

A guide to tenants and residents (English)

Introduction

This leaflet has also made available in *Adobe Acrobat* format for downloading in the following languages:

- Bengali
- Hindi
- Urdu
- Vietnamese

Further copies are available to order from Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Publications.

From April 2000, a new law^[1] is going to provide greater opportunities for local people to have a say about the housing and other services provided by their local council. It's called "Best Value" and is part of the Government's drive to make local government more modern and in touch with local people.

1: Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999

What is Best Value?

Best Value is a new duty which means that councils must review all the services they provide for local people and improve them by the best means available. This must be done in consultation with the people who use the services and the wider local community.

Under Best Value councils will be required to consult local people on all their services.

Best Value in housing

Our homes can influence our well-being, our sense of worth and our ties to our families, the local community and work. Housing is a very important part of a council's work, and the Government wants to see it improve year on year. All tenants and residents have a role to play in helping their local council bring this about.

This leaflet explains how Best Value will apply to housing services which local councils provide. It will therefore be of interest whether you are a council tenant or leaseholder, a housing association tenant, a home owner or private tenant. This information has been produced to accompany a more detailed guide for councils on the application of Best Value to housing - *Best Value in Housing Framework* ([ordering details](#)).

Which housing services are covered by Best Value?

All of them! All local councils have certain housing responsibilities even if they have transferred their council housing to a different landlord. These include:

- how action on housing can contribute towards important things like the environment in which local people live and getting safer and sustainable communities;

- investment in other housing in the area, such as through renovation grants for privately owned houses in poor condition; home adaptations for disabled people and advice to help improve the energy efficiency of properties;
- responsibilities for homeless people;
- assessing housing needs; and
- housing advice

If your council still owns council houses, its responsibilities as a landlord include:

- repairs and maintenance;
- setting and collecting the rent;
- managing the tenancy;
- consulting and involving tenants; and
- allocating and reletting houses.

What will councils have to do?

They will need to draw up a plan for the whole community showing what they are trying to do, why and how. This will be the "community strategy". They will then have to agree a programme for reviewing all council services, including housing, within a five year cycle and publish the programme in a Best Value performance plan. The first plans must be published no later than 31 March 2000 and then every year to the same deadline. Each local council will send a copy of its plan, or a summary of it, to local households and to other places of residence in the council's area.

In carrying out reviews of their services councils will have to consider four elements which are often referred to as the "four Cs" :

- **challenge**: why, how and by whom the service is being provided;
- **compare**: how well they are doing in comparison with other councils and organisations;
- **consult**: people who use the service and other local people to see what they think of it and how they think it could be improved;
- **competition**: consider if using fair and open competition can provide the best solution.

Councils' Best Value performance plans will also have to show their performance against nationally set (that is set by the Government) and locally set (that is set by the council) performance indicators and targets for improvement.

Will councils be monitored?

Yes, they will:

- External auditors under the control of the Audit Commission will check the Best Value performance plans every year;
- There will also be independent inspections to look in more depth at councils' performance, including what the tenants and residents think, and with the findings published in inspection reports;

- For housing, the inspection role will be undertaken by a new Housing Inspectorate. The Housing Inspectorate is being set up within the Audit Commission as part of a Best Value Inspectorate which will be responsible for inspecting other council services;
- If councils are not up to scratch, the auditors and inspectors will point out what needs to be improved. Councils will then have to draw up and publish action plans in response;
- In most cases this will help councils to bring about the necessary improvements;
- But if a council fails to respond and is really letting local people down, the Government will take action to protect the interests of local people.

How will I be involved?

Your council will want to know your views whether you are a council tenant or leaseholder, housing association tenant, home owner or private tenant.

Your views matter. There is no obligation on you to offer views if you do not wish to. However your council should give you the opportunity to make your views known on housing issues. This should be on the basis of your council providing you with clear information on the range of opportunities available for making your views known; the issues on which your council would like to hear your views; and the benefits to you and the council from your participation.

Your views matter because if councils are to improve housing services they need:

- to know what you think;
- to know about the changes you would like to see and which might influence the type and quality of services being provided; and
- your feedback on whether changes are meeting the needs of local people and making things better on the ground.

In offering views please remember that your council cannot do everything. Nor can it do all things at once. Like any organisation, councils have to balance a number of priorities against available resources and other considerations. But responding to consultations from your council will help them reach decisions which best meet the needs of local people.

If you are a council tenant or a council leaseholder

Tenant participation compacts are being introduced by councils from 1 April 2000. These are local agreements between a council and its tenants on how tenants can get involved in decisions on housing matters which affect them. A council and its tenants may want to extend their compact beyond just housing services. They might like, for example, to cover issues like neighbourhood nuisance, street cleaning and other things which impact on the quality of neighbourhood life.

There is a leaflet *Tenant Participation Compacts: A Guide for Tenants* which is available free, see the back cover. Also listed on the back cover are the more detailed guides on compacts and tenant participation which are available free.

If you are a tenant of a housing association

You can also participate in your landlord's Best Value programme and have a say in the way your landlord operates. Like councils, housing associations should give their tenants a real say in

decisions about their housing services. You can get further details from your housing association landlord. As a housing association tenant your views will also be important to the local council in helping it meet its wider responsibilities for housing in the area.

Who else can help?

Councillors have to be responsive to their wider electorate. But they also have an important role as champion of their communities. Under Best Value they will need to work closely with local people in checking their council's performance.

Council officers can also help you, give you the information you need, and listen to your views.

How to find out more

If you would like to know more about Best Value and how you can feed in your views about housing services, you should ask at your local council housing office or housing department. You can find out the address and phone number in the phone book, or if you are a council tenant, on your rent book or tenancy agreement.

Further information

Copies of this leaflet and the leaