

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR HOUSING & PROPERTY SERVICES

The Housing Strategic Communication Team is the Departmental focus for dissemination of information and co-ordination of projects to engage service users.

Copies of the Communication Strategy can be provided in large print, on audiotape, or translated into a language other than English.

To request a copy, please telephone: 01843 577221, or e-mail: housing.tenantparticipation@thanet.gov.uk

If you have any comments or would like advice on the Stock Options Appraisal process, please call your Independent Tenant Advisor on Freephone: 0800 085 4348.

Aims and objectives

- To enhance communication within the Housing and Property Services Department, and between other departments of the Council, Partner Organisations, Stake Holders and Department Customers.
- To undertake public, community, stakeholder and partner involvement using a range of methods appropriate to the issue, the target group and available resources. To co-operate, wherever possible, with service users, community and voluntary groups.
- To make the service proactive by developing a co-ordinated approach to how the department develops its strategic role and markets its key messages and to provide leadership on new strategies for the department.
- To co-ordinate performance management and to lead on e-government within all Services and to develop further service opportunities within the Housing and Property Service Department.
- To ensure that the service is wholly customer-focussed, by engaging all service users, tenants, partner authorities, organisations and those seeking accommodation/housing advice and by taking their views into account in all aspects of our service delivery.
- To use a proactive approach in listening to our partners, staff and customers by using regular consultation and feedback in order to provide a service that is flexible, innovative and responsive to change.
- To harness “informal feedback” from front-line staff and to use their expertise and the comments of customers to bring further improvements and

enhancements both inter-departmentally and to the Housing and Property Services Department.

- To ensure the provision of user-friendly literature in plain English across all service areas.
- To work in partnership with the corporate Communication Team to ensure that both the departmental and corporate messages are clear and consistent.

Identifying stakeholders:

There will be a variety of stakeholders involved in the housing stock options Appraisal process that will be affected either directly or indirectly by the results, and as such, 'key' stakeholders will need to be closely involved in the consultation process.

Key Stakeholders include:

- Individual tenants
- Individual leaseholders
- The Tenants and Residents Forum representing TDC tenants and leaseholders
- The SOAP Stars
- The Tenants Consultation Group (TCG)
- Housing applicants including homeless households
- Residents in temporary accommodation
- Individuals renting garages from the Council who are not housing tenants
- Councillors
- TDC housing staff

Choice of consultation method

Prior to the stock options process, the department employed a variety of means to reach out and consult with tenants (and other key stakeholders such as staff) including the TCG, the Forum of Tenants and Residents Associations, a regular newsletter, questionnaires, telephone panels and a staff newsletter.

The stock options appraisal process has presented the opportunity to look at the way we consult in order provide a more responsive service, which better meets the needs of our customers. As a result, we have identified that there is a preference for concise surveys and questionnaires, over formal meeting structures, and as such these will be deployed with greater frequency in the future. To build on initial feedback arising out of the stock options process, we will be conducting a survey during the summer months to ascertain/confirm choice consultation methods.

Risks and Resources

Key risks to delivery of project have been identified as follows:

- failure to engage tenants in the process
- The risk associated with each option
- Stock condition variations from condition database
- Failure to complete the process in accordance with Government guidelines

As such, each stage of the process will be managed with due consideration to these risks bearing in mind both the probability of the risk arising, and the impact if it does.

The cost of developing and implementing the Communication Strategy will be met from the Housing Revenue Account.

Corporate links

The Communications Team is a central point for Housing Department Service Heads to forward information in order to facilitate circulation of documents/consultation both internally and externally.

We will liaise with our Corporate Communications Department to ensure that all our major documents are speedily and professionally printed and distributed, within corporate guidelines.

It is also intended that staff will be able to feedback through the Communications Team and it is important that we are made aware of any major projects within the Housing Department so that we can inform other departments in the Council who may be affected by these, or have an interest in them.

Monitoring/feedback

The effectiveness of communication mechanisms will be monitored on an on-going basis throughout the process. This will be the responsibility of the Tenant Participation Officer and all wider staff (such as Housing Officers) and will be overseen by senior management.

At the end of the process an assessment of performance will be carried out, together with a survey, which will inform the future direction of consultation mechanisms for the future.

Evaluation of the Communication Strategy will feature as an agenda item for the Tenants Consultation Group, and development will be on-going pending

feedback from tenant and resident stakeholder groups. This will be aided by monitoring by:

- Liaison meetings between our area Housing Officers/ Participation Officer and the Resident Associations in their area.
- By Tenant Advisory Representatives.
- By the Forum of Tenants and Residents Associations.

KEY MILESTONE DATES FOR STOCK OPTION APPRAISAL PROCESS

What	Start	Finish	How
Formation of initial Steering Group	12/03/04	17/06/04(meeting-terms of reference agreed)	Suggested membership discussed at initial meeting
Publicity/ awareness building	04-05/04	On going Final edition pending close of process	Tenants and Residents newsletter- 'Your Say' Special newsletter- Tenants' Voice
Appointment of authorities financial consultant	07/04	25/09/05	Consultants brief and tendering guidance notes
Tenants and residents Steering Group- SOAP STARS nomination	08-09/04	27/09/04	Initial 'Your Say ' article requesting volunteers Initial meeting of prospective SOAP Stars

Recruitment of ITA	07/04	11/04	Expression of Interest advert placed- Inside Housing Brief and contract documentation Presentation and Q+A session between prospective ITAs and SOAP Stars Decision made by SOAP Stars
Tenant Empowerment Strategy agreed with Tenants, Leaseholders	Spring 2004	First draft approved Spring 2004	Draft sent to every tenant and leaseholder with Newsletter with invitation to comment. Also included on TCG Agenda
Tenant Empowerment Strategy agreed with GOSE	Pending		Amended draft sent
Communication Strategy agreed with Tenants, Leaseholders	Spring 2004	First draft agreed Spring 2004	Draft sent to every tenant and leaseholder with Newsletter with invitation to comment. Also included on TCG agenda
Communication strategy agreed with GOSE	Spring 2004	Pending	Amended draft to be sent
Training sessions for SOAP Stars, Members and staff	07/04 10/04 03/05	03/05	Members briefing selecting and managing your ITA, Heart of England Consultancy staff training session

Independent advice and information	11/04	ongoing	fact sheets produced sessions and surgeries by ITA across district Tenants and Residents Forum information sessions
Consultation	12/04	04/05	press release All sessions publicised by letters to local residents and flyers and posters displayed at council offices and across the district Feedback form produced and distributed to gauge effectiveness of ITA and gather comments
Best practice sharing between neighbouring Authorities going through process	2/03/04	Ongoing- final meeting pending completion of process	South East Regional Housing Forum Kent Stock Options Group
Financial modelling of options	September 2004	Ongoing	Beha Williams Norman Ltd
Options evaluated	End of May 2005		SOAP Steering Committee
Tenants and residents Test of Opinion	05/05	05/05	Test of Opinion sent to all of Thanet's tenants and leaseholders
Project Plan for chosen option			
Report to Cabinet			
Report to Council if necessary			
Options Appraisal submitted to GOSE		07/05	Fully evidenced submission

