Folkestone & Hythe District Council

Future options for managing council housing
Analysis of consultation responses

1. Introduction

Consultation on future options for the management of housing services across East Kent took place between 22 October and 20 December 2019.

All council tenants and leaseholders across the district were sent a letter, information sheet and questionnaire inviting them to give their views, and an online version of the questionnaire was available on the council's website.

Additionally, key stakeholders including district councillors, county councillors, MPs, Citizens Advice Bureaux, Kent County Council Social Services, Kent Police and the NHS were emailed directly inviting them to respond to the consultation.

2. Questionnaire responses

A total of 602 completed questionnaires were received. 72 of these were submitted online and 530 paper copies were returned.

In terms of who responded:

- 588 tenants and leaseholders (16% of all tenants and leaseholders)
- 4 other individuals
- 1 response from the Shepway Tenants and Leaseholders Board
- 1 response from Age UK Hythe and Lyminge
- 1 shared ownership resident
- 7 respondents did not say in what capacity they were responding

2.1. Level of agreement with the proposal to bring the service back in house

As shown below, 74% of respondents agree to some extent with the proposal:

	All respondents	Tenants and leaseholders
Strongly agree	54% (323)	54% (316)
Tend to agree	20% (120)	20% (119)
Neither agree nor disagree	13% (76)	13% (75)
Tend to disagree	4% (21)	4% (21)
Strongly disagree	9% (53)	9% (51)

The following comments were made by respondents who agree with the proposal:

- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repair and maintenance issues: 104 comments
- The council is more local so can deal with issues more quickly: 93 comments
- The council would be more accountable than East Kent Housing: 82 comments
- Unhappy with the general standard of service provided by East Kent Housing: 72 comments
- Lack of communication from East Kent Housing: 53 comments
- The service provided by East Kent Housing has deteriorated in the last few years: 50 comments
- The council ran the service well before East Kent Housing was created: 41 comments
- It would be easier for residents to deal directly with the council: 29 comments
- The council knows its own housing stock: 20 comments
- The council could build stronger relationships with its tenants: 20 comments
- East Kent Housing do not provide us with a dedicated Housing Officer anymore: 18 comments
- Any money saved from bringing the service under direct council control could be used to improve housing services: 11 comments
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with anti-social behaviour: 10 comments
- Bringing the service under direct council control would minimise the risk of an alternative provider seeking to make a profit: 9 comments
- Agree, providing a dedicated housing department is created at the council: 3 comments
- Agree, providing our existing Independent Living Manager is retained: 1 comment

Respondents who disagree with the proposal made the following comments:

- East Kent Housing provide a good service: 35 comments
- Concern that neither the council nor East Kent Housing would deliver a good service: 10 comments
- Concern the council would reduce service levels and/or staff if option 2 is implemented: 6 comments
- Concern it would be harder to contact the council than it is to contact East Kent Housing: 4 comments
- Concern the council would not provide front line staff with the support needed to deliver the service effectively: 3 comments
- Concern we would not keep our existing Independent Living Manager: 2 comments
- Concern bringing the service under direct council control would cost more money: 2 comments

General comments received regarding the proposal:

- No preference on who runs the service as long as it is delivered effectively: 17 comments

- Don’t feel able to give an opinion as only recently became a tenant: 3 comments
- Don’t feel there is any point giving an opinion as they feel it would not be listened to: 3 comments
- The decision should be made by experts: 2 comments
- Concern the council has already decided on its preferred option: 1 comment

2.2. What the council should focus on for housing services
Respondents were asked what they feel are the three most important things for the council to focus on for housing services. The following responses were received:

Dealing with repairs and maintenance	79% (473)
Dealing with anti-social behaviour	22% (130)
Providing value for money for your rent and service charges	40% (240)
Building new council homes	24% (142)
Estate services (such as grass cutting, cleaning communal areas etc)	21% (129)
Dealing with customer enquiries and complaints	36% (218)
Involving and listening to residents	24% (142)
Other: • Improve dialogue with all residents x3 • Maintain reasonable rent charges x1 • Improve efficiency x1 • Improve consultation with residents x1 • Improve dialogue with disabled residents x1 • Dealing with communal repairs x1 • Listen to East Kent Housing x1 • Be more accountable x1	2% (10)

2.3. Resident involvement
Tenants and leaseholders were asked if they would like to be more involved in the management of their council homes. 89 tenants and leaseholders said they would, and provided their contact details.

2.4. Other comments
The following additional comments were received:

- The council needs to listen to tenants more: 25 comments
- Estate services need improvement: 22 comments
- Unhappy that East Kent Housing no longer provide rent statements: 10 comments
- The council needs to build more properties: 6 comments
- Problems with parking: 4 comments

- Problems with the way East Kent Housing have calculated leasehold service charges: 3 comments
- Would be happy to pay a higher leasehold service charge if it meant more repairs would be carried out: 2 comments
- Concern over the criteria for allocating properties to residents on the housing register: 1 comment
- Problems with items left in communal areas: 1 comment
- Would oppose the service being outsourced to a housing association: 1 comment

3. Events

3.1. Win Pine House, Hythe, 7 November 2019

This event was staffed by Adrian Hammond, Sandra Sainsbury and Tasha Love and 21 residents attended. Five councillors also attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Lack of communication from East Kent Housing
- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repair and maintenance issues
- Issues with parking bays
- Issues with recycling bins
- Sheltered tenants would like a greater Independent Living Manager presence

Additionally, all but one of the attendees stated their support for the service returning to the council.

3.2. All Souls Church Hall, Cheriton, 9 November 2019

This event was staffed by Adrian Hammond and Sandra Sainsbury and 11 residents attended. Six councillors and a tenant who is a member of the Shepway Tenant and Leaseholder Board also attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Lack of parking bay markings at sheltered scheme, worried about vehicles being damaged
- Repairs not carried out even though contractor had visited to measure up
- Wished to downsize but could not get in touch with anyone

3.3. Assembly Rooms, New Romney, 20 November 2019

This event was staffed by Adrian Hammond, Sandra Sainsbury and Lizzie Norcott and 3 residents attended. Two councillors and a tenant who is a member of the Shepway Tenant and Leaseholder Board also attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repair and maintenance issues
- Concern over issues with contractors
- General lack of a good service from East Kent Housing
- Lack of communication from East Kent Housing
- Need for regular rent statements

3.4. Salvation Army, Folkestone, 4 December 2019

This event was staffed by Adrian Hammond, Sandra Sainsbury and Lizzie Norcott and 5 residents attended. Three councillors also attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Lack of action by East Kent Housing to deal with repair and maintenance issues
- Support for East Kent Housing
- Lack of communication from East Kent Housing
- Concern of rent increasing

3.5. Nailbourne Court, Lyminge

This event was staffed by Sandra Sainsbury and 8 residents attended. One councillor also attended.

The main issues discussed were:

- Concerned about trees surrounding the building - very overgrown and move about a lot when windy
- Residents keep asking for things to be done, repairs are outstanding for months and when they are carried out, the problem is not always sorted
- Concerns over very elderly residents not receiving a daily call when the Independent Living Manager is on leave

4. Contact with the consultation team

The consultation team dealt with enquiries from 8 Folkestone & Hythe residents:

- Repairs reported to EKH but not dealt with x4
- Tenant's son seeking clarification on how the consultation would affect his mother x1
- Tenant querying how the proposal would affect her x1
- Leaseholder querying whether both leaseholder names are recorded on the system x1
- Leaseholder querying why her deceased husband is still recorded on the system x1

NB: One of these tenants also said she supports bringing the service back in house.