



PORTFOLIO : HOUSING

CABINET – 2 JANUARY 2002

PROPOSED STRATEGY FOR TENANT PARTICIPATION IN THE NEW FOREST

1 Summary

- 1.1 This paper looks at the existing arrangements for tenant participation, the current issues and how arrangements could be changed to ensure fair representation for all tenants who live in Council owned housing and a more effective tenant involvement process.

2 History

- 2.1 Tenant representation and involvement has, over the past 10 years, always been seen as important in the New Forest to allow tenants to express their views on the Housing Service.
- 2.2 Until relatively recently there have been in excess of ten tenant associations active in various parts of the District. Unfortunately these have declined over the years and there are now only very few that can be said to be active.
- 2.3 The original tenant participation arrangements that were in place until the changes brought about by the modernisation structure in local government, were that each tenant association would nominate two representatives to attend the Joint Residents and Tenants Consultative Committee. This Committee met regularly with Officers and Members and was used to allow tenants and residents to have a voice and involvement in the Housing Service. Tenant comments would be included in all committee reports. One tenant from the Consultative Group was nominated to attend Housing Committee and although not entitled to vote on issues, would be invited to make comments on committee reports.

3 Existing Arrangements

- 3.1 Following the changes in the Committee structure the arrangements for tenant participation were reviewed and new arrangements introduced. These new arrangements are shown at Appendix 1.
- 3.2 The new arrangements retained the core group of tenants who previously attended the Joint Residents and Tenants Consultative Group and these formed the new Tenants Consultative Group. Formal consultation arrangements were introduced by a number of services panels and the Housing Advisory Panel. Two tenants were invited to attend the

Cabinet so that their views could be made known to members of the Cabinet on housing issues. Six tenants were invited to attend the meetings of the Housing Review Panel so that, again, tenants views could be fully represented.

4 Current Issues

- 4.1 In recent years there has been a substantial decline in the number of formal resident and tenant associations. In reality there are now only two formal tenant/residents associations and these cannot be said to be properly constituted since regular meetings are not taking place and the recognised constitution is not being upheld.
- 4.2 Therefore the original intention that tenant representatives who attend the Consultative Group formally represent their areas can no longer be strictly said to be true. However, it is true that the existing representatives do try to represent their areas and the perceived views of their tenant residents. Nevertheless the guidance from the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) is that tenant representatives, if they wish to have a voice and involvement in housing issues, should be able to define their representation and be accountable to those they represent. It is not currently possible to assess accurately whether or not existing representatives would clearly meet this criteria.
- 4.3 The issue of representation is important since for proper consultation and involvement to take place the views of tenants' representatives must reflect wherever possible the wider view of all tenants. It is difficult with the current arrangements to confirm that this is the case.
- 4.4 A recent detailed tenant survey has highlighted the interest of tenants in the services provided to them and also their concerns. The Council must be seen to be taking on board the wider view of tenants when setting policies and service standards. It is difficult with the current arrangements to deal with this issue.
- 4.5 In addition to the arrangements mentioned above there are a number of small panels and focus groups which have been established. These groups tend to focus on issues that relate to their own distinct areas and they want assistance from the Council to deal with these. They are less enthusiastic about being part of a wider tenant consultation or involvement process. However, their views can be fed into a central group so that their concerns, if justified, can be seen in the wider context of tenant participation and involvement in the District. We must involve tenants in the ways they want to be involved and not force them to do things which they have no desire to do.
- 4.6 The tenant survey also identified that there were a number of tenants in the District who were prepared to be involved in particular issues or in particular ways (i.e. telephone and postal surveys). The views of these tenants need to be taken and again they could be fed into a central group for consideration.
- 4.7 The existing tenant participation arrangements are not allowing a wide range of tenant involvement and representation to take place. This is clearly not satisfactory and does not meet the governments proposals for ensuring the widest possible consultation arrangements and to ensure that all tenants are able to have a say in how housing services are provided.

