

HOUSING

STANDARD



Issue 32
Spring 2010

YOUR NEWSLETTER FROM EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Your spring issue

**New Council houses
coming soon!** Page 6

**Tenant Services
Authority** Page 8



**Crackdown
on housing
fraud**
Page 12

**Your new
independent
Housing Review
Board
representative**
Page 4

**Plans submitted
for new Sidmouth
community centre**
Page 5

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Welcome to your spring issue of the Housing Standard

In this newsletter you will find lots of useful and interesting information including up to date information about the Tenant Services Authority, the new regulators for Social Housing. On page 3 you will find information about the 2010 Tenants Conference and on page 15 details of how to enter the 2010 Garden competition.

In this edition

East Devon District Council fourth Annual Tenants' Conference	3
Coming soon – the SWITCH project	3
Introducing your new independent Housing Review Board representative	4
Plans submitted for new Sidmouth community centre	5
Good News! New council houses coming soon	6
Even more affordable housing for East Devon	7
Downsizing – the best move you may ever make!	7
Tenant Services Authority	8
Developments in your area	10
Estate Walkabouts	11
Crackdown on housing fraud	12
East Devon District Council Tenant profiling survey	13
Are you struggling with your rent?	14
2010 East Devon Tenants Garden Competition	15
Replacement exterior doors to Council properties	16

How to get in touch

In person

Call at reception at
Knowle, Sidmouth
8.30am – 5.00pm Mon – Fri

Phone

01395 516551 or
01395 516854 for out of
hours and emergencies

Write to

Tenant Participation
East Devon District Council
Knowle
Sidmouth
EX10 8HL

Visit our website

[www.eastdevon.gov.uk/
homes_and_housing](http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/homes_and_housing)



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East Devon District Council fourth Annual Tenants' Conference

News & Events

Friday 18 June, Seaton Methodist Church complex

The programme planned for this year's conference gives you an ideal opportunity to speak to and question the officers of East Devon District Council Housing Service. This is your chance to talk to the people directly responsible for delivering the service you receive.

We have also managed to secure the attendance of Paul Netherton the Assistant Chief Constable for Devon and Cornwall Police – so again your chance to ask questions and raise any concerns you have about policing in East Devon.

Lunch and refreshments will be provided free of charge and transport can be arranged, if required. Please state any dietary requirements when applying. Places are limited so please apply as soon as possible.

Don't miss out on this opportunity to have an enjoyable and worthwhile day out. Contact Bev or Jane on **01395 517453** or email tenantparticipation@eastdevon.gov.uk to reserve a place.



*Last year's conference ▲
was a complete success*

Coming soon – the SWITCH project

A dynamic new approach to meeting the needs of children and young people

This project aims to link young people in East Devon with the services that will help them reach their full potential. It will provide information and advice on employment, training, parenting skills, health and money matters. SWITCH will do this in the following three ways:

One off DJing beatboxing events to provide positive activities for 16 – 25 year olds and providing them with information on services they could benefit from, for example Youth Service recording facilities, Connexions, Working Links, Ivy

Project Exeter College courses. The weekly service below will also be promoted.

A weekly information/training service initially held at Clayton House on the Littleham estate in Exmouth on Wednesday mornings from 10.00am until 12.45pm with free internet access, advice on CV writing and IT training. On Wednesday afternoons from 1.30pm until 3.00pm a young parents group.

'Play' activities for younger children on the estate in the holiday periods run by 'Youth' Volunteers.



If you are living in a council owned property, aged between 16 and 25 and would like to get free training in first aid, safe guarding children, games, circus skills, face painting, beatboxing, DJing and play work then get in touch! Also if you would like to get some experience helping run activities for younger people and receive references to help with future employment, please contact Polly Anderson on **01395 516551** Ext. **2372** or email switch@eastdevon.gov.uk.

Introducing Julie Adkin, your new independent Housing Review Board representative

We are very pleased to welcome Julie Adkin as the new independent Housing Review Board representative. The Housing Review Board, which oversees all our landlord

Julie has a wealth of experience in the field of social housing

functions, consists of five tenant representatives, five district councillors and two independent representatives. Julie has taken over from Heather Williamson, who stepped down due to ill health last autumn.

