

**LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST**

**TENANTS EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY**

**WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP**  
**WITH ASCHAM HOMES**

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## **General Statement**

The London borough of Waltham Forest is committed to ensuring that tenants and leaseholders are at the heart of the option appraisal process. As key stakeholders it is essential that tenants and leaseholders make a genuine contribution to the option appraisal process and as a result that they have full ownership of its conclusions.

This strategy is intended to set out how tenants and leaseholders will be central to the decision making process and also how they will influence subsequent decisions that follow on from the option appraisal.

## **Introduction**

The Communities Plan requires all local authorities to set out, through an Options' Appraisal (OA) process, how they will achieve and maintain the Decent Homes standard for their own housing stock. The OA will need to be signed-off by the Government Office for London no later than January 2005

The process must be undertaken with the full involvement of tenants and leaseholders (in this document, "tenants" is used to mean tenants and leaseholders); however it may be perceived by some as a period of change, and as such be viewed with fear and concern. It is therefore vital to have a rigorous Tenant Empowerment Strategy to ensure tenants have a clear understanding of the facts to allay any fears they may have, and enable them to take an informed view.

The Council's Strategic Plan clearly sets out the importance of involving our customers. Our key priorities are: "Building Sustainable Communities", "Extending Quality and Choice in the Housing Market" and to "Delivering a Quality Housing Service".

The Council's vision is to "build sustainable communities now and for future generations". This vision is supported by a number of ambitions and priorities for the next five years.

These ambitions are reflected in the aims and objectives of the Council's Housing Services, in partnership with Ascham Homes. There is a deep commitment to tenant participation and we aim to work in partnership with tenants to provide a housing service that is constantly improving. The Tenant Participation Compact (in draft form) sets out how the Council involves tenants and the Option Appraisal process is seen as a great opportunity to widen this involvement further. This Tenant Empowerment Strategy is based on the principles contained within the Tenant Participation Compact.

Tenants, staff, members, the Tenant Investment Working Party (TIWP) Ascham Homes and other key stakeholders have been consulted on and involved in developing this strategy. The Ascham Homes Community Development Unit (CDU) will work with tenants and staff to help develop and implement the Tenant Empowerment Strategy.

## **Aims and objectives of the Strategy**

This Tenant Empowerment Strategy sets out how tenants will be involved in making decisions over the stock options appraisal and how we will make sure that they receive the support they need so that they are at the centre of the decision-making process about their future.

This strategy also makes provision for tenants to indicate whether their aspirations will be met simply through achieving the basic Decent Homes Standard. If this is not the case, then tenants will be given sufficient information to conclude how best their aspirations can realistically be met.

This strategy shows how we will:

- Raise awareness of the OA process and the meaning of each option for Waltham Forest tenants
- Maximise the number of tenants involved
- Empower and inform all tenants
- Link in with existing Tenant Participation structures
- Work with the CDU so that resources are maximised, any gaps are "plugged" and the Council and the CDU's approach complement each other.
- Make appraising the options for the Council's housing stock a positive exercise for tenants.
- Maximise publicity for this important process
- Ensure that tenant representatives, who will play a role in disseminating information, are given a full understanding of the issues
- Ensure the OA process is used to encapsulate the broader concerns of stakeholders about the quality and delivery of the housing service for example regeneration and community safety.
- Foster a sense of co-operation and understanding amongst all involved parties

The Council and Ascham Homes will work with CDU to enable tenants to understand fully and contribute to the information provided about option appraisal. Key objectives are to ensure that tenants:

- Understand the implications of each of the options, including the investment priorities (this may involve additional training for tenants)
- Are confident to express their views and feel sure that their views feedback in to the process
- Are provided with updates and new information on an ongoing basis throughout the process.
- Take a key role in the decision-making process

It is important to ensure that all tenants have an equal opportunity to be involved in the OA. Traditionally groups such as young people, black minority

and ethnic (BME) groups, people with disabilities and the elderly have been "hard to reach" so it is vital to make every effort to engage with these groups. Different methods of involvement are appropriate to encourage residents from these groups to participate and utilising existing networks, and forums rather than expecting all tenants to attend meetings will assist in this aim.

The four main issues relating to the BME strategy in this regard are as follows:

- 1) increase the representations of BME members in the Tenant Council to 27%
- 2) increase the BME satisfaction level to 65% (BVPI 74)
- 3) Empower BME community groups through training to be an advocacy role and representations in tenancy issues and decision making process
- 4) wider training and encouragement activities for hard to reach groups such as youngsters.

These ambitions will empower the BME Communities and will be achieved in partnership with Ascham Homes and BME Community Groups through the Community Services Housing BME Strategy .

It is important to identify the relevant message for each group in the community and to deliver that message in the most appropriate way. It is understandable that every audience will be almost solely interested in how this will affect them.

Officers and Members will play a key role in encouraging the empowerment of tenants throughout the OA process. It is essential relevant training and/or updates will be provided for these stakeholders and to ensure that they appreciate the importance of the tenant's role. In turn officers will be able to assist with any queries on a day-to-day basis at the frontline of the housing service. Training for frontline staff will be carried out and information will be available at local offices. Staff and Members will be briefed on the tenant empowerment and communication strategies so they understand fully the role they play in their implementation. To enable them to fulfil this role, training and/or information sessions will be provided throughout the OA.

## **The Tenant Participation Structure in LBWF**

The Council in partnership with Ascham Homes will manage the OA process.

Further to this, TIWP representatives will work closely with CDU to plan the extent and scope of their consultation, and to monitor its progress.

Tenants must be truly involved in the OA process in order that they can make a meaningful contribution and so have ownership of the conclusions. The final decision of the Council will then be an informed one, encompassing the views of the majority of tenants.

## **The role of the Independent Tenant Advisor (ITA)**

In the original option appraisal in 2002, PPCR fulfilled this role, For the purpose of this re-assessment, tenants' representatives decided not to re-engage a ITA.

Their decision was made on the basis that no value would be added by employing another ITA, and indeed that to do so would complicate an already difficult "revisit" of the options.