- 4.8 It must also be recognised that not all tenants want to attend formal meetings at the Council offices. Many people see this as intimidating and feel that they cannot either give their views or are concerned that their views may not be listened to in this context. These same people are happy to give their views on a one to one basis. We must ensure that these views are fed into the process to ensure true consultation and involvement.
- 4.9 The current tenant representatives generally are elderly and retired. Many of our tenants are young with families and we need to ensure that these people also have a voice and their views considered. These are generally the sorts of people who are less likely to have the time or want to attend formal meetings. Telephone and postal surveys are a means by which these people can be reached.

5 Types of Involvement that Tenants may Want

- 5.1 In the paragraphs above it has been indicated that tenant participation must recognise that tenants will want to be involved in different ways. Listed below are suggested four levels of involvement that tenants may want. Any arrangements for tenant participation should aim to meet these needs wherever possible.

Information

This can take the form of information in response to a request, or by receiving a copy of the tenants' newsletter "Round the Houses". It may also include the publication of leaflets, posters or the tenants handbook. These methods are currently used to inform tenants.

Consultation

This involves asking our tenants to give us their views. Ways of obtaining views will include surveys, holding local meetings and sending out letters. The emphasis is the Council asking for views so that we are able to take these into account before reaching a decision. Examples are satisfaction surveys and the recent tenant survey.

Participation

This is where the Council and its tenants work together to make decisions. The tenant's views and opinions are listened to and they are able to influence the decisions and take part in what is happening. This is very much the process whereby the tenants are involved in all reports to Cabinet on Housing issues and are able to make their views known both within the report and at Cabinet.

Control

The tenants work with the Council, taking over, and making decisions on the way in which certain aspects of the service they receive are carried out. There are no examples of this at New Forest. An example of where tenants have such control would be a Tenant management Organisation such as in place in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

6 What Other Organisations are Doing and What Others Recommend

6.1 Many other housing authorities have had similar problems with their tenant participation arrangements and have examined how best to meet the needs of all their tenants and at the same time comply with the guidance from government and others (e.g. the Tenant Participation Advisory Service).

6.2 It is now generally accepted that for tenant participation to work it is essential to ensure that the widest possible representation is obtained and that the way to achieve this is to offer as many varied ways as possible to involve tenants. Tenants will become involved in different ways and on different issues. Some may only want to be involved on a single issue and once that issue is resolved will not wish to be involved further, whilst others will wish to be involved in much more detail and perhaps on more strategic and policy issues. It is important that any new arrangements must be able to meet these varied requirements.

6.3 Other authorities have recognised the need to ensure that tenant representation arrangements meet the needs of all their tenants and have incorporated new arrangements on the following lines:-

- District Panel Meetings
- Annual tenant conferences
- Area Panel meetings
- Tenants/Residents Associations
- Small panel meetings.
- Telephone and postal surveys
- Village voices (representatives who act as a contact in small villages or districts).
- Tenant suggestions via e-mail and via the Council's website.

6.4 A recent Best Value review undertaken at Copeland Borough Council recommended, amongst other things, that the Council increased tenant participation and engagement with tenants and extended the opportunities for more people to be involved in tenant participation. The Inspectorate felt that there was too much reliance by the authority upon the traditional role of setting up and supporting groups rather than in addressing the wider community needs and issues. The wider remit described in 4.3 would help New Forest to address this issue.

By a combination of some or all of the above approaches it is possible to achieve a wide representation and be more sure that the wider view of all tenants on particular issues is obtained.

6.5 Members of the Panel will recall the recent attendance at a Panel meeting by officer and tenant representatives from Gosport Borough Council, and the positive approach and success that they are having with their tenant participation arrangements. In Gosport the tenant consultation framework includes a main Forum, a tenant compact group and many tenants who work with the Council on an individual basis to ensure that all views are listened to. The Tenant Forum is the means by which all views are brought together. Membership of the Forum is made up of representatives from Associations, consultative groups and area panels. Individual tenant views are also fed into this arena.

6.6 The Tenant Participation and Advisory Service (TPAS) have produced an information sheet on the criteria for recognising tenants and residents association. Advice contained in this document includes:-

The association should not exclude anyone who lives in the area

The association must be able to show it has the support of the people it aims to represent.

The association should be run by a committee elected each year at an annual general meeting.

The association must be able to show that it keeps its members regularly informed and listens to and acts on what they say.

6.7 There are no legally binding standards that tenants and residents associations have to meet. However, the “National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts” issued by the DTLR has laid out a set of standards for groups who want to have a major role in the formal consultation and decision making process. The DTLR believes that tenants groups involved in decision making should have the following:-

- A written constitution
- Regular elections
- Open financial records
- Regular meetings, including a minuted, quorate annual general meeting.
- Membership clearly open to all tenants.
- An equal opportunities policy that is complied with.
- Ways to make sure that all tenants know about the group and are encouraged to become more active.
- Regular newsletters or other written communication with members.
- Means of showing that they have met their objectives and still have the skills to work effectively.

6.8 Any proposals for tenant participation in the New Forest should comply with the latest guidance and wherever possible learn from best practice in other organisations. The possible solutions suggested below will meet this basic criteria.

7 Possible Solutions

7.1 There are a number of possible solutions that could lead to better working arrangements with tenants and to ensure that tenant representatives do reflect the wider views of all tenants. These are listed below with the strengths and weaknesses of each.

7.2 Option 1

7.3 Review district wide group. Consider a small group with high training provided (in house for procedures/structure and external for good practice, specialised topics).

7.4 Representatives to this group should be elected annually with a reviewed constitution, aims and objectives. Membership must be targeted to represent all ages, gender, ethnic groups and areas as far as possible. The group must meet regularly with members.

- 7.5 Quarterly Area Panels to be introduced to enable all tenants to have their say based on 5 defined District areas. These panels would need to be facilitated by TPO(S) and Landlord staff. The 5 area panels elect 4 representatives to attend the district wide group and have written aims/objectives. Members invited to attend these meetings. Regular newsletters produced. Agendas sent to all tenants and are similar across the 5 Panels.
- 7.6 Continue local Panels/Associations subject to requests and needs of tenants to continue to provide opportunity and choice for involvement. All to have constitutions or aims/objectives.
- 7.7 Cabinet, Scrutiny Panel and Client/Contractor representatives to be elected from the district Panel annually by Area Panel attendees. No representative to hold more than one role so the current number on Scrutiny may need to be reviewed.
- 7.8 Round The Houses to continue with officer involvement but for 8 pages only. The additional 4 pages to be a tenant's only paper. Editorial team to consist of 1 representative nominated from each area panel.
- 7.9 Promotion of an Annual tenant conference to enable issues to be debated amongst the widest possible audience.
- 7.10 Consultation on issues and policies to be achieved by:-
- focus groups and area panels
 - telephone/postal tenant surveys
 - These views then fed into the main District wide group by Officers to ensure balanced views are obtained and given by the District Wide group.

Strengths of Option 1	Weaknesses of Option 1
<p>Provides options for involvement to obtain a better feedback, participation and representation.</p> <p>Elected district group by areas</p> <p>Regular local newsletters</p> <p>Maintains monitoring role and representation in the new Council's structure</p> <p>Tenants have their own newspaper</p> <p>Member involvement locally and at district level</p>	<p>Still a relatively complicated structure</p> <p>Will require high officer involvement and resources</p> <p>Will increase expense costs to provide area meetings (hall hire, taxi/travel/carer expenses and refreshments)</p> <p>Higher postal and printing costs/advertising meetings/newsletters</p>

7.12 Option 2

7.13 Contact those responding to the Survey to establish additional groups and carry out surveys as requested. Use these telephone surveys and one to one consultations to gain views of tenants. Continue with current arrangements and Officers and Members would need to judge and make decisions based upon the views of the two distinct groups of consultees.

Strengths of Option 2	Weaknesses of Option 2
Meets the needs of tenants New groups established and feedback obtained	High resources needed over short period of time Would not solve the current representation issues with existing groups. Until all had been contacted the structure would not be definite Could increase division between existing tenant representatives and new groups

7.16 Option 3

7.17 Apply for an Option Study grant from the DTLR (Section 16) specifically to review the district wide groups.

Strengths of Option 3	Weaknesses of Option 3
Independent advice of a review of tenant participation Finance available	What would happen in the "interim" period/during review? Survey results already show an indication of our tenants needs which could create duplication.

7.18 Option 4

7.19 Retain current structure except that the District group is only made up of representatives elected by local Associations and Panels.

7.20 All local groups to have aims/objectives and regular newsletters.

Strengths of Option 4	Weaknesses of Option 4
<p>Elected district wide group</p> <p>Feedback to more tenants</p>	<p>Could take a while to establish local groups across the whole district</p> <p>Resources required for local meetings and newsletters</p> <p>This was the previous arrangement which was not successful due to the decline in Associations.</p>

7.21 Option 5

- 7.22 Abolish the district wide groups and concentrate on local groups with area panels
- 7.23 Annual election for representatives on Cabinet and Scrutiny Panel (similar to Rufus Board representatives). Reporting directly in Round The Houses
- 7.24 Use of focus groups, village voices, panels and surveys to review policies and monitor results. The promotion of an annual tenant conference to ensure all tenants have an opportunity for their voice to be heard.

Strengths of Option 5	Weaknesses of Option 5
<p>More local structure/opportunity for involvement</p> <p>Key representatives are elected annually</p>	<p>How will Cabinet/Panel representatives obtain feedback to represent all views?</p> <p>Less 'trained/experienced' representatives.</p>

8 Financial Implications

- 8.1 Dependant upon which Option is recommended there will be minor implications for the cost of the tenant participation service in New Forest. Officers consider that any implications can be contained within existing budgets.

9 Crime and Disorder Implications

- 9.1 Effective tenant participation arrangements with tenants and residents will ensure that the appropriate atmosphere is created in which tenants and residents feel their voice is heard by the Council and that their views are listened to. This will ensure that the delivery of the housing service meets the needs or areas and that whenever possible crime and disorder issues that come within the remit of the housing service are effectively tackled.

10 Environmental Implications

- 10.1 As above effective tenant participation arrangements will ensure that any environmental implications are fully taken into account when aspects of the housing service that have an impact on environmental issues are discussed.

11 Conclusions

- 11.1 It is necessary to obtain a good working relationship with tenants and to ensure that they feel included in the consultation processes that are established. Tenants must feel that they are able to make a difference and unless they have this reassurance it is likely that they will not wish to be involved.
- 11.2 It is also very necessary to provide a number of different ways that tenants can be involved. As previously mentioned not all tenants want to be involved in formal meetings but will want to make their views known in an appropriate way. This can be done by telephone or postal surveys.
- 11.3 Any solution must provide the best mix of available alternatives for tenants to become involved in the work of the Housing service both at a strategic level and also in the day-to-day operation of the service. It must also enable the Council to have a broad swathe of tenant views and to be able to act accordingly on these views.

