comments
- Issues with flytipping: 2 comments
- Happy with East Kent Housing: 1 comment
- Unhappy that residents were promised central heating which has not been installed: 1 comment
- Would oppose a housing association taking over: 1 comment

3.1.3. The Horsebridge Centre, Whitstable, 19 November 2019

This event was staffed by Sarah Randall, Mike Bailey and Lizzie Norcott and 6 residents attended. Councillor Caffery, Councillor Kenny and two residents who are members of the Tenant Consultative Group also attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Support bringing the service back in house: 4 comments
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repairs and maintenance: 2 comments

- Lack of communication from East Kent Housing: 1 comment
- East Kent Housing's complaints procedure is not fit for purpose: 1 comment
- Desire for the Housing Appeals Committee to be reinstated, and for at least one member of the committee to be a tenant: 1 comment
- Query over whether Tenancy Agreements would change if the service were to come back under direct council control: 1 comment
- Query over whether succession rights would change if the service were to come back under direct council control: 1 comment

3.2. Question and answer sessions for sheltered housing tenants

3.2.1. Lang Court, Whitstable, 28 October 2019

This event was staffed by Mike Bailey and Lizzie Norcott and 15 residents attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Lack of action by EKH to deal with repair issues
- Concerns over how EKH manage the performance of contractors
- Query as to whether support staff that were in place pre-2015 would be reinstated
- Query as to whether the same Independent Living Manager would be retained
- Tenants want their homes to be managed by the council
- Query as to whether rent levels would change
- Query as to how long it would take to implement option 2 if agreed
- Query as to whether night support and laundry staff would be retained

3.2.2. Seaview House, Herne Bay, 29 October 2019

This event was staffed by Mike Bailey and Tasha Love and 7 residents attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Unhappy that the scheme is served by 3 Independent Living Managers rather than having a dedicated Independent Living Manager solely for their scheme
- Concerns regarding the application/selection process on who is allowed to move into sheltered housing
- They feel that have to make all the reports about repairs themselves instead of a service manager who does this for them
- Query when the process of bringing the service back under council control would start if it is decided to do this
- Query as to how long it would take to implement option 2 if agreed
- Query on whether residents would notice a difference in service levels in the interim if option 2 is agreed
- Query on whether residents would receive more attendance from staff on site
- Query on whether management staff from EKH will just transfer over to the council and if so, concern as to whether there would be any difference in service

3.2.3. Cranmer House, Canterbury, 4 November 2019

This event was staffed by Mike Bailey and Jon Crwys-Williams and 8 residents attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Query as to whether residents would notice a difference in service levels if option 2 is agreed
- Query as to whether there would be any cost savings if option 2 is agreed
- Happy with the service provided by Mears
- Support the proposal to bring the service back under direct council control

3.2.4. St Gregory's Court, Canterbury, 6 November 2019

This event was staffed by Mike Bailey and Jon Crwys-Williams and 9 residents attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Query on why the council is consulting tenants when an in principle decision has already been made
- Query over rent free weeks
- One resident commented he had lived there for five years and never had any problems
- Query as to which organisation would employ the Independent Living Manager
- Query as to whether residents would notice a difference in service levels if option 2 is agreed
- Query when the process of bringing the service back under council control would start if it is decided to do this
- Query as to how long it would take to implement option 2 if agreed
- Query on which organisation receives the rent money tenants pay
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repairs and maintenance
- Two residents stated their support for bringing the service back under direct council control

3.2.5. Windsor House, Whitstable, 7 November 2019

This event was staffed by Mike Bailey and Lizzie Norcott and 23 residents attended. Councillor Cornell and Councillor Kenny also attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Strong support for bringing the service back under direct council control (21 residents)
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with anti-social behaviour
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repairs and maintenance
- Tenants not being kept informed of timescales on the work currently being undertaken on the building
- Concerns over insufficient scooter storage once the works to the building are complete
- Concerns over insufficient car parking
- Concerns over accessibility of bin storage area, and residents not using the recycling and residual waste bins correctly

- Concerns regarding the application/selection process on who is allowed to move into sheltered housing
- Query as to whether Independent Living would be retained or whether the service would be rebranded as Sheltered Housing
- Query as to whether the same Independent Living Manager would be retained
- Unhappy that rent statements are no longer provided
- Residents' support plans are not being regularly reviewed and updated
- Desire to retain and improve the Independent Living Forum if the service is brought back under direct council control

3.2.6. Franklyn House, Sturry, 8 November 2019

This event was staffed by Mike Bailey and Jon Crwys-Williams and 10 residents attended. Councillor Dekker and Councillor Harvey-Quirke also attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Query on why the council is consulting tenants when an in principle decision has already been made
- Query as to whether Independent Living would be retained or whether the service would be rebranded as Sheltered Housing
- Query as to whether residents would notice a difference in service levels if option 2 is agreed
- Desire to retain and improve the Independent Living Forum if the service is brought back under direct council control
- Query as to whether the handyman service would be retained
- Concerns over contractor performance
- Query on how rent and service charges are calculated
- Query as to whether tenants' rights under their tenancy agreements would change
- Query on whether the choice based lettings system would be retained
- Concerns over building security
- Concerns over lack of adequate cover when the Independent Living Manager is absent
- Concerns over emergency evacuation procedure for disabled residents as no wheelchair or stairlift is provided
- Concerns over accessibility of bin storage area
- Query as to whether it would be easier to contact staff at the council than it is to contact staff at East Kent Housing