The Consultation and Communication Strategy outlines how the options appraisal process strategically supports documents such as the Community Plan, the Housing Strategy and Ascham Homes Business Plan, and how they underpin the involvement structures and development plan within the Tenant Participation Compact. It also details the range of decision-making forums and meetings that tenants can get involved in.

## **How the Council and Ascham Homes consult with tenants**

Under s.105 of the Housing Act 1985 (Provision of Information and Consultation), the Council must consult secure tenants on housing management matters and give them or their representatives an opportunity to make their views known. This means that before introducing a new programme or changing policies relating to the management, maintenance, improvement or demolition of tenants' homes, or the provision of services or amenities, the Council must consult. There are various levels at which this consultation is organised, depending on the type of change and the number of tenants likely to be affected by it. Tenants may be consulted as:

- Individual tenants
- As part of a group (estate, block or area)
- Through a recognised Tenants' and Residents' Association or Estate Champion
- Via Leasehold Forum Meetings (leaseholders)
- Tenant Investment Working Party
- Contract Panels
- Service Development Groups

There are also a range of opportunities to participate in a number of different meetings, forums and panels and this allows tenants, residents, stakeholders and partners to discuss housing management and associated issues, such as policies, procedures and performance. These include:

**Ascham Homes Board:** The Board is made up of fifteen Directors, seven of them tenants, elected by tenants as a whole. The meetings of the Board and its sub-committees are held in public, and residents may put questions to the Board in the first part of the agenda. The Board is open to all residents of the Borough and meets on a six weekly basis.

**Annual General Meeting:** Ascham Homes holds its Annual General Meeting (AGM) in October each year. The public may attend this meeting where the company reports on its annual performance and achievements, as well as selecting the Bursary recipient [details of which is within the Ascham Homes Business Plan 2005], agreeing change of rules, and changes to Board offices.

**Board Member Surgeries:** Board members hold surgeries in the areas where housing stock is located. The surgeries are linked into Area Contract Panels (see below) and tenants can meet Board members to air their views and concerns in person. Surgeries are open to all tenants and leaseholders of the Council.

**Area Contract Panels:** There are six Area Contract Panels, and these allow tenants the opportunity to scrutinise the work of Ascham Homes. The meetings also decide how Major Repair Allowance funding should be spent within the area. The meetings are held on a six weekly cycle, and are chaired by a resident. The meetings are public meetings and are held in venues within the contract area.

**Chair of Contract Panels and Executive Management Team meetings:** A monthly meeting where the Executive Management Team meets with the Chairs of the Area Contract Panels to discuss issues around policy, strategy and service provision that have been referred by the Area Contract Panels.

**Waltham Forest Community Councils:** There are six Community Councils that were introduced by the Council in 2003 with the aim of bringing democracy closer to local people. They encourage all sections of the community to get involved with local issues and help to improve council services and the environment. The meetings consist of two parts: a public forum, which gives local people the opportunity to discuss issues and comment on items for consultation; and a formal Community Council meeting. The meetings are held five times a year.

**Impact Assessment Scheme:** This is a new initiative being piloted by Ascham Homes, with the aim of ensuring that comments, complaints or positive feedback made by tenant and residents of major repairs schemes are taken into account and used to select, improve and monitor contractors.

**Sheltered Housing Meetings:** Since April 2004, the Community Development Team has held a series of informal consultation sessions within our sheltered Housing Schemes. The meetings are held every three months and are an important way for the views of elderly and disabled tenants to be taken into account by Ascham Homes.

**Tenants' Council:** This is the Council's forum for formally liaising with and consulting its tenants. The Tenants' Council meets six weekly, and performs a scrutiny role of the services provided to tenants by the Council and Ascham Homes.

**Tenant Investment Working Party:** This provides a Borough-wide consultation forum made up of Council and Ascham Homes officers, and TRA representatives. The Working Party has a scrutiny role on strategy, policy, consultation and performance and meet on a six weekly basis. It has a particularly important role in terms of the OA process.

**Leasehold Panel:** Ascham Homes held its first Leaseholders Forum in April 2004. The Forum was set up at the request of leaseholders to address their service charge concerns and to promote and encourage best practice as recommended by the Audit Commission inspection report. The forum is held twice yearly and all Waltham Forest Lease holders are invited to attend.

**Circulars and letters :** Where matters affect a particular estate, block or small group of properties, circular letters will be sent to all tenants affected.

**Tenants' and Residents' Associations:** There are tenants' and residents' associations in most parts of the Borough, officially recognized by the Council and Ascham Homes as representing the views and interests of the tenants in their areas. The Council or Ascham Homes may request that issues of a local nature be raised at TRA meetings for information, discussion, consultation and feedback. Any outcomes will be reported at a subsequent meeting and/or through the TRA newsletter, and will also be reported in the minutes of meetings, to which all association members have access.

**Ad Hoc Meetings:** Where considered appropriate the Council or Ascham Homes will call meetings and invite tenants to attend.

**Focus Groups:** Where the Council or Ascham Homes wishes to gain the views of tenants over a longer period of time and in greater depth, it invites a representative section of tenants to attend smaller meetings, on a regular basis over a set period of time.

**Steering Groups:** Where the Council or Ascham Homes is looking to develop certain projects, tenants may be invited to sit on a Steering Group so that their views of developing the project can be taken into account.

**Estate Champions** These are individuals recognised by the Ascham Homes who seek to represent tenants in their area where, for whatever reason, a TRA is not achievable or sustainable

Tenants need not attend meetings to gain information. They can access important documents and publications through the Internet on the Council's website [www.lbwf.gov.uk](http://www.lbwf.gov.uk) or on the Ascham Homes website: [www.aschamhomes.org.uk](http://www.aschamhomes.org.uk)

**Ascham Homes Business and Delivery Plan:** This sets out Ascham Homes' vision, values and medium term objectives. The Plan shows how Ascham Homes complements the Council's Community Plan and corporate objectives, and is available on the Ascham Homes website.

For the purpose of the OA, it has been agreed by the TIWP that their meetings will be opened up to include the wider spectrum of interested tenants, on an observation only basis.