Julie has a wealth of experience in the field of social housing. She has

worked for a long time within both the construction industry and housing association sector. She also has experience of providing care communities for the elderly and has visited Denmark, Holland and the USA to review their housing provision for the long term care of the elderly. As well as this she is experienced in research for social and private housing and education.

Julie lives in Beer and is well aware of the local pressures for housing, having two children and 18 nephews and nieces living locally who have all struggled to find jobs and homes at some point. She is very keen to use her experience to support the work of the Housing Review Board and the Housing and Social Inclusion Service of East Devon.



Members of the Housing Review Board

Ted Brown	Tenant Representative (Chairman)
Douglas Hull	District Councillor (Vice Chairman)
Julie Adkin	Independent Representative
Vivienne Ash	District Councillor
Ann Bickham	Tenant Representative
Rob Finch	Independent Representative
John Humphries	District Councillor
Victor Kemp	Tenant Representative
Jim Knight	District Councillor
Christine Morrison	Tenant Representative
Sue Saunders	Tenant Representative
Pauline Stott	District Councillor

You can be contact the members through Democratic Services at East Devon District Council on **01395 517546**.

Upcoming Housing Review Board meetings

Dates

Thursday 24 June 2010
Thursday 9 September 2010
Thursday 25 November 2010
Thursday 13 January 2011
Thursday 3 March 2011
Thursday 28 April 2011

Visitors are welcome to attend meetings. Meetings are usually in the Council Chamber at the Council Offices in Sidmouth and start at 6.00pm. Before attending please contact Democratic Services on **01395 517546** to check the date, time and venue for the meeting.

Plans submitted for new Sidmouth community centre

A community and children's centre in Sidmouth takes a step closer this month, as plans are submitted for final approval.

Plans for the centre at Stowford Rise will be submitted to East Devon District planning at the end of the month, with building work due to start in August. The exciting design includes a 180 m sq hall, large kitchen and a community room.

It also includes an outside area ideal for a range of uses including seating for the coffee shop. The children's centre features office space for members of the health team and larger areas for running various groups for children under five and their families.

The project has been the result of a partnership between Devon County Council, East Devon District Council and Sidmouth Town Council, who have worked together to provide funding for this community facility.

The centre is also supported by a growing membership of volunteers, who have formed the Stowford Rise Community Centre Association, and are taking an active role in the project's development. The group has conducted surveys of the local residents, local businesses and voluntary sector and are at present in the process of developing a business plan.

Another group of volunteers is starting to fund raise for equipment and other items that will be needed for the centre.

One of their first events, being held on Monday 3 May, will include displays of the centre and a whole host of activities for all ages rounding off with a barbecue.

“ I am delighted that this long-held ambition will now become a reality ”

Councillor Stuart Hughes

Local Devon County Councillor Stuart Hughes, who has championed the community centre for over 15 years, said: “I am delighted that this long-held ambition will now become a reality. The community and children's centre will put the heart into the Stowford Rise area and it is so rewarding to see all the partners working together and driving this project forward. I now look forward to seeing the foundations being laid later this year.”

Anyone who would like to get involved with members of the Association can contact Maggie Baldwin on **07882 751096** or Debbie Stewart on **01392 666281**.

Architects' visual of the new community centre ▼



Good News!

New council houses coming soon

East Devon District Council is leading the way and building new council homes in the district

Two new bungalows for local people with disabilities will be ready in Sidmouth in March 2010. The bungalows will be cost-effective to live in and have used sustainable materials wherever possible, as well as renewable energy supplies. A further new council house is being built for us by a private developer in Rockbears and should be ready for occupation later this year.

As well as this we have been successful in bidding for a social housing grant

administered by the Homes and Communities Agency, the Government's single housing and regeneration agency for England, through its Local Authority New Build project. We will match this investment of more than £1 million to enable us to provide 17 new homes in four different areas, as detailed in the table below.

The architects Charles E Ware are acting as project manager for this work and we are currently in the process of awarding the build contracts.

