

# The Bracknell Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Compact

**An Agreement between:-  
The tenants and leaseholders of Bracknell Forest  
and  
Bracknell Forest Borough Council.**

No. 3, December 2006



**This is how you, as tenants and leaseholders  
can have a say on how your homes and  
estates are managed**

*“This document provides a wide range of opportunities for your voice to be heard, from meetings to questionnaires to estate walkabouts. You will have the opportunity to support, challenge and influence. We evolve to involve!”*

*Summaries or extracts of this document can be made available in large print, in Braille or on audio cassette. Copies in other languages may also be obtained. Please contact Joanna Flaxman on 01344 351570 or minicom 01344 352045.*

**Every tenant and service charge paying leaseholder will receive a summary document of this Compact, with this full version available on request.**

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## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN THIS COMPACT DOCUMENT**

<b><u>Word or phrase</u></b>	<b><u>Meaning</u></b>
Tenant	Someone who pays rent to the council to live in a home provided by the council  (in this document “tenant” also means “leaseholder”)
Leaseholder	Someone who has bought their home from the council, but the council still owns the freehold so the person has to pay them ground rent and / or service charges
Compact	An agreement – in this case between the council and the tenants about how they will be consulted and involved in services they receive
Targets	Things we want to do and achieve within a certain time limit
Best Value	The government have said that all councils must review their services to make sure they provided the best value for money
Independent Tenant Advisor (ITA)	An outside agency who give tenants impartial advice about whether the housing stock should be transferred to a Housing Association and how this process should proceed.
Stock Options Appraisal	A process which all councils who own housing had to go through by July 2005 to investigate the options for meeting the government’s standards for social housing, there were four options given to tenants – keeping the stock owned by the council, transferring to a new or existing Housing Association, an Arms Length Management Organisation or setting up a Private Finance Initiative.  The initial outcome in Bracknell Forest was to keep the stock owned by the Council in the short term, but due to the financial circumstances, to investigate further the option of transferring the stock to a Housing Association.

	<p>In 2006, an updated financial appraisal revealed that the Council could no longer afford to meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard by 2010 and that the Housing Services Operational Account would fall into deficit by 2009/10.</p> <p>Following a unanimous recommendation from the Housing Steering Group, the Council decided to consult and ballot tenants on the option of transferring the Council homes to a new local Housing Association.</p>
Decent Homes Standard	All property owned and managed by the council must meet the Decent Homes standard. To meet the standard, property must have reasonably modern facilities, be warm and weatherproof. The government wants all social housing to be brought up to the Decent Homes standard by 2010.
TPAS	A national organisation who work to promote tenant empowerment.
CRE	Commission For Racial Equality – this organisation issue standards to achieve racial equality in Housing which all landlords are required to meet.
SHAP	A national working party on world religions in education.
Dispute	A disagreement which cannot be resolved through the usual means.



## **About the Tenants & Leaseholders Compact**

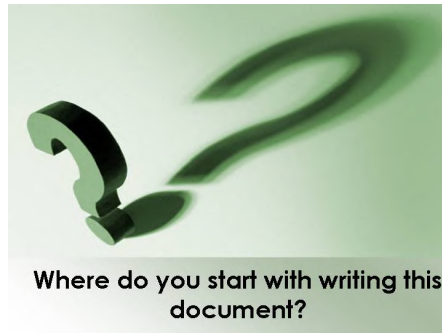
**The Compact is a written agreement between the Council (as a landlord) and Council tenants and leaseholders.** It sets out how tenants can be involved in issues that affect them, their homes and neighbourhoods.

The Government has advised that all Councils must agree Compact documents with their tenants, and regularly review them. They have produced guidance on this called the National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts.

This compact is the third version. Previous documents were produced in 2000 and 2003. In 2003 every tenant and service charge paying leaseholder received a summary of the Compact, with the full version available on request.

In the event of a transfer to a new local Housing Association, the new landlord must honour this agreement.

*The term tenant in this document is used to mean tenants and leaseholders.*



## **Reviewing the Compact**

The review in 2005/06 began with a workshop in July 2005 for interested tenants and leaseholders, where the borough's tenant involvement structure was examined and tenants and leaseholders explored some ideas from other landlords about how to involve more people. This was a successful event and outcomes have been fed into the review.



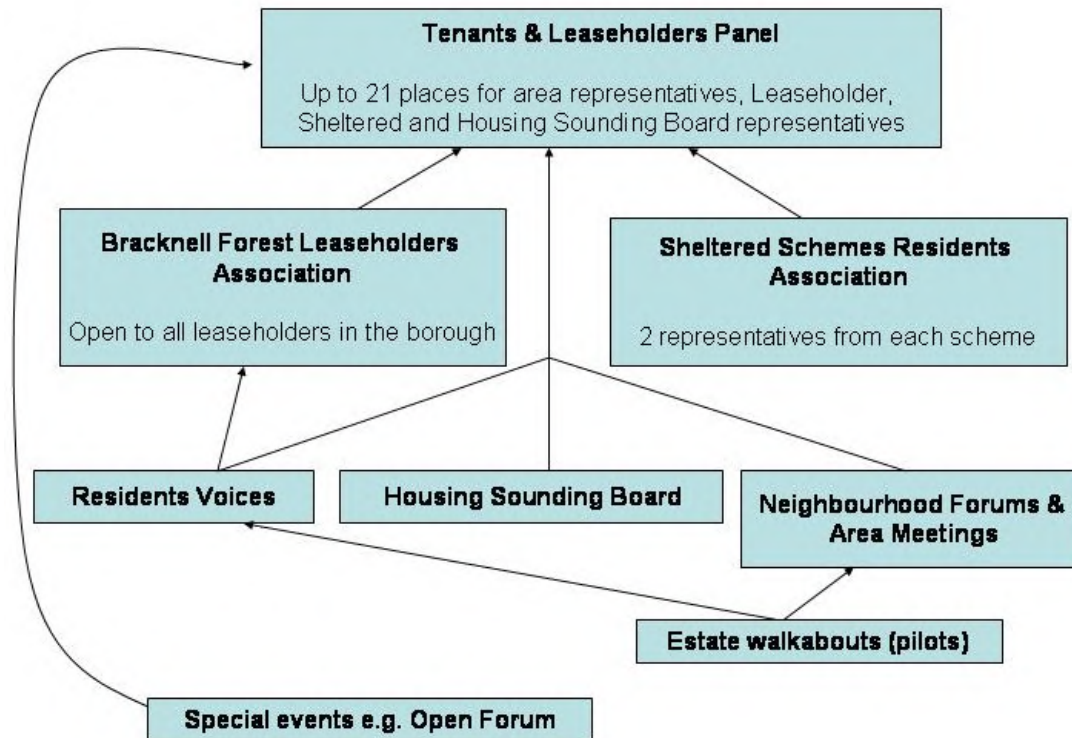
*Tenants, leaseholders and officers discuss ideas for tenant involvement at the workshop*

