

Tenant Participation Strategy

August 2008

ADUR
DISTRICT COUNCIL



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Introduction

Adur Homes has an excellent track record in resident involvement and is keen to engage with the wider community. It is for this reason that we have put in place a broad range of opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to participate in the management of their housing service and we expect this to be reflected in greater levels of customer satisfaction in the future.

Adur Homes manages 2,700 council housing tenancies and 470 leasehold properties. The council's priorities are to provide improved customer services, promote a clean and green environment, revitalise, regenerate and create lively economies and support and contribute to the health, safety and wellbeing of the area.

Adur District Council's Housing Department has always been financially prudent and kept its housing stock well-maintained. As a result of this, Adur will be able to meet the Decent Homes Standard within the timescale laid down by central government. This prompted over 90% of tenants and leaseholders who responded to a postal survey in 2005 to support the council in retaining the management of its housing stock.

The council has always encouraged resident involvement but this has traditionally taken the form of helping local people to set up a residents' association in their area. In recent years the opportunities for resident involvement have expanded and new initiatives are increasingly being developed. These form the basis of this strategy, which is on-going and open-ended and will develop according to the changing aspirations of residents and their communities. The challenges ahead include adapting resident involvement to the council's decision to switch to the new political management system of Leader and Cabinet.

How can residents become involved?

Adur Homes is keen to involve a broad section of the community in the decision-making process but we also want individuals to be involved at a level that suits them and for which they have the required level of knowledge and understanding.

We know that some tenants and leaseholders want nothing more than to receive a quality housing service from their landlord, while others want to be directly involved in the management of their homes.

Resident involvement will fall into one or more of the following categories:-

- **Information**

This can include letters, leaflets, newsletters and presentations to residents informing them of proposed changes to a particular policy or service.

- **Consultation**

This is where residents are asked for their views on a particular topic and include, for example, surveys or exhibitions on proposed developments where people are asked their opinions. While residents' views are taken into account, decisions are still made by the council.

- **Participation**

This involves residents and council staff working in partnership with decisions being made jointly. These may take place in various situations from specific meetings to agreements while carrying out estate inspections.

- **Devolved decision-making**

Here the council provides the resources required for residents to make and implementing decisions. An example of this in Adur is the Adur Consultative Forum having control of an environmental improvements budget.

In reality, these levels of participation are rarely isolated and may include several different forms of involvement at the same time. It is therefore important that all tenants and leaseholders receive clear and timely information about the management of their homes, so that they have continuous opportunities to influence decisions at whatever level they wish.

Current options for involvement in Adur

Residents' associations

Local residents may establish a group to discuss any issues that affect people living in their area. These are not restricted to housing matters and many groups will also arrange social events for their residents.

The council recognise groups who comply with an approved constitution, which includes:

- having a membership that is open to all adults living in the area
- following an equal opportunities policy
- holding regular committee meetings
- holding an Annual General Meeting each year to elect a committee and other general meetings, as specified in the constitution
- achieving a quorum (i.e. minimum number of people) at meetings, as specified in the constitution
- operating a bank account in the name of the association. This must have three signatories and accounts must be presented annually to the council for inspection.

Membership: Open to all residents living in the relevant area.

Adur Consultative Forum (ACF)

The ACF is the umbrella group for all Adur Council approved residents' associations in the district and the principal body that the council consults with on housing policy and service provision.

It is made up of Adur Council tenants and leaseholders and each recognised residents' association is entitled to nominate two voting members onto the ACF. Up to two individuals may also represent the neighbourhood in which they live, where there is no recognised residents' association in that area.

The ACF generally meet during the week before meetings of the Cabinet to discuss reports on that agenda that relate to housing and other relevant issues. (The Cabinet is a small group of elected Members, consisting of the Leader of the Council and five councillors, who may take key decisions on behalf of the council.)

The Chair of the ACF is also one of the Policy Advisors to the Cabinet and is responsible for relaying to them the views of the ACF on housing matters. In the absence of the Chair, this role is taken on by the Vice-Chair.

The ACF are also responsible for providing a Policy Advisor to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee who identify areas for potential enquiry and scrutinise decisions that have been made.

