

Case Study - Tenant Participation

Dartford Tenants are playing a more active role in the management of their homes and communities following the introduction of the Tenant Participation Compact in April 2000 and the subsequent creation of a Borough-wide Residents Forum.

The Compact was drawn up following consultation with residents through seminars, workshops and meetings. It was signed by chairs of the five Residents' Associations, local ward Councillors and the Head of Housing Services. It formalises the relationship between Dartford Borough Council and its tenants and sets out roles and responsibilities, the scope and methods of consultation together with standards, priorities and recognition criteria. It also forms the basis of a valuable consultation forum for all sorts of issues within the community including the design and quality of Council services such as repairs within homes, grounds maintenance or the design of play areas.

In its first year the Compact priorities were to ensure tenant involvement in the Best Value review of Housing; develop ways for tenants to participate in monitoring the performance of housing services and developing relationships between tenants, Councillors and Officers.

Through the Tenant Participation Advisory Service, members of the Residents Forum and Council officers have undertaken training in a range of issues including:

- Planned Maintenance
- Decent Homes Standard
- Antisocial Behaviour
- Community Safety

As a result many residents have become more actively involved in their communities - two are now involved in the Stone Community Safety focus group and another took the lead in contacting residents of Claywood Lane (see below). This process also works in reverse. For instance active members of the Tree Community Forum and Advocacy Network now attend the Tenants' Forum.

Forum successes

The Residents Forum was actively involved in the design and development of Dartford's unique "Talking Trailer". Launched in May 2002 with the primary aim of maximising tenant participation the trailer provides a physical presence in areas of the Borough that are hard to reach. The trailer is not only used for housing issues, but a whole range of consultation initiatives and policy launches.

Forum members were actively involved in improving the environment for residents of the Claywood Lane Gypsy Caravan site, a marginalised community with poor access and no mains drainage or electricity supply. The Chair of the Forum visited the site and took the issues up with the Council's repairs and housing manager, which led to repairs to the road and a bid to the ODPM for a Gypsy Sites Refurbishment Grant to cover drainage and other services to the site.

Tenants were involved in developing the styles of new kitchens. Three firms tendered for the contract and tenant representatives attended presentations by each of them. They also formed part of the interview panel to award the contract.

Dartford Council's nuisance information leaflet was developed by a working party of the Tenants Forum. Tenants reported back from two workshops, identifying and prioritising the main types of nuisance. This formed the text for the new leaflets which are a statement of intent by Dartford Council.

Tenant delegates helped monitor problems with day-to-day house repairs leading to the appointment of a new contractor to carry out work to empty properties. Originally one contractor was responsible for all day to day repairs, including those to empty properties. The change has speeded up the re-housing of applicants from the Council's waiting list.