The CDU has also agreed to attend Leasehold Panel/Area Contract Panel meetings where possible to impart information about OA and gauge resident's aspirations and/or concerns.

The Waltham Forest Housing Policy Team have presented the Options Appraisal Consultation Programme 2004 – 2005 at all Area Contract Panel meeting in August and September 2004. This has afforded another useful avenue for key stakeholders to engage in the consultation process.

Less formal methods of involvement, which do not require a regular or intensive time commitment, are:

- Seminars (budget setting)
- Estate Walkabouts
- Surveys
- Using facilities at Tenant Resource Centre
- Open days
- Participating in focus groups
- Completing satisfaction questionnaires
- Conferences and Training
- Attendance at Estate Based meetings

The Council will build upon this existing participation framework to promote the broadest involvement of tenants in the OA process. Moreover this will be added to by:

- The production of specific OA newsletters; and
- Complementary consultation exercises that the CDU is preparing, with the assistance of tenants' representatives

Whilst we acknowledge that written information does not always meet everyone's needs, it does form an important element of any communication strategy. However in this strategy we are seeking to achieve as diverse a range of methods of communication as possible. In doing so, we hope that

communication channels will be opened up to a maximum number of stakeholders.

### **Progress on Option Appraisal to date]**

There are four broad stages to the communication/consultation process reflecting the three main stages of the Option Appraisal process itself. These are start, middle, conclusion and communication or stages 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Stage one of this process tackles awareness raising. Two identification and evaluation stage three how decisions are made and four communicating that decision. These stages are detailed within the Communication and Consultation Strategy.

Ascham Homes will be represented at Contract Panels by a Senior Officer and will provide a minute taker.

Legitimate transport expenses for tenant and leaseholder members will be met by Ascham Homes where these are not already covered by existing funding arrangements for Tenant and Resident Associations.

Ascham Homes will provide a newsletter for Contract Panels to share good practice and keep all Chairs and panels advised of what is happening in other areas.

### **Resources**

To enable tenants to be fully involved in the process and ensure the aims of this strategy are met, the Council acknowledges that there must be adequate resources available. This will include financial resources as well as training, officer support and the appointment of the PPCR or Independent Tenant Advisor

Throughout the OA process a number of newsletters and information leaflets have been provided to aid tenants understanding. The Council has made budgetary provision for these costs as well as the costs associated with the appointment of the ITA, and other consultants. Additional training or specialist advice was not needed for tenants and the ITA worked with tenant representatives throughout the whole process.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation of this Tenant Empowerment Strategy will be undertaken by the Council and Ascham Homes in partnership.

This partnership will ensure that the consultation process is fully evaluated, and that the process has reached as many tenants as possible. Tenants' understanding of this process and their responses will be checked and reviewed and the success of these different methods will be feedback to tenant representatives and stakeholders.

The final stage of the CDU's involvement will be to work together with the Council, tenants', and wider stakeholders to interpret the findings of the consultation exercises and make recommendations accordingly. This will hopefully produce an unbiased and accurate reflection of the tenant point of view, which will inform the Council's decision- making process.

## **Conclusion**

The successful involvement of this strategy will ensure that at the end of the OA:

- Tenants have been at the heart of the process, and their views have been properly incorporated in to the decision-making process
- Tenants have an understanding of the implications of each option for Waltham Forest
- An informed decision is taken by Tenants on the best fit financial option for Waltham Forest
- A clear direction is given on priorities for investment in the Council stock to achieve the Decent Homes Standard and if possible to go beyond.
- An informed decision is taken on the preferred management option for the delivery of Housing Services for Waltham Forest.
- A consensus is reached on the importance of the provision of social housing in the future
- Priorities for improvements in all housing services are identified

**LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST**  
**HOUSING OPTION APPRAISAL**  
**COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION STRATEGY**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Government has set a target for all councils to ensure that their housing stock meets the decent homes standard by 2010.
- 1.2 As an integral part of that process each council owning its housing stock must complete an option appraisal exercise, to identify the best way to delivering decent homes. The option appraisal study requires detailed consultation and communication with a range of stakeholders. How Waltham Forest intends to undertake this consultation is set out in this strategy document.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Waltham Forest started looking at stock options In September 2001 where we outlined the options available to residents at our Housing Strategy Stakeholders Forum

### ***The options were:***

- *Maintaining the status quo* - Waltham Forest Council owns and manages the housing stock
  - *Arms Length Management Organisation* – Create a separate company owned by the Council to manage the housing stock but ownership remains with the Council
  - *Stock Transfer*- The stock goes to a separate organisation which will own and manage it
  - *Private Finance Initiative* – Private finance is used to repair the stock and is paid back over a period, however the stock remains in the ownership of the Council
- 2.2 Over the period of a year, the Council consulted with tenants, leaseholders and a range of stakeholders on the four options, culminating in a ballot of all tenants in October 2002. In the ballot 85% voted in favour of setting up an ALMO as the vehicle for delivering decent homes.
  - 2.3 Taking this option forward, the Council made a bid for £68 million of additional ALMO funding to deliver decent homes. The ALMO, (Ascham Homes) became operational in May 2003. Its main function is to manage the housing stock.
  - 2.4 The company has it's own management structure consisting of fifteen directors. There are seven tenant representative, four council members and four independent members with expertise in relevant fields.

### **3.0 Joint working**

3.1 Waltham Forest Housing Services and Ascham partnership to deliver decent council housing for all by 2010. We aim to achieve this goal by

- Working with all stakeholders, particularly residents
- Involving Council members and officers, in joint consultation from the outset
- Collaborating on all aspects of the process, with the Tenant Investment Working Party (TIWP), and Tenants Council

### **4.0 WHAT IS THE CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

4.1 At the start of appraising options we have to produce a strategy for communicating and consulting with tenants, leaseholders and all other stakeholders. We also need a strategy for empowering tenants and leaseholders to enable them to fully participate and ensure they can make an informed choice.