Key tenant and leaseholder representatives have met together with officers and the Tenants & Leaseholders Champion and have negotiated this agreement on behalf of all tenants and leaseholders of Bracknell Forest Borough Council. Members of the Housing Sounding Board were also consulted on a final draft of the document to gain the views of a wider body of tenants.



## Where are we now?

The formal tenant involvement structure is shown below – this has been developed since the previous versions of the Compact.





In addition to the Groups and activities in the structure, there is also:-

- The News Group - tenants and leaseholders who look at the newsletter text and make comments.
- The Housing Transfer Group - this group of tenants, councillors and Council staff acts as a consultative body to support communication and feedback on the 'Your Homes, Your Choice' project to respective interested parties; to receive information on and help facilitate the consultation process and to be appraised of progress on the project. The Housing Transfer Group also plays a key role in helping to develop the formal "offer document". This will form the proposal on which tenants will be asked to decide whether or not their homes will transfer to a new, local Housing Association.



### **Whats New....**

Since the publication of the last compact there have been new initiatives established, and events for tenants and leaseholders taken place, such as:-

- The Housing Sounding Board – a group of up to 1000 tenants and leaseholders who are willing to be consulted regularly and influence and be involved in services which affect them. Every effort is made to ensure that this group reflects the whole tenant population of the borough. A commitment has been made that this group will be offered the opportunity to respond to three telephone or postal surveys per year, for which they will get a £5 shopping voucher as an incentive. The Sounding Board is a way of obtaining the views of tenants who are not involved in formally recognised groups. Anyone wishing to join this should contact the council on 01344 351570 or log on to [www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/housingsoundingboard](http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/housingsoundingboard)
- Neighbourhood Forums – the borough has been divided into 14 areas and each has a six monthly forum where local people can give their views and discuss issues relevant to their neighbourhoods. The council, police and other agencies attend these meetings. Action planning groups (NAGs) take place in between the six monthly meetings to oversee work in relation to priorities given at public meetings.

- Activities to consult and involve tenants in the Housing Transfer proposal, such as:-
  - ❖ Estate based and town centre roadshows
  - ❖ Home visits to tenants by staff to explain the reason why the council needs to consider transfer, the process and the proposal
  - ❖ Two large evening events at a local hotel venue
  - ❖ Meetings in sheltered schemes
  - ❖ Surveys with all tenants
  - ❖ Focus groups to look at the options for the housing stock in more detail.
  - ❖ Surveys of the Housing Sounding Board

The 2003 Compact set targets for improving Tenant Involvement, and the following progress has been made:-

- A poster was designed by tenant representatives and the Council and distributed around the borough to try and encourage tenants and leaseholders from all backgrounds to get involved.
- A Residents Voices scheme for tenants and leaseholders who wish to represent just their street or block has been developed.
- Mailboxes have been placed in libraries and community centres for tenants and leaseholders to use to contact tenants and leaseholders groups.
- Ground rules have been set for Tenants & Leaseholders Panel meetings and Sheltered Schemes Residents Association meetings to enable them to run smoothly.
- Links have been made with the wider community through Community Days and more recently Neighbourhood Forums.
- The Sheltered Schemes Residents Association now has a representative from each scheme in the borough and decided not to expand to include other groups of older people but to remain specific to Bracknell Forest Borough Council sheltered schemes.

- The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel has met with many other groups of tenants from other areas, particularly as part of the Options Appraisal process.
- A website has been set up for the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel – the address is [www.bftlhp.org.uk](http://www.bftlhp.org.uk)
- The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel celebrated their ten year anniversary with a social event and balloon race.



*Past and Present members of the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel, together with officers and Councillors, celebrate 10 years of the Panel in Bracknell Forest in June 2006*

The following aspects of the targets in the 2003 Compact still need to be developed, and will be continued in work related to the 2006 Compact:-

- The Residents Voices scheme needs to be promoted to enable take up, as this has been unsuccessful so far.
- Information given to new tenants needs to be improved so that they know about involvement opportunities and who their representatives are.



### **Aims for the Compact**

**Bracknell Forest Borough Council and its tenants groups and representatives will work towards the following aims:-**

- Giving tenants the opportunity to have a real influence on issues that affect their communities through their tenant representatives and tenants groups, which are directly linked to the Council's decision making structures. This will be complemented by other methods of consultation and participation.
- Ensuring that there are a variety of ways that tenants can get involved, which reflect that people can give as much or as little time and commitment as they wish to.
- Setting up and supporting an effective working partnership between tenants, councillors and Council officers and the wider community.
- Maintaining a good working relationship with the councillor who has been nominated as the Tenants & Leaseholders Champion.
- Ensuring that all partners to this Compact treat each other with respect, integrity, openness and honesty.
- Promoting equal opportunities for all tenants ensuring that groups seek to reflect the diversity of the borough. Parties to the Compact shall work for good relations amongst all members of the community.

- Ensuring that the Council facilitates reasonable access to resources, advice, practical and financial support to tenants who want to get involved, as well as helping to develop tenant involvement across the borough.
- Making sure that tenants have the opportunity to be trained to give them the knowledge and skills to participate effectively. Training will also be available to officers and councillors so that they are aware of the roles of tenants in the decision making process.
- Ensuring that the Compact continues to change with time to represent the aims of tenants and their representatives.
- Reviewing and assessing how the Compact is working, and whether targets have been achieved, every six months, by tenants, officers and councillors.

