

working together



Tenants participation compact

Wiltshire Council

Where everybody matters



working together

Dear Tenants,

We are pleased to endorse this updated copy of Wiltshire Council's Tenant Participation Compact, which demonstrates our commitment to working closer together.

The ultimate aim of the compact is to encourage you to have a greater say in the way housing services are delivered and new opportunities for involvement. You will find in this compact an action plan showing you how we plan to improve tenant participation over the next three years, and a list of ways in which you can become active. We have also given you an indication of the level of involvement and a star rating to guide you on your time commitments if you wish to be involved.

This compact has been formally agreed with advice from the council's Tenants' Panel, the Sheltered Housing Forum and the Leaseholder Panel.

The compact is a constantly evolving document, which seeks to address effectively tenants' issues and representation. It will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that it is kept up-to-date and continues to deliver the level of involvement that you want.

Our thanks go to the enthusiastic and dedicated tenants and leaseholders, elected members, and staff whose efforts have produced this compact.

If you need to find out more information about tenant involvement, we have included a contact section, together with a list of publications and other organisations at the end of this document.

This compact is available in large print, Braille, audiotape and translations in other languages. Please contact us to request a copy.

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Our Vision

The council will promote and enhance its landlord services to the highest quality. This will provide value for money to tenants, with an assurance that all services will be delivered within the principles of 'Best Value'. Services will continue to improve, and where possible be responsive to tenants' needs. We aim to:

- agree common aims and goals;
- improve the quality of life;
- to preserve peace of mind;
- improve housing and other council services;
- support, promote and widen tenant participation;
- share values, be honest and open and work together to promote and enhance its landlord services.

What is this compact?

This compact is an agreement between Wiltshire Council and its tenants and leaseholders. It explains how the council and tenants and leaseholders are working together to ensure that tenants and leaseholders are involved in decisions affecting their homes and communities and how tenants and leaseholders can become involved. It sets out standards for ways of working together.

In this document 'tenants' means tenants and leaseholders, 'the council' means councillors and staff. Other terms used in this document are explained in the explanation of terminology at the end.

How was the compact produced?

A working group has been set up to monitor and review the compact. The working group has worked on reviewing and updating the compact using examples of good practice from other local authorities, and guidance documents from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) and the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

The compact is a working document, which will be reviewed annually by the compact working group.



What will the compact achieve?

The compact is designed to ensure that the council becomes more answerable to tenants, by letting tenants know who is responsible for decisions and how those decisions are made.

Tenants are being invited to get involved in housing related matters and to tell us their areas of concern. The council and tenants will work together to look at ways of measuring success, and find areas where performance can be improved.

What has the compact achieved?

Below are some examples of what the compact has achieved, which have come about as a direct result of the first compact:

- the setting up of a leaseholder panel;
- the setting up of a sheltered housing forum;

- the recruitment of more tenants and leaseholders to the Tenants' Panel, the Sheltered Housing Forum, and the Leaseholder Panel, to try and ensure that they are more representative of the areas they cover;
- development of the website for tenants to access information;
- increased training opportunities;
- contributions to Scrutiny and Best Value reviews;
- the review of relevant new policies before they are presented to Cabinet;
- involvement in relevant committee meetings;
- the agreement of a new Tenant Participation Strategy in 2009.

For details of improvements to tenant involvement over the next three years, go to the compact action plan 2009 – 2012 on page 15.



Making the compact work

A. The role of tenants

Tenants are encouraged to acknowledge their responsibility in playing their part in the compact, which is for the mutual benefit of the council and all tenants. Tenants can work towards the success of the compact by:

- abiding by their tenancy conditions and particularly those relating to anti-social behaviour;
- respecting the council in the performance of its duties;
- co-operating with and respecting the council's contractors who work on the council's behalf for our mutual benefit,

In addition to the above points every tenant has the right to:

- access relevant papers or background information (**excluding those of a confidential nature**), in order to make an informed decision on services provided for them;
- be involved in the decision-making process concerning housing related services, and working in partnership with the council;
- decide on what level or stage to become involved;
- have their views recorded to reflect a true, accurate measure of their needs and to ensure there are no misunderstandings;

- indicate at what level, stage, or by what method they wish to be consulted or involved regarding housing issues;
- establish a tenants group.