Location	Number and size of properties	Number of people per property
Churchill Court, Lymstone	5 two bedroom houses	3 people
	4 three bedroom houses	5 people
Normandy Close, Exmouth	1 two bedroom house	3 people
	1 three bedroom house	5 people
Heals Field, Axminster	2 two bedroom flats	3 people
Waggs Plot, Axminster	4 two bedroom houses	3 people

For further information about these exciting projects:

Sue Bewes	Housing Strategy Manager	01395 516551 Ext. 2200
Paul Lowe	Housing Enabling Officer	01395 516551 Ext. 2379
Emma Charlton	Housing Projects Officer	01395 519982 Ext. 2982

Even more affordable housing for East Devon

As well as starting to build new council housing stock for the first time in 20 years (see article opposite) we continue to work with local Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to enable them to build new affordable housing throughout East Devon.

We are working with Hastoe Housing Association to provide 20 two and three bedroom homes for rent in Colyton. These will be available from early Autumn 2010.

Sanctuary Housing is building 12 new properties for rent in Axminster comprising of one bedroom flats and three bedroom houses. These are due to be completed in March 2010.

Hastoe Housing Association are also building a further 16 homes in Dunkeswell. These will be a mixture of shared ownership and rented properties, consisting of two and three bedroom houses. They should be completed in Spring and Autumn 2010. These properties will be available to local people and advertised through Devon Home Choice.



▲ New homes at Dunkeswell

Downsizing – the best move you may ever make!

By helping others you could also help yourself to £1,100!

- Are you living in a house too big for your needs?
- Is your garden now too much for you to look after properly?
- Do you want to feel more secure in your home?
- Do you want to move closer to family or friends?

Many tenants live in a home which is too big for their current needs. Also we have lots of tenants and new applicants who are desperate for larger family accommodation. By 'downsizing' to a smaller home you could help each other.

If you do move from a general purpose house to a smaller (one or two bedroom) flat or bungalow, we will pay up to £1,100 to help you move.

If you want to know more about this scheme please contact a member of Housing Needs on **01395 517469** or email housingneeds@eastdevon.gov.uk.

Tenants and staff have been busy responding and commenting on consultation papers about the work of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA). In January tenants from East Devon District Council, Mid Devon District Council and Exeter City Council prepared a joint response to the final consultation paper. A copy of the response can be found on our website www.eastdevon.gov.uk/how_to_get_involved. The TSA took note of what was said by us and other organisations and has made some changes to the standards. In April the TSA became the new regulator for social housing.

The TSA believes that the best place for the quality of services to be discussed, agreed and scrutinised is locally, between providers and tenants. The standard detailed below require landlords to set out what they offer to tenants and set local standards that reflect the local priorities.

The TSA's objectives:

- Improve standards of service delivery to tenants.
- Support decent homes and neighbourhoods.
- Promote effective tenant involvement and empowerment.
- Ensure providers are well run and deliver value for money.
- Promote and protect public and private investment.
- Encourage and support a supply of well managed social housing.

The TSA want to develop a new relationship between landlords and their regulator. They want the main relationship being between landlord and tenant – one where tenants help shape, influence and monitor the service provided. This is called co-regulation. This is a new way of regulating – there will be less 'red tape' and landlords will be expected to make themselves more accountable and to work more closely with their tenants.

The TSA believes that the best place for the quality of services to be discussed, agreed and scrutinised is locally, between providers and tenants



What you as a tenant can expect in the future?

- A greater focus on the issues that matter most to you, such as repairs, affordable rents and tackling anti-social behaviour.
- More opportunities to have your say, to get involved and to hold your landlord to account.
- A greater emphasis on your priorities through new local standards, agreed jointly by both you the tenants and landlords.
- More feedback from your landlord, including an annual report setting out how well they are performing against both the locally agreed standards and the TSA's national standards.

What can landlords expect in the future?

- More responsibility to work closely with their tenants to drive improvements.
- More flexibility about how they deliver their housing services in return for more accountability to tenants and partners.

- A modern 'co-regulatory' relationship with tenants and the regulator where many of the activities necessary to regulate outcomes are undertaken by landlords with their tenants.
- A fair and proportionate approach if their performance needs to improve.

To support the achievement of these objectives the TSA has devised six standards:

- **Tenant involvement** – this standard includes customer service, choice, complaints, understanding and responding to diverse needs.
- **Value for money.**
- **Governance and viability.**
- **Neighbourhoods and community** – this standard covers neighbourhood management, local area cooperation and anti social behaviour.
- **Tenancy** – this standard covers allocations, rents and tenure.
- **Home** – this standard covers quality of accommodation and repairs and maintenance.