# A REAL SAY IN HOW HOUSING IS RUN

## Chapter 1 – Core Standards for involvement in the Housing Service

**Tenants and leaseholders will be involved in and consulted about the following subjects:-**

### ***1. Developing the council's housing policy and strategy***

- The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel will look at final drafts of housing policies and strategies before they are submitted for approval (e.g. to the Corporate Management Team or the Executive) and their comments, wherever possible will be incorporated into the final versions. If their suggested changes cannot be taken on board, adequate explanation will be given by officers. The comments of the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel will be reported to the relevant decision making group.
- If a new strategy or policy affects a specific group such as sheltered tenants or leaseholders, it should be taken to the relevant Association meeting prior to the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel.
- If there are major changes to a policy or strategy, or if it is a new document, the Housing Sounding Board will be consulted prior to the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel so that the Panel know the views of the wider tenant population before they give their comments.
- In the case of the Housing Strategy, a group of residents have also indicated that they are willing to be involved in this in the future, and therefore this specific group will be consulted when the Housing Strategy is updated.
- There is a seat for a Tenants & Leaseholders Panel member on the Strategic Housing Partnership – this group exists to promote sustainable development and support existing communities, to promote housing as an issue and to encourage the provision of more affordable housing including key worker housing. This tenant representative has speaking and voting rights. A Tenants & Leaseholders Panel member also sits on the Adult Social Care & Housing Scrutiny Panel where they have speaking but not voting rights. Both of these representatives will stand for the collective views of the Panel.

## **2. *Drawing up and Appraising Options for Housing Investment and Improvements***

- Tenants were consulted and involved in great detail in the Housing Stock Options Appraisal which took place in 2004-05 to look at the options for funding the government's Decent Home Standard. In 2006 an updated financial appraisal revealed that the Council could no longer afford to meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard by 2010 and that the Housing Revenue Account (Housing Services' Operational Account) would fall into deficit by 2009/10 due to the requirement to pay £9 million to the Government every year. Following a unanimous recommendation from the Housing Steering Group, the Council decided to consult and ballot tenants on the options of transferring the Council homes to a new local Housing Association.
- Tenants will continue to be involved in the ongoing process of looking at the future of housing in the borough, involvement of tenants will include information exchange and gathering views through home visits, road shows, and other activities.
- The Housing Sounding Board will be consulted on a regular basis about their views regarding whether the homes should be transferred to a Housing Association or remain with the council.
- The Housing Transfer Group is an advisory body reporting to the Council's Executive and has an overview of the process that leads to tenants voting on the proposal to transfer the Council's Housing stock to a new local Housing Association. The group will seek to ensure that tenants and leaseholders are provided with clear and accurate information so that they can make an informed choice at the ballot. The group will also play a key role in the development of the formal offer to tenants. Membership of the group consists of:-
  - ❖ two members of the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel, one leaseholder representative, one sheltered representative, two (tenant) members of the Housing Sounding Board
  - ❖ five members of the Council, including the leader, the Executive member for Housing and one opposition member
  - ❖ three staff representatives, drawn from Housing, Bracknell Forest Services and Corporate Services
  - ❖ One representative of the Trade Union.

This group gives tenants a direct say in the future of homes in the borough. Representatives must feedback to their respective groups where appropriate about the areas under discussion in the Housing Transfer Group.

- All tenants receive regular newsletters about the progress of the "Your Homes – The Way Forward" project.



### **3. *Developing and taking forward the chosen option for investment***

- The Housing Transfer Group will continue to exist with tenants represented as outlined in (2) until group members make a decision that the group will either evolve into another group or disband.
- The decision made in July 2006 to consult tenants on the option of transferring Council homes to a new Bracknell Forest Housing Association will lead to a formal ballot of tenants in Spring 2007. Leaseholders will also be consulted on their views.
- In the lead up to a ballot, a shadow board for the proposed new Housing Association will be set up, with seats for tenants.
- An Independent Tenant Advisor has been funded by the council, and chosen by the tenants to guide them through the process running up to a ballot and give tenants independent advice and information.

### **4. *Drawing up the Council's capital and renovation programmes***

- The Council has a duty to make sure all its homes come up to the government's Decent Homes Standard by 2010. With funding already inadequate to meet this target if the homes remain owned by the Council, unfortunately there is limited scope for tenant involvement and choice in the capital programme, as there has been in the past.
- The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel will receive information about the capital programme just before the start of the financial year. This information will also be published in the Tenants and Leaseholders Newsletter.
- In the event of a transfer to a Housing Association, there would be increased opportunities for consultation with tenants on the capital budget, and as in previous years it may be possible for tenant representatives to take a tour of the borough to give them information about areas of the borough they are not so familiar with, which will be of use when they are consulted on the future works on the housing stock.

### **5. *Developing and implementing regeneration and improvement programmes***

- The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel will receive update reports on any relevant regeneration and improvement schemes and may ask appropriate officers to attend their meetings to give updates, e.g. on the regeneration of Bracknell town centre.

- If an improvement programme includes large numbers of council leaseholders it is important that the Bracknell Forest Leaseholders Association are consulted, along with the legally required consultation with leaseholders.

## **6. *Budgets, finance and rent setting***

- All tenants will be informed of the rent rise each year. This will be through the Tenants & Leaseholders newsletter, and individual letters. In the past, tenants were consulted over the options for rent rises, but this can no longer take place as the government sets the rent as part of its rent restructuring programme. Should this situation change, the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel would be informed and discussions would take place about the way forward.
- All tenants will be given four weeks notice of their individual rent increase.
- The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel can request reasonable information about budgets on capital and responsive repairs, housing management, voids, tenant participation etc., and these will be provided in 10 working days or at the next meeting of the Panel, depending on the urgency of the request. A designated Panel member automatically receives repairs performance information including budgets, on a monthly basis, and can share this with other Panel members if required.
- Key members of staff from Bracknell Forest Services who provide a repairs service to council homes, attend the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel on a quarterly basis to give performance and service information, which includes budgets.
- Information about the use of housing budgets is published in the tenants and leaseholders newsletter from time to time.
- A presentation is made to the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel on a yearly basis by a senior accountant from the council, to give information about the budget proposals for the coming financial year.