For further information on how you can become involved, at what level and the time commitment see 'options for involvement' on pages 6 & 7. If you would like further information on tenant involvement, or would like to contact the council's Tenant Participation Officer see contacts on page 18.

Remember that tenants have statutory and legal rights. One of the most important is the right to be consulted.





B. Tenant Participation

The Tenants' Panel has representation in the council's decision-making process and can comment on all housing-related reports prior to being presented for decision.

Tenants agreed the original structure for tenant involvement in 1996. As part of this review the structure has been updated to include the changes to the council's committee structure and the improvements to tenant involvement brought about by the compact. The formation of the Sheltered Housing Forum and Leaseholder Panel, both started in 2006, have given sheltered scheme tenants and leaseholders more influence.

The council and tenants support the principles of developing tenant involvement and consultation in ways that meet the needs of individual tenants and groups, consistent with government expectations.

Work will continue to examine new opportunities taking into account any costs to ensure that proposals are appropriate to the resources available.

In line with the Best Value principle of continuous improvement, an action plan has been put together outlining goals for achievement to develop and improve tenant involvement.

There are lots of ways and opportunities to become involved, from sharing views and information to meeting other tenants, attending focus groups, or going to council

committee meetings, these are shown below with an indication of the level of involvement and a star rating to guide you on the time commitment.

C. Options for involvement

The options	Level of involvement	
Conference and training events	Information Participation	★
Letters, leaflets, customer care, and cards and questionnaires	Information Consultation	★
Social events	Information	★
Focus groups	Information Participation	★
Information sharing sessions in sheltered housing	Information Consultation Participation	★
Review groups	Information Consultation Participation	★★
Estate inspections (walkabouts)	Participation	★
Individual sheltered housing scheme meetings	Information Participation	★
Sheltered Housing Forum	Information Consultation Participation	★★★
Leaseholder Panel	Information Consultation Participation	★★★
Tenants' Panel	Information Consultation Participation	★★★
Housing Matters	Information Consultation Participation	★★★
Neighbourhood Voice	Consultation Participation	★★

Star Rating



Low level of commitment

Letters, questionnaires, focus groups and occasional contact with tenants and the council



Medium level of commitment

Irregular meetings, and occasional contact with tenants and the council



High level of commitment

Regular meetings with tenants and the council

The options for involvement are a general guideline to your involvement. The council recognises that many may not want, or be able to get involved in the ways mentioned.

You can still get involved by:

- letter writing (see page 18 for address);
- telephone on 01722 434490;
- email on HSGMail@wiltshire.gov.uk;
- reading Housing Matters and contributing articles;
- completing surveys and questionnaires.

The level of involvement is a matter of individual choice

D. The councillor's role

Councillors are responsible and accountable for policy and strategic decisions and ensuring legal requirements are met.

A councillor will (either individually or through council systems):

- consult, communicate and address the needs of tenants when policies are amended and developed;
- be honest, listen and be non-judgmental when approached by tenants;
- provide feedback and information regarding any issue;
- be supportive, strengthening links with tenants to promote close understanding of local community issues and the implementation of the compact;
- support an equal opportunities policy.

E. The role of council staff

Council staff at every level will work to ensure the success of the compact by:

- constructively respond to tenants needs when developing and delivering housing services;
- developing better working relationships with tenants and leaseholders;
- working in a flexible way to adapt to the needs of tenants;
- allowing additional time, where possible, when tenants are being consulted on housing services and policies;
- arranging meetings and training events between tenants and the council to assist and help develop the relationship;
- arranging meetings at locations and times that will attract more tenants involvement;
- putting into action the policies of the council.

F. Equal opportunities

Some groups of people often do not get a chance to have their say. Everyone should have an equal opportunity to get involved. This includes older persons, younger residents, lone parents, residents of minority ethnic groups, people of both sexes and different sexual orientation, and people with disabilities. This compact is intended to encourage the involvement of these groups.

