

How you can get involved in your housing service and in your community 2013-2018



The ways that you can get involved

These are the ways in which you can be involved as a resident or tenant of Milton Keynes. If something is not yet up and running we have given details of when we expect it to start.

1. Giving us feedback to improve the service

The most important thing you can do as a customer is to help us keep on improving your service. We need you to tell us how you felt about the last time you contacted us

A. Join our mailing list

Objectives

Increasing involvement in your community.

What is it for?

It is a great way of staying informed about what is going on in housing and how to get involved. The service is free and may encourage you to dip a toe into the water of involvement!

How often?

Every month we will send you a copy of the 'Resident Involvement News' which has information about topical housing issues both national and local and lots more besides. It also includes a monthly calendar giving details of events and training opportunities.

Who is in it?

The newsletter is sent to tenants and residents who are interested in housing and getting involved.

How does it work?

Just get in touch and we will put you on our mailing list. We will also send you details of other consultations and events as they come up. If you have an e-mail address we will also send you the weekly housing news update provided by the Housing Quality Network and let you know of up and coming meetings, particularly Council meetings where housing issues are on the agenda.

How much time does it take?

Just a few minutes to read the newsletter.

Staff support

The Resident Involvement team produce the newsletter and can help you with any queries you have.

B. Individual Customer Satisfaction Feedback

Objectives:

Improving the quality of your service

What is it for?

When we deliver a service to you, such as carrying out a repair, we will often ask what you thought of the service.

How often?

You may be contacted, by 'phone, text, e-mail or letter, after we have delivered a service to you.

Who is in it?

Anyone who asks us to do something for them.

How does it work?

If we ask you to tell us what the service was like please do so honestly and openly. We may ask you to complete a 'New Tenant' feedback card, answer some simple questions on the phone about recent repairs carried out or about how happy you are with different aspects of the Housing Service. Sometimes we invite people to come along to a meeting to give us your views. If you can spare the time we really do appreciate it and all your expenses will be met.

How much time does it take?

It only takes a couple of minutes and is used to help us improve the quality of the service.

Staff support

Contact is usually from the teams who have delivered the service.

C. Tenants Voice

Objectives

Improving the quality of your service and managing, challenging and directing the service.

What is it for?

The Tenants Voice is a group of tenants who are interested in commenting on the service, being involved in specific consultations etc.

How often?

Surveys will usually be carried out around once every 6 months. We usually want the views of the Tenants Voice when there are major changes being proposed which require customer input.

Who is in it?

Anyone who is a Council tenant can join. At present we have approximately 500 people signed up (about 3.3% of our 15,000 tenants shared owners and leaseholders).

How does it work?

When you agree to join you will be asked which aspects of the service you would be interested in working with us on. Whenever we need to make major changes to how we work we will contact you, usually by post, and ask you to complete a survey form. You may occasionally be asked to take part in a focus group but you do not have to do this.

How much time will it take?

Most surveys will take no more than 10 minutes to complete. If you do take part in a meeting it will last no more than a couple of hours and your expenses will be paid.

Staff support

The Tenants Voice is administered by the Resident Involvement Team.

D. Leaseholders On-Line

Objectives

Improving the quality of your service.

What is it for?

To give feedback on proposed changes to the service and on suggestions about improvements.

How often?

Contact will probably be around once every 3 months depending on whether there are major changes being proposed which require customer input.

Who is in it?

The group is an e-mail group made up of leaseholders. Currently there are 30 people in the group.

How does it work?

From time to time we will e-mail the group to ask your views on issues or initiatives which affect you. Feedback will be given via the newsletter 'MK@Home'. Leaseholders who are not on-line can get involved in other ways, such as through their residents' association.

How much time does it take?

It will probably take no more than 15 minutes to give us your views.

Staff support

The Home Ownership Team put questions together and gather responses. The Resident Involvement team administers the group.

E. Shared Owners On-Line

As leaseholders (above) but for shared owners. There are about 20 people in the group at the moment.

The ways that you can get involved continued

F. Responding to Surveys

Objective

Improving the quality of your service.

What is it for?

To ask what you think of the quality of the service, to get ideas for improvement and to find out information about you and your lifestyle. This information helps us to improve the service to meet your particular needs.

