

Dartford Borough Council

Resident Involvement Agreement

Foreword

I am pleased to present the newly reviewed resident involvement agreement between residents and the Council.

The Council has worked hard with residents to ensure that it sets out clear guidance on how the Council will work with residents to improve the delivery of housing services through these challenging times.

The agreement sets the standards for partnership working and for involving residents in monitoring housing services and the Council's continuing commitment to encourage residents to get involved.

The Council recognises that residents want to be involved at different levels and have developed a range of ways to get involved to suit their different needs and availability for involvement.

I would like to thank the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum and other residents who are involved with services for their hard work and commitment to improving services for everyone.

I look forward to continuing the good work that we do in partnership to improve our local communities.

Cllr. Jeremy Kite
Leader of Dartford Borough Council

Signatories:
Brian Qualey
Chairman, Dartford Borough Residents' Forum

Cllr. Pat Coleman
Portfolio Holder for Housing Services

Cllr. Jeremy Kite
Leader of the Council

Peter Dosad,
Head of Housing Services

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Introduction

This Partnership Agreement is an update of the original 2007 version and has been developed in consultation with residents (tenants and leaseholders of Dartford Borough Council) and the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum. All parties to this agreement recognise the need for increased and meaningful participation by residents in housing associated policy management decisions. All parties also recognise the views of those they represent. This compact will be reviewed on a regular basis. The results of the review will be made available to the public as appropriate.

For the remainder of this document the term “residents” will be used in place of tenants and leaseholders.

Statement of Intent

It is the intention of all parties to this Agreement to work together to ensure that the views, concerns and housing needs of Dartford Residents are recognised and addressed by Dartford Borough Council (DBC).

It is the intention of the parties of this Agreement to work together as equal Partners, to help ensure that the needs of Dartford residents are placed at the centre of housing services especially in terms of design, delivering, monitoring and review. The emphasis is upon the residents ‘participating in decision making’.

It is the intention of the parties that Dartford Residents can choose their level of involvement in shaping the policies and practices that affect the landlord services that they receive. This allows residents the opportunity to influence and improve the quality of life in properties and on estates. Levels of involvement can range from simply being kept informed, through consultation to being closely involved in developing policy and strategic decision-making.

All parties will be open and honest with each other to ensure that Councillors, Staff and Residents are able to exchange views and opinions on housing issues.

The Resident Involvement Agreement

The Agreement is a tool to:

- help ensure the Council becomes more efficient, transparent and accountable, so that people know who exactly will be responsible for decisions and who will be actively involved in helping councils to reach those decisions
- enable residents to make an informed view on their housing services, be involved in planning them, improving them, monitoring and reporting on performance and identifying and taking remedial action
- help residents identify issues of concern and ways of improving their quality of life as part of a wider strategy to improve estates and neighbourhoods

The process of continuous improvement in terms of service delivery is an essential element of the Agreement. Resident satisfaction in Dartford Borough Council will be monitored and assessed by the Council's internal processes and regulatory body. One of the methods used to assess levels of resident satisfaction will be a tenants and leaseholders survey, mystery shopping, monitoring groups, etc.

An essential element of any regulatory evaluations is the need to demonstrate that the views expressed by residents during the participation process are truly representative of residents and, where applicable, the wider communities they are required to represent.

Dartford Borough Council's commitment to resident involvement

This Agreement provides a framework whereby residents can be fully involved in challenging existing arrangements, comparing with other landlords and continually reviewing how consultation and participation can be most effectively delivered.

The Council will ensure that residents are able to take a full and active part in designing, developing, monitoring and reviewing housing services at strategic and local level. To help residents in this the Council will:

- Work with residents, especially the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum Portfolio Holders who are responsible for monitoring contracts for the delivery of the Council's Housing Service
- Commission and undertake service specific and resident satisfaction surveys e.g. the tenants STAR survey
- Share up-to-date and timely information with all stakeholders through newsletters, leaflets, email and the Council website
- Work with residents to establish focus groups and neighbourhood agreements
- Ensure regular meetings between the Councillors and residents take place including the Residents' Joint Liason Group Meeting
- Carryout consultation exercises as appropriate
- Working with local forums and residents associations (subject to meeting the Councils recognition criteria) that may be formed to address specific issues/topics
- Provide training to residents to enable them to fully participate in the design, development, delivery, monitoring and review of the Council's Housing Service
- Work to ensure that all residents are represented with particular focus on those from under represented groups