This involvement can be at a very local level, on the local estate, or on a wider level looking across all housing related services. It is a matter of individual choice.



Core standards

These are agreed levels of service or support. All tenants will have the opportunity to be involved in reviewing these standards and monitoring performance.

1. Support for tenants

The council recognises that it needs to make funds available from tenants' rents held in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to support and maintain tenant involvement. The tenant participation budget will make the following resources available in consultation with the Tenants' Panel:

- a new post of Tenant Community Development Officer to oversee the implementation of the Council's Tenant Participation Strategy agreed in 2009;
- a dedicated full-time Tenant Participation Officer to work with tenants and their representatives to encourage involvement;
- financial support for recognised tenant groups including an annual grant, and starting-up grant for new groups;
- facilities including the access to meeting rooms, photocopying and stationary;
- a reasonable payment for out-of-pocket expenses for attendance at meetings, which will include transport costs, for example bus fares, reimbursement of mileage to and from meetings and parking tariffs;

- access to support for typing and distributing meeting notes, agenda and local newsletters;
- access to an annual budget for:
 - ◆ books and publications;
 - ◆ room hire to hold meetings;
 - ◆ membership and free independent advice from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) as well as voluntary organisations and other public bodies;
 - ◆ a range of options available to encourage more tenants to get involved at levels to suit their needs and issues;
 - ◆ any other reasonable requests for support as agreed by the Tenant Participation Officer;
 - ◆ access to training identified by the council's Tenant Participation Officer.

2. Standards for information

The style and content of all written material should be easy to understand and available to everybody. If this is not the case, then tenants are encouraged to challenge this by either contacting the Chairman of the Tenants' Panel or the council. The same applies to verbal and visual presentations given.

All information about housing services will be in plain English, timely and relevant to tenants' needs. Individual tenants will receive information on issues that directly affect them. This information will be provided on request wherever possible in large print, other languages, Braille and audio-cassette.

The council will provide information on:

- housing management - including present and future capital works, for example major improvement works;
- housing strategies, policies and procedures, business plans, housing investment options;
- other relevant services;
- the council's Diversity and Equalities policy.

3. Standards for representatives

Tenants' Panel

The Tenants' Panel is a district wide tenant consultative forum, which is made up of 15 tenants, as well as individual tenant volunteers, councillors and council officers. They meet every six weeks and work in partnership with the council to improve the housing service for all tenants.

Sheltered Housing Forum

The Sheltered Housing Forum is a district wide consultative forum, which is made up of two nominated tenants from each of the councils 22 sheltered housing schemes. They meet every six weeks and work in partnership with the council to improve the housing service for all sheltered housing tenants.

Leaseholder Panel

The Leaseholder Panel is a district wide consultative forum, which is made up of 10 leaseholders. They meet four times a year and work in partnership with the council to improve council services provided for leaseholders.

Representatives must:

- be either a tenant or leaseholder of the council;
- be nominated at an AGM in April of each year, if eligible for re-election, representatives stand for a maximum of two years before having to stand for re-elected;
- comply with the council's confidentiality policy at all times;
- not use their position of influence to raise issues relating to their own tenancy or lease. These issues must be dealt with through the normal channels available to all tenants and leaseholders;
- attend a minimum number of meetings each year, and not be absent for more than three consecutive meetings.

The council will work in partnership with representatives and assist them in every possible way to help them achieve these standards.

4. Standards for tenants' groups

Support and encouragement will be provided to set up tenants' groups across the district, meeting the needs and interests of local people.

Tenants will be encouraged to make links with other tenant organisations or residents' groups on estates to share knowledge, allow wider consultation and jointly resolve common issues.

The current structure for involvement takes into account different levels of participation, and ensures a means for formal and informal groups and individual tenants to feed into the decision making process.

Where groups have a role in decision making, they should be able to show that as far as is reasonable they are democratic, accountable and must have the following:

- approved written constitution;
- democratic elections of officers (chairman, vice chairman and secretary);
- regular meetings which are minuted and published;
- a level of attendance, that demonstrates a commitment to involving local tenants.

