This policy establishes a framework for enabling client groups of Housing Services to be consulted and effectively participate in the decision making processes of the council which affects them and the management of their homes. It will also provide an opportunity for the council and its client groups to move forward in partnership. We believe that tenant participation can help us identify and address weakness in service delivery providing a mechanism for continuous & challenging service improvements.

We believe that consultation and participation can bring benefits which range from empowering individuals to improved service delivery through stabilising, sustaining and revitalising communities. We want the client groups of housing Services to have the opportunity to shape the future of the housing services that they receive.

We recognise that there are weaknesses in tenant satisfaction levels & the opportunities to participate in the decision making process and see this policy helping to address these issues.

The policy will help us to develop more active tenant involvement, ensuring that there are opportunities for the views of all tenants to be considered in the development of Housing Service Improvements.

We recognise that clients may belong to groups with diverse needs, beliefs, cultures and could be subject to inequalities and prejudice. We will respect and take account of all differences when considering how we implement this policy. We will strive to achieve equality and opportunity in all that we do whilst promoting positive actions by officers to overcome disadvantage and discrimination.
The key principles of the Tenant Participation & Consultation Policy 2004-2007 are:-

**Aims and Objective**

1. We will at all times encourage and assist out tenants to participate in the decision making processes which affect them, their homes & neighborhoods.
2. We want to ensure that there is a mechanism in place to ensure that tenants can develop & influence service delivery improvements.

**Equalities**

3. We will ensure that the consultation & participation process is transparent & equal to all client groups

**Processes**

4. We will embrace & develop any future proposals from DETR and good practice standards when identified.
5. We will develop structures & mechanisms to enable client groups to influence the design, delivery and monitoring of housing services, policies, strategies, business & corporate plans.
6. Encourage support & assist Clients to form Tenant & Resident Associations, become members of FORTAC, & engage in networking with others on a local, county, regional & national basis.
7. Receive & analyse service improvement proposals & feed back the result of their involvement.
8. Involve individuals & groups in refurbishment & regeneration schemes & give feedback on the outcomes of their involvement

**Training**

9. We will ensure that Staff of Housing Services & Tenant Participation Officers will be committed and trained to facilitate & support consultation 7 participation processes.
10. We will ensure that elected members receive adequate training & support for their roles.
11. We will ensure that individuals & groups also receive adequate training to support their roles.

**Performance and Standards**

12. We will be proactive & innovative in improving the ways groups can influence & enhance service delivery, policy & practice.
13. We will do all that we can to increase client group satisfaction levels.
Legislative Requirements

14. We will at all times meet legislative requirements and in particular relate our actions to:
   - Local Govt. Act 1999 – Section 3.
   - The Housing Act 1985 Section 105
   - The Human Rights Act 1998
   - The Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000
   - The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
   - The Sex Discrimination Act 1975
Tenant Consultation & Participation Policy

2004 – 2007

Corby Borough Council

“Deeds Not Words”

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1. Policy Introduction And Analysis

Under the Best Value regime, by virtue of Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 there is a specific statutory duty for the Council to consult its client groups.

Consultation and participation should be seen to be an equal and transparent partnership between the Borough Council and its client groups.

The Corporate Governance Re-Inspection Report published in January 2003 specifically noted that the Council understands the need to build capacity within the community.

Adoption of this policy will show that the Council is committed to mainstreaming consultation and participation within Housing Services by establishing a Consultation and Participation Framework.

The policy and strategy will dovetail with the key Housing Strategy objective to facilitate communication, consultation and participation in the borough, integrate with the Corporate Communications Strategy and will be clearly linked to the Communication and Tenant Empowerment strategies created for the delivery of the stock options appraisal process.

They will also link into the Borough Councils' first Tenant Consultation and Participation Strategy, the 'Shared Vision - Shared Principles' Participation Compact, the mission statement and core values of the Corporate Plan and the Community Strategy that was developed by the Local Strategic Partnership. Strong links will also be developed between Housing Services business planning imperatives with those of the corporate planning financial process to ensure that financial decisions will be focussed in this priority area on a short, medium and long term basis.

The Tenant Consultation and Participation Strategy will provide the Council with the necessary strategic objectives to establish an overarching framework for consultation and participation for Housing Services in this key policy area. The strategic objectives are to be delivered through the service improvement action plans of the overall implementation plan and the Participation Compact.

