

TENANT PARTICIPATION OFFICER

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Members of the Policy and Finance Committee to consider the appointment of a part-time dedicated Tenant Participation Officer as part of the Tenant Compact Review.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.2 On 27th November 2001, during discussion on minute 146 about the Tenant Participation Compact Review, Members were advised that the Council did not have a dedicated Tenant Participation Officer and that there was a potential £20,000 Government Grant available to employ someone. Members resolved at that meeting that the Tenant Involvement Steering Group consider the appointment of a Tenant Participation Officer.
- 2.3 On 23rd January 2002, the Tenant Involvement Steering Group agreed that the Head of Revenue and Housing Management should submit a report setting out proposals for the appointment of a part-time Tenant Participation Officer.

3 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The Government granted the Council funds to implement the Tenant Participation Compact, over two years. The Council received £13,372 p.a. for 2000/1 and 2001/2, to help set up and develop the Tenants Compact. Unfortunately there is no more grant available. There is £14,000 in this year's Housing Revenue Account budget that can be used to develop the Compact by employing a dedicated specialist member of staff. This level of funding is fully supported by the Tenants Association.
- 3.2 Currently the role of Tenant Liaison Officer is carried out within the duties of the Office Co-Ordinator. However there is little spare capacity to develop this role to help initiate and sustain resident involvement structures and processes, including ways of encouraging the involvement of other sectors of the community.
- 3.3 The Action Plan for Service Improvement to Housing Management has a stated aim 'To improve tenant participation' with a target date of September 2002. The plan is slightly behind target.
- 3.4 A commitment to customer involvement and empowerment along with accountability to service users are central to a Best Value approach to

housing. The Best Value precepts of 'challenge-compare-consult-compete' suggests that residents should be involved in:

- The need to challenge the requirement for the service to be provided at all
- The need to compare the level of service being provided against that of the best available
- The need to consult the local community to determine the quality and type of service that is required and to monitor its delivery
- The need to ensure that services are competitive, providing for competition where appropriate.

Tenants therefore have a role in the best value review and inspection processes, providing information and evidence about the housing management service, contributing their views and being represented on inspection teams.

3.5 Rochford Council needs to meet these principles of Best Value and is committed to a co-ordinated involvement strategy, but unfortunately current tenant participation levels are very low and attempts to generate interest have failed. Tenant representation comes principally from the Western part of the District (the Rochford and Great Stambridge Tenants Association having been disbanded in December 2000) and wholly from those who occupy sheltered housing or linked bungalows. Concern, therefore, has to be expressed that around 72% of tenants are not represented.

3.6 A dedicated specialist Tenant Liaison Officer could undertake many new tasks that are essential to prove the Councils' commitment to its Tenant Participation Compact. This would include to:-

- Develop methods of consultation to cultivate a district wide tenant participation strategy such as newsletters, surveys, focus groups, meetings, user panels, user forums etc
- Emphasise inclusion in the running of the housing service by building a consumer perspective into all areas of service planning and delivery
- Bring added value to tenants to enable them to share information and to influence policy making
- Ensure equality of opportunity by encouraging participation by all sectors of the community including ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, elderly people, young people etc
- Liaise with other Registered Social Landlords to establish an agreed framework for involvement
- Involve the existing tenant group in helping to set up new groups and in giving advice and training to their members
- Liaise with the Supporting People Officer to ensure commitment to supporting people and the provision of support to tenants

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- Liaise with the Community Safety Officer regarding incidences of anti-social behaviour, racial harassment and domestic violence
 - Support for witnesses in any action against anti-social behaviour
 - Help meet Performance Indicators, e.g. BV 75 – ‘satisfaction of tenants of council housing with opportunities for participation in management and decision making in relation to housing services provided by their landlord’
 - Provide leaseholders with opportunities for participation and involvement similar to those for tenants.
 - Liaise with the Citizens Advice Bureau to provide a welfare rights service
 - Develop information available to tenants via modern technologies on web pages and the internet
 - Develop the tenants association members knowledge by promoting access to external training

3.7 The DTLR have reported that 34% of Councils in the 2000 review spent the additional resources available to them on staffing and that many rural authorities were appointing or re-designating specialist tenant participation officers for the first time.

3.8 The DTLR also reported that there were specific challenges facing rural and small urban authorities – with few specialist staff, more dispersed stock, elderly populations and often no tradition of collective representation or action. Some of these councils had taken the launch of compacts as an opportunity to start from scratch in developing participation and to take good heed of good practice from elsewhere along the way.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Members need to consider the following factors when evaluating this report:

- That the issue of whether to employ a dedicated member of staff to try to improve the current levels of tenant involvement has been outstanding for a considerable time
- The failure to improve our current involvement may be criticised by a Housing Management Best Value Inspection if it feels that the Council is not committed to the values of its Tenants Participation Compact to engage tenants in its delivery of services.
- The Chartered Institute of Housing Good Practice Manual recommends the employment of staff with a specific brief to help to develop, support and enable service user participation; such staff should have the appropriate skills and knowledge through relevant qualifications and/or experience to be able to perform their role effectively.

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- 4.2 Because the duties are currently only part of an Officers post and there is a very small housing stock, a full-time post may be under-utilised. A part-time post, initially for 25 hours per week, would still provide longer dedicated working on participation. The hours worked can be reviewed later as tenant participation is improved and more groups formed. A fixed term contract of three years allows for a complete review of tenant participation needs in three years time.

5 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The appointment of a Tenant Liaison Officer would help to meet primary objective 6 of Rochford District Council's Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy, 'To engage the community in its future development' by stimulating involvement.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Additional resources would be met from the Housing Revenue Account budget. A part time member of staff working 25 hours per week would cost in the range £9,700 to £12,300 including 18.5% on costs, based on a salary range scale 2/4.

7 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that a part-time specialist Tenant Liaison Officer be appointed for 25 hours per week, on a fixed term contract of three years on a pro-rata salary on scale 2/4. (HRHM)

S. J. Clarkson

Head of Revenue and Housing Management

Background Papers:

Chartered Institute of Housing – Good practice Housing manual
DETR – Tenant Participation in Transition: Issues and trends in the Development of tenant participation in the local authority sector in England
DETR – National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts
DTLR – Analysis of 2000 HIP data on Best Value, Tenant Participation and other Housing Issues

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