

**MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE DETR
Re: TENANT PARTICIPATION COMPACTS**

MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL'S RESPONSE

The following submission is a joint response, which includes views from tenants, Councillors on Housing Committee, and housing staff. Milton Keynes Council has also given its response at the consultation event run by TPAS in Birmingham on 2 March 1999.

In general, Milton Keynes Council welcomes the Tenant Participation Compact document of national standards and performance monitoring for tenant participation. Tenant Participation as a whole needs to become more "professional", with measurable, uniform, and comparable standards.

However, this document heralds a huge change in Tenant Participation, and we need to make sure that we manage this change properly. This will require dedicated resources, time, and training - as well as recognition that this is "unchartered territory".

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The "clawback" to the Treasury on the sale of ex-Development Corporation houses should be stopped. The rent cap should also be lifted. These 2 measures taken together would increase the resources available to the Housing Revenue Account and would also help to alleviate social exclusion.

Tenants should not be penalised through their authorities' lack of meeting the requirements of the Compact. Tenants do not gain full benefit from the range of TP options available without TP Compacts, and they will also suffer through a reduced HIP allocation etc if their authorities don't implement TP Compacts well.

Although it is recognised that the principles of the TP Compact are desirable, and we want to implement them as soon as is practicable, the timescale for review, planning, and the implementation of new ideas must be realistic and recognise the amount of work and time involved.

If the Council has to subsidise the implementation and monitoring of Tenant Participation Compacts and the subsidy rules remain as they are at present, the resources needed for the

Compact can only come out of the repairs or the salary budgets. Effectively, this would be reducing standards in the short-term to fund Compacts. What about a specific rent levy for Compacts, outside the subsidy system ?

RESOURCES

Resourcing the Compact is a major cause for concern. Although the point is taken that an effective TP Compact will lead to improvements in efficiency in the long-term, tenant representatives are concerned that there are no extra resources being made available. If Compacts are to be effective, they must be properly resourced. Most of the areas covered by the TP Compact will require additional ring-fenced funding in order to be done well, such as promotion of the range of Tenant Participation options, and the publication and dissemination of performance indicators to tenants

RULES

There should be one inclusive set of rules for staff, members, and tenant reps to all work from. These rules should be mutually agreed

AIMS

The aims of the Tenant Participation Compact must be reasonable and achievable, for both tenant representatives and staff

There is an inherent dichotomy in the philosophy of the Compact: it needs to be flexible enough to be relevant locally, but standardised enough to permit national comparisons

It is important that the Compact is a success, so we need to consider how this success will be measured.

The provision of Good Practice guidance nationwide would be very helpful to enable comparisons to be made and good/innovative ideas to be shared

OTHER PARTIES THAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED ?

How do groups other than tenants fit in ?

For example, in Milton Keynes, there is a huge variety of community and project groups (ie Citizens' Panels, focus groups, SRB groups, multi-agency groups, parish and neighbourhood councils etc.)

It is often same people who are involved in all these groups. We need to find a way of attracting more than just the "usual suspects"

How will partner organisations in the community be involved in Compact arrangements ? What about other landlords in order to get complete local picture ?

Tenants are not the only residents affected by housing services and strategies– how do non-Council tenants (RSL tenants, residents etc) get involved ? Perhaps funding needs to be sought from other stakeholders in order to jointly develop strategies which involve the whole community.

Housing does not work in isolation from other departments. How are these departments to be catered for in the Compact arrangements ? Also, the issues involved are not solely those dealt with by Council departments. There must therefore be arrangements for involving other agencies.

Some tenant representatives felt that a quota of tenants on Resident Association committees was viable, but only if they have ownership of certain issues and successes to encourage them to take part and convince them that their involvement is worthwhile and can make a difference

COMPACT STANDARDS

It is difficult to create Compact standards that are neither too bland on one hand nor too prescriptive on the other. Tenants must be able to choose the method or methods of participation that are appropriate for them from a range of available options. It is important that there are innovative choices available, rather than simply the “usual” structures etc that are now widespread

WHY SHOULD TENANTS WANT TO BE INVOLVED ?

Why should tenants get involved ? What’s in it for them ? The traditional Residents Association is a voluntary organisation and yet we are asking more and more from our active residents. It is difficult enough currently to sustain tenant involvement without what may be seen as added stringency. We need to ensure that we give something back and that they see positive results of their involvement. Tenant involvement must be meaningful.

It has been acknowledged that the “traditional” Residents Association organisation may not be the best way of involving tenants. Despite this, the Compact would require a majority of tenants to be represented by this type of organisation. We need to ensure that innovative ways of working are allowed to develop, especially ways of involving people which are designed by tenants themselves

PROVISION OF INFORMATION AND TRAINING

Information and training will be essential for all 3 major stakeholders (tenants, Councillors, staff) if we are to successfully undergo the culture change described in the consultation document. This will need both time in the timescale and resources.

REAL COMMITMENT

The letter of the Compact can, for some local authorities, be met relatively easily. It is the spirit of the Compact that needs to be reflected in the performance indicators and monitoring if we are to avoid tokenism and lip-service.

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