

8. Involvement

8.1 Community empowerment – the duty to involve

The Government has published guidance on Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities¹ (July 2008). This explains how local authorities can engage residents, lead their communities and find new and more effective ways to deliver high quality services with partners. It reaffirms that housing is at the heart of place shaping and encourages local authorities to ensure that the strategic vision for the area takes full and proper account of housing.

A new 'duty to involve local representatives' will be introduced in April 2009. Local authorities are required to take appropriate steps to involve 'representatives of local persons' in the exercise of their roles. It specifies three ways of involving:

- providing information
- consulting
- involving in another way.

We will be studying the guidance to ensure that we meet the requirements in relation to both our routine functions and any significant one-off decisions.

8.2 Tenant participation

We see our relations with tenants as an important feature of our housing work and are committed to ensuring that tenants can have a voice in housing services and be involved in decision making at all levels within the Council. There is a well developed culture of tenant participation with residents associations and an active Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel (TLCP), who are genuinely involved in the management and maintenance of their homes.

During the Housing Stock Options Appraisal process in 2004/06 tenants, officers and councillors worked well together and the **Housing Review Board** (HRB) was formed to keep this work progressing. It is a new idea for a council which has retained its housing stock to set up such a board. The HRB consists of five tenant members, five councillors and two independent community representatives. Further information about its work can be found on our website.

We have a Tenant Participation Officer, a Tenant Participation Assistant and a Community Development Worker, working with tenants on a wide range of initiatives.

Tenants have been involved with a range of new initiatives including:

- redrafting the new secure tenancy agreement
- writing a new Tenant Handbook
- reviewing and updating the old Tenant Participation Compact into the new Tenant and Council Partnership Agreement
- setting up and joining 'service review groups' which consider issues around specific areas of our service such as repairs
- preparing for the Housing Commission Audit Inspection in September 2007
- mystery shopping activities
- reviewing the Resident Involvement Strategy
- organising the annual Resident Conference
- resident inspectors – inspecting areas of the service.

¹ Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities, Statutory Guidance, HM Government www.communities.gov.uk

The TLCP produces its own newsletter, Partnership News, for tenants and leaseholders. Some of its members are also involved with editing the Housing Standard and Sheltered News newsletters.

A priority for us is to engage tenants more effectively in all aspects of the Housing and Social Inclusion Service, build on the capacity for tenant representatives to be more involved and draw on their skills and local knowledge to improve the management of the housing stock.

We actively encourage tenants to become involved with the service. There is a wide range of ways in which this can be done from answering surveys and replying to email or telephone consultation, attending various different meetings from once yearly area forum meetings, to becoming a member of a group or panel such as a service review group or the TLCP. We provide a wide variety of training courses and actively advertise these on our website and within the newsletters.

The **Tenant and Council Partnership Agreement April 2008²** sets out the full range of options and targets for tenant participation. It has a comprehensive Action Plan.

8.3 Tenant satisfaction

We are pleased to be able to report very high levels of tenant satisfaction with our housing services.

The STATUS survey results from the 2008 survey indicate that:

- 87% of tenants were satisfied with the overall service provided by the landlord
- 84% of tenants were satisfied with the general condition of their property
- 88% of tenants said that we provided either good or very good value for money
- 85% of tenants were satisfied with the repairs service.

The Housing and Social Inclusion Service carries out several different surveys to measure how satisfied users have been with the services they receive. These include:

- repairs and maintenance satisfaction surveys
- estate management surveys
- newsletter surveys
- allocations surveys.

The results of the surveys will be monitored, used to improve services and published in newsletters and on our website.

² www.eastdevon.gov.uk/google/tenant_partnership_agreement_lowres.pdf