The Role of the Council

The Council will:

- Recognise the invaluable role of residents in designing, developing, delivering, monitoring and reviewing the housing service to ensure that it meets customer needs and continually seeks improvement
- Recognise the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum as the main voice of the residents. However, the Council and Dartford Borough Residents' Forum will also work in partnership with other bodies that are established to address specific issues, including individuals. Such groups will have to meet the requirements of the Council's recognition criteria
- Encourage residents who are not members of the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum to get involved in a way that suits them
- Publicise arrangements for resident involvement through leaflets, newsletters, email and the Council website. The Council will ensure that each new tenant is aware of these arrangements when they enter into tenancy
- Support and encourage the development of local resident organisations where these meet the Council's criteria for recognition and represent residents in a given geographical area
- Make sure there are mechanisms for all residents to have the opportunity to become involved
- Make arrangements for residents to receive information and the necessary training to participate in the design, delivery and review of the housing service in general
- Support meetings of specific forums to ensure that the views and needs of those residents can be fully considered

The Role of the Residents

Residents, through recognised organisations such as the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum and in some cases individually, will:

- Work in partnership with the Council to identify and tackle issues of concern
- Work according to an agreed code of conduct as detailed in the groups constitution
- Be open and honest in all their dealings and feedback to their relevant organisations and/or other residents
- Be fair and democratic in representing views of all residents
- Work holistically and wherever possible not focus on personal issues
- Treat information shared as confidential unless stated otherwise

Standards for services

Standards for information

Giving residents a say in setting standards for information

- **The Council will ensure that all information provided to residents will:**
 - Use plain language
 - Be of good quality
 - Be clear and jargon free
 - Be translated where necessary, e.g. audio, braille, other languages
 - Be tailored to residents needs
 - Be provided in good time

Meetings and Consultation

Giving residents a say in setting standards for meetings and consultations

- **Publicising meetings and consultations. The Council will ensure that all meetings and consultations will be:**
 - Advertised, giving as much notice as possible but no less than two weeks
 - Made available to all residents, where appropriate
 - Give a clear explanation of what the meeting or consultation is about
 - Make use of all local media including, the Councils' website, the Link newsletter and local press
- **Accessibility and support. The Council will support residents by:**
 - All meetings and consultations will be held in venues that are accessible e.g. disabled access, times and dates of meetings.
 - Meeting reasonable expenses such as carers costs and travel, in line with the expenses policy
 - Provide practical support such as translators or interpreters
- **Running meetings and consultations. The Council will ensure that meetings and consultations will:**
 - Have a clear purpose and agenda
 - Be chaired in a fair and democratic way to ensure that everyone gets a chance to have their say and is kept informed
 - Keep information jargon free, clear and tailored to residents needs
 - Keep an accurate record of what was discussed and agreed
 - Minutes for meetings will be word processed and distributed to those present or who have sent apologies
 - Minutes will be made available upon request to the Resident Involvement Officer or the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum
- **Cancellation of meetings and consultations**
 - In the event that a meeting or consultation needs to be cancelled, every effort will be made to notify attendees and an explanation and apology will be given.

Choice Based Lettings

Giving residents a say in the allocations and lettings process

Responsible Officer for actions: Housing Options and Private Sector Manager

- **Monitoring service satisfaction. The Council will:**
 - Use tenants surveys to ask about the Choice Based Lettings process
 - Invite members of the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum to regular contract/service meetings
 - Ensure that both new and existing customers are involved.
- **Changes to the allocations and lettings policies and procedures. The Council will:**
 - Consult with residents on any proposed changes
 - Present a report to Cabinet with findings and recommendations
 - Ensure that the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum and wider residents are involved

Estate Services (Communal cleaning and grounds maintenance)

Responsible Officer: Housing Manager

Giving residents a say in keeping your estate clean and tidy

- **Monitoring estate services. The Council will ensure that:**
 - Consultation is carried out to review services and contractors
 - Feedback is given at Dartford Borough Residents' Forum Public Meetings and using relevant media
 - All customers are involved, including the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum at contract monitoring meetings.
- **Proposed changes to estate services delivery. The Council will ensure that:**
 - A report is given offering an explanation of any changes
 - Consultation takes place using surveys, road shows, meetings
 - Any changes are publicised in the relevant media
 - All residents, including the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum are involved.