The Participation Compact will spell out the framework and routes for consultation and participation. This will provide an opportunity for the full client base of Housing Services to be consulted and participate in ways agreed with the Federation Of Residents and Tenants Associations in Corby (otherwise known as FORTAC which is the umbrella organisation for affiliated tenants and residents associations in the Borough). The client base will also be able to have the opportunity to be consulted and participate in more ways than are presently available.

This connection between the Tenant Consultation and Participation Strategy and the Participation Compact will run in tandem with the objectives of the Community Section of the Corporate Plan that shows how the Council will meet the relevant objectives within the Community Strategy. There are also wider agenda considerations to take into account such as the governments' Sustainable Communities Plan, and the Catalyst Corby Regeneration Framework.
A strategic approach to tenant consultation and participation will show a Council commitment to the governments' Sustainable Communities agenda, which is about helping people live where they want to with pride in their community. This can in part be achieved through reducing social exclusion by promoting social inclusion in the key policy area of consultation and participation.

Whilst acknowledged to be service specific, the Tenant Consultation and Participation Strategy Framework could provide a template for a corporate approach to consultation and participation for each service area of the Council and it is expected to run complementary to the Corporate Consultation Strategy.

1.1 Best Value

As a result of the Housing Services Best Value Report on frontline housing services that was published in June 2003, consultation with and the participation of client groups has been reviewed in line with the observations and recommendations that were made. In the Tenant Participation service area specific observations and recommendations made were that:

1.1.1 There is limited involvement of tenants in FORTAC.
1.1.2 Provide more active tenant involvement to support existing structures.
1.1.3 Sustain and add new groups.
1.1.4 Reassess all participation mechanisms.
1.1.5 Develop new and innovative methods of participation.
1.1.6 Use all available means to communicate with tenants.
1.1.7 Increase the opportunities for the views of all tenants to be considered.
1.1.8 Extend satisfaction surveys across the whole of housing services.
1.1.9 Review the Participation Compact.

1.2 Strategic Objectives Of The Tenant Consultation & Participation Strategy

The strategic objectives of the Tenant Participation Strategy have been developed to address the observations and recommendations made in the Best Value Inspection and Corporate Governance Re-Inspection reports previously mentioned. They have also been developed to address good practice guidance as contained in the DETR National Framework for the Tenant Participation Compact 1999 as amended. This good practice guidance illustrates how the quality of tenant participation can be checked and how a menu for measuring local performance can be provided in Appendices F and G respectively.

As a consequence this will empower the Council to deliver the below mentioned strategic objectives of the strategy:

1.2.1 Provide resources for the capacity training of Housing Service client groups, officers and elected Members.
1.2.2 Have a clear delivery strategy for Housing Services' participation structure and mechanisms.
1.2.3 Provide different routes for involving those who may not have had the opportunity to be involved in the past.
1.2.4 Provide for effective communication to show what the Council is trying to achieve and establish a sophisticated yet uncomplicated e-consultation and participation
framework that can be replicated in the off-line world.

1.2.5 Create a ‘can do’ culture of encouraging and facilitating involvement in the consultation and participatory structure and mechanisms that should be shared across the whole of Housing Services to deliver service improvement.

1.2.6 Set service standards and targets for both policy and service objectives with monitoring processes to gauge progress from customer satisfaction surveys, with results being reported back to the client base.

1.2.7 Engage in effective dialogue coupled with the effective marketing of the value of participation to the Council and its client groups.

1.2.8 Find ways to overcome barriers in recognising diversity and equal opportunities for reaching out to the perceived hard to reach groups in the borough.

1.2.9 Provide clear linkages to business planning, other relevant policies and strategies as well as wider agendas.

The Borough Council will encourage the participation of its client groups that consist primarily of tenants, prospective tenants and leaseholders in the provision of Housing Services.

It will aim to provide a service that meets the needs of its’ client base by actively encouraging proactive consultation and participation individually and collectively in the design, delivery and monitoring of housing services, policies, strategies, business planning and corporate plans.

2. Policy Aims

Corby Borough Council will adopt a Tenant Consultation and Participation Policy with standards of consultation in line with current good practice codes of guidance and potential future guidance. Standards of behaviour with its client base both individually and collectively are set out. It will also develop ways and means to encourage the client groups of Housing Services to take up the opportunity to participate effectively. The Council will therefore:

2.1 Work within the current and developing legal framework and the performance standards as set by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions.