4.2 This document sets out:

- How we intend to engage with all the key stakeholders involved and affected by this process
- How we will use existing and new consultation structures
- What methods, techniques, and ideas we will adopt; and
- How we will attempt to reach and secure reaction from residents with the aim of going beyond the easily accessible groups and individuals.

4.3 Extensive consultation will continue for a further three months and we envisage a submission to the Government Office for London in January 2005. This strategy therefore follows the stages with appropriate consultation activities. The content and nature of engagement therefore falls into three broad phases - i.e.

- Awareness raising ' between July and September 2004,
- Options identification and appraisal between September and November 2004
- 'Decision making December 2004 and January 2005
- Communicating the decision

4.4 The exercise to determine a suitable option for Waltham Forest is being led by the in-house policy team, with consultants

engaged for their specific expertise and external verification of the process.

## **5.0 GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE ON COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

- 5.1 Government guidance is clear that there has to be a communication and consultation strategy at the beginning of the option appraisal exercise and that all stakeholders are given information and engaged in appropriate and inclusive ways.
- 5.2 Prior to discussing options for the future management of the Housing stock it is important to inform stakeholders about the need for the exercise, and engage in a dialogue locally about the issues. We are also encouraged to broaden our perspectives to include wider concerns of residents rather than focusing narrowly on capital investment. We therefore need to consult on all issues and agree on a shared vision of the future before deciding on options.
- 5.3 The process needs to be fair and factually based. We will use existing involvement and information structures and build on them for this exercise, e.g. TRA Meetings, Area Contract Panels, TIWP and the Tenants Council.
- 5.4 We need to ensure the process is accessible by using clear and simple English, large printing, tape versions, and translation services. The choice of venues and timing of meetings are also expected to follow equally clear diversity lines.
- 5.5 We are expected to have appropriate measures to ensure the strategy is as effective for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) tenants and leaseholders as other members of the community.
- 5.6 We are advised to use a variety of tools or methods of engagement including tenant panels, and link this strategy with the empowerment strategy.

## **6.0 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

- 6.1 The main objectives of our strategy are to:
  - Revisit the original consultation strategy set out in the draft Tenants Compact still represent the settled views of engaged stakeholders

Increase the knowledge base and awareness of issues and choices before us in relation to managing the housing stock.

- Widen the focus of our attention beyond capital investment and bricks and mortar, to include concerns of residents such as delivery of quality services, community safety, and good governance.
- Ensure that the strategy is developed, owned and implemented jointly between the Council, Ascham Homes, Council residents and other stakeholders including voluntary and faith groups; but acknowledge and support the wishes of any group who might wish to be independent.
- Ensure easy access to information, events etc, and provide ample opportunities for feedback to be made, recorded and used.
- Learn and improve the consultation process adding new ideas to existing good practice and keep what works by applying it.
- Engage widely, with a targeted audience but aim to include as many people as possible.
- Ensure transparency and openness to gain trust and confidence.
- Ensure accessibility and capacity building to empower and bring about a high level of participation.
- Ensure that information sent out meets the language and literacy needs of stakeholders.
- Ensure that information is presented in plain language which is jargon-free and impartial and that the conduct of the exercise is based on a rigorous analysis of options before a decision is made.

## **7.0 THE STAKEHOLDERS**

### **7.1 Our main stakeholders are:**

- 11409 tenants and 1,280 leaseholders that are our primary stakeholders and primary audience
- LB Waltham Forest and Ascham Homes staff.
- Council members and other service units e.g. finance, legal, technical etc.
- Trade Unions
- Strategic partnership groups e.g. the Local Strategic Partnership
- Voluntary sector, community groups, Black and ethnic Minority communities and their organisations and faith groups

- Registered Social Landlords
- Private organisations delivering services to residents of Waltham Forest

## **8.0 EXISTING COMMUNICATION, CONSULTATION AND DECISION MAKING STRUCTURES IN WALTHAM FOREST**

8.1 Councils Consultation and Decision making structure

8.2 The Council has adopted a new way of working by modernising the way it makes decisions. This is in line with Government proposals and is aimed at improving democracy, accountability and efficiency.

8.3 New policies will only become effective if they are agreed by full Council and after public debate.

### **8.4 Cabinet**

8.5 A Cabinet of lead Councillors will make all strategic decisions within the policy framework and budget agreed by the full Council.

### **8.6 Overview and Scrutiny**

8.7 Overview and Scrutiny Committees of non-Cabinet members have been established to monitor decisions, review policies and performance and to make recommendations for future action. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission is responsible for looking at different aspects of the Councils' Services and is supported by 3 sub-committees

8.8 Where the decisions are made by Cabinet within existing Council policies, they become effective immediately unless they are "called in". Calling in is a mechanism whereby other Councillors can challenge decisions taken before they are implemented.