Planned Maintenance

Giving residents a say in the delivery of Planned Maintenance

Responsible Officer: Housing Maintenance Manager

- **Major work to tenants' homes (Capital Works Programme). The Council will ensure that:**
 - It identifies how, where, when and why major work will be carried out
 - It provides regular updates on progress at regular contract monitoring meetings
 - It consults with residents about programmes which will directly affect them, in addition to the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum
 - Monitoring of tenant's choices continues e.g. kitchen colour choices of tiles, units, floor coverings etc.

Repairs

Giving residents a say in the day to day repairs service

Responsible Officer: Housing Maintenance Manager

- **Renewing the repairs contract. The Council will ensure that:**
 - The Dartford Borough Residents' Forum are involved in the selection of contractors as and when necessary
 - Feedback is given about the results of involvement
 - Members of the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum are involved during the process including operational meetings.
- **Monitoring performance of the current contract. The Council will ensure that:**
 - Consultation is carried out using various tools including focus groups and surveys.
 - The designated portfolio holder(s) from the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum Committee and customers are involved via regular contract meetings and attendance at Project Board meetings.
- **Repairs carried out in homes. The Council will ensure that:**
 - Repair satisfaction surveys are issued to everyone receiving a repair
 - Mystery shopping is used as a tool to monitor quality of services
 - Feedback is given on results
 - Information from residents receiving a repair, and the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum, is used to monitor the service.
- **Proposed significant changes to the service. The Council will ensure that:**
 - A report is given to highlight changes and the reasons behind the changes
 - Consultation takes place using surveys, road shows, meetings
 - Any significant changes are publicised
 - All customers are involved, including members of the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum.

Housing Services Delivery

Giving residents a say in measuring how well the housing services are being provided

Responsible Officer: Head of Housing

- **Major reviews to show how well the Council is performing against government legislation and best practice. The Council will ensure that:**
 - Information sessions about legislation are held and timetables are reviewed via the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum Executive Committee Meetings
 - Consultation is carried out using surveys, focus groups and so on
- **Clear standard of achievements to measure the service provided. The Council will ensure that:**
 - An Annual Report is published for tenants and leaseholders
 - Boroughs to benchmark against and share good practice with are identified
 - All tenants and leaseholders, and members of the Policy Overview Committee, are involved

Support for resident involvement

Giving residents a say in the support provided for resident involvement

Responsible Officer: Resident Involvement Officer

- **Review the support for resident involvement. The Council will ensure that:**
 - The opportunities available are reviewed bi-annually
 - Focus groups are held to review the opportunities available
 - Feedback is given using the relevant media
 - The Dartford Borough Residents' Forum Committee review the Agreement bi-annually
- **Support and advice. The Council will ensure that:**
 - Practical support from the resident involvement officer is available e.g. writing a constitution, research, funding applications.
 - A start up pack for residents association is available
 - Financial support is available by way of a start up grant
 - The Resident Involvement officer attends meetings, wherever possible when invited
 - A Council officer attends relevant meetings with requests for specific officers to be met wherever possible
 - Assistance in booking meeting rooms, publicising meetings and so on is given
 - Assistance in developing publicity i.e. newsletters, websites is given

- **Expenses for resident involvement. The Council will ensure that:**
 - Out of pocket expenses are met by the Council in accordance with the Expenses Policy
 - The Dartford Borough Residents' Forum are involved with ensuring this is up to date
- **Training for residents. The Council will ensure that:**
 - Continue TPAS membership, which provides extensive training courses to residents, continues
 - A suitable training programme is identified for the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum Committee
 - Training is available to residents who are involved in residents associations or have expressed an interest in setting up a group
 - Staff training is provided about how to involve residents with services
 - The Dartford Borough Residents' Forum Committee and residents who meet the criteria are able to attend training

Resident Involvement Opportunities

Dartford Borough Residents' Forum

The Dartford Borough Residents' Forum is a group of residents who represent the views of residents living in Dartford. They hold quarterly forum meetings across the borough to feedback on their work with the Council and take on board the views and concerns of residents and voice them to the Council. The Dartford Borough Residents' Forum Committee is elected by members to work with the Council to monitor the delivery of housing services and contractors. The Committee meet every month to feedback on their progress and to the wider forum at quarterly meetings.

Residents' Associations

A residents' association is a group of residents living in an area, block or street who come together to address issues of common concern in relation to the community they live in and the general environment. All residents groups will need to meet the Council's criteria in order to be recognised and eligible for a start up grant.