## **7. *Allocations and lettings policies and procedures***

- The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel and other tenants groups will be consulted about changes to allocations and letting policies as outlined in (1).
- For any major changes tenants who are on the list waiting for a transfer will be consulted.

- Residents will be consulted about the change over to a Choice Based Lettings scheme which is a new system of allocating properties. Choice based systems allow social housing tenants to exercise some choice over their future homes. Customers move from being 'point hunters' to 'home hunters' by responding to adverts that list available properties.
- The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel will be informed of any significant and relevant changes to national policy or legislation around allocations and lettings.

#### **8. *Anti-social behaviour policies and procedures***

- The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel have been consulted on the development of the Anti-social Behaviour policy and procedures for dealing with anti-social behaviour and will continue to be consulted about changes to anti-social behaviour policies as outlined in (1).
- The Safer Communities Manager and Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator will be invited to the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel on an at least yearly basis to update on current progress, e.g. how many Anti Social Behaviour Orders have been granted, and can be invited to other groups at their request. The Panel can request more frequent updates if this is required, e.g. to discuss initiatives to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.
- The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel will be informed of any relevant changes to national policy or legislation around anti-social behaviour.

#### **9. *Management of Housing Services and policies and procedures for repairs, maintenance, rent collection and rent arrears and empty properties***

- The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel and other tenants groups will be consulted about changes to housing management policies as outlined in (1).
- The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel will be consulted on any review of service standards for housing management.
- The Housing Sounding Board will regularly be consulted on their satisfaction levels with the Housing Service. Also the service is required every three years to consult a wider group of tenants on this matter and to report the result to central government.

**10. *Tenancy management and sustainability issues, tenancy agreements and conditions***

- If any changes to the tenancy agreement are proposed, the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel will be invited to consider how best tenants' views can be reflected e.g. in working groups etc., which happen before the compulsory legal consultation with every tenant.

**11. *Housing Benefit and debt advice, debt recovery procedures***

- General information regarding Housing Benefit policy, procedures or performance statistics will be submitted to the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel as they request.
- Information about Housing Benefit performance will be included, every six months in the information session on Housing Management with the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel.
- The Council has appointed an officer within Housing Management Services to give tenants and their families advice & support in claiming Welfare and Housing benefits. This service is regularly highlighted in the Tenants & Leaseholders newsletter. Debt counselling can also be arranged through referral to the Citizens Advice Bureau.

**12. *Leaseholder issues and charges***

- The Bracknell Forest Leaseholders Association will be consulted on all major issues relating to leaseholders, before the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel.
- The council will make use of all reasonable opportunities to encourage leaseholders to become part of the Association.
- The Bracknell Forest Leaseholders Association will always be attended by a Housing Officer with specific responsibility for leaseholders.
- The Bracknell Forest Leaseholders Association can ask for other officers (such as staff from Bracknell Forest Services) to attend their meetings, and any such requests will be met, provided at least 2 weeks notice is given.
- Two positions on the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel will be reserved for Leaseholder representatives to be selected by a nomination from the Bracknell Forest Leaseholders Association. The Panel representatives will aim to ensure that the impact on leaseholders of Council policy is considered.

- Training and information will be available concerning leasehold issues such as service charges, statutory consultation, rights and responsibilities.
- Every effort will be made to ensure that the Housing Sounding Board has a proportional representation of leaseholders, reflecting the make up of the council leaseholder population of the borough.
- There will be a place for one leaseholder on the Housing Transfer Group which looks at the future of council housing in Bracknell Forest and will play a key role in developing the transfer proposal.

### **13. *Sheltered Housing Services***

- The Sheltered Schemes Residents Association will be consulted on all major issues relating to sheltered tenants and schemes, before the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel.
- The council will make use of all opportunities to encourage every scheme to be represented on the committee of the Association.
- The Sheltered Schemes Residents Association will always be attended by the Supportive Housing Manager or Supportive Housing Officer from the Council.
- The Sheltered Schemes Residents Association can ask for other officers (such as staff from Bracknell Forest Services) to attend their meetings, and any such requests will be met, provided at least 2 weeks notice is given.
- Two positions on the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel will be reserved for sheltered tenants representatives to be selected by a nomination from the Sheltered Schemes Residents Association. The Panel representatives will aim to ensure that the impact on sheltered tenants of Council policy is considered.
- Every effort will be made to ensure that the Housing Sounding Board has a proportional representation of sheltered tenants, reflecting the make up of the sheltered tenant population of the borough.
- There will be a place for one sheltered tenant on the Housing Transfer Group which looks at the future of council housing in Bracknell Forest, for as long as this group runs.
- Information on the performance of Forestcare (the organisation who provide emergency support to sheltered and other housing in the borough via pull cords, pendants etc.) will be submitted to the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel upon reasonable request.

**14. Council Service and performance strategies; and arrangements for monitoring and reviewing council performance, addressing shortcomings and remedial action**

- The performance of Bracknell Forest Services who provide the repairs service is reported on a quarterly basis to the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel.
- The Social Services and Housing Quarterly Operations Report is available for Tenants & Leaseholders Panel members to view at any time, and reports from other departments can also be requested. Panel members can ask questions about the information contained in these reports.

**15. Setting, monitoring and reviewing services, performance standards and targets for housing management and neighbourhood services**

- The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel and Housing Sounding Board will be consulted on the Housing Management Service Standards, including what information on performance should be published to all tenants and leaseholders.
- Tenants and leaseholders can have their say on neighbourhood services via the Neighbourhood Forum process.
- If residents wished to set up a local or special interest compact (e.g. for younger, Black and Minority Ethnic or sheltered tenants) then the council would support the development of this.

**16. Proposed remedial action if performance falls short**

- If performance issues are reported to any of the groups in the tenant involvement structure which require further investigation, they can raise referrals with the relevant department or organisation. The officer responsible for Tenant Participation or a group member nominated at the meeting will then pass this issue to relevant council officer at the earliest opportunity, usually by e-mail. A reply should be received within 10 working days. If no response is received or if there is dissatisfaction with the response, it may be decided that the Tenants & Leaseholders Champion should take the matter forward (in the case of the Sheltered Schemes Residents Association, it can be the Tenants & Leaseholders Champion or Pensioners Champion who does this).
- Members of groups in the tenant involvement structure may call officers to attend their meetings to give account of shortfalls in performance provided 2 weeks notice is given.