2.2 Initiate future proposals relating to this policy area by the Office Of The Deputy Prime Minister (as DETR is now called).

2.3 Supply its client base with information on matters that may affect them or the management and maintenance of their homes.

2.4 Establish a structure and mechanisms with agreed terms of reference within Housing Services to enable client groups to successfully influence the design, delivery and monitoring of housing services, policies, strategies, business planning and corporate plans at the time that decisions are being made which may affect them or the management and maintenance of their homes.

2.5 Encourage and assist the client base to form tenant and resident associations, become members of FORTAC, form a housing consultative forum, a representative tenant panel, a representative leaseholder panel, service improvement groups or become involved in reality checking and consultation banks.

2.6 Regularly obtain and analyse service improvement proposals from client groups on the design, delivery and monitoring of housing services, policies, strategies,
business planning and corporate plans and feed back to them the results of their involvement.

2.7 Support client groups in their involvement in the various forms of engagement and assist them in networking with others on a local, county, regional and national basis in order to continually develop good practice in this key policy area.

2.8 Ensure that the staff of Housing Services and Tenant Participation Officers in particular, will be committed and trained to facilitate and support the consultation and participation structure and mechanisms to enhance service delivery.

2.9 Ensure that elected members receive adequate training and support for their roles.

2.10 Ensure that individuals and client groups who consult with the Council and participate within the structure and mechanisms in place receive adequate training and support in their roles.

2.11 Involve individual clients and client groups where possible, in the design and monitoring of refurbishment and regeneration schemes and give feedback on the outcomes of their involvement.

2.12 Constantly be proactive and innovative in improving the ways client groups can influence and enhance service delivery, policy and practice.

2.13 Increase client group satisfaction levels.

3.  Policy Statement

Corby Borough Council will implement the following actions and standards in pursuit of its Tenant Consultation and Participation Policy:

3.1 Information

Corby Borough Council will provide client groups with regular information updates in a hard copy and electronic format and will provide a copy of the Customers Charter that explains their rights and responsibilities in a hard copy and electronic format.

3.2. Consultation And Participation : Structure And Mechanisms

The Borough Council, and its agents, will consult with FORTAC, tenant and resident associations; a tenant representative body, a leaseholder representative body, constituent service improvement panels and reality checking and consultation banks.

The Borough Council will also consult with other relevant interested groups. Registered Social Landlords will also be consulted as necessary to continually develop good practice in this policy area. The form of consultation that the Council adopts will be dependent on the type of decision or issue involved and the number of client groups affected. The Council will consult its client base through a number of methods including, where appropriate:

3.2.1 Holding meetings.
3.2.2 Conducting postal surveys.
3.2.3 Conducting telephone surveys.
3.2.4 Conducting home interview surveys.
3.2.5 Conducting office based interview surveys.
3.2.6 Conducting E-Mail surveys.
3.2.7 Requesting feedback from the Councils' website.
3.2.8 Periodic satisfaction surveys that will provide all client groups with an opportunity to comment individually on policies that affect them, services that they receive, and to make recommendations for policy and service improvements.

The results of consultation, such as the number of tenants, prospective tenants, leaseholders, or groups and organisations responding, and an analysis of their views, together with the methods of consultation, will be monitored in order to assess the effectiveness of all aspects of any consultation and participatory processes.

3.3 Consultation With Individuals

Corby Borough Council will consult individual tenants, prospective tenants, leaseholders and individuals of other clients groups who are affected by proposals for changes of policy and in service delivery, by one or more of the following methods:

3.3.1 Writing a letter or newsletter giving details of the proposed changes and requesting comments, usually within 28 days.
3.3.2 Calling a meeting or meetings for all affected client groups collectively or individually.
3.3.3 Visiting our client base in their homes.
3.3.4 Inviting our client base to the offices of Housing Services.
3.3.5 By telephone.
3.3.6 By E-Mail where applicable.

3.4 Consultation With Groups

Corby Borough Council will consult with:

3.4.1 FORTAC.
3.4.2 Recognised Tenant and Resident Associations affiliated to FORTAC.
3.4.3 Sub-groups of FORTAC.
3.4.3i A consultative housing forum.
3.4.3.ii A representative tenant panel.
3.4.3.iii A representative leaseholder panel.
3.4.3.iv Service improvement groups.
3.4.3 vi Consultation banks.
3.4.4 Relevant associations or with groups that are independent of FORTAC.
3.4.5 Relevant outside organisations as appropriate.