Membership: Open to council tenants and leaseholders representing a recognised residents' association and to nominated individuals in areas where there are no associations.

Adur Leaseholders' Forum (ALF)

This is a district-wide forum open to all council leaseholders. They meet every couple of months to discuss housing issues of specific interest to leaseholders, such as service charges, major works and repair obligations. The Leasehold Properties Administrator attends their meetings and provides them with regular updates on relevant issues.

The Adur Leaseholders' Forum is represented on the ACF by the Chair of the group.

Membership: Open to council leaseholders.

Sheltered Housing Action Review Panel (SHARP)

This district-wide panel meets every three months to discuss issues related to housing and support services for tenants and leaseholders living in council sheltered schemes.

The Sheltered Housing Action Review Panel is represented on the ACF by the Chair of the group.

Membership: Two representatives from each council sheltered housing scheme.

Register of interests

This is a register of council tenants and leaseholders who have expressed an interest in resident involvement. Residents may choose from a wide range of options on issues in which they wish to be involved.

These range from taking part in surveys or joint estate inspections to attending one-off focus groups or conferences. This is particularly an opportunity for those who are unable to attend meetings because of caring commitments or mobility difficulties to still be involved in how their housing service operates.

Membership: Open to all tenants and leaseholders.

Estate inspections

These are joint inspections of council estates and related areas that are carried out on a regular basis (normally every two months) by housing management staff and residents.

Membership: Previously offered to members of resident associations but now open to all tenants and leaseholders.

Annual conference

Since 2004, Adur Council has have held a conference for tenants and leaseholders each year. These conferences normally focus on a specific topic and previous themes have included anti-social behaviour and the Tenants' Compact.

Membership: Open to all council tenants and leaseholders.

Focus groups

Focus groups bring together residents (and sometimes staff) to discuss a specific area of work. These are normally one-off meetings and are often run by individuals from external and independent organisations.

Membership: Normally by invitation to council tenants and leaseholders who have previously expressed an interest in the topic under discussion.

Compact Monitoring Group

The Tenants' Compact is an agreement between tenants, leaseholders and the council and sets out the standards that can be expected from the housing service.

The Compact Monitoring Group meets every four months to review progress on achieving the targets set out in the document. The Compact is reviewed approximately every three years and revised editions are delivered to the homes of all council tenants and leaseholders.

Membership: Open to equal numbers of ACF members (tenants and leaseholders), Adur Council staff and councillors.

Forum

The Forum is a four-monthly newsletter that is delivered to all council tenants and leaseholders. It is written and produced by an editorial team of tenants and leaseholders and contributions are invited from all residents. The Forum aims to provide useful information on housing matters, council services and entertaining items in an easily readable format.

Membership: Open to all council tenants and leaseholders.

Staff interview panels

ACF members who have undertaken the council's recruitment and selection training are invited to sit on interview panels for Adur Council staff. They act in an advisory capacity and are able to ask questions that have been agreed in advance with the interview panel but they do not take part in the final selection decision.

Membership: ACF members who have undergone recognised training.

Methods of communication

Tenants' handbook

All tenants are issued with a copy of the handbook at the start of their tenancy. This handbook contains useful information on tenancy related matters and is broken down into ten individual booklets:

- Conditions of tenancy
- General information about the council
- Allocations, transfers, exchanges and shared ownership
- Your rent
- Repairs and improvement
- Your rights
- Consultation and involvement
- Sheltered housing
- Ending your tenancy
- Anti-social behaviour policy and procedures

New tenants are also issued with a sign-up pack that contains a list of useful contacts within Adur Council and information on utility suppliers, housing benefits, home contents insurance, fire safety and the Right to Buy.

Leaseholders' handbook

All leaseholders are issued with a copy of this booklet that contains a number of fact sheets with information on:

- Your responsibilities as leaseholder
- The council's responsibilities as landlord
- Service charge accounts
- Major works
- Insurance
- Who to contact with a query

Housing Voice

Housing Voice is a full colour newsletter that Adur Council Housing Department produces three times per year and delivers to the homes of all council tenants and leaseholders. It aims to provide readers with

important information on the housing service in an attractive and easily readable format.