Would you like to get involved?

If you would like to take part in this new and exciting way of monitoring and scrutinising your landlord or would like more information about the TSA please contact Jane Reading, Tenant Participation Officer jmreading@eastdevon.gov.uk or 01395 516551 ext 2236 or visit the TSA website at www.tenantservicesauthority.org.

Further information about the TSA will be available on our website www.eastdevon.gov.uk and in future newsletters.

Developments in your area

Millwey Rise

There is great news for all the residents living on the Millwey Rise estate in Axminster who have been wanting the play area, currently next to the Football Club, to be moved to a more prominent and visible position. We are pleased to let you all know that about £77,000 has been found to build a brand new play area on the green behind the Spar Shop on First Avenue.



▲ Consultation event for the proposed Community Centre and the area it will be in

The money comes from two different sources. £47,000 is coming from Section 106 development money which local people voted at the end of last year to spend at Millwey Rise. £30,000 is coming from a Play Builder grant from Devon County Council. The old play area will be removed and that area can then be used by the Football Club. We have already done some consultation and plan to do some more over the next few months. So look out for information about this and come along to give us your views.

St Pauls

We have some good news for everyone living on and around St Pauls! There will soon be a new Trim Trail for the young children by the Community Flat. The children all voted for what play equipment they would like to have in the Trim Trail so we hope that they will enjoy having the trail so close to their houses.

There is a lot of other work that continues to take place on the Heathpark estate. We work closely with the Heathpark Steering Group, made up of representatives from East Devon Volunteer Services, the East and Mid Devon Community Safety Partnership, the

Honiton Childrens Centre, and the local police. This group continues to oversee the running of the Monday evening homework club, holiday activities and housing and advice surgeries. The group also arranged for a six week cookery course run by Health and Local Food for Families (HALFF) which was attended by six local families who all found it very useful. The Steering Group also pays for a community development worker on the estate for six hours a week.

We would like to thank everyone who has been involved in all these different projects over the last few months, especially to the young people from the homework club who came up with such good ideas.

Estate Walkabouts



Our Estate Management Team identify problems they find on estates as part of their job, when they are 'out and about'. However to maintain standards we also involve tenants and the local police on formal estate walkabouts. We carried out estate inspections with tenants in January 2010 and the overall results are detailed as follows.

	Untaxed/ abandoned vehicles	Condition of properties and gardens	External or communal repairs	Grounds maintenance/ environmental	No. of Council properties of total
Exmouth					
Gibson Close	0	0	1	3	22 of 66
Cheshire Road	0	0	5	5	39 of 58
Wilmot Close	0	0	1	0	1 of 6
Burch Close	0	0	0	1	3 of 15
Dinan Way	0	0	0	1	6 of 20
Offwell					
Ramsden Lane	0	0	0	0	5 of 8
Cotleigh Rye Pk.	0	1	0	0	5 of 12
Monkton – Dumpdon View	0	0	0	1	8 of 14
Otter View	0	1	0	0	1 of 4
Feniton					
St Andrews Cl. & Station Rd	0	1	1	0	6 of 21
Lashbrook	0	0	1	0	3 of 6
Talaton					
Orchard Close	0	0	1	0	6 of 6
Payhembury					
Hillside	0	3	0	2	14 of 34
Beer					
Park Road	0	1	0	0	10 of 46
Underleys	2	1	0	0	29 of 68
Peazen Flats	0	0	0	0	16 of 16
The Meadows	0	0	0	0	4 of 16
Branscombe					
Bennets Close	0	0	0	0	2 of 9
Bucknall Close	0	0	0	0	6 of 6
Hillside	0	0	0	0	5 of 12
Parkfield Ter.	0	0	0	1	5 of 10

We would really like your help!

Would you like to take part in an estate walkabout as a tenant representative, with all the training provided? Would you like to be part of our Estate Management Service Review Group? If you're interested please contact Rose Tyrrell on **01395 516551 Ext. 2390.**

Details of our next walkabouts

Exmouth

Normandy Close on 4 May starting at 10.00am

Colyton and Shute

All Council owned properties in these villages on 6 May at 10.30am

Hawkchurch and All Saints

All Council properties in these villages on 5 May at 10.30am

Poltimore, Rewe and Stoke Canon

12 May at 10.00am

Crackdown on housing fraud



**If you suspect
someone is
committing housing
fraud, let us know**

**Blow the whistle
on housing cheats**

What is housing fraud?