Corby Borough Council will meet regularly with FORTAC, recognised Tenant and Resident Associations affiliated to FORTAC and sub-groups to discuss matters of housing management, service delivery, housing policies, strategies, business planning and corporate plans.

3.5 Responses Received And Feedback To Client Groups

The Council recognises the critical role that client groups of Housing Services have in defining quality and assessing performance. As such the Council will utilise received
responses to continually improve service delivery and feedback the results and changes implemented as a result to those participating in the process so that they may measure the quality of their involvement.

3.6 Recognition And Support For Tenant And Resident Associations

Corby Borough Council will formally recognise a tenant and resident association affiliated to FORTAC, which has adopted the model constitution as approved by the Council and FORTAC that includes a diversity and an equal opportunities statement to ensure that the opportunity to participate will be available to all. Corby Borough Council will offer practical assistance to affiliated groups to FORTAC. This may include for example:

3.6.1 Provision of annual delegated grant aid to FORTAC that will include initial grant aid for new associations starting up and annual grant aid for established tenants and residents associations. The appropriate level of support will be agreed with FORTAC.

3.6.2 Jointly organising with FORTAC training for recognised affiliated and sub-groups of FORTAC by internal and independent external trainers where appropriate.

3.6.3 Provide networking opportunities on a local, county, regional and national basis.

3.6.4 Use of Council offices for meetings where required.

3.6.5 Provide help with the production of posters, letters and other information literature.

3.6.6 Use of photocopying facilities for emerging tenant and resident groups.

3.7 Recognition And Support For Other Client Groups

Corby Borough Council will recognise client groups set up to implement the structure and mechanisms that will deliver the Tenant Consultation and Participation Strategy and offer practical assistance for members of the client groups to carry out their roles.

3.8 Estate Management Boards And Tenant Management Organisations

Corby Borough Council will work with tenants who wish to form an Estate Management Board, a Tenant Management Organisation or similar organisations, to explore the best options for their future involvement by facilitating an application for grant funding from local and central government sources.

3.9 Community Development

Corby Borough Council will encourage client groups to become actively involved in those issues which affect their lives, homes and community that fall within the Councils’ remit. The Council will also work closely with other agencies to identify community needs.

3.10 Code Of Guidance For The Conduct Of Staff And Elected Members

3.10.1 Staff and elected Members will remember that it is the policy of Corby Borough Council to increase the participation of our client base in the design, delivery and monitoring of housing services, policies, strategies, business planning and corporate plans to enhance service delivery. It is therefore imperative that the
staff and elected Members of Corby Borough Council support and encourage tenants, prospective tenants and leaseholders and any other client group in this goal.

3.10.2 Staff and elected Members will be open and honest.

3.10.3 Staff and elected Members will be fair and impartial.

3.10.4 Client group representatives will be treated with courtesy and respect at all times.

3.10.5 Staff will make every effort to attend Tenant Participation meetings provided that they are invited in writing, with preferably at least two weeks notice. However, it is acknowledged that personal and/or other commitments may not allow this. If this is the case then all efforts will be made to send another member of staff if acceptable to the association, forum, group, panel or bank in question.

3.10.6 Staff and elected Members will remember that they are invited to meetings as guests and therefore will behave in an appropriate manner.

3.10.7 Staff and elected Members should remember that whilst at an association, forum, group, panel, or bank meetings they represent Corby Borough Council.

3.10.8 Staff and elected Members will advise tenant representatives on general and local policies and procedures. Importantly they will not discuss the management of individual tenancies.

3.10.9 Staff and elected Members cannot discuss with tenant representatives, prospective tenant representatives or leaseholder representatives, details of the personal circumstances of any individual without the written consent of that individual.

3.10.9 Staff cannot discuss with elected Members details of the personal circumstances of any individual without the written consent of that individual, except in so far as is allowed by the Councils’ Corporate Data Protection Officer.

3.11 Code Of Guidance For The Conduct Of Client Groups

Association, forum, group, panel and bank representatives should behave in a reasonable and courteous manner towards staff, councillors, group members and general membership of all participatory mechanisms in the structure for Tenant Participation.