Annual Report

The Annual Report contains information on the performance of Adur Council Housing Services in the preceding year and where useful, compares this against performances in previous years. A copy of this report is delivered to the homes of all council tenants and leaseholders and is available on request.

Council offices

Most Adur Council Housing staff are either based at the Civic Centre, Ham Road, Shoreham by Sea or at one of the two Local Offices in Southwick or Lancing.

Allocations and transfers, housing advice, leasehold management, repairs to council homes and surveying services are generally dealt with at the Civic Centre.

The Civic Centre reception is open from:
9.00am to 5.30pm on Mondays to Thursdays
9.00am to 5.00pm on Fridays.

The cash office at the Civic Centre is open from:
9.00am to 4.30pm on Mondays to Fridays.

The Local Offices are situated at 21 Southwick Street, Southwick and 101 North Road, Lancing. The vast majority of day-to-day housing management matters are dealt with from these two offices including tenancy matters, rent collection and rent arrears recovery.

The Local Offices are open between:
9.00am to 12.45pm and 2.00pm to 4.30pm on Mondays to Fridays.

The cash offices at the Local Offices are open from:
9.00am to 12.45pm and 2.00pm to 4.30pm on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays only.

Service standards leaflets

Leaflets are available from council offices that set out the standards required for core services within Adur Council Housing Services.

Internet

Information on Adur Council Housing Services is available via the council's website.

www.adur.gov.uk

Most members of staff also have their own e-mail address, which means they can be contacted directly.

Self-service internet facilities are available to tenants to check or pay their rent account, update their contact details, view repairs to their home or request a new repair. Details of how to register are available on:

www.adur.gov.uk/tenants-on-line

Leaseholders may request repairs electronically by using the form at:

http://www.adur.gov.uk/housing/information_for_leaseholders

Resource Centre

The ACF Resource Centre is situated behind the Southwick Local Office at 21a Southwick Street, Southwick and is open to the public from 9.00am to 12.00pm on Tuesday and Thursday.

The Resource Centre is used for residents' meetings and training. It also contains a small library of publications on housing and community services and provides ACF members with computer and printing facilities.

Surveys

The council consult tenants and leaseholders individually before any major improvements are carried out to their homes or to the communal areas where they live. Consultation may be by letter or interview.

Tenants are also consulted prior to any major changes being brought in to their tenancy conditions.

In order to meet the needs of our tenants and leaseholders and to make continuous improvements to the service, we also carry out regular and on-going surveys. Examples of these include our repairs survey and the STATUS survey.

In the repairs survey, tenants are asked to complete a satisfaction questionnaire after each repair is carried to their home. The STATUS survey is a more in-depth tenant and leaseholder satisfaction survey that looks at many aspects of Adur Council Housing Services, including the opportunities for residents to participate in the decision-making process. This survey is now carried out every two years and the results, which are published in Housing Voice, are used to analyse our performance and to make improvements to the service.

Exhibitions and events

Exhibitions take the form of drop-in sessions and are used by the council to consult with residents on specific issues, such as the modernisation of tenants' homes or environmental improvement programmes in the neighbourhood. Such events are promoted and open to everyone in the relevant area.

Apart from conferences, area or district-wide events also include roadshows that are open to all residents living in the neighbourhood. The purpose of these events is often to encourage greater involvement, to promote services and to provide residents with an opportunity to give their views on housing related matters and policies.

Ideas for other options to expand resident involvement

Areas that have been identified for future consideration include:

- Area or neighbourhood panels. Membership of these would be open to all council tenants and leaseholders living in the area being represented.
- Housing disability panel to consider matters related to tenants and leaseholders with disabilities.
- Residents' development and training forum to look at the knowledge and training that tenants and leaseholders require to take an active role in the decision-making process.
- Community Action Plans – working with the Council's Community Wellbeing Section to develop a range of services that impact on all areas of life. This has already been carried out successfully in the Southlands Ward of Shoreham and could be expanded into other areas.
- Youth forum to consider housing and estate issues affecting young people.
- Black and ethnic minority forum to discuss matters affecting ethnic minority groups and to ensure effective communication with the council.
- Look at how, what and when information about housing services is passed to ACF members and consider whether this could be presented in a more easily understandable format (e.g. quarterly reports on void turnover, rent arrears and repair performance by area).
- Investigate the need for more devolved budgets (e.g. so that residents are given the opportunity to have more say on how much is spent on non-emergency work such as fencing and communal-way decorating).