**17. *Proposals to contract housing services to other providers including through partnering contracts***

- Information about contractors working with Bracknell Forest Services can be provided to the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel upon reasonable request, and information given at quarterly performance reports at panel meetings if requested.
- When works take place involving leaseholders, formal consultation takes place – three quotes are sought and leaseholders are later informed of who the contractors are.

**18. *Neighbourhood issues which affect tenants homes or the management of the housing service***

- The Neighbourhood Forum process will be used for residents to feed in any issues in the area they live in, and also be informed or consulted on any changes or issues. Area representatives on the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel will be invited to relevant Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs) where action planning takes place with all agencies as a result of feedback from the community.
- If there are specific neighbourhood issues in an area, tenants and leaseholders will be liaised with individually.
- A tenant in each area of the borough have an opportunity to sit on the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel and represent their area – after being elected / supported by other tenants in their area. Other tenants and leaseholders can raise issues with this representative if they wish to.
- Tenants and leaseholders have a more informal opportunity to have a say through becoming a Residents Voice (people who represent a road or block and do not have to attend meetings).
- Information on neighbourhood issues may also be publicised in the Tenants & Leaseholders newsletter.

**19. *Equality policies, including race equality policies and policies on racial harassment***

- The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel and other tenants groups will be consulted about equalities policies as outlined in (1), this includes any reviews of the council's Race Equality Scheme and Action Plan and also the Disability Equality Scheme (which came into place in December 2006) and the Gender Equality Scheme (which comes into place in April 2007).

## **20. Customer Care**

- A random sample of people who contact Customer Services are sent a customer satisfaction survey. A random sample of around 250 tenants per month are also sent a further satisfaction survey when they request a repair.
- Reports on customer care performance will be given to the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel yearly or more often upon reasonable request.
- The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel and Housing Sounding Board will be consulted on Service Standards for Housing Management, which include how the service deals with customers.

## **21. Environmental Works**

- If the Council's Housing stock remains with the council, it is unlikely that environmental works (such as improvement to external features of estates) will take place due to funds being directed towards the government's Decent Home standard, however if any works are to be undertaken, the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel will see details of this as part of information they receive about each year's Capital programme, and there would also be local consultation.

## **22. Arrangements for providing information, for tenant consultation and involvement, including handling complaints and remedial action**

- Information is provided to all tenants and leaseholders through the quarterly Tenants & Leaseholders newsletter.
- A dedicated officer is employed by the council to support and promote tenant involvement. A Consultation Manager is also employed by the council to work specifically on the Your Homes – The Way Forward project on the future of council housing in the borough.
- The Social Services and Housing Department have a Customer Response Officer who deals with complaints from customers of the department. Bracknell Forest Services also have a Complaints Monitoring Officer for the repairs service.



## Targets for Tenant Involvement in the Housing Service

### **To Run Estate Walkabouts on the council's main housing estates.**

(These involve residents, officers and others meeting to look at areas on estates which need improvements and agreeing how and whether this can take place. Tenants will receive invitations to attend and will be able to have their say on areas / issues visited).

**By:** Pilot in August 2006, if successful, a programme in place by July 2007

**Who is responsible:** -

Officer responsible for Tenant Involvement  
Head of Housing Management  
Housing Officers

### **To Promote the Residents Voices Scheme and have at least 10 tenants / leaseholders throughout the borough signed up to the scheme**

(This is a scheme which allows tenants to represent their street or block rather than a large estate and without the commitment of regular meetings. "Voices" need to have the written support of 3 tenants in the area that they wish to represent)

**By:** December 2006

**Who is responsible:** -

Officer responsible for Tenant Involvement  
Head of Housing Management  
Housing Officers

### **To present Housing Management performance information to the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel on a quarterly basis**

(This information will show the Panel how well the service is performing e.g. how rent arrears are being collected and how fast empty properties are relet).

**By:** July 2006

**Who is responsible:** -

Head of Housing Management

**For the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel to have a training / information session about Housing Management Policies and Procedures**

(This will allow the Panel to have more insight into the work of the Housing Management Service)

**By:** October 2007 – a brief will be proposed by August 2007

**Who is responsible:** -  
Head of Housing Management  
Officer responsible for Tenant Involvement

**To present regular information about the performance of the repairs service through the Tenants and Leaseholders newsletter**

(This will allow all tenants to see how their repairs service is performing, not just the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel)

**By:** October 2006 and ongoing

**Who is responsible:** -  
Head of Strategy & Business Systems at BFS

**Due to tenant demand, to re-start Tenants & Leaseholders Area meetings.**

(These may be linked with Estate Walkabouts)

**By:** A pilot cycle in October 2006, followed by a review

**Who is responsible:** -  
Officer responsible for Tenant Involvement  
Head of Housing Management

## **SUPPORT TO KEEP PEOPLE INVOLVED**

### **Chapter 2 – Standards for Resources for Tenant Participation**

The following resources will be provided to support tenant involvement:-

- **Financial Resources**
  - ❖ The tenant involvement budget for 2006/07 is £23,170. (This was £37,760 in 2005/06 and £36,760 in 2004/05 – the decrease is due to savings needing to be made in the Housing Revenue Account).
  - ❖ If associations start up in geographical areas they will be given a grant of £50 to start up and then £100 per year upon meeting grant requirements
  - ❖ Borough wide groups can apply for a grant of £500 annually which will be topped up to £1000 if a need can be demonstrated. This can be used to hire venues, provide transport, fund social events, any publicity and any other appropriate expenses.
  - ❖ Tenant and leaseholder representatives who incur out of pocket expenses such as telephone calls, parking, childcare etc. may claim the full cost of these back upon production of a receipt and completing a claim form.
  - ❖ The cost of Neighbourhood Forums and Neighbourhood Action Groups is met by the Council corporately.
  - ❖ The Council will explore methods of obtaining additional resources for tenant involvement, such as using Wise-Up, a service which allows councils to generate funds by placing adverts for relevant services in their Tenants & Leaseholders newsletters.
- **Facilities (funded by the tenant involvement budget unless otherwise stated)**
  - ❖ Access will be provided for groups to meet in council meeting rooms if they request this and if there is availability, refreshments will be provided.
  - ❖ Meeting venues and refreshments outside the council offices will be provided and funded if required and if costs are reasonable.