How often?

Every 2 years we ask a randomly selected group of people to give us their views, usually by postal survey. At other times we may contact you to complete a survey form.

Who is in it?

Any tenant, leaseholder or shared owner may be asked to respond. If you do receive a form please be honest and open in your replies. Often there is a small prize draw to encourage returns.

How much time does it take?

It will probably never take more than 30 minutes to give us your views.

Staff support:

The survey is administered by the Resident Involvement Team.

2. Get involved where you live

The most important thing you can do as a local resident is to make a difference in your neighbourhood and community.

A. Residents Associations

Objective

Improving your area and increasing involvement in your community.

What are they for?

Resident groups are the bedrock of local activity and they are understood by and appeal to many people. They are locally based groups who want to benefit their local area, the community and improve the services they receive from the Council and a wide range of other agencies. Getting involved in a group brings people together socially and that is a benefit in itself. They are independent of the Council but most receive grant funding and/or other support from the Resident Involvement team and so have to comply with standards set by the Council. Support for groups is provided in areas where there are Council tenants. This is because our funding comes from the rent that tenants pay.

How often do they meet?

Groups will meet several times a year but involvement continues between meetings. Many groups have websites to help people keep in touch.

Who can join?

Anyone living in the area covered by the association is welcome to join. We think that local involvement works best when everyone is able to take part.

How do they work?

Groups have a constitution that sets out their aims and describes how they will work. All groups must work with everyone in their community and not discriminate. Groups will have a committee with a Chair, Treasurer, Secretary etc. These people are elected at an open meeting called an Annual

General Meeting and anyone in the area can stand for election.

There may be an existing group in your area. The Resident Involvement team can tell you and will introduce you. If there is not a group in your area people can either get together as a local group or as individuals. The Resident Involvement Team can give advice and support and can help you set up an association if that is what you want. If you do want to form an association, be recognised by the Council and to be eligible for funding, you will need to agree to be properly organised and behave in a fair and open way.

The Resident Involvement Team provides training for groups to make sure they work effectively. We also help groups to understand what the priorities are for the community and to undertake tasks that make a difference to people locally.

Some associations organise estate walkabouts which identify problems in the area. They will often invite Council staff or others along, such as the Police. You may be able to get involved in this.

Many associations are keen to involve their community in fun activities such as fetes, coach trips and other social gatherings. This can be a great way to get to know neighbours and to get involved in the community.

By getting involved you can learn new skills and meet new people that may be beneficial in other walks of life.

How much time does it take?

It can range from a few minutes reading a newsletter or checking the website to going along to meeting for a couple of hours. If you get involved in the committee then the time commitment is more but the satisfaction of making a difference can be very rewarding. The Resident Involvement Team are here to support you and the group every step of the way.

The ways that you can get involved continued

Staff support

Each resident association has a Housing Officer linked to it. This helps the association to access Council services, particularly Housing Services, and to develop a positive relationship that benefits residents and the Council. Housing Officers attend meetings and regularly keep in touch with the chair about current issues.

The Resident Involvement Team helps to set up groups and gives support to keep them going. Every year the group will have a 'health-check' with the team to help them think about achievements in the year and aims for the next year. The health-check helps to determine the financial support applicable to groups.

The Resident Involvement team are the first port of call for any queries, training and funding requests.

B. Local Interest Groups

Objectives

Improving your area and increasing involvement in your community.

What is it for?

We know that some people want to get together in the community to improve things but that they do not want the formality of setting up a resident association. Alternatively there may not be enough support for an association locally. In these cases a Local Interest Group can be set up. A Group can help people to start building links in the community and to get things done to improve the area. Those people who are interested can still be involved and kept informed and a full resident association may follow in due course.

How often do they meet?

It is up to the individuals involved. There may just be one formal meeting a year, or possibly an annual summer funday, picnic or barbecue. The Group may be more about fun and getting to know neighbours.

The idea is that commitments are tailored to meet the needs of the individuals concerned.

Who is in it?

Anyone living in the area can get involved.

How does it work?