There are different types of housing fraud and some of the most common are as follows.

Unlawful subletting

Where a tenant lets out the whole of their house or flat. Often they will be charging a higher rent than the Council and so making a profit for themselves. This is illegal and it is unfair to profit from a property that could be given to someone in greater need.

Wrongly claimed succession

Where a tenant dies there are rules concerning who can, if anyone, “take over” or succeed, the tenancy. Wrongly claimed succession is when someone who is not entitled, tries to take over the tenancy, for example by saying they had been living at the address before the tenant died. Or someone may not have applied to succeed to the tenancy, but just hope that they can stay on in the property.

Non occupation

Where the tenant does not occupy the property as their principal (or sole) home, they may visit to collect post but do not properly live at the address.

Obtaining housing by deception

Where a person gets a council home by giving false information in their application, for example not telling the authority that they have a council house elsewhere.

What are we doing?

The Estate Management section currently investigate all cases of alleged fraud as a matter of priority. We are able to work with other agencies, and where appropriate, take legal action under the terms of the tenancy agreement. This can result in repossessing the property and letting it to another family.

The Government has recently launched a publicity campaign, which the Council is fully supporting, by displaying posters and leaflets in various places. We are also raising awareness within the Council to improve the flow of information between different sections.

What can you do?

Your help in reporting housing fraud is important, because you know what is going on in your neighbourhood. You might know that the tenant has left and has rented the house out, or you might be suspicious because the tenants of a property keep changing.

If you suspect someone is committing any of the types of housing fraud mentioned above, let us know. Contact your housing officer in estate management on **01395 516551 Ext. 2381** or **2396**, or phone the confidential fraud line on **01395 517494** and leave a message. Anything you tell us will be held in the strictest confidence. It is possible to remain anonymous, but this can often prevent us making an investigation, because we may have further questions, not have the right information, or just want to report back to you to let you know how we are getting on.

East Devon District Council Tenant profiling survey

The tenant profiling survey carried out in 2009 has enabled us to collect detailed information on the needs and household make up of our tenants.

Two particular areas that we wanted to address were preferred method of communication and details of disabilities.

Elderly tenants living alone may be potentially vulnerable. The results support our need for tenant participation, estate management, and supporting housing teams to continue in their important roles to ensure that some sort of contact point is available for them.

The findings that a large number of our properties are underoccupied support the setting up of a 'virtual' housing team to tackle the under occupation of our housing stock.

The questionnaire has also been beneficial as a data cleansing exercise. We will be able to update our telephone numbers, and names and addresses if we find a mismatch against our existing records.

Thank you to all who took part. The full report can be viewed on our website

www.eastdevon.gov.uk/homes_and_housing.

Summary of Findings

- 56% of the respondents were female
- 64% of tenants were over 65 years of age
- 53% of tenants lived alone
- 45% of tenants did not own a vehicle
- 98% of tenants classified themselves as White British
- 90% of tenants stated they wished to be contacted by post by the council
- 25% of tenants had the internet at home
- 54% of households had someone living with a disability
- 70% of three bedroomed and 42% of four bedroomed homes were underoccupied
- The preferred language of all tenants who responded was English

For further information contact
Richard Mainwaring
Information & Analysis Officer
01395 516551 Ext. 2220.

Are you struggling with your rent?



There are many ways in which our friendly staff may be able to help you

Are you a household on a low income? Do you receive any benefits?

You may be entitled to Housing Benefit. You can make an application over the telephone, at the council offices, or one of the benefit team may be able to visit you at your home. If you want to claim, you can ring us on **01395 517446**.

Are you struggling with debts and money management?

If you are struggling with rent and other debts, we may be able to refer you to one of our Floating

Support agencies. They will help you to manage your money and offer support to help you through the difficulties you may be having. These services are free and independent.

Do you want to be able to pay your rent another way?

Changing your method of payment may well help you to keep up with your rent. We now offer several ways to pay:

- Direct Debit (monthly on the 1st of each month).
- Rent Payment Voucher Book.
- Bank Standing Order.
- Over the telephone using a Debit Card by calling our automated line on **08447 36 96 31** and choose *option 5*. Alternatively call our offices during working hours on **01395 517444** and speak to one of our staff.