5. Standards for meetings

Meetings are one way in which the council and tenants can share information and work together in the decision making process. Each meeting must:

- be publicised effectively and in good time;
- be organised at times and venues to suit most tenants;
- have an agenda giving details of what will be discussed at the meeting;
- have a chairman who conducts the meetings properly and ensures that all attendees have an opportunity to speak;
- have minutes or meeting notes, with a clear action plan to deal with any matters arising.
- keep to the rules of conduct for the meeting

If you are interested in setting up a tenants group but are finding it difficult to meet any of the standards, please contact the council's Tenant Participation Officer who can give you advice on:

- organising your meetings;
- producing agendas and minutes;
- help with publicising your meetings;
- advertising your group in the council's housing magazine 'Housing Matters'.

These are just a few ways in which help and support is available. For other ways see 'Support for Tenants' on page 9.

6. Standards for housing services

Tenants can play an important role in the delivery and improvements to the housing service, and will be consulted and involved in the decision making process in the following areas:

- developing the councils housing policy and strategy, including identifying and appraising investment options, monitoring and review;
- management of housing services
- advising on priorities for the council's capital and renovation programmes;
- budgeting and finance;
- council services and performance strategies, and the arrangement for monitoring and reviewing council performance;
- repairs, maintenance, rent collection and voids;
- developing and implementing regeneration and improvement programmes;
- anti-social behaviour polices;
- tenancy conditions and agreements;
- housing benefit advice and debt recovery procedures;
- leaseholder issues and charges;
- sheltered housing service;
- allocations and letting policies;
- equalities policies, including race equality policies and policies on racial harassment;
- customer care;
- arrangements for providing information, for tenant consultation and involvement;
- neighbourhood issues which affect tenants' homes or the management of the housing service;
- environmental works.



7. Standards for monitoring performance

The compact and the action plan set out the aspirations and targets for tenant involvement. For tenant involvement to work it is necessary to monitor, evaluate and measure its success. This can be achieved by use of national and local performance indicators.

The performance indicators used to measure the success and effectiveness of the compact and tenant involvement are as follows:

- satisfaction of all tenants with the overall services provided;
- satisfaction of all tenants with opportunities for participation in management and decision making;
- satisfaction with the repairs service, advice on rent and getting a move, and how the council deals with problems associated with nuisance and anti-social behaviour.

As part of our commitment to continual improvement a postal survey will be sent to tenants, which will include the above indicators. This survey will be carried out a minimum of every three years in accordance with government guidelines and the results will be fed back to all tenants using Housing Matters (the councils housing magazine).

In addition to national performance indicators there are a number of other ways to monitor the compact and tenant involvement.

These are:

- setting clear standards and targets for tenant consultation and involvement;
- formal consultation and survey of tenants;
- monitoring and assessing the outcome of consultation and surveys to find out whether or not change has resulted;
- assess performance against other similar local authorities.



Monitoring and dealing with complaints and disputes

If you feel the need to complain please see the council's complaints procedure leaflet, which is available at all council offices or visit the council's website at **www.wiltshire.gov.uk**

What should you do if you have a complaint?

If the matter is reasonably simple you may choose to contact us by telephone. If you feel the matter is too complicated, we will ask you to put the details in writing. You can do this by letter, email or using the 'the council's complaint system' form. If you would like some assistance to complete the form, please contact our customer services department, who will be happy to assist you.

If you feel you would like independent help, you can contact the 'Citizens Advice Bureau', their telephone number is **01722 327 222** in Salisbury or **01980 622 696** in Amesbury.

Alternatively you may wish to contact the South Wiltshire Advocacy Network (SWAN), 26 Milford Street, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 2AP tel. **01722 341 851**.

You may also contact the Council via our website at **www.wiltshire.gov.uk**

What happens once you have contacted us?

If you choose to write to us, you can expect a full response within 15 working days. If for some reason we cannot do this, we will send you an acknowledgement, and we will let you know who will be dealing with the issue.

If you contact us by email or through the website, you will be sent an automated acknowledgement of receipt.

