

Resident Involvement Agreement 2013-2018



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Executive Summary

The Resident Involvement Agreement 2013/18, is the first update of the 2008 Agreement that introduced major changes to the way the Council involved people in its housing services.

The agreement is for its housing tenants, leaseholders and shared owners but also for residents who are in housing need or live in areas where the Council is / or was the major landlord.

It outlines the way the way the Housing Service is organised and describes its approach to equalities and fairness.

As before, the agreement is clear about the reasons for involving residents. It recognises that we need to listen to their concerns and act on what they say, especially about the condition of their home and the immediate neighbourhood. It outlines how the Council makes its decisions and describes the resources, which the Housing Service puts into resident involvement.

The key features of the new agreement are:

- a refreshed 'menu' of involvement options,
- a clearer focus on equalities,
- a new approach to regulatory requirements embracing 'co-regulation' and tenant scrutiny,
- The introduction of employment as an involvement theme.

It identifies five involvement themes:

- Improving customer service and satisfaction,
- Improving how residents can help manage, direct and scrutinise the housing service,
- Improving the local area,
- Increasing involvement in the local community,
- NEW - Develop the skills and confidence of individuals and link this to improving employment prospects for residents.

Regulation is addressed by a new Tenant Scrutiny Panel to enable tenants to drill into performance and Value for Money and the new Tenant Complaints Panel both of which are responses to the co-regulation environment established by the Localism Act.

The big changes on involvement are:

- a new Estates Group to monitor housing management in response to people's concerns about their immediate environment.
- A new way of working with Residents Associations to link their funding to performance We think this is any important Value for Money issue. To support this the Agreement outlines the Local Standards on Involvement and Empowerment.



Introduction

This is the new Milton Keynes Council Housing Service Resident Involvement Agreement 2013. It builds on the 2008 Agreement, which aimed for greater inclusion and informality in the way the Housing Service involves its customers. It has been developed in partnership with tenants and other residents.

This new version recognises a changing context. Locally, the Council is moving to neighbourhood regeneration over the period of the Agreement so we will need effective communications with our community and our approach is to refocus our resources on supporting and developing local associations and groups.

Regeneration is about people not just buildings, so the agreement has a new involvement theme: Individual Skills and Confidence, designed to help people become better off through getting a job and making communities better as a result.

The agreement also takes into account the national shift to co-regulation by introducing new activity on tenant scrutiny and involvement in complaints, under the Localism Act 2011.

Who is the Resident Involvement Agreement for?

The agreement is for all residents of Milton Keynes who rely on or are affected by the housing service.

Tenants of the Council are at the heart of the agreement because they are the people who use the service most frequently and who have a direct relationship with the Council through their tenancy agreement.

We also recognise that some groups have different needs so we work with and listen to interest groups such as:

- People living in areas where the council is / was the majority owner and provider of housing,
- People using the Housing Option Service,
- Private tenants of properties that the council has access to as part of its' Housing Options work,
- Communities of interest such as ethnicity, faith, gender, age, sexuality and disability.

How does the Housing Service work?

Housing is part of the Council's Housing and Community Group, which also includes Regeneration, Community Safety and Regulatory Services. It is organised into five broad areas.

Housing Maintenance

The Council maintains and improves its homes through external contractors. Responsive repairs are handled by MITIE and gas safety checks and repairs by Wheldons. A range of contractors carries out major works programmes such as window replacement or structural works.

Housing Management

The Council directly delivers housing management service through a team that is based at the main Council offices but includes on site Caretakers and Cleaners. This role includes day-to-day management (e.g. letting empty properties, collecting rents and recovering debt) and maintenance of homes, communal areas and structures (e.g. door entry systems in flats).



Housing Options

The Housing team helps people in housing need to find a home. They work very closely with private landlords and housing associations to help applicants find a home. We do not have a housing waiting list – everyone who contacts us is seen on an individual basis and their needs are assessed. Appropriate advice and assistance is then offered according to individual circumstances.