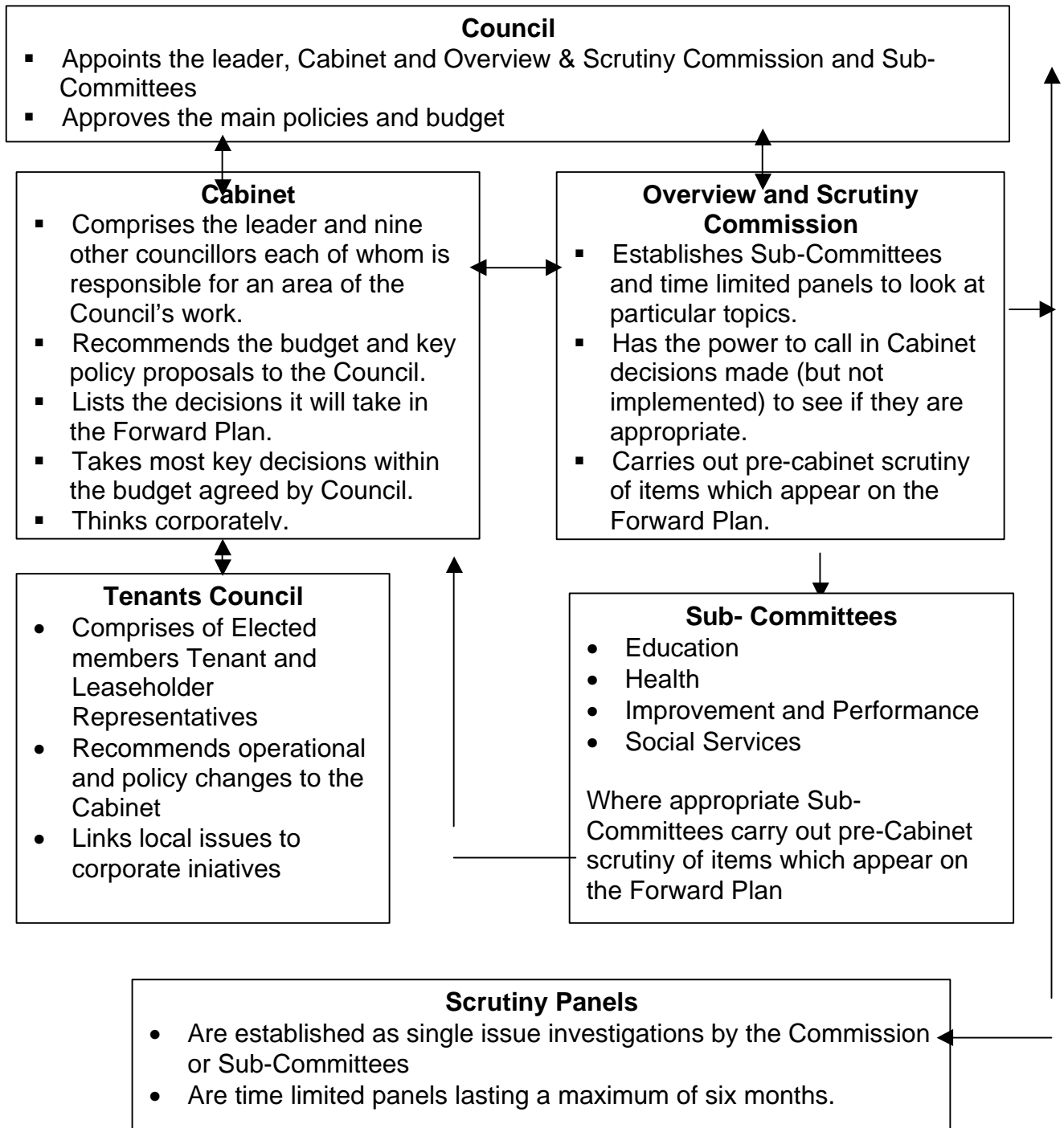
8.9 Four Councillors of the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee can ask for a meeting of that Committee within five working days of the publication of the decision. This Overview and Scrutiny Committee can then, if they agree, call a meeting of full Council to discuss the issue or make recommendations to Cabinet.

8.10 The following Scrutiny Committees have been established:

- Overview and Scrutiny Commission
- Education Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee
- Health Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee

- Social Services Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee

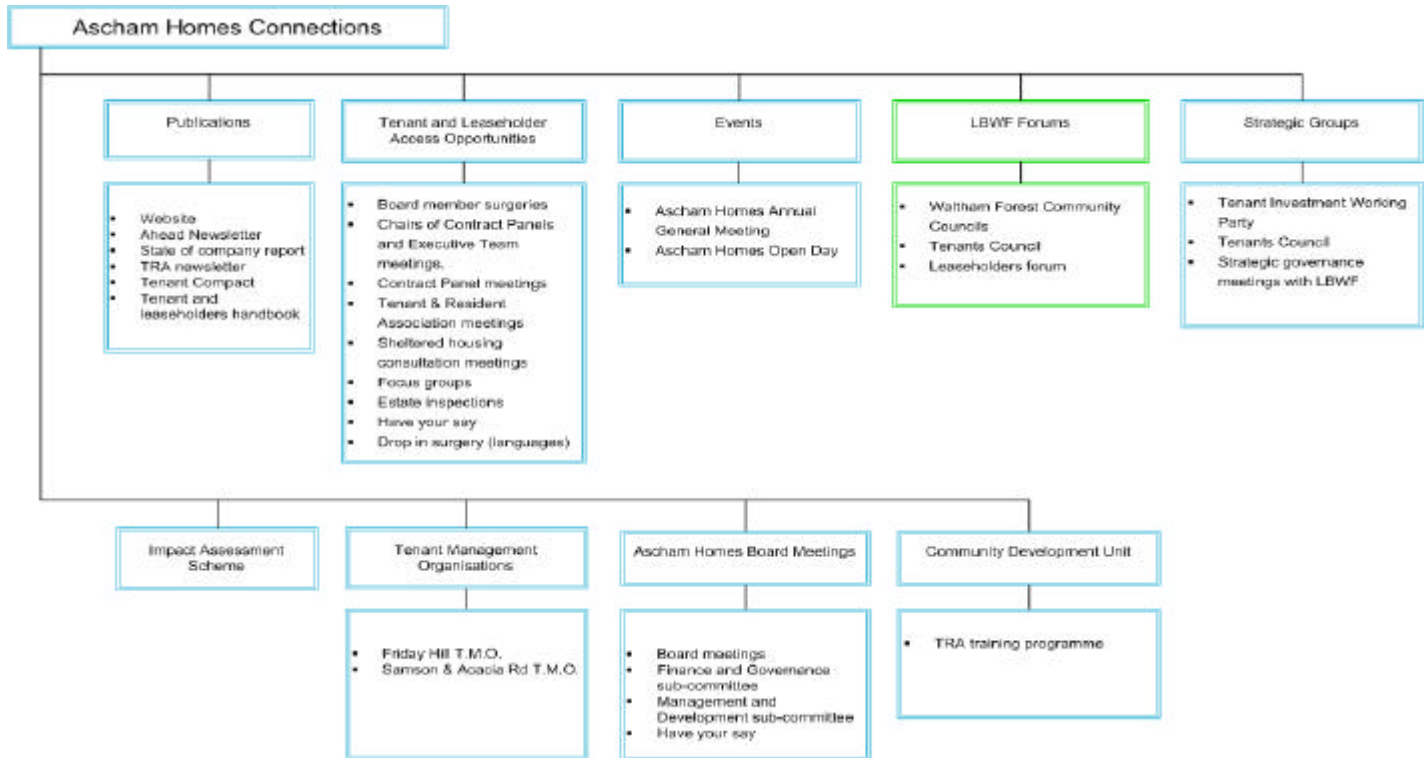
**Flowchart - Political Structure in Waltham Forest**



