

TENANT PARTICIPATION COMPACT

Accountable Officer: Derek Nickless (Head of Neighbourhood Services)

Authors: Derek Nickless (Head of Neighbourhood Services) - MK253498

Clare Jones (Tenant Participation Officer) - MK253021

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an update on tenant participation following receipt of the DETR consultation document about Tenant Participation Compacts.
- 1.2 To seek Committee approval for a way forward to enable Milton Keynes Council to meet the requirements of the forthcoming Tenant Participation Compact.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Local authorities need to implement Tenant Participation Compacts by April 2000. A fundamental review of current Tenant Participation must be undertaken, and the Area Housing Boards will be an essential resource in this process. Standing Orders need to be relaxed so that these representatives can continue to take part in this review, despite some Residents Associations having folded. Alternative methods of participation need to be developed to increase the number of tenants who get involved in the Councils' consultative and decision-making processes.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to note the need to develop Tenant Participation Compacts, and to approve the proposed way forward as specified in this report in agreement with tenant representatives.
- 3.2 The Committee is asked to approve the suspension of Standing Orders 2.1 and 2.13 of the Scheme of Operation of the Area Housing Boards and Borough-wide Housing Board.

4. **Background**

- 4.1 Tenant Participation Compacts are locally-negotiated agreements between local authorities and their tenants. They will involve tenants in strategic and local decisions on housing issues.
- 4.2 National standards will mean that, for the first time, meaningful comparisons between local authorities nationwide will be possible. Tenants' rights to true involvement will be enforced by annual inspections from external auditors.
- 4.3 The DETR is recommending that an authority-wide Compact should be complemented by local Compacts (to be based on estates or contract areas).
- 4.4 Practical arrangements and plans must be made for negotiating and agreeing council-wide and local Compacts with tenants, which must be in place by April 2000. Progress towards this implementation will form part of the Government Office's assessment of performance under the Housing Investment Programme (HIP) process. Local authorities and tenants are therefore required to begin planning for this introduction of Tenant Participation Compacts.
- 4.5 The Council has already started to consult tenants about Tenant Participation Compacts in a numbers of ways. The Borough-wide Housing Board received a presentation in January 1999, and all 4 Area Housing Boards and the attendees of the Annual Tenants' Conference were consulted in March 1999. The 4 chairs of the Area Housing Boards have contributed to a report for the DETR detailing local authority tenants' views about the proposals. All councillors and tenant representatives were invited to contribute to Milton Keynes Council's response to the DETR about the proposals (a copy is in **Annex A**). The members of the Area Housing Boards were invited to attend a meeting on 19 May 1999 to undertake a preliminary review of existing structures and to look at possible improvements.
- 4.6 A copy of the summary of the Tenant Participation Compact proposals by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) is reproduced in **Annex B**.

5. **Issues and Choices**

- 5.1 In order to meet the requirements of the Tenant Participation Compacts, the Council needs to undertake a fundamental review of the existing Tenant Participation strategy and structures. This includes re-examining the aims, objectives, outcomes, and benefits of the Tenant Participation Strategy, and how these should be adapted, developed, or changed.
- 5.2 A tenant representative report to the Borough-wide Housing Board on 15 April 1999 detailed the problems being encountered by the Area Housing Boards in getting tenants from Residents Associations to participate. Bletchley Area Housing Board currently has only two tenant members, both of whom are having difficulties maintaining their Residents Associations. To produce an informed and challenging review, it is necessary to use the extensive experience and knowledge of existing tenant representatives. This necessitates the relaxing of the current Standing Orders of the Area Housing Boards and the Borough-wide Housing Board (reproduced in **Annexes C and D**) as some Residents Associations have folded, and some cannot get tenants to represent them.

- 5.3 It is premature to pre-judge the best arrangements prior to proper consultation during the forthcoming review and it is therefore recommended that the Standing Orders 2.1 and 2.13 for both the Area Housing Boards and the Borough-wide Housing Board are suspended forthwith. This proposed suspension is based on the resolution of the Borough-wide Housing Board on 15 April 1999 (38.0 2): “That a report be forwarded to the Housing Committee asking for a relaxation of the current constitution to include the Area Housing Board and the Borough-wide Housing Board representatives to continue to participate even if the Residents Associations have folded, otherwise the Council will not be able to meet the requirements under the Tenant Compact arrangements”
- 5.4 Possible methods of getting the opinions of tenants who are not currently involved in the Council’s Tenant Participation structures need to be investigated.

6. **Implications**

6.1 Environmental

The Tenant Participation Compact proposals aim to ensure that councils work in partnership with their local communities to improve their quality of life and to promote the well-being of their areas.

6.2 Equalities

Tenant Participation Compacts will provide opportunities for all Council tenants to be involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of local housing decisions and policies.

6.3 Financial

No additional money is available for the introduction of Tenant Participation Compacts, as the Government believes that effective tenant involvement should already be an integral part of local authority housing.

Therefore, the review process itself; the training needs of tenants, councillors, and staff; and the implementation and monitoring of Tenant Participation Compacts must be funded from existing resources.

6.4 Legal

At the moment, the Tenant Participation Compact proposals are voluntary, but Councils’ delivery of Compacts will form part of the assessment of performance under the HIP process and the forthcoming Best Value regime. If Councils fail to adopt the Tenant Participation Compact principles voluntarily, the Government may introduce legislation to ensure compliance.

6.5 Staff and Accommodation

Successful implementation of Tenant Participation Compacts needs to involve training and information sessions for tenants, councillors, and staff.

7. **Conclusions**

- 7.1 Relaxing the Standing Orders of the Area Housing Boards and the Borough-wide Housing Board will permit existing representatives to continue to play a full part in the required review of Tenant Participation, pending the results of the review and the implementation of its recommendations.

Background Papers: Milton Keynes Council's response to the DETR Tenant Compact consultation (**Annex A**)

TPAS summary of the Tenant Compact proposals (**Annex B**)

Scheme of Operation for the Area Housing Boards (**Annex C**)

Scheme of Operation for the Borough-wide Housing Board (**Annex D**)