Private Sector Housing

The private rented sector is a rapidly growing part of the Milton Keynes housing market and is important in meeting housing need. The Council has to apply the Health and Safety Rating System and have a Private Sector Housing Strategy. We have introduced a Landlord Accreditation Scheme, which gives the 'seal of approval' to private landlords working to a high standard in the borough.

Housing Strategy

Working directly with others to make the Milton Keynes housing market as effective as it can be for a growing city and a strong economy.

Paying for the Housing Service

Managing and maintaining Council homes are paid for by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The HRA is made up of income from rents and charges and interest from reserves. This account is 'ring-fenced' which means the money can only be spent on council housing. Housing finance arrangements changed in April 2012 to allow councils to keep all of their rental income. This means we have more control over how we spend our resources.

A housing service for all

We have looked at issues around equality & fairness again.

They are the basis of this Agreement. They require everyone to have fair access to the resources and benefits of the service. In particular, as part of this agreement, the council will ensure that:

- Unfair treatment is eliminated by ensuring satisfaction from different sections of the community are of a similar level.
- All residents have an equal opportunity to participate and be involved, which may mean supporting residents who are under-represented.
- Good community relations are fostered by encouraging residents to engage with one another and build respect.

In particular, a person's age, disability or ethnicity could be the source of them being excluded from being part of their Housing Service. Monitoring how people are involved or levels of satisfaction can help in identifying issues, needs and dissatisfaction. For example:

- When those with a disability (and maybe a particular disability such as someone who is blind) are more dissatisfied with how service information is being designed.
- When those who are from a "White British" or "Black British" background (according to the census classification) are more dissatisfied with the neighbourhood changes.
- When younger or older people are not represented in focus groups.

We rely on the information that residents confidentially provide and can lead to improvements for everyone. For example:

- Better communications from the Housing Service,
- More people become happy with changes in their neighbourhoods,
- A wider sharing of issues and the management of resources,
- Improved community spirit after residents work together,
- Better design of local projects after input from residents.

Why involve residents?

The Council's Housing Strategy 2012 sets out the housing challenges for Milton Keynes. The strategy states that to meet the challenges the council will work in partnership. This agreement outlines how residents can be a part of this partnership. Residents can be:

- Advisors and consultants, share views and influence the decision making process.
- Challengers and scrutinisers; join groups to challenge the housing service, its cost and services.
- Community ambassadors; pointing out issues, welcoming people new to the area, developing community spirit and sharing advice and help.

Resident involvement tries to make it easy for you to have a say and to improve the service and where you live.

What do tenants and residents say?

You said...

This agreement is based on the views of tenants and residents given over a number of years.

Large-scale tenant satisfaction surveys in 2008 and 2011 have told us how people like to be involved and where we need to do better.

The results of more specific public consultations about resident involvement in 2007 and 2012 have also helped to shape the way we do things.

The key themes that emerged are:

- Around half of tenants feel that the Council give them the opportunity to make their views known.
- Tenants often feel that we listen to them but we do not act on what they tell us.
- Repairs are the subject of interest to most tenants and are a 'key driver' of satisfaction.
- People are also very concerned about the maintenance of the local environment.
- Most people like to give their views by post or survey.

- Meetings are the least popular way of being kept informed.
- Just over half of tenants have access to the internet.
- The service could improve most by talking directly to tenants, listening more and by keeping information up to date.
- Resident groups should be used more to improve the community and the Council should come out to local people in the areas they live in.

Improving service delivery in these areas will therefore have a positive impact on how tenants feel the council listens to their views and acts on them.

We did...

We have used these views to shape the way we will focus our resources to try to involve people. In this agreement we have described the different ways in which people can get involved.

- Develop more local resident associations.
- Help existing associations focus on meeting resident's needs.
- Make sure they are run properly and that the funding they get is directed to meeting the needs of all residents, including Council tenants, and the Council.
- Set up a Housing Management Group and a Cleaning Network to look at how we can improve the local environment.
- Use new technology and social networking.
- Develop better survey tools to get peoples views on key decisions.