- ❖ Stationery items and photocopying needed for the running of a group or the work of a representative will be provided to groups / representatives who do not already have a grant.
- ❖ Transport to meetings will be available, provided that at least 24 hours notice is given in the request and the group attended do not have a grant. If tenants use personal cars, mileage allowance is payable at the same rate as council members.
- ❖ The council has six laptop computers with internet connection available for tenant and leaseholder representatives, these will be allocated on a needs basis, which will be reviewed by the officer responsible for tenant involvement every six months.
- ❖ During the consultation on the option of Stock Transfer, the council will fund a freephone telephone number for tenants and leaseholders so that they can obtain free advice and information (funded by the stock transfer budget).
- ❖ The Council will fund an Independent Tenant Advisor for independent advice and information (funded by the stock transfer budget).
- ❖ If a group does not have the facility to take notes from their meetings, support can be provided by the council to do this until such time as a minute taker comes forward.

- **Advice**

- ❖ The Council will employ an officer responsible for tenant involvement – the role of this officer who is based in the Social Services and Housing department is to provide advice, support and training for tenants, to develop and co-ordinate involvement mechanisms in the borough and overall to implement the Tenants & Leaseholders Compact. This officer is employed for 30 hours per week and has administration support for 7 ½ hours per week. These officers are funded from the Housing Revenue Account.
- ❖ The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel will always be attended by the Assistant Director – Sustainable Communities and / or Head of Housing Management.
- ❖ Throughout the consultation on the option of stock transfer process an officer who manages consultation with tenants on the issue regarding the future of council housing in the borough will also be employed. This officer is employed for 37 hours per week.

- ❖ The Full Council will annually nominate and elect a councillor as Tenants & Leaseholders Champion (existing champions may be re-elected), who will act as a communication channel between individual tenants, tenants' groups, and the Council, and ensure that tenants' views are fed into decision making processes.
- ❖ As mentioned above an Independent Tenants Advisor will be appointed.



*Councillor Mrs. Shelagh Pile*  
*Bracknell Forest's Tenants & Leaseholders Champion, 2005 →*

The role of the Champion is:-

1. To give advice and views to tenants and leaseholders (as long as it is stated that they are his or her views)
  2. To report to full Council on issues affecting tenants and leaseholders
  3. To liaise with tenants and leaseholders on relevant issues
  4. To liaise with ward councillors on relevant issues
  5. To act on behalf of tenants' groups if requested and / or if all other avenues have been exhausted
  6. To attend, where reasonably possible, tenants and leaseholders meetings
- ❖ The Council are full members of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) - this is a national organisation who work to promote tenant empowerment. Their aim is to extend the reach and quality of tenant influence by working with social housing residents and landlords to develop successful partnerships and supporting tenants and community groups to take on a more representative role. TPAS is a not for profit membership organisation that provides information, advice, consultancy, training and conferences on all aspects of involving tenants in their housing management. To this end they provide: A freephone helpline and information service for social housing tenants and landlord members, Conferences and seminars on all aspects of tenant participation, training and consultancy. They also have links with Central Government and help to

develop government policy around tenant participation issues.  
(see useful contacts)

- ❖ During the consultation on the process of stock transfer (including the stock transfer ballot process) tenants and leaseholders have had and will continue to have access to independent advice through external consultants who they have selected with support from the council.

- **Training**

- ❖ Internal and external training will be provided as and when required by tenant representatives, subject to available budget.
- ❖ Links will be made with neighbouring authorities and joint training possibilities considered wherever possible.
- ❖ The officer responsible for tenant participation will ensure that tenant representatives and groups are aware of training sessions and conferences which may be of interest to them. This includes events in the borough and those run by external organisations
- ❖ Elected members and Housing staff can also be trained as the need arises, subject to available budget.

- **Innovative Approaches to involvement**

- ❖ The Housing Sounding Board – a list of up to 1000 interested tenants and leaseholders will be maintained on behalf of the council by a research consultancy.
- ❖ Housing Officers direct some of their time into involvement activities such as home visits regarding the consultation on transferring homes to a new local Housing Association.

### Targets for Tenant Participation Resources

**To provide training for tenant representatives on equality and diversity issues as well as the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) standards in housing which all landlords are required to meet.**

**By:** September 2006

**Who is responsible:-**

Officer responsible for Tenant Involvement  
Human Resources Department

**To use any small amounts of funding which may be remaining in the Tenant Involvement budget at the end of the year to fund notice boards in communal areas of flats etc. – priority will be given to areas with Residents Voices or Associations**

**By:** May 2007 and ongoing

**Who is responsible:-**

Officer responsible for Tenant Involvement  
Head of Housing Management Services

# GETTING EVERYONE TOGETHER

## Chapter 3 – Standards for Meetings

In order to be effective, tenants and leaseholders meetings should:-

- Have a clear objective (we will aim not to have meetings for the sake of meetings!).
- Have an agenda.
- Have minutes or outcomes to feedback to people who took part, or people who are being represented (the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel have a feedback form so they can report back to the panel consistently about meetings they attend on the panel's behalf).
- Have relevant background papers distributed prior to the meeting wherever possible and all papers distributed 7 days prior to the meeting.
- Be held on dates and at times convenient to the community or members of the group as far as it is possible to accommodate everyone's needs. Every effort will be made to avoid clashes with other relevant meetings and events.
- Be in physically accessible venues.
- Be in venues that are easy for the community to reach.
- Be in venues that are of a suitable size for the meeting (i.e. rooms which are not too big or too small).
- Have support available if necessary for people to take part fully e.g. a hearing loop, information in large print, Braille or on tape or interpreters if appropriate and if requested.
- Be publicised in good time – ideally at least giving no less than 10 working days notice. Publicity should state:-
  - ❖ The purpose of the meeting
  - ❖ Exactly where the meeting is to be held (with a map if necessary)
  - ❖ The time and date of the meeting
  - ❖ Who to contact to request transport or request reimbursement of expenses



- Be chaired in an effective manner where everyone can have their say but the meeting ends at the specified time and the agenda is kept to.
- Be fair and democratic.
- Abide by the ground rules and constitution if a group has developed them.
- Groups can invite appropriate council officers or other organisations to their meetings to provide further information on relevant topics. These officers must be given at least two weeks notice of a meeting and the request shall not be refused unless it is reasonable to do so.