Focus Groups

Focus groups will be set up as appropriate to discuss a specific project/topic with a targeted group of residents e.g. to further consult on a project/development that may affect residents living in the area. Groups will be carefully structured to ensure that everyone is given a fair opportunity to have their say and that all issues are covered.

Surveys

Surveys are carried out with residents borough wide to ensure that we are getting the views of all residents. Surveys can be completed online, by telephone or by post.

Mystery Shoppers

Mystery shoppers measure the level of service given to customers and identify if any improvements can be made by testing out services posing as a regular customer. Mystery shopping is designed to test service standards and is a form of market research which

assesses services from the customers' point of view. This could be calling, writing to or visiting the Council. Information is fed back to the relevant departments on completion of each shop.

Estate Inspections

Regular estates inspections take place on Council estates. Housing Officers, along with representatives from Public Realm, Housing Maintenance and Councillors often attend. The inspections look at the conditions of communal areas, lighting, grass & hedge cutting, pavement etc. Residents are encouraged to join the inspections as 'experts' in knowing where attention is needed in their area.

Working with under represented groups within the community

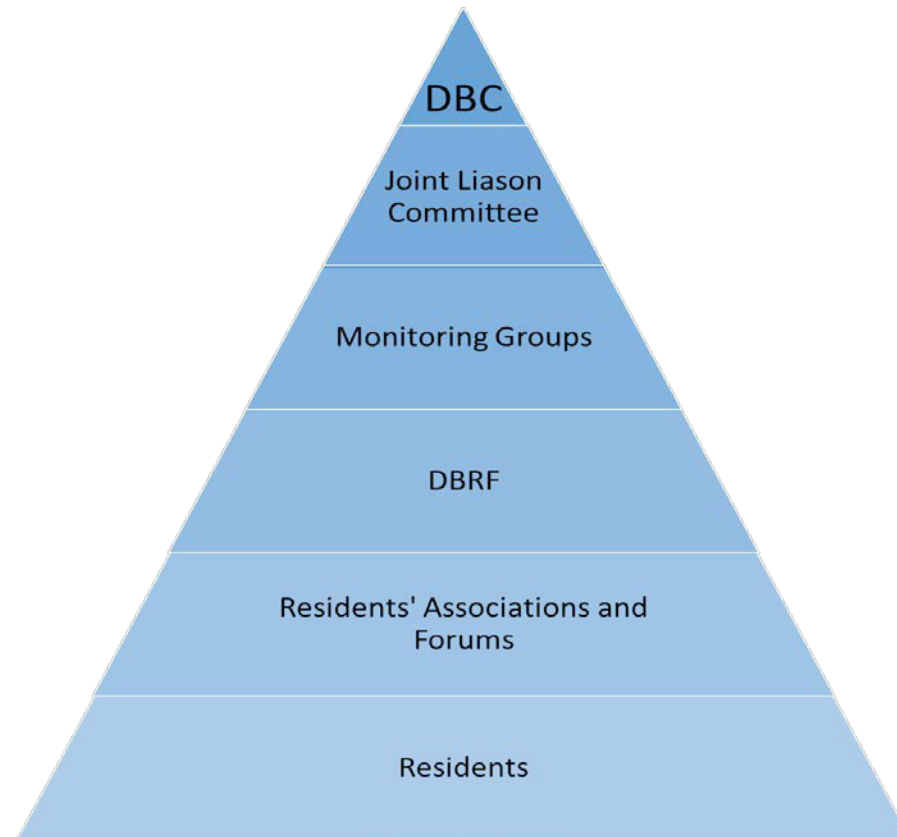
The Council will work to ensure that it consults with all residents regardless of their age, ethnicity, disability etc.

At times the Council will be requested by the government to consult specifically with under represented members of the community and when necessary the Council will seek to work in partnership with local community groups who are already providing a service to and have contact with the community.

This work will be carried out following guidance from the Corporate Policy Team.

The Resident Involvement Officer will continue to promote opportunities for involvement and further identify other ways for residents to get involved.

How does it all fit?



Monitoring the Agreement

The Agreement will be monitored every two years by the Dartford Borough Residents Forum Executive Committee in partnership with Dartford Borough Council and any other residents(s) who has expressed an interest resident involvement.

Any proposed amendments and feedback will be given to residents' borough wide using relevant media.