Principles and Themes of resident involvement

Principles

We have used residents view to establish following principles:

- Improved engagement, by both residents and council; with one another and with the wider community.
- Shaping the local area and fostering good community relations.
- Acknowledging the expertise of tenants and residents in developing and designing solutions and service improvements is crucial to meeting their needs.

Themes

We involve residents to bring improvements to five themes which residents have told us are important to them:

- ✓ Measuring customer service and satisfaction.
- ✓ Scrutinising the value for money housing service.
- ✓ The quality of local area.
- ✓ Involvement in the local community.
- ✓ NEW - Developing the skills and confidence.

Developing skills and confidence

This new theme recognises that voluntary involvement skills are transferable to the workplace.

As well as making you individually better off an economically active community is a better place to live. Residents living in areas of high employment experience less domestic violence; less anti-social behaviour; have fewer childcare problems; have better diets and live longer.

The council is promoting employment through Job Clubs and training.

We are asking resident groups to promote them. Meetings and fun-days provide an opportunity for residents to promote similar initiatives. Speakers and promotional materials are available to support groups.

The Council is developing a training accreditation scheme that recognises and values the training that we provide in a formal way. This can be used positively in application forms and CVs to enhance an individual's chance of employment.



How can residents influence council decisions?

The Council's Decision Making

The Council will listen to the views of residents when changing the housing service in order to:

- Shape and improve services;
- Make better quality investment decisions;
- Widen involvement to include 'hard to reach' groups;
- Develop neighbourhoods and communities, which are welcoming to all and where people want to settle.

The Council's normal process of delegation continues to apply, so decisions are made either by the Cabinet or delegated to the Assistant Director Housing in consultation with the Cabinet Member.

Key Decisions

Where a key decision is to be taken by Cabinet, a formal consultation exercise will be held which will include formal and informal groups covered by the Agreement. This will cover budget priorities, major policy or operational changes.

Day-to-day Decisions

The Assistant Director develops operational services unless a key decision is required. The Council may seek the views of residents to validate these changes or they can be considered by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

Where this relates only to Housing Revenue Account or specific local issues it will limit its consultation to tenants.

All formal or informal groups covered by the Agreement are consultative and advisory. They have the ability to feed in views and influence the decision making process.

The new Tenants Housing Scrutiny Panel (see below) has additional powers to guarantee that its recommendations are thoroughly considered at all levels in the organisation.

Resident Routes

Tenant Scrutiny (NEW)

The Tenants Housing Scrutiny Panel begins its work in 2013. It will closely examine, challenge and scrutinise specific council housing services.

The panel will make recommendations for service improvement following a period of investigation. These recommendations are made to the Assistant Director Housing & Community. If the Panel are unhappy with Assistant Directors response they can set out their concerns directly to:

- The Councillor with the portfolio for housing;
- The relevant Council scrutiny committee;
- The Cabinet;
- Internal Audit.

The Tenants Complaints Panel (NEW)

The Tenants Complaints Panel can review those complaints that are unresolved beyond stage two of the council's procedure.

Volunteer tenants have come forward and have received some information and training to support their role. After deliberations, which can be a desktop review or a meeting with the complainant, the Panel will decide on a course of action.



Other Ways to have a say

- **Milton Keynes Council**

Residents can contact local MKC Councillors to get their views across and raise issue about housing.

- **Parish, Community and Town Councils**

Milton Keynes Council works with Parish, Town, Community and Neighbourhood Councils to promote consultation appropriate to the nature and impact of proposals.

The relationship is governed by a Parishes' Protocol.

A maximum timeframe for consultation is set at 12 weeks but it could be as short as two weeks. Short periods can be used so long as a clear explanations and a rationale is given.

- **The Internet**

Milton Keynes Council promotes and encourages consultation through a specific consultation webpage. Details of proposed significant changes to policy or practice are provided here and the public are asked to give their views within a specified timescale (usually 90 days).