12 Consultations

- 12.1 The Housing, Health and Social Exclusion Panel considered this report at their meeting on 21 November 2001. The Panel debated the merits of the various options and considered that they wished to recommend Option 1, supplemented by Options 2 And 3, to be adopted by the Cabinet as the approach to be followed with a view to increasing tenant participation. The Panel also noted that the new Tenant Participation Officer had been appointed and her input and dialogue with the tenant representatives would be critical.
- 12.2 Tenant representatives attended the Housing, Health and Social Exclusion Panel and made the following comments.
- Some minor word amendments were needed, for accuracy and clarity
 - The group wished to delete paragraphs 6.4 and 6.5; arguing that the content is not relevant to New Forest at this time and would be more appropriate when the Best Value Reviews take place
 - Under the review of the Tenant Participation Compact, the Tenant Participation Officer is reviewing the current structure and framework on Tenant Involvement. The aim is to avoid: too many meetings; discussing similar subjects by the same people; and attempt to involve other tenants and to make the whole process of consultation and involvement more efficient, effective and representative
 - The group wish the panel to note that tenant involvement cannot be bound or restricted by one single option; and that the Tenant Participation Officer needs to consider a range of different options and levels of involvement to address the issue of representation
 - That being so, that any preferred option must be flexible enough to meet the needs of all tenants wishing to become involved.

13 Housing Portfolio Holder Comments

13.1 The Housing Portfolio Holder is concerned that the proposals may place considerable burdens both financially and in officer time on the organisation and is concerned of the necessity of some of the approaches contained in Option 1. He is also of the view that the tenants need to be involved in all proposals and that these should be discussed in depth with them prior to any implementation. Finally he wished to thank the Panel for their suggestions.

14 Recommendation

14.1 That the Cabinet note the report and request that the Housing, Health and Social Exclusion Panel reconsider the report and advise Cabinet of more specific and costed options for the proposals for increasing tenant participation.

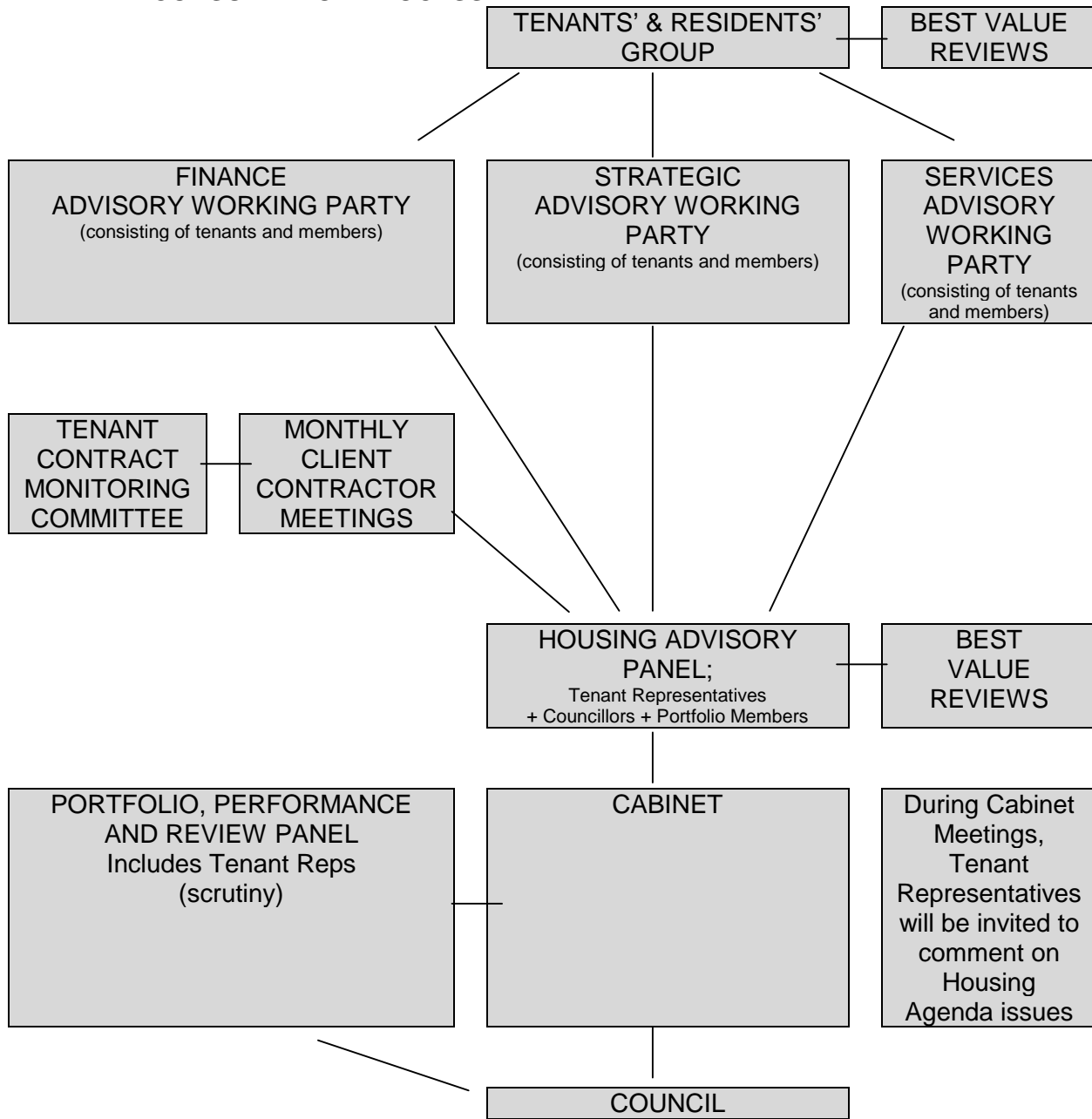
For further information contact:

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Background Papers

National Framework for Tenant
Participation Compacts (DTLR)
TPAS Information Sheet "Encouraging
Involvement"

TENANT CONSULTATION PROCESS



NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
DRAFT GENERAL FUND FORECAST 2002/03 TO 2005/06 BASED ON 2001/02 BUDGET

<u>20/12/01</u>	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Net Portfolio Requirements	19040	19040	19040	19040	19040
Transfer To Provisions					
Est. Inflation (salary related)		595	1135	1695	2275
Other Inflation		170	340	520	700
Sub Total (A)	19040	19805	20515	21255	22015
Capital Financing Provision	250		250	250	250
Sub Total (B)	19290	19805	20765	21505	22265
Transfer from DSO reserve	-250	-250	-250	-250	-250
Sub Total (C)	19040	19555	20515	21255	22015
Less Interest on Balances(net)	-1300	-850	-1000	-1000	-1000
Sub Total (D)	17740	18705	19515	20255	21015
Transfer From Capital Financing Reserve	-293				
Transfer To/From(-) General Reserve	-79				
Budget Requirements Total (E)	17368	18705	19515	20255	21015
Add Expenditure Plan Bids					
Corporate & Finance		767	828	923	957
Crime & Disorder		189	214	224	214
Economy & Planning		134	291	266	210
Environment		94	179	179	179
Health & Social Exclusion		22	22	22	22
Housing		102	104	106	108
Leisure		229	368	337	338
General Purposes & Licensing Committee		0	80	20	20
Planning Development Control Committee		0	0	0	0
Standards Committee		19	19	19	19
Sub Total Bids	0	1555	2104	2095	2067
Deduct Expenditure Plan Savings					
Corporate & Finance		-736	-804	-864	-938
Crime & Disorder		0	0	0	0
Economy & Planning		-200	-188	-223	-223
Environment		-261	-261	-261	-261
Health & Social Exclusion		-13	-13	-13	-13
Housing		-140	-150	-160	-170
Leisure		-397	-513	-620	-625
General Purposes & Licensing Committee		0	0	0	0
Planning Development Control Committee		-9	-9	-9	-9
Standards Committee		0	0	0	0
Sub Total Savings	0	-1755	-1936	-2148	-2237
Other Items	388	-139	-139	-139	-139
Transfer To/From(-) General Reserve	-388	0	-75	-50	0
Forecast Budget Requirements Total (F)	17368	18365	19469	20013	20706