Current resources for tenant involvement

Permanent staffing levels for resident involvement consist of one full-time Tenant Participation Officer and one part-time Tenants' Assistant. In addition to this, supporting and developing resident involvement is an integral part of the role of all Adur housing staff, whether this is conducting surveys or attending meetings of residents' associations.

The annual budget for tenant participation in 2008/09 exceeds £37,000. This budget is administered by the Tenant Participation Officer and is in addition to the staff and administration costs of the section.

Expenditure of this budget covers items such as training, conferences, travel allowances, hire of venues, refreshments, printing costs, subscriptions and stationery.

- The council provides a tenants' resource centre at 21 Southwick Street, Southwick. This consists of an office with computer and printing facilities and a small library. The office is staffed by ACF members and is currently open on Tuesday and Thursday mornings.
- A start-up grant of £25 paid to all new residents' associations who adopt an agreed constitution. A further grant of £25 is also paid after six months.
- An annual grant of £50 is paid to all existing residents' associations who follow an agreed constitution. This is paid to them each year following their Annual General Meetings. As with the start-up grant, this grant is primarily for postage, stationery and expenses for meetings. To be eligible, each group is required to keep financial records and to hold a bank/building society account with three signatories.
- Travel allowances are available for tenants and leaseholders attending meetings, conferences and training. Taxis will be arranged for meetings where public transport is not practical. Bus and train fares will be reimbursed on receipt of tickets or a mileage allowance of £0.25 per mile will be paid for journeys by car.

- Tenants and leaseholders attending conferences or training sessions that require them to be away from home overnight will be entitled to a subsistence allowance of £10 per night, in addition to any out-of-pocket accommodation or meal expenses.
- Costs for carers will be reimbursed for those attending meetings, conferences or training. This will be paid at the Social Services carer or childminding hourly rate and will be payable on production of a receipt.
- The cost of hiring rooms for meetings will be funded from the tenant participation budget.
- A budget of £5,000 will be made available to the ACF each year to fund environmental improvements in and around areas of council accommodation.
- A training and conference budget, managed by the Tenant Participation Officer in conjunction with the ACF, will be made available each year to fund training on housing and resident involvement issues.

Race equality strategy

Adur District Council is committed to making race equality integral to our work and to demonstrate accountability through monitoring and assessment. The actions taken will include:

- Collecting information in a standardised format and analysing it to identify policies and practices that affect race equality in the delivery of services.
- Reporting these findings to the ACF and publishing details in Housing Voice and the Annual Report.
- Promoting and encouraging equality of opportunity and good race relations through community cohesion.
- Improving communication between the council and ethnic minority residents who live in council properties or on council-owned housing estates and encouraging all to express their views about housing and the neighbourhood.
- Working in partnership with other council departments, social housing providers and external agencies to promote improvements in the quality of life for ethnic minority residents.
- Empowering, training and supporting ethnic minority residents to encourage and enable participation in the various mechanisms for resident involvement.
- Ensuring that council employees, councillors, contractors and other agencies that provide housing services are aware of the needs of ethnic minority residents and encourage equalities training to be undertaken.
- Offering equalities training to all tenant and leaseholder representatives to encourage cohesion between groups.
- Ensuring that communications from Adur Homes are available in a range of formats that meet the needs of ethnic minority residents.
- Monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of all actions that are taken with the aim of improving equal opportunities.

The information collected on black and ethnic minority groups will incorporate:

- the percentage of housing allocations by category of property (including sheltered housing).
- the percentage of households applying as homeless.
- the number of reports of racial harassment and satisfaction with the outcome of investigations, classified by ethnicity and area.
- the number of reports of anti-social behaviour and satisfaction with the outcome classified by ethnicity and area.
- responses to repairs surveys.

All information given by individuals for monitoring purposes will be treated in confidence and only categorised by ethnicity.