The group will have a simple Terms of Reference which will define the activities they want to carry out. There is no constitution, bank account or other duties normally implied with a resident association. The group will receive support from the local housing team and the Resident Involvement team but no direct grant. Support can take the form of organising or chairing meetings and/or financial help to pay for room hire or newsletters for instance.

How much time does it take?

This depends on you and the others involved. We want the group to have a long term future so it is not a good idea to over commit yourselves. You can increase involvement over time as your confidence and support grows.

Staff support

A Local Interest Group will have a Housing Officer linked to it. This helps to develop a positive relationship with the Council. The Housing Officer will come along to meetings and will keep in touch with the Group regularly. The Resident Involvement Team is on hand to give additional advice and support.

C. Local Events

Objectives

Improving the quality of your service, improving your area and increasing involvement in your community.

What are they for?

Improving the service locally, giving advice and information, getting views and resolving problems. You can meet housing and other Council staff, get help and give your views.

How often?

These events happen occasionally in various parts of the Borough. They are usually drop-in sessions where you can get advice about, for example, swapping homes or housing benefits. The local resident association will often be there as well to encourage people to get involved. Keep an eye out for more information in MK@Home or on the website:

www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/resident-involvement

Who can go?

All are welcome whether they live locally or not.

How does it work?

Just drop in during the event and have a chat over a cup of tea and a biscuit.

How much time does it take?

It depends on you.

Staff support

There will often be a member of staff on hand to talk to you about local housing issues. Events may be organised by the resident association, the Resident Involvement Team, the local housing team or the Parish Council.

D. Major Works Information sessions**Objectives**

Improving the quality of your service.

What are they for?

Tenants receiving major works, such as asbestos removal or window replacement will get the chance to talk to staff and contractors face-to-face about what the work will entail.

How often?

A session will be arranged when necessary, usually about a month before work is due to start. All tenants affected will be notified by post.

How does it work?

Just drop in anytime during the session

How much time does it take?

As long as you need, probably only a few minutes.

Staff support

Sessions are organised by the Building Services team. They are attended by this team and staff from the contractors doing the work.

E. Sheltered Housing Scheme meetings**Objectives**

Improving the quality of your service & increasing involvement in the community.

What are they for?

Each sheltered scheme has a meeting where all the residents can get together to discuss current issues with the Sheltered Housing Officer and other managers. It is also a good opportunity for everyone to meet up for a social chat and a cup of tea.

How often?

They are usually held once a month.

How do they work?

Some meetings will be informal and others will be more structured, with attendance from other staff to talk about specific issues. Every resident is encouraged to come along and join in the discussions.

How much time does it take?

Meetings last an hour or so.

Staff support

The meetings are organised and lead by the Sheltered Housing Officer. Other staff can be invited along. Sheltered Housing Managers will also often come along.

The ways that you can get involved continued

3. Getting Involved Across the Service

These are the ways that residents who want to shape the wider direction of the service and understand how it is run and financed can work with us.

A: Housing Service Forum

Objectives

Managing, challenging and directing the service.

What is it for?

The Housing Service Forum (HSF) is open to all those groups and individuals with an interest in housing in Milton Keynes.

The purpose of the HSF is to consider housing and neighbourhood issues which are of strategic importance to the community and the Council. It will also keep the overall direction of the service under review. Each meeting will receive presentations and discuss topics. Some recent topics include:

- Regenerating our older estates.
- Energy efficiency in our homes.
- Changes to welfare benefits and the impact on residents.
- Houses in Multiple Occupation and regulating the private rented sector.
- The Council's housing strategy.

Who can go?

This is an open meeting and so anyone with an interest in housing in Milton Keynes can come along. There is therefore no 'membership' but we will maintain a contact list of attendees and ensure that they are invited to every meeting.

How often are the meetings?

The HSF meets 4 times a year

How does it work?

The HSF takes reports and presentations and discusses the big housing and neighbourhood issues that affect all residents. The reports and presentations are loaded onto the website as soon as they are available. They can be posted to you if

you don't have access to the internet. Other formats and translations are available on request.

The HSF is chaired by an independent local person with skills in co-ordinating partnerships/voluntary groups.

The HSF has Terms of Reference and a Code of Conduct that describes how the meetings are run and how it can influence decision-making.

The meetings are relaxed and informal so that people feel comfortable with speaking out and giving their views.