8.11 The link between the Council decision making body and Tenants and Leaseholders is the Tenants Council. This body is a combination of

Tenant and Resident representatives who review operational and policy changes and make recommendations to Cabinet

## 9.0 EXISTING COMMUNICATION, CONSULTATION AND DECISION MAKING STRUCTURES IN ASCHAM HOMES



9.1 Under the Housing Act 1985 (Provision of Information and Consultation Section 105), the Council must consult tenants on a range of housing management matters and give them or their representatives an opportunity to make their views known. This means that before introducing a new programme or changing policies relating to the management, maintenance, improvement or demolition of tenants homes, or the provision of services or amenities, the Council must consult with their tenants.

9.2 There are various levels at which this consultation will be organised, depending upon the circumstances of the changes and the number of tenants and leaseholders likely to be affected.

Consultation may comprise

- Individual tenants or as part of a group (estate, block or area)
- A recognised Tenants and Residents Association / Estate Champion
- Leasehold Forum Meetings

- Tenant Investment Working Party
- Contract Panels
- Service Development Groups

9.3 All consultation with Tenants and Residents is now led by the Councils management agents Ascham Homes

9.4 The structure chart above, “Ascham Homes Connections”, highlights the strategic position of their communications strategy and its links with its management board and the community. We believe that the establishment of Ascham Homes has opened new and dynamic opportunities to drive consultation, forward, as a primary engagement tool.

9.5 There is also a range of opportunities to participate in meetings, forums and panels that allow tenants, residents, stakeholders and partners to discuss housing management and associated issues, performance monitoring, policies and procedures.

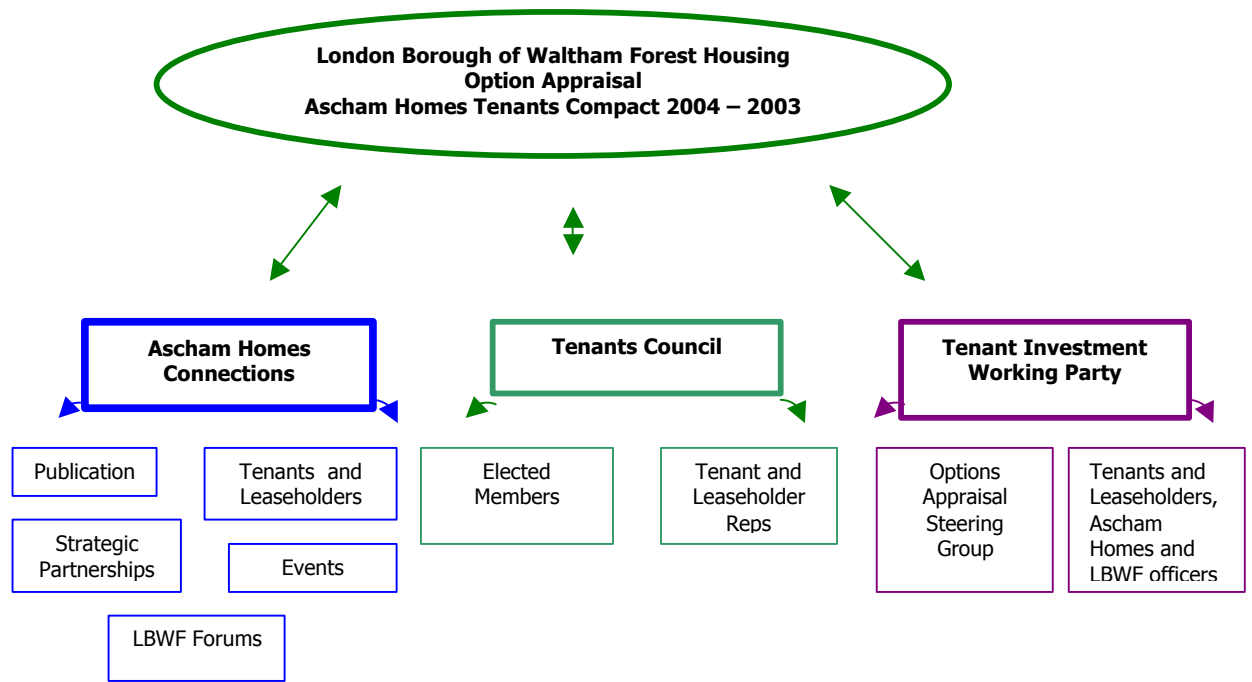
9.6 These are further detailed within Tenants Compact 2004 – 2003 Stage (3) Consultation draft

## **10.0 COMMUNICATION, CONSULTATION AND DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE WITH HOUSING OPTION APPRAISAL**

10.1 The consultation and decision making structure supporting Waltham Forests Options Appraisal is a dynamic three way partnership.

10.2 The three-way dialogue ensures information will flow out from the partnership and encourage a variety of traditional and non traditional feedback. This feedback will be fed into the business planning and options development exercises to inform analysis and decision-making.

10.3.1 The following diagram shows the three way partnership structure for consultation and decision-making, between the Council, Ascham Homes and the Tenants Investment Working Party.



## 11.0 METHODS OF CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT WE HAVE USED AND CONTINUE TO PERSUE

11.1 The following is a list of the various consultation/communication methods adopted by Waltham Forest Housing Service and continued and which have been expanded by Ascham Homes

- Tenant Involvement Working Party meetings
- Ascham Homes Board Meetings
- Open Meetings
- Focus groups
- Contract Panel Meetings
- Conferences/Seminars/Workshops
- Fun events (local and borough-wide)
- Press briefings
- Local Radio and TV
- Roadshow/Displays
- Website
- Member briefings
- Staff briefings
- ODPM briefings
- Surveys
- Trips to learn from others
- Use of Customer Services Team to inform and engage with callers

## 12.0 DETAILS OF METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

12.1 To maximise stakeholder involvement the Options Appraisal programme has adopted a range of different types of activities. This

has included monthly meetings and events at different times to ensure flexibility for a range of stakeholders and also encouraged interaction, networking and feedback. The use of mass media, the Internet and e-mail has meant that regular and up-to-date information is readily available to stakeholders. Similarly, regular information on a smaller scale has been put out in booklets and bulletins.