If you have received our full response and are still not satisfied, you can make a second stage appeal to the Corporate Complaints Team.

If you are still not satisfied after this point, you can complain to the local government ombudsman's office. This is an independent organisation set up specifically to look at whether or not councils have followed their procedures and whether any injustice has been caused.

Our customer services staff will be able to provide you with details of how to contact the ombudsman.

Before you take a matter to the ombudsman, you must give the council the opportunity to deal with it.

Compact Action Plan 2009 – 2012

Objectives	Action	Target date	Responsibility
Improve overall participation	To help implement the new Tenant Participation Strategy	2009	Tenant Community Development Officer
Tenant involvement information to new tenants	Implement a new tenant letter/survey for welcome pack	2009	Tenant Participation Officer
Tenant Training	Assess training needs and organise sessions as appropriate	On going	Tenant Participation Officer
Information Display	Improve information display in housing reception	2009	Tenant Participation Officer
Housing Matters	Produce magazine quarterly and involve tenant volunteers as editorial assistants and pilot an Editorial Panel	Quarterly	Tenant Participation Officer
Annual report	To be included in the December edition of Housing Matters	Annually	Tenant Participation Officer
Out of pocket expenses for attendance at meetings	Review transport arrangements and mileage allowance	Annually	Tenant Participation Officer
Tenants handbook	Review tenants handbook and identify areas that need updating	2009	Tenant Participation Officer

Objectives	Action	Target date	Responsibility
Develop a benchmarking group with other neighbouring local authorities and housing associations to share information, best practice and training opportunities	Establish regular meetings	2009	Tenant Participation Officer
Involvement Register	To establish a new Involvement Register of tenants volunteering to participate	2009	Tenant Participation Officer
Pilot Neighbourhood Voice	To initiate pilot schemes	2009	Tenant Participation Officer
Estate Walkabouts	To initiate pilots for one estate and one rural location	2009	Tenant Participation Officer
Mystery Shopping	To set up systems to monitor the standard of housing services	2010	Tenant Participation Officer
Improved written communication	To investigate Plain Speaking Campaign/crystal mark	2010	Tenant Participation Officer
Use of mobile phone technology	To pilot the use of mobile phones for communication by text	2010	Tenant Participation Officer

Objectives	Action	Target date	Responsibility
Induction pack for new representatives	Develop an induction pack welcoming new members and explaining their roles and responsibilities	2009	Tenant Participation Officer
Tenants web page	Review web pages to ensure the information to tenants and leaseholders is current and publicises the roles of the groups	2009-10	Tenant Participation Officer
Review Tenants Compact	Annual review and improvements, via the Compact Working Group	Annually	Tenant Participation Officer + Working group
TPAS membership	Annually review the current membership arrangements to ensure that the council and tenants are getting value for money and tenants are receiving independent advice	Annually	Tenant Participation Officer
Tenant recruitment campaign	Organise a campaign to provide greater publicity for tenant/leaseholder groups, to raise their profile and help set up new groups	On going	Tenant Participation Officer
Area Forums	Set up a pilot scheme in Amesbury and the Friary	2009-12	Tenant Participation Officer
Focus groups and telephone surveys	Recruit members of the community from hard-to-reach groups, for formal consultation on housing related matters.	On going	Tenant Participation Officer
To review the structures for participation	To review the structure of the Tenants' Panel, Sheltered Housing Forum and Leaseholder Panel	2009-10	Tenant Community Development Officer

Contacts and other organisations

Tenant Participation Officer

Wiltshire Council
26 Endless Street, Salisbury
Wiltshire SP1 1DR

Tel: 01722 434490

Fax: 01722 434386

email: HSGMail@wiltshire.gov.uk

Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS)

5th Floor
Trafford House, Chester Road
Manchester M32 0RS

Tel : 0161 8683500

Email: info@tpas.org.uk

Website: www.tpas.org.uk

TPAS also provide a free phone advice line for tenants providing independent advice and information on all aspects of tenant involvement. Salisbury District Council is a full member of TPAS and tenants are entitled to make full use of the services they offer. Visit their website for up-to-date information on training, conferences and information sheets to download.