3.2.7. Longfield Court, Whitstable, 11 November 2019

This event was staffed by Mike Bailey and Lizzie Norcott and 12 residents attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Strong support for bringing the service back under direct council control (9 residents)
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repairs and maintenance
- Lack of communication from East Kent Housing
- Query as to why East Kent Housing was created
- Concerns over contractor performance

- Query as to whether the same Independent Living Manager would be retained

3.2.8. Ellen Court, Littlebourne, 11 November 2019

This event was staffed by Mike Bailey and Jon Crwys-Williams and 11 residents attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Query as to whether residents would notice a difference in service levels if option 2 is agreed
- Query over whether rents would reduce if it costs the council less to deliver the service than it currently costs East Kent Housing
- Concern over whether the council actually deliver a better service than East Kent Housing
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repairs and maintenance
- Query on whether staff currently employed by East Kent Housing would transfer to work for Canterbury City Council
- Desire for a greater Independent Living Manager presence in the scheme
- Lack of communication from East Kent Housing
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing on fire safety issues
- What would happen if one or more of the councils wanted to keep East Kent Housing
- Query on health and safety checks being carried out at weekends but tenants not notified
- Concerns over emergency evacuation procedure for disabled residents as no wheelchair or stairlift is provided
- Concerns over building security
- Residents unable to access their electricity meters as they are in a locked cupboard

3.2.9. Maple House, Rough Common, 12 November 2019

This event was staffed by Mike Bailey and Jon Crwys-Williams and 6 residents attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Residents being told they are in rent arrears only to subsequently be told East Kent Housing have made a mistake and they are not in arrears
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repairs and maintenance
- Residents being given misleading reasons for work not being carried out
- Support bringing the service back under direct council control as the council would be more accountable and provide more a local focus
- Query as to how long it would take to implement option 2 if agreed
- Access problems to the car park caused by an overgrown hedge

3.2.10. Whitgift Court, Canterbury, 14 November 2019

This event was staffed by Mike Bailey and Tasha Love and 19 residents attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Concern that the council is consulting on its preferred option rather than asking for tenants' views on all four options referred to in the information sheet
- Unhappy with general standard of service provided by East Kent Housing
- Issues with missed bin collections
- Lack of communication from East Kent Housing
- Difficulties contacting the Independent Living team on the number provided when staff are not on site
- Problems with lift maintenance
- Desire for a greater Independent Living Manager presence in the scheme, particularly at weekends
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repairs and maintenance
- Query as to how long it would take to implement option 2 if agreed
- Query as to whether the council might look to outsource the service again in the future
- Issues with parking

3.2.11. Churchill House, Bridge, 15 November 2019

This event was staffed by Mike Bailey and Lizzie Norcott and 10 residents attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repairs and maintenance, particularly issues with the communal washing machine, lift and communal boiler
- Lack of communication from East Kent Housing
- Query over why residents of the bungalows adjoining the main building are allowed to use the communal areas of the scheme
- Concerns over contractor performance, particularly window cleaners and grounds maintenance
- Query as to whether Independent Living would be retained or whether the service would be rebranded as Sheltered Housing
- Concerns over building security
- Feeling East Kent Housing ignore Churchill House
- Desire for a greater Independent Living Manager presence in the scheme,
- Query as to how long it would take to implement option 2 if agreed

3.2.12. Collard House, Canterbury, 19 November 2019

This event was staffed by Mike Bailey and Tasha Love and 9 residents attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Query as to whether the process for existing tenants wishing to submit transfer applications would change
- Query as to what would happen if the majority of tenants wanted to keep East Kent Housing

- Query as to whether rents would increase if the service is brought back under direct council control
- Query as to whether staffing levels would increase if the service is brought back under direct council control
- Query as to how much savings the council could make by bringing the service back under its direct control
- Concerns over the performance of contractors, particularly grounds maintenance
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repairs and maintenance, particularly lift maintenance
- Lack of communication from East Kent Housing
- More confidence in the council to deliver a good service
- Issues with the Kent Homechoice system
- Query as to whether Mears would be retained as the repairs contractor
- Happy with the service from Mears, particularly the handyman service

3.2.13. Shalmsford Court, Chartham, 28 November 2019

This event was staffed by Mike Bailey and Jon Crwys-Williams and 8 residents attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Query as to whether the same Independent Living Manager would be retained
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repairs and maintenance
- Parking problems
- Issues with fly tipping
- Support the proposal to bring the service back under direct council control
- Concerns over contractor performance
- Desire to retain and improve the Independent Living Forum if the service is brought back under direct council control

4. Contact with the consultation team

The consultation team dealt with enquiries from 16 Canterbury residents:

- Repairs reported to EKH but not dealt with x7
- Tenant wanting to complete questionnaire over the phone x2
- Unhappy with the general standard of service provided by EKH x2
- Lack of action by EKH on potential tenancy fraud x1
- Request for electronic copies of the consultation documents x1
- NHS CCG wanting to discuss the proposal over the phone x1
- Tenant requesting a home visit to discuss the consultation x1
- Query regarding a tenancy succession issue x1

NB: Four of these tenants also said they support bringing the service back in house, and one said he would prefer to keep EKH.

5. Written submission from Canterbury Housing Advice Centre

Canterbury Housing Advice Centre sent an email in response to the consultation, in which they made the following comments:

"Canterbury Housing Advice Centre most strongly supports option 2 which is to close East Kent Housing and create a team at Canterbury City Council to look after Canterbury City Council homes. We would also strongly support keeping all housing services under the direct control of Canterbury City Council and to not contract out any of these services to anybody else".