12.2 We engage cross-sections of the borough's population through focus groups. Our empowerment and capacity building strategies enable people to receive the right information and to reach informed decisions.

12.3 Listed below in categories are the means through which we engage with people.

### **Tenants Investment Working Party (TIWP) Meetings**

TIWP is the main and central group overseeing this process. It is made up, tenants and leaseholders representatives, Ascham Homes Officers and a Council officer. The Group also acts as an advisory body to Tenants Council.

### **Other Formal Meetings**

These meetings include Cabinet, Ascham Homes Board Meetings, Contract Panel and Tenant and Resident Associations. We plan regular reports being made to these meetings for information, feedback and guidance. It would be for the Housing Options Appraisal Working Group to recommend a final option to the Strategy Committee for approval.

### **Meetings we organise**

We will organise ad hoc meetings for a range of stakeholders over the next four months. small and large meetings for different audiences and places. These will be on-going throughout the next 4 months. They will vary in time, location and style to meet different needs so as to be effective.

Leaseholders for instance have specific issues of concern, which may be best addressed at meetings for them separately. We will also organise meetings in our sheltered housing schemes specifically for our elderly residents.

We plan to hold local conferences as an opportunity to bring together all stakeholder representatives including GOL and ODPM at key stages.

### **Meetings with the community**

We cannot rely just on people coming to meetings and events organised by us. We need to widen the scope, by targeting and attending meetings of stakeholders. This means we are able to engage with more people who may otherwise be missed out. Such meetings could be Tenant and Resident Association regular meetings or AGMs. They might also include meetings of

the Local Strategic Partnership, Waltham Forest Race Equality Council and a range of community forums

## **Events**

Formal or informal meetings are not enough. Events like a Fun Day can draw people into contributing to the process who would otherwise be unable to or disinterested in attending formal meetings. We plan to organise such events as well as seek time or space in other people's events for our roadshow. This was achieved through a well-attended and very successful Ascham Homes "open day" on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2004.

## **Briefings**

Both written and oral briefings will be made as and when needed to specific groups e.g. staff, Members, the press etc

## **Media**

The local press are invited to events and will receive information to reduce inaccurate reporting and encourage probing but accurate and fair coverage of issues. Management of news has already started with a briefing to news editors and journalists. This approach has already resulted in a more balanced press reporting . We will be developing this relationship further with a programme of regular updates of what is happening through press releases and meetings with the local press.

We have and will continue to use 'advertorials' (bought space in newspapers) to present issues and progress in the local media. We aim to ensure effective distribution of the free newspapers by monitoring and reporting to the editors on how well they reach our target audiences.

## **Website**

We will use pages within the Council's and Ascham Homes website, but with its own URL (web address) for direct access and also have links to other sites -e.g. Office of deputy Prime Minister, Chartered Institute of Housing, Audit Commission, Priority Estates Project (PEP) and other local authorities. The site will provide information and will also be interactive, allowing visitors to post their views and raise questions. The chosen website address will be [www.LBWF.housingpolicy.@.gov.uk](http://www.LBWF.housingpolicy.@.gov.uk)

## **Booklets and Bulletins**

At the early stages of the process we will put together a booklet to explain the reasons why we are revisiting this process. The strategic options/delivery vehicles, the business planning and option appraisal processes, as well as all the relevant issues. Short bulletins, which give reports on progress and address burning issues, will be put out for information and feedback. Electronic versions will be posted on our website.

## **Displays**

We intend to have regular displays in our libraries and Council office foyers in the form of posters and/or desk/panel displays which would be staffed on occasion. The same will apply to other Council and non-Council public buildings –e.g. churches and places of worship, pubs, supermarkets, schools, and at established poster sites. The purpose would be to repeat core messages over a period of time to catch people’s attention and raise awareness.

## **Surveys**

The Council regularly undertakes surveys for both internal and external use. We will therefore use existing arrangements to conduct different forms of surveys that will be a helpful in seeking views and reactions.

### **13.0 SOME KEY ISSUES**

#### **13.1 Black and Ethnic Minority Communities**

13.2 Waltham Forest’s black and ethnic minority population represents 36% of the total population. We are working with the Waltham Forest Race Equality Council to target and contact BME groups and also organise BME focus groups.

13.3 This strategy has been diversity proofed by staff from the Waltham Forest Race Equality Council. Throughout the process we will ensure that our policies and actions have a beneficial effect on our BME population.

#### **14.0 Languages policy**

14.1 We will be using the services of Waltham Forest Community Interpreting Service to ensure we cover the main languages spoken in the borough to avoid excluding any group of people. Additional service will be sourced from Language Line, which is available through the Council.

#### **15.0 Role of Independent Tenant Adviser**

15.1 Through consultation and steer from the Tenant Investment Party it was decided not to re engage an ITA. It was considered that this may confuse stakeholders in an already complex process. Coupled with this we re consulted using a variety of methods as discussed earlier, conducted a revised Stock Condition Survey ratified by Kinge Sturge consultants, updated the original build cost model. This then allowed Hacas Chapman Hendy to produce a new financial options appraisal including sensitivity analysis of the preferred option.

## **16.0 RESIDENT EMPOWERMENT, CAPACITY BUILDING AND ACCESSIBILITY**

- 16.1 There is a separate Tenant and Resident Empowerment Strategy that covers these issues in more detail, but because of the obvious links with the engagement process, it is apt to mention here broadly how much our success will depend on empowering tenants and leaseholders in particular.
- 16.2 The Tenant and Resident Empowerment Strategy will show our intention of ensuring stakeholders are in positions to influence and help make decisions, providing opportunities for learning and development, and of ensuring that there are no blockages stopping stakeholders from being engaged or playing a decisive role.