How much time will it take?

The meetings are in the evening and run for 2 hours. They are held in central Milton Keynes.

Staff support

The meetings are chaired by the independent chair. The Resident Involvement Manager co-ordinates the agenda in conjunction with the Resident Involvement Review Group (see page??) and manages the day-to-day business of the HSF.

B: MKC Tenants Group

Objectives

Managing, challenging and directing the service.

What is it for?

The purpose of the MKC Tenants Group is to enable tenants, leaseholders and shared owners from across the Council area to meet and discuss the delivery of key Housing Services. The group takes presentations and reports and brings a customer perspective to the Housing Service. For example it will review:

- The Repairs & maintenance service.
- Rent collection & debt.
- Nuisance & anti-social behaviour.
- Resident involvement.
- Changes to housing policy and practice.

The Group is encouraged to give their views, voice their opinions and play an active part in setting the direction of service improvement.

How often is it?

The group meets 4 times a year.

Who can come?

Any Milton Keynes Council tenant, shared owner or leaseholder can attend the meetings.

How does it work?

The Group takes reports and presentations and discusses the issues that are of importance to tenants. Each meeting has one or 2 key themes. The agendas are set by the Resident Involvement Review Group (see page??) working with the Resident Involvement Manager. Information is given on the website as soon as it is available. This information can be posted to you if you don't have access to the internet. Other formats and translations are available on request.

The Group is chaired by an independent local person with skills in co-ordinating partnerships/voluntary groups.

The Group has Terms of Reference and a Code of Conduct that describes how the meetings are run and how it can influence decision-making. The meetings are relaxed and informal so that people feel comfortable with speaking out and giving their views.

How much time will it take?

The meetings are in the evening and last 2 hours.

Staff support

Meetings are organised by the Resident Involvement Manager working with the Resident Involvement Review Group. Staff from the Council, its partners and other agencies will attend as needed.

C: The Resident Involvement Review Group**Objectives**

Managing, challenging and directing the service.

What is it for?

The Resident Involvement Review Group is primarily set up to plan the agendas for the Housing Service Forum and the MKC Tenants Group. The Group reviews feedback from previous meetings and recommends changes where necessary. Attendees make suggestions for current and relevant topics that will be of interest to tenants and residents. By a process of collaboration and negotiation agreement on the topics to be included is usually reached. The discussion can be wide ranging. Occasionally other topics of current interest are also discussed.

How often does it meet?

Meetings are monthly and are held in the daytime, usually in the Civic Offices.

Who can come along?

The meeting is open to all residents.

How does it work?

The meetings are informal and are chaired by the Resident Involvement Manager. The group reflects on previous meetings to learn any lessons and make improvements and looks ahead to future meetings.

How much time does it take?

Meetings last about 1 1/2 hours.

Staff support

The Resident Involvement Team supports the group.

D: The Tenants Housing Scrutiny Panel**Objectives**

Managing, challenging and directing the service.

What is it for?

This panel is to enable and empower Milton Keynes Council tenants, leaseholders and shared owners to get more involved with how services are delivered to them and look at and come up with ways services can be improved.

The ways that you can get involved continued

The aim of this panel is to be an independent, challenging and critical friend and to examine and scrutinise in detail the delivery and performance of the Council Housing Service and recommend improvements that will benefit all tenants, leaseholders, shared owners and the Council.

The panel will review a specific service and investigate performance, looking at, for instance: costs, performance data; customer satisfaction; how the service is delivered; how other landlords deliver the service. After a period of examination the panel will write a report and make recommendations for improvement to the Housing Assistant Director.

All Council tenants will be kept up to date with the achievements and progress the panel makes in MK@Home and other appropriate medias.

The panel will keep all Council tenants, leaseholders and shared owners informed of what the scrutiny panel is about and encourage more involvement.

Keep an eye out for more information in MK@Home or on the website

Milton Keynes Council- Housing Performance - Housing

How often is it?

There will be a meeting at least once a month though there could be more depending on the topic under investigation.

Who can go?

All Council tenants, shared owners and leaseholders can apply to join the panel. If you want to get involved you will have to complete an application form and have an interview. The application process is run by tenants already on the panel and is an informal process. Training will be available to and has been put in place to make sure that the panel has all the skills and knowledge it needs and that potential members are aware of the work entailed.

