

TENANT PARTICIPATION COMPACTS

INTRODUCTION

Compacts need to be seen in the context of all the other initiatives the government has launched in relation to reforming local government, tackling social exclusion, and driving up the standard of local services.

Tenant empowerment is really defined in the Compact as

- making tenants aware of all the options for involvement in and delivery of housing services;
- providing tenants' groups with the skills and support necessary to choose what level of participation they want; and
- providing a flexible framework that allows tenants to increase their involvement where and when they choose.

Government believes that empowering tenants leads to better decision-making that properly reflects local needs and that in turn leads to sustainable communities.

PRINCIPLES BEHIND THE COMPACT

The TP Compact is about levelling up the standards of tenant involvement across the country. The emphasis is clearly on collective participation ie local authorities working with and supporting various forms of tenants' groups.

There are two kinds of Compact outlined. The first are district-wide agreements between the local authorities and tenants. These should be introduced alongside local compacts covering estates or other coherent areas.

At the heart of the Compact guidance are the Core Standards. All district-wide Compacts should conform to the core standards and local compacts should contain as much as is seen by local tenants as relevant to those particular areas.

TP Compacts should be working documents constantly kept under review as local circumstances and tenants' wishes change.

The Core Standards are however just a framework of minimum standards covering the kinds of areas local compacts should cover. They are not meant to specify how tenants and landlords should operate or how meaningful involvement is delivered.

It is very important that Compacts are locally-negotiated and reflect the needs of tenants in each local authority.

Compacts do not mean a set of new legal rights for tenants. Instead, they aim to give tenants the opportunity to fully-exercise their existing rights and have them enforced by much more active regulation and encouragement from the government.

SETTING UP COMPACTS

The first thing that tenants and landlords will be expected to do is to identify the benefits they want to see from the process, review all existing arrangements and see how they fit both local hopes and the requirements of the Compact.

Both parties will then have to draw up a realistic plan of action to achieve their aims and be able to measure their progress.

If after reviewing their existing arrangements it is found that they don't come up to scratch, landlords and tenants will have to jointly plan how they can be improved. This is especially the case if existing structures are found to be unrepresentative or no real umbrella body exists to represent local tenants.

The Government takes the view that meaningful tenant involvement should already be part of the core functions of local authority housing. This means that there is no new money specifically tied to the introduction of TP Compacts.

This means that the money needed to support the review process, meet the training needs of tenants, councillors and staff as well as implement and monitor the compacts must come from existing budgets. The Government sees a strong link between this kind of investment and efficient, cost-effective decision-making. In short, local authorities that work in partnership with tenants make better, more efficient decisions.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF COMPACTS

It is important to recognise that setting up structures that appear to meet the criteria but then don't produce any effective outcomes will be seen as a significant failure. The Government is keen to find measures for finding out the effectiveness of various forms of tenant involvement and how they can be compared and monitored.

Government will take a keen interest in the progress of TP Compacts and, although they are voluntary arrangements, they will form part of the wider Best Value regime. This means that compacts would be annually inspected by external auditors.

Council's consultation arrangements also form part of their annual assessment for the Housing Investment Programme and progress on implementing the compacts will form part of that process too.

CORE STANDARDS FOR TENANT PARTICIPATION

CORE STANDARDS FOR	... include requirements for local authorities to ...
Tenant involvement in housing services	<p>Offer involvement in ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developing housing policy and strategy - the development of regeneration programmes - budgets, finance, and rent setting - allocations and lettings policies - arrangements for monitoring and review of remedial action - leaseholder issues and charges
Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - offer allowances or transport to people who need it - publicise and run meetings effectively and democratically
Information	<p>Provide information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - accessible to all (large print, translations, tapes, braille) - on options, strategies, policies and priorities, and arrangements for developing Best Value - and seek the views of tenants (and wider stakeholders where appropriate)
Resources for TP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have an identified annual budget for participation - give reasonable financial support, such as start-up grants or estate budgets - provide access to training for tenants' representatives - access to premises and equipment, photocopying, and stationery
Structures & methods	<p>Show</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the majority of tenants will be represented by active, recognised tenant/resident organisations and that all are represented by other structures - an umbrella organisations for groups, such as a federation, is in place - they use alternative methods such as panels and focus groups
Representative tenant organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - demonstrate that they have open and fair criteria for the recognition of tenants' groups
Monitoring and measuring performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - set and monitor performance standards and targets - monitor tenants representatives and groups to ensure equality of opportunity - monitor outcomes against expectations - monitor and evaluate value for money of different involvement methods