## **17.0 GENERAL TIMETABLE OF ACTIVITIES**

- 17.1 There are four broad stages to the communication/consultation process reflecting the three main stages of the Option Appraisal process itself. These are start, middle, conclusion and communication or stages 1, 2, 3 and 4

### **STAGE ONE –awareness raising**

18.2 This is the period beginning in July 2004. Much of the data collection, analysis and survey work will be taking place. Therefore whilst the detailed technical, accountancy, and policy work progresses to develop options, we aim to use the time profitably on an awareness campaign through a variety of means. This is the time to discuss the question of why we are undergoing a review of strategic options, make the case for it, and highlight the need for major changes. It is also the period to deal with misinformation from any quarter and receive initial soundings of how tenants and leaseholders (who are the prime audience within a wider pool of stakeholders) are feeling.

18.3 We will undertake to do the following to achieve the purpose of this stage:

- Hold monthly TIWP report to and receive feedback from the Cabinet, Ascham Homes Board Contract Panels and TRA meetings.
- Do guest presentations at key meetings, primarily through Area Contract Panels

- In partnership with Ascham Homes meet with editors and journalists of the local media to brief them and foster a working relationship so they might become participants in the process. This will be followed by further briefings, press releases and articles in the papers.
- Place articles in regular Council and tenant/leasehold publications WFM and Branching Out.
- Produce a short factual booklet written plainly (with pictures and illustrations) to cover main issues and improve the knowledge base.
- Use this period to develop a website which is interactive and has links to other sites eg ODPM, CIH and Audit Commission, aimed at providing information and also receiving views and contributions from people.

## **19.0 STAGE TWO –option identification and evaluation**

- 19.1 This stage will coincide with the option evaluation stage in the project plan, during which period we will be reporting progress on the business and financial planning and discussing the options with various audiences. Therefore between September and December 2004 there should be four months of intensive activity relating to evaluating options and deciding on the most suitable one. During this stage events will be organised as in stage one in collaboration with residents, although leaseholders and tenants would be expected to hold exclusive events and activities with Ascham Homes Community Development Unit acting as Tenant advisors.
- 19.2 We will undertake the following activities to correspond with the task of option evaluation/selection during this period.
- Maintain monthly TIWP meetings
  - Report to Cabinet
  - Maintain programme of Members and staff briefings
  - Continue with guest presentations at key meetings
  - Place newspaper articles or buy a page in local papers. At this stage 'managed' articles should be appearing regularly to keep the momentum in public awareness and interest to maintain a healthy debate.
  - Maintain the flow of articles in regular Council and tenant/leasehold publications
  - Update the interactive website and include space for posting of views and preferences from the public. The website will be publicised widely at every opportunity to sustain interest and be an information and discussion forum in its own right.
  - Publish news bulletins for staff and residents

- Hold more active road shows at the area, neighbourhood and block/street level
- Hold fun and other forms of events which allow facilitated activities. These events would take place in each of the housing management areas.

## **20.0 STAGE THREE – decision making**

- 20.1 This is quite a critical period because having decided on the option it is possible for interest and momentum to wane, when in fact it is the time to publicize the preferred option(s), promote ownership, and in so doing prepare for implementation and change.
- 20.2 Therefore the period commencing December 2004, when ratifications and approvals will be sought, is equally important for all stakeholders who will be affected by the changes ahead.
- 20.3 The strategy at this stage would be to focus on explaining the preferred option and the implications for tenants, leaseholders, staff and the Council as an organisation.

## **21.0 Stage Four - Communicating the decision**

- 21.1 Once the Options Appraisal package has been signed off by Tenants Council, the Tenant Investment Working Party with an information item to Cabinet, the Council in partnership with Ascham Homes will publish the decision in the following ways

- Update at Tenant Involvement Working Party meetings
- Update at Ascham Homes Board Meetings
- Update at Area Contract Panel Meetings
- Press briefings
- Local Radio and TV
- Website editorial
- Member briefings
- Staff briefings

## **22.0 RESOURCES**

- 22.1 To enable tenants to be fully involved in the process and ensure the aims of this strategy are met, the Council acknowledges that there must be adequate resources available. This will include financial resources as well as training, officer support and the appointment of the PPCR or Independent Tenant Advisor

22.2 Although resources are often equated to budgets, a number of key players were involved in the original bid. These being

22.3 The following lists the key resources needed for the communication/consultation process:

- Councillor Roberto Bruni, Cabinet member for Housing at London Borough of Waltham Forest
- Investment group of residents including Louise Thompson, Renee Paul, Alan Eagland, Brian Wilks, Kay Winn-Cannon, Sheila Bass, Tony Bakare, Patricia Smith, Jenny Cook, Barbara Allsop, Martini O'Connor, Michelle Spink, Karen Smith, George Pearson, Gordon Tracey, Edward Gold, Stan Grogan, Josette Richards.
- Joanna Holmes, Ian Green and Robin Tebbutt of HACAS
- Adrian Webb of King's Sturge, surveyors
- Simon Randall and Scott Dorling of Lawrence Graham, solicitors
- Tony Jones, Mark Kirk, Andrew Sivess and Jim Wintour, ( Initial Bid) London Borough of Waltham Forest, 869 Forest Road, London, E17 4UH

22.4 A working budget of £230k was set aside to engage and facilitate the following specialists

- King Sturge
- PPCR twice
- HACAS Chapman Hendy
- Mariane Hood Wrote bid for Round two ALMO
- Jenna Caprice Wrote Bid for Round Five ALMO
- Shadow Board start up costs

## **23.0 RESULTS/OUTCOMES – MEASUREMENT OF SUCCESS**

23.1 Success will be measured in a number of ways e.g.:

- Attendance at events
- Website hits
- Volume of interest and response
- Volume of 'new blood' encouraged and empowered to represent their communities as a result of this process
- Wholesale acceptance and ownership of the decision as a result of a fair and transparent process