TPAS Freephone advice line **0500 855111**.

Tenant and Resident Organisation of England (TAROE)

41 – 42 Estate Building
Railway Street
Huddersfield HD1 1JY

Tel: 01484 223466

Website: www.taroe.org



National Tenants Resource Centre

Trafford Hall
Ince Lane, Wimbolds
Trafford
Chester CH2 4JP

Tel: 01244 300246

Website: www.traffordhall.com

Funded by the Government this independent organisation offers a wide range of useful and informative residential courses to help tenants become actively involved in their estates and communities.

Government Office for the South West

2 Rivergate
Temple Quay
Bristol BS1 6EH

Tel: 0117 900 1700

Email: swcontactus@gosw.gsi.gov.uk

Tenant Services Authority

Enquiries Team, 2nd Floor, Lateral, 8
City Walk, Leeds LS11 9AT

Tel: 0845 230 7000

Explanation of terminology – What does it all mean?

Best Value

A duty to deliver services to clear standards – covering both cost and quality – by the most economic, efficient and effective means available.

Councillors (elected members)

People elected to serve on the council to represent defined wards.

Core standards

An agreed level of service or support that tenants and staff are guided by.

Capacity building

Empowering tenants to develop themselves and their tenants' association in order to fulfil their aims and objectives.

Compact

The tenant participation compact is a written agreement between local authorities and its tenants to identify how participation in housing and other services will occur and the support provided to enable it to happen.

DCLG

Department for Communities and Local Government – responsible for housing.

Focus groups

One off sessions of small gatherings of tenants designed to gather information on specific issues. Meetings usually last between one and two hours.

Housing management

A range of housing related services, including rent arrears and estate management.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

Housing Revenue Account is the council account into which rents and any money from the Government is paid. It pays for repairs, managing and maintaining the housing stock and staffing costs.

Housing subsidy

Money paid to the government from local authorities Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

Housing Matters

A magazine produced by Wiltshire Council's housing department, containing news and information for tenants and their families.

Leaseholders

Tenants who live in flats and maisonettes bought from the council.

NI

National Indicator – two hundred key performance areas for local authorities chosen to improve the quality of peoples' lives.

PEP

Priority Estate Project is a tenant participation training and consultative organisation.

Planned maintenance

This refers to repairs and improvements that are planned ahead (i.e. not responsive repairs). They may be part of a rolling programme, e.g. painting exteriors.

Secure tenancy

This is the legal agreement between local authorities and their tenants describing their rights and obligations.

Sheltered accommodation

Sheltered accommodation housing for elderly people who require some support, which includes visits from a Housing Support Officer.

Tenants' panel

Wiltshire Councils Tenants' Panel is an elected group of tenants.

Tenant participation

A range of activities for tenant and landlord liaison including information giving, consultation, involvement in decision-making and the right to manage; also specific to tenant involvement in decision-making.

Tenant participation officer

An officer with responsibility for developing and implementing the councils' tenant participation strategy, as well as encouraging and supporting tenant involvement within Wiltshire.

TPAS

The Tenant Participation Advisory Service is a training, advice and consultancy agency.

TSA

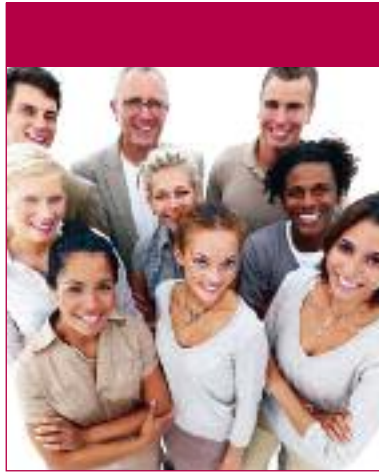
Tenant Services Authority – the body responsible for the regulation of social landlords.

Void

An empty property.







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Information about Wiltshire Council services can be made available in other formats (such as large print or audio) and languages on request.

Please contact the council on 0300 456 0100, by textphone on (01225) 712500 or by email on customerservices@wiltshire.gov.uk

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