### Targets for Meetings

<b>To obtain the SHAP (Working Party on religions in Education) calendar of cultural and religious <u>significant</u> dates to help avoid clashes with meetings if possible.</b>
<b>By:</b> August 2006
<b>Who is responsible:-</b> Officer responsible for Tenant Involvement

<b>To develop a simple system of monitoring whether meeting standards are kept which is reported to the Compact Monitoring Meeting</b>
<b>By:</b> January 2007
<b>Who is responsible:-</b> Officer responsible for Tenant Involvement

## **TELLING EVERYONE ABOUT IT!**

### **Chapter 4 – Standards for Information**

In order to promote clear and effective communication, information about tenant involvement will:-

- Be open, honest and truthful, with nothing hidden.
- Be jargon free, in plain English and as basic as possible.
- Contain as few acronyms as possible – if they have to be used, a full explanation must be given.
- Be short and brief.
- Contain no complicated statistics.
- Be available in alternative formats on request, such as different languages, on tape, in Braille, in large print etc. Alternative formats should be provided within 10 working days of the request.
- Be up to date (especially if on public notice boards).
- Avoid racist, sexist, discriminatory or biased language.
- State who it is relevant to.
- Give contact information, e.g. telephone numbers and e-mail addresses.

Information should be provided on:-

- Involvement activities and support available.
- The core standards for involvement in the housing service as outlined in Chapter 1.
- The Tenants and Leaseholders Compact – full versions of the compact will be provided to those who request them, and summaries will be available to all tenants and service charge paying leaseholders.
- Changes in council policy that affect tenants.
- Changes in government policy that affect tenants.

Information will normally be provided in the Tenants and Leaseholders Newsletter but occasionally leaflets and flyers may be produced. Housing Sounding Board may be contacted by e-mail or telephone to give information or ask their views.

Information about tenant involvement will be available on the Council's website, as well as the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel website, including minutes of meetings as well as this compact and the associated summary.

The newsletter is published quarterly, and chairs of tenant and leaseholder groups will be asked to contribute information from their groups. The News Group will ensure that information in the newsletter is appropriate and clear.

## Targets for Information

**2 pages in the quarterly Tenants & Leaseholders Newsletter will always be reserved for Tenants and Leaseholders groups who will endeavour to find relevant information to communicate to tenants**

(The remaining 6 or 10 pages will be used by the Council to communicate with tenants).

**By:** July 2006 and ongoing

**Who is responsible:-**  
Chairs of Groups

# WORKING TOGETHER FOR ALL TENANTS

## **Chapter 5 – Standards for Tenants Groups**

A “Tenants Group” means any group of tenants who meet together regularly and fulfil the below criteria.

In order to represent tenants and leaseholders effectively, tenants’ groups in Bracknell Forest will:-

- Be representative of the people they serve rather than themselves as individuals.
- Have a constitution agreed by the majority of the group members.
- In the case of borough-wide groups (i.e. The Tenants & Leaseholders Panel, Sheltered Schemes Residents Association and the Bracknell Forest Leaseholders Association) all be council tenants or leaseholders.
- Have a regular general meeting (e.g. annual or bi-annual) if they are an Association.
- Have a clear process of electing members onto groups (if relevant) and the officers of the committee. Some groups may decide that their meetings are an open forum, and some may require members to be elected on – either way is acceptable as long as this is set out in the constitution.
- Elect a chairperson and vice chairperson, as well as a secretary if possible. If the group has a bank account and funds they must also elect a treasurer.
- Have a procedure for dealing with members or committee officers who do not fulfil their role.
- Be non party political
- Open their meetings to observers at least four times per year.

## Targets for Tenants Groups

**To ensure that meetings run to time – this may require groups to restructure their meetings.**

(The idea is not to prevent opinions but allow people to get home on time having had their say!)

**By:** July 2006 and ongoing

**Who is responsible?:-**  
Panel & Association chairs

**A description of the tenant representative's role will be developed**

**By:** October 2007

**Who is responsible?:-**  
Officer responsible for Tenant Involvement  
Tenants representatives

## **MAKING SURE IT WORKS**

### **Chapter 6 – Standards for monitoring and measuring performance**

In order to ensure that standards in the compact are met, and that tenant involvement is of a high quality the council and tenants will:-

- Hold a meeting every six months to monitor progress of the compact – this will be attended by Tenants & Leaseholders Panel members, relevant council officers and the Tenants & Leaseholders Champion. The TPAS Compact Health Check document may be used to check on progress.
- Undertake regular surveys with the Housing Sounding Board on satisfaction with participation opportunities.
- Scrutinise the response to the question on the compulsory Tenant Satisfaction Survey (STATUS survey) which the council must carry out every three years, which asks tenants how satisfied they are with opportunities for participation. This response can also be directly compared with the response received by other landlords.
- Any complaints about support for tenant involvement or service delivery should be directed initially to the Assistant Director, Sustainable Communities. If the complainant does not consider there to be a satisfactory outcome, the issue can be passed through the Corporate Complaints procedure if appropriate and if other avenues have been exhausted. Further information is available from the council about the Corporate Complaints procedure.
- Compare information and benchmark with other authorities and organisations to gain and share new ideas and practices.
- Carry out an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) on Tenant Participation every 3 years as part of the Council's EIA programme – these assessments are a legal requirement and an essential part of the council's work to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and promote good relations between people of different backgrounds and groups.
- Review the compact document every two years. (This review may take up to a year so it would be assumed that a new document would be published every three years)



## **Dealing with Disputes**

In the event of a dispute arising within the Bracknell Forest Tenants & Leaseholders Compact, or difficulties occur in the relationship between the council and tenants groups or representatives, the council will work with tenants to ensure the dispute is resolved.