How does it work?

The panel has detailed terms of reference and code of conduct that govern how it works. A key feature is that the group is independent of the Council, and that it acts as a 'challenging and critical friend' in order to drive improvement.

The panel aims to complete 4 'scrutiny reviews' a year.

The panel will choose an area to investigate and then will set out how it will go about the investigation. The group will probably want to talk to tenants who receive the service and interview staff who provide it, as well as reviewing a wide range of data. Site visits and 'shadowing' staff may also be involved. Once the investigation is complete the group will produce a report with recommendations that identify areas for improvement which will be presented to the Housing Assistant Director to respond to.

Panel members will serve for 3 years. There will be a rolling programme of membership renewal. Every year a third of the membership will stand down and new members appointed.

How much time will it take?

Panel members will have to devote quite a lot of time during the investigation phase. As well as monthly meetings members may well be involved in activities like those described above and there could be other meetings to discuss findings and to prepare the recommendations etc. Time reading documents and data will also be required.

If there are enough members of the panel the workload can be spread.

Staff support

Although the panel is independent the Council is fully supportive of the panel and will provide the assistance necessary to make this a success. Current support is provided by the Performance Analyst Officer and the Resident Involvement Team

E: Housing Finance & Budget Group

Objectives

Managing, challenging and directing the service.

What is it for?

The group will develop an understanding of how the service is financed and will look at budgets in detail. The group will review under and over spending areas and review the reasons and potential solutions to this.

How often?

The group will meet every quarter.

How does it work?

This group has developed from the tenants 'Self-financing' group that was set prior to MKC taking full control of its Housing Revenue Account income in April 2012.

The new group is in its early stages and its full remit and terms of reference are not yet determined.

How much time does it take?

A couple of hours for the meetings once every 3 months plus some time in-between for reading.

Staff support

The meetings are lead by the Head of Assets and Strategy and the Senior Finance Manager. Admin support is provided by the Resident Involvement Team.

recommendation for resolution. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome he/she still has the option to appeal to the Local Government Ombudsman.

The panel can also make recommendations for service improvement in the light of the complaints they review.

How often?

This is hard to predict as most complaints are resolved at an early stage and rarely get to stage 3. Last year only 5 complaints reached stage 3.

How does it work?

Tenant volunteers on the panel will be contacted as soon as we have a case that needs to be reviewed. There may be a 'desk top' review of the complaint and a decision may be made on the basis of this. There may be a review meeting where the complainant can state their case to the panel. Council staff will also make their case to the panel and then the panel will consider what they have heard and make a recommendation.

How much time does it take?

This is hard to say as the number of cases is not predictable. When there is a case the review will probably take half a day.

Staff support

The panel is supported by the Customer Services Team.

F: Tenants Complaints Panel

Objectives

Managing, challenging and directing the service.

What is it for?

This Tenants Panel will review complaints made by tenants using the official MKC Complaints Procedure. If complaints have not been resolved by stage 3 of the procedure (i.e. agreement cannot be reached at stages 1 or 2) then complainants have the option to have their problem reviewed by a tenant's panel. After reviewing the case the Panel will make a

The ways that you can get involved continued

4. Tenure / Service Specific Groups

If you have a particular interest in any specific aspect of the service this is how to get involved.

Service Specific Groups:

Building Services Tenants Group

New Tenants Group

Cleaning Network

Housing Management Group

Private Landlords Forum

A: Building Services Tenants Group

Objective

Improving the quality of your service.

What is it for?

The group brings a customer perspective to the repairs and maintenance service. It reviews and monitors performance and is involved in operational and strategic issues. There is a main group and separate 'core' groups for different contractors and aspects of the service such as day-to-day repairs or gas heating. Tenants from the main group sit on each core group.

Terms of Reference have been agreed.

Tenants on the group gauge the performance of contractors by making calls to tenants who have recently experienced the service. They bring their feedback to the 'core' groups and discuss what they have found, outcomes and lessons learned with contractors.

All tenants on the group get together every 2 months to share their experiences of the contractor performance.