Do you struggle with the frequency of your rent payments?

How often you pay your rent may also help you to manage your account. If you get paid weekly, why not pay weekly. If you get paid monthly, we can calculate a monthly figure for you so you can pay the same amount every month, once a month. Payments should always be in advance.

Do you currently have any arrears on your account?

If your rent account does fall behind, we can make an arrangement agreed by both yourself and the Council to repay what is owed in instalments, rather than you trying to find a large sum of money in one go.

As soon as you find yourself struggling to keep up with your rent payments, contact us. If we are not aware of your situation, we cannot help you. The sooner you inform us that you are having problems paying, the sooner you will receive help. Please contact the Rents team on direct dial number **01395 517444**.



2010 East Devon Tenants Garden Competition

We've made some changes to this year's garden competition as a result of feedback received from you. There are seven categories to choose from. For each category there will be an overall winner, gold band winners, silver band winners and bronze winners, with some highly commended gardens.

As well as these seven categories there will be a one off prize of £50 for the best or most original feature within the entries. You do not need to enter for this award separately as the judge will make the choice.

The closing date for entries is Tuesday 1 June 2010 and judging will take place on Monday 19 July or Tuesday 20 July 2010

Sponsors:

skinner

Kieron Bewes
Horticultural Consultant Ltd

Connaught



Overall Garden

Display of flowers and vegetables

Children's Garden

Best small area designed and maintained by a child under the age of 14 – this can be either a vegetable or flower garden

First Time Entrants

The most innovative and creative first time entry

The Permaculture Garden

The garden that makes the best use of recycled material

Communal and Friends Together

Tenants working together to make the very best of their communal area

Back and Front Garden

Display of flowers

Containers and Hanging Baskets

Tubs, hanging baskets, window boxes etc

▲ Some of the winning gardens from last year's competition

Garden Competition Entry Form

I would like to enter the following:

(please tick each category you would like to enter)

- Overall Garden First Time entrants The Permaculture Garden Back and Front Garden
 Containers and Hanging Baskets Communal and Friends Together Childrens garden

Please write down any special features you would like to be taken into account by the judges, for example steep slopes, gardeners with disabilities, Council maintained grass and hedges:

.....
.....

Form continued overleaf

Replacement exterior doors to Council properties

The Council have now started on the third phase of replacement doors to Council properties, and during the coming year we hope to replace the exterior doors to some 330 properties.

During 2008 we replaced doors to 150 properties and during 2009 we managed 250, so the latest programme maintains an increase in the numbers being done annually.

Those properties selected for this latest programme have all been identified, tenants have been contacted, surveys carried out and by the time this newsletter arrives on your doormat, the replacement programme should be well under way.

Tenants are given a choice of five different styles of door in five different colours. Those wishing a further choice may elect to pay the difference to achieve their individual requirement.

The company selected to install these doors is "Homesafe Doors" who have been chosen by Advantage SW, as the cheapest available. Their competitive price is based on bulk buying, as they provide the majority of doors for all of the Councils and Housing Associations in the South West.

Do you want a new door but are not on the programme?

As a by product of this programme, tenants living in properties which are not included within the current programme may take the opportunity to have their doors replaced at a discounted price.

You need to write in to the Housing Department for Landlord's consent, and we will then arrange a visit by "Homesafe Doors" to carry out a survey and provide a price for each door. Once the door has been installed tenants will be required to pay the Council the agreed sum. The likely cost to tenants is about £325 per door.

The door replacement programme is produced taking into consideration the age of properties and with regard to inspections by the Technical Officers for each area, and clearly represents a significant investment by this Council in housing stock.

For more information
please contact
Chris Brookbank on
01395 516551
Ext. 2408

33

Rules: I agree to abide by the rules of the competition. Only one prize will be awarded per household. The judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into if there is a dispute. I also give my permission to publish my photo along with my name and address (excluding house number) in future Council publications.

Name:

Phone Number:

Address:

Signed: **Date:**/...../.....



Please send your completed forms to Tenant Participation, East Devon District Council, Knowle, Sidmouth, EX10 8HL