The Housing Service recognises that this is a useful tool for generating feedback on proposals and that it is an accepted part of the council's formal procedures. There are limitations and risks in relying solely on web based consultation, particularly within the housing service where just under half of tenants do not have access to the internet (STAR survey 2011).

You said, we did

The housing service wants to encourage consultation responses from as many residents as possible. Residents have made it clear that web-based consultation is not sufficient. The housing team will therefore take additional steps beyond web-based consultation in order to encourage responses to 'formal' consultations. The Resident Involvement team will be the 'sounding board' for any housing related consultation. Depending on the nature of the consultation and the audience the Resident Involvement team will recommend a range of options, such as:

- Resident focus groups
- Using the Tenants Voice Group
- Using 'MK@Home' and the 'Resident Involvement newsletter'
- Briefing local resident association at their meetings
- Convening specific meetings
- Using the existing open meetings (MKC Tenants group and the Housing Services Forum)

The Resident Involvement team will offer advice and support to all staff carrying out consultations.



Resources provided by the council

The council will provide appropriate resources and focus on increasing meaningful involvement.

Resident Involvement budget

£176,000 from the HRA pays for two dedicated posts, surveys, tenant training, transport, meeting costs and other involvement initiatives, support grants to associations and conference costs.

The General Fund contributes to resident involvement to reflect that the teams work is not just focused on tenants but also includes community development across all tenures.

Grants to Residents Associations (that include tenants)

Support Grants are for running costs, which include things like hall hire and printing costs to advertise meetings.

Grants are assessed on a three-tier approach; each tier qualifies the Association for more money and to enable them to move on to the next level.

1. The amount of Council tenants in their designated area.
2. Whether they have the MKC approved constitution.
3. the work they have done in their community, based on the following criteria – consultation; employment, communication, achievements, transparency, development of the association and future plans.

The highest grant paid in 2013-2014 was £525 and the lowest was £50.

Staffing

- Two full time Resident Involvement posts Resident Involvement Manager and Resident Involvement Officer.
- Housing Officers provide an identified contact for Resident Associations.
- Building Services support the Building Services Tenants Group.

Training for Residents

Residents need skills and knowledge to contribute to service improvement and to help them to make communities good place to live. Training also contributes to getting a job.

There is a training budget of £11,000 per year. Tenant attendance at some housing conferences is also supported.

• Skills to help people to get involved

Tenants and residents who are active in their communities and who are likely to be part of the local community group can access a range of skills training to help them.

Some examples of training available are:

- Chaining skills,
- Designing and producing a newsletter for your community,
- Representing your community,
- Treasurers skills,
- Setting up a website for your group.

When new groups are set up or a new committee is elected at an AGM they will be encouraged to attend training to fill any 'skill gaps'. These training needs can be identified at any time but will be formally reviewed at the annual 'health-check' carried out by the Resident Involvement Team.

Training is usually provided by local suppliers such as Community Action MK or Adult Continuing Education.

Residents are also encouraged to take up specialised skills training to help them develop in their roles. such as the Building Services Tenants Group or the Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

- **'Life-skills' for all**

We want to encourage all our tenants to enjoy their home and to live in thriving and stable communities. We therefore use some of the training resource to develop skills such as:

- Household budgeting
- Gardening
- DIY and decorating
- Healthy eating

Providing these sessions also helps us to encourage attendees to get involved in other ways.

All the courses and training opportunities that we provide are assessed for their impact and effectiveness both directly after the event and some time later in order to find out whether the new skills are being used.

All training is free. Reasonable expenses, including subsistence and travel, are paid. Residents attending training are expected to pass on their skills and knowledge to others.



Measuring Success

Local Standards

On 1 April 2011 we introduced standards to measure the quality of housing services such as tenant involvement, the quality of the repairs service, how we deal with nuisance and treating everyone fairly and with respect.

We set the standards after a long consultation period. After two years of working with these Standards we feel it is time to review them to make sure they are still relevant and useful.