Tenants on the group can also 'shadow' operatives to get an idea of how the service is delivered.

How often does it meet?

The Building Services Tenants Group meets every 2 months. Some 'core' groups meet every quarter and others are every 6 months.

Who can come along?

The group is open to all tenants and leaseholders with an interest in building services.

How does it work?

The Building Services Tenants Group meets at the Denbigh site, where most of our partners in Building Services are based. The main group receives updates on the progress of contracts generally and receives performance information. There is an opportunity to question staff and resolve performance and customer service issues. In the 'core' groups contractors report on and discuss performance and agree strategy.

Meetings are held during the day.

Full training and support for members is provided.

How much time will it take?

Members are committed to coming to the main group and to their own 'core' group. Both meetings last about 2 hours. On top of this members are required to read and comment on reports, and review data.

When contracts are up for renewal members will need to spend additional time reading contract documents and attending selection panels etc.

Overall the time commitment to this very important area of work is considerable and members should be prepared for this.

Officer support

The groups are supported by the Council's service managers, staff from the MK Service Partnership (formerly Mouchel) and the Resident Involvement Team. Training will be provided.

B: New Tenants Group

Objective

Improving the quality of your service.

What is it for?

People who have recently become tenants tell us about their experience of the lettings process. We learn from the feedback and make changes to how we do things.

How often does it meet?

The meetings are every quarter. The meetings are for new tenants only. They last between 1 to 2 hours.

Who can go?

All new tenants who have started their tenancy with us in the last 3 months are invited.

How does it work?

The meetings are informal and are attended by repairs, lettings and housing management staff. Tenants who come along are asked to tell us about their experiences of all stages of the lettings process.

Officer support

Staff from different services attend and the meetings are supported by the Resident Involvement Team.

C: Cleaning Network

Objective

Improving the quality of your service.

What is it for?

A cleaning service is provided in all of the blocks owned and managed by the Council. We want residents to be our 'eyes and ears' and tell us about the day to day quality of the service they receive.

How does it work?

Residents will be told about the standard and frequency of the cleaning service that they can expect. They will be asked to report, using a unique e-mail or text message service, whether the cleaning has been carried out correctly. Residents who take part will receive feedback so they know what action

we have taken as a result of their report. Every quarter there will be a prize draw to encourage respondents to keep reporting.

Officer support:

The Network will be supported by the Housing Management Team.

D: Housing Management Group

Objective

Improving the quality of your service.

What is it for?

This is a new group that will look at estate issues such as anti-social behaviour, mutual exchanges, communal cleaning, caretaking and landscaping. The remit of the group will be developed as it becomes established and the aim will be to bring a customer perspective to these very important issues in order to improve our service and estate conditions.

Who can get involved?

The group will be open to any tenant, shared owner or leaseholder. We expect people may get involved if they have specific interest in the topic under discussion.

How often does it meet?

This has not been decided yet but will probably be once every quarter.

How does it work?

The details have not yet been decided and we would hope that residents who get involved will help us shape how the group works. It is likely that residents will look at performance information and may spend time 'shadowing' staff to see how services are delivered.

How much time will it take?

Probably 2 hours for the meetings and some time reading.

Officer support

The group will be supported by the Housing Management team with help from the Resident Involvement Team. Training will be provided if necessary.

E: Private Landlords Forum

Objective

Improving the quality of your service

What is it for?

Private rented housing is increasingly being used to meet our housing demand. We want to make sure that private landlords in Milton Keynes are aware of current standards and issues so that they can provide an excellent service.

How often does it meet?

All private landlords operating in Milton Keynes are invited to a meeting which is held once every 6 months.

How does it work?

At the meetings staff and other agencies deliver presentations. There is plenty of time for questions and networking.

How much time does it take?

The meetings last a couple of hours.

Officer support

The meetings are supported by the Private Sector Housing Team with support from the Resident Involvement Team.

Contact the Resident Involvement Team

We are based at:

Civic Offices,

1 Saxon Gate East,

Central Milton Keynes.

MK9 3EJ

T 01908 253264 or 253756

E get.involved@milton-keynes.gov.uk

W www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/resident-involvement

M 07908 814932 or 07908 814833



Resident Involvement Milton Keynes-