As far as possible, disagreements will be resolved between the parties themselves. If the difficulty is still not resolved, the following steps may be taken:-

1. A scrutiny panel containing independent tenants, elected members and staff members will be established solely for the purpose of investigating the case/complaint. The panel will review the case and make recommendations for an improvement in the situation.
2. If the case is still unresolved, representations may be made to a neighbouring local authority, selected jointly by the landlord and tenant representatives, to be appointed as a 'critical friend', probably on a reciprocal basis. A panel of nominees from this authority, including elected members, staff members and tenants, will review any conflict and will make suggestions about how to reach an amicable solution.
3. In continuing unresolved or serious cases an independent mediator will be hired to work with both parties to find a compromise with which all parties agree. Both the landlord and the relevant tenant representatives will choose the mediator.
4. Where all other measures have failed to reach a satisfactory conclusion an independent arbitrator will be appointed jointly by the landlord and tenants to review the case and arrive at a conclusion. This conclusion is binding and must be adhered to by all parties involved.

Each panel will sit for a maximum of 10 working days and if there is no resolution after this time it will move onto the next step.

### ***What's the difference between mediation and arbitration?***

*In mediation, the mediator assists the parties in resolving their own conflict and reaching an agreed resolution. In arbitration, the arbitrator makes the final decision over the dispute which is final.*

## Closing statement from the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel



Hi everyone,

This is the new Tenant and Leaseholders Compact. A lot has happened since the last Compact in 2003.

My time on the Tenant and Leaseholders Panel has been very busy and challenging and rewarding.

We have all gone through the Options Appraisal, because of Bracknell Forest wanting to meet the Decent Homes standard set by the Government. The Panel visited other councils who have all gone through that process, which was very interesting.

Now we are on the final stage. Eventually by Spring 2007, all tenants will decide the best way forward by a ballot.

We have seen quite a lot of changes, not just new people coming on to the Panel but the Housing Sounding Board has successfully been recruited to for a few months now. This new venture was to try and get more people involved, as much or as little as they wanted to.

We have all been active, meeting members of our community, and attending road shows. Also there are Neighbourhood Forums for all residents to attend and exchange their views with the Council, Police and any other interested parties. We still have the Tenants and Leaseholder's Newsletter going out to all of you and I hope you find it informative.

Kind Regards

**Jacki Brundish**  
**Acting Chair of the Tenants & Leaseholder's Panel 2005-2006**



Hello to all Tenants & Leaseholders of Bracknell Forest Borough Council,

Before I introduce myself I would like to thank our previous Chair David Maynard and Acting Chair Jacki Brundish for their sterling work with the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel for the past two years.

I'm Peter Maguire and I have been representative of Hanworth on the panel since 2002, I have been elected Chair person for this next term of office by the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel and I would like to thank them for their confidence in my election.

I can only agree with Jacki's introduction to the Compact, and will ensure to the best of my ability to maintain the high standard of all our previous Chairs.

The future of Bracknell Forest Housing Stock is with you the tenants & leaseholders of the Borough, we will ensure with the Independent Tenant Adviser (DWA) to give you the factual information to make an informed choice for the Ballot of Stock Transfer or Retention by the Council.

Yours Sincerely

Peter Maguire  
Chair of the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel 2006 ☞

## **Useful Contacts**

- Officer responsible for Tenant Participation at Bracknell Forest Borough Council – tel 01344 351570,  
e-mail [Joanna.Fluxman@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:Joanna.Fluxman@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)  
web: [www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/tenantparticipation](http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/tenantparticipation)
- Bracknell Forest Tenants & Leaseholders Panel website –  
[www.bftlhp.org.uk](http://www.bftlhp.org.uk)
- Tenant Participation Advisory Service – tel 0161 868 3500  
e-mail: [info@tpas.org.uk](mailto:info@tpas.org.uk)  
web: [www.tpas.org.uk](http://www.tpas.org.uk)
- PEP (national agency which works with agencies to improve services for residents) – [www.pep.org.uk](http://www.pep.org.uk)
- TAROE (Tenants and Residents Organisations of England) –  
[www.taroe.org.uk](http://www.taroe.org.uk)

**Thank you to the Compact working group who committed many hours to reviewing this agreement, regular group members were:-**

- ❖ Peter Maguire – Hanworth tenant and leaseholder representative and Chair of the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel
- ❖ Jacki Brundish – (At the time of review - Acting Chair of the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel) and Great Hollands tenant and leaseholder representative
- ❖ Richard Ireland – Crown Wood tenant and leaseholder representative
- ❖ Robert Gristwood – Priestwood tenant and leaseholder representative
- ❖ Linda Coyle – Leaseholder representative
- ❖ Mark Hickson – Head of Housing Management Services
- ❖ Carrie Brierley – Senior Housing Officer
- ❖ Councillor Mrs. Shelagh Pile – Tenants & Leaseholders Champion
- ❖ Joanna Flaxman – Policy & Commissioning Officer

Thank you also to the members of the Housing Sounding Board who made comments on drafts of the compact.

THIS AGREEMENT is made the DATE

BETWEEN

Bracknell Forest Borough Council

(called the "Council" in this Agreement)

AND

The Tenants & Leaseholders of Bracknell Forest Borough

In this Agreement, made in accordance with the National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts (the "National Framework"), the Council and the tenants, through T&LP and other representative groups pledge to work towards the aims and goals set out on Page 9. The Agreement is not intended to constitute a legally binding document.

The Council and the T&LP (on behalf of tenants and leaseholders) agree to abide by the terms of this Agreement which are set out in Chapters 1 to 6.

**This Agreement is signed with the authority of the Council.**

Signed ..... Executive Member for Adult Services,  
Health Commissioning & Housing

Signed ..... Chief Executive

**This Agreement is signed with the authority of the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel.**

Signed ..... Tenants & Leaseholders Panel Chairman

Signed ..... Tenants & Leaseholders Panel Member.