Tenants and staff 'refreshed' the standards, which were launched on 1 April 2013. The Standards for Involvement and Empowerment will form an integral part of this Resident Involvement Agreement and are described below.

What are the Standards used for?

The Standards set a level of service that the council and tenants think is acceptable and that meets people's needs. We have collected performance data against these Standards and the full results of the first year of performance measurement can be found in the

Annual Report 2012:

http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/resident-involvement/documents/Housing_Annual_Report_2012.pdf

Involvement and Empowerment standards

YOUR LOCAL STANDARDS	HOW WE WILL MEASURE THIS
We will tell you about events, services & how you can get involved & what we are doing. We will use our website (including Facebook), direct mailing, MK@Home, open meetings, direct e-mails, Twitter, and our regular monthly newsletter to involved tenants.	Articles in MK@Home, keep the internet up to date, monthly newsletters to 'involved' tenants.
We will consult you about any major changes to the service. We will hold eight open meetings a year four of which are for council tenants, shared owners and leaseholders and four are for anyone in MK who has an interest in housing issues. We will ask our Tenants Voice group twice a year about specific services.	Number of meetings held and surveys carried out.
We will support tenant involvement in decision-making. We will provide opportunities for tenants to get involved in setting the aims and objectives for the service and in the delivery of the repairs & maintenance service.	Number of meetings held.
We will hold four Performance meetings a year when tenants can look at housing performance.	Number of meetings held.
We will support the Tenant Scrutiny Group and help them achieve their objectives.	Number of 'scrutinies' completed

Involvement and Empowerment standards

YOUR LOCAL STANDARDS	HOW WE WILL MEASURE THIS
<p>We will give you help, advice and support so that you can get involved easily and effectively. This support will be through training (which can be tailored to your particular needs), access to other resources (such as PCs and other equipment) and dedicated staff time.</p>	<p>The number of training courses provided.</p>
<p>We will support local residents associations to improve their local area and to have a say about the housing service. This support will be through grants, training, access to other resources (a list of what is available can be obtained from the Resident Involvement team) and dedicated staff time.</p>	<p>Satisfaction of association with the support provided, measured by a survey.</p>

Details of all the standards and how we have performed can be found at:

http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/resident-involvement/documents/Housing_Annual_Report_2012.pdf

If you would like a paper copy please contact the Resident Involvement Team.



How you can make a difference

The table below shows some examples of how you can get involved in improving your neighbourhood or local community. It also shows how you can challenge, scrutinise & influence the overall housing service. The different ways of getting involved are described in the next section.

Objective	What It's About	Examples of What You Might Do	By Getting Involved With
Improving the quality of the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looking at parts of the housing service to find ways of delivering them, which are better for residents and give better value. Finding ways in which we can go the extra mile for people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Join the Tenants Scrutiny Group to examine a particular service in detail & recommend changes. Give your feedback about a service you have experienced e.g. neighbour nuisance. Learn about how repair contractors deliver the service. Find out about how services may change in the future & give your views. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenants Voice Building Services Tenants Group Leaseholders On Line Shared Owners On-line MKC Tenants Group Your individual feedback on the service you received Tenants / Residents Associations
Managing, scrutinising and directing the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking an overview of how well the council is delivering the housing service. Seeing if it is putting the resources in the right place to meet residents needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look at housing performance and costs across the service. Recommend areas for close investigation. Give comments on the housing service plan for the year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responding to surveys about major changes, which are being planned. The Tenants Housing Scrutiny Panel The MKC Tenants Group
Improving the area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looking after & improving the place where you live. Looking at problems on estates & working with others to get these resolved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walk around your area and tell us about problems. You can also tell your resident group about them. Join a resident association Get involved in a community clean up Become a cleaning inspector for your block 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents Associations / community groups Parish and Town Council Neighbourhood Action Groups
Increasing involvement in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting to know other people who live in the neighbourhood Making the place you live feel more neighbourly and safe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a welcome to people new to the area Give advice or practical help to people about gardening or decorating Take part in local events such as fun days and fetes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents Associations / community groups Parish and Town Council Neighbourhood Watch Neighbourhood Action Groups
Developing the skills and confidence of individual residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn new skills to help you in the job market. Getting involved can boost your self-confidence and help you to make a positive impact on employers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go on a training course Take part in service 'scrutiny' Join the committee of your local group Write a newsletter for your community Set up a website for your group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Tenants Housing Scrutiny Panel Going to a housing conference Going on a course

Actions and Outcomes

Action Plan 2013/14

Action plans for subsequent years can be found on the website or by contacting the Resident Involvement Team.

Activity Date	Start Date	Completion	Owner	Key actions	Outcomes
1. Increase networking activity with other social housing providers, particularly in relation to regeneration	1 April 2013	30 March 2014	Resident Involvement Officer	Attend quarterly meetings of the local networking group. Feedback to colleagues after the discussion Introduce appropriate new initiatives based on good practice.	An improved service for residents Increased awareness of good practice elsewhere Improved performance by sharing ideas and discussing problems with others.
2. Introduce a structured training approach for Resident Associations that links to recognised accreditation & therefore improved employment prospects.	1 July 2013	31 December 2013	Resident Involvement Officer	Research best practice elsewhere. Liaise with local training / education providers. Prepare a proposal. Discuss proposal with staff and residents. Launch scheme.	Improve the employment prospects & life skills of residents.
3. Embed new Housing Officer / Resident Association liaison arrangements and review effectiveness of Building Services/RA liaison.	1 April 2013	2 September 2013	Resident Involvement Officer	Develop work with staff and resident groups to improve relationships & communication. Hold regular meetings with staff. Embed liaison arrangements.	Improve the service to local resident groups to ensure their sustainability and effectiveness in the community.
4. Increase leaseholder involvement.	1 April 2013	2 September 2013	Resident Involvement Officer	Refresh the leaseholders' on-line group. Hold one open meeting a year for all leaseholders.	Leaseholders have improved opportunities to shape & improve the service they receive.

Action Plan 2013/14 continued

Activity Date	Start Date	Completion	Owner	Key actions	Outcomes
5. Review how new technologies can increase involvement & implement findings.	1 April 2013	2 September 2013	Resident Involvement Officer	<p>Research best practice.</p> <p>Liaise with ICT colleagues to discuss problems & solutions.</p> <p>Make proposal & discuss with staff & residents.</p> <p>Launch initiative.</p>	Increase resident participation.
6. Establish a Housing Management sounding board/focus group.	1 July 2013	31 December 2013	Resident Involvement Officer	<p>Convene a meeting of tenants interested in reviewing services such as communal cleaning, anti-social behaviour, etc.</p> <p>Establish terms of reference & a programme for the year.</p>	Increase resident involvement in order to improve the quality of the housing management service.
7. Involve residents of blocks in checking the quality of the cleaning service.	1 July 2013	31 December 2013	Resident Involvement Officer	<p>With colleagues set up a communication & feedback system that encourages residents to report problems with cleaning & tells them what we are doing about it.</p>	Improve the quality of the communal cleaning service.
8. Increase resident input to the service planning process.	1 July 2013	31 December 2013	Resident Involvement Officer	<p>Provide opportunities during the year when service priorities are discussed & agreed with residents.</p>	The direction of the service reflects the priorities of residents.

Action Plan 2013/14 continued

Activity Date	Start Date	Completion	Owner	Key actions	Outcomes
9. Develop a Satisfaction Survey Strategy to ensure that we can demonstrate that we listen to & act on tenants views.	1 July 2013	30t September 2013	Resident Involvement Officer	Describe the arrangements that are in place.	Clarity about how we assess satisfaction & what we do with the results.
10. Implement performance and governance based grant regime for RAs.	1 April 2013	2 September 2013	Resident Involvement Officer	Continue implementation of 'health checks' and award grants appropriate to their needs & aims. Prepare support plans for each RA.	Resident groups are run properly for the benefit of residents & tenants, & the council.





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