3.11.1 Corby Borough Council may request that groups take action to deal with representatives who fail to act in accordance with this guideline or whose behaviour brings the Borough Council an association, forum, group, panel, or bank into disrepute.

In the case of abusive, racist or threatening behaviour, this may include the removal of the offending person(s) from the relevant body.

3.11.2 Participating representatives are selected to represent the interests of client groups and will not seek to use their position to seek preferential treatment or personal gain.

3.11.3 Association, forum, group, panel and bank representatives should be aware that although staff and elected Members will attempt to be available at short notice, access might be difficult due to workloads. It is therefore a preferable requirement that at least two weeks notice is given to any staff member or elected Member who is required to attend a meeting.

3.12 Confidentiality
Association, forum, group, panel or bank representatives should treat as confidential all information given to them by a tenant, prospective tenant, leaseholder or other member of a client group, where action is required on an individual's behalf. Deliberate disclosure of confidential information of any kind may result in Corby Borough Council requesting the removal of that person(s) from an association, forum, group, panel, or bank.

3.13 Complaints

If an association, forum, group, panel or bank is dissatisfied, or has complaints about members of staff or councillors regarding their dealings with the association, forum, group, panel or bank, the relevant body should:

3.13.1 Discuss the matter, and vote on the appropriate course of action.
3.13.2 Direct a written complaint to the appropriate line manager.
3.13.3 Await an initial response before deciding and taking further action.
3.13.4 Where individual residents have complaints about staff, these should go through the formal complaints’ procedure of Corby Borough Council. Forms are available from Housing Services and other service area outlets.

3.14 Disputes

Should a dispute arise, Corby Borough Council and FORTAC may suspend recognition of tenant and resident associations, forums, panels, groups or banks during disputes. This could include disputes between two or more bodies, between bodies and Corby Borough Council, or between members of the same body. This is to allow time to investigate the cause of a dispute and to make recommendations to resolve it.

Associations, forums, groups, panels and banks are expected to comply with recommendations resulting from any investigation or mediation. During the period of suspension, associations will not be eligible for grant support, training or involvement in consultation or participatory initiatives.

3.15 Financial Monitoring Of Associations

Where it is found that deliberate financial mismanagement has taken place, Corby Borough Council will expect committee members involved to be deselected from the committee of an Association. Such persons will be excluded from further involvement with registered affiliated tenant and resident associations or FORTAC. Where necessary, Corby Borough Council may instigate Police involvement in investigations. Where mismanagement is a result of lack of information or training, such Associations will be expected to have relevant committee members attend basic book-keeping training.

3.16 Political Allegiance

Corby Borough Council requires that all associations, forums, groups and panels and banks act in a non-political manner when conducting business. They should therefore invite equal participation from all local councillors, irrespective of their political party. Councillors cannot act as committee members of FORTAC or a tenant and resident association. They can however be invited to attend their committee, public and annual
general meetings in either a listening or speaking capacity but cannot cast a vote in any voting procedures.

4. Priorities

It is a priority of Corby Borough Council to empower its client base through the concept of tenant consultation and participation. To this end an annual budget is available for providing financial resources to FORTAC that includes the provision of a start up grant and continuing annual grant aid to its affiliated tenant and resident associations through delegated grant aid from the Housing Revenue Account.

5. Responsibility

The elected Members of Corby Borough Council will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of this policy. It is the elected Members’ responsibility to provide the overall direction and leadership for the policy and to monitor its outcomes to ensure that the Council and its Housing Service comply with the Councils’ policy. They will do this through the Chair of the Community Committee and the Chair of the Community Committee Overview & Scrutiny Panel, each of whom will receive reports on progress.

The Chief Executive, Corporate Director For Operational Services, and the Head of Housing Services are responsible for delivering the policy and are accountable for its implementation.

All managers and supervisors have a responsibility for familiarising themselves with the policy, for ensuring that it is distributed to, and understood by, all employees and for dealing appropriately with any breaches of it.

Every employee is responsible for putting this policy in place.

6. Monitoring And Review

As a part of the review process Corby Borough Council, in partnership with FORTAC will, through a Consultation And Participation Management Review Board, meet quarterly to monitor and appraise the impact of its Tenant Consultation and Participation Policy with progress being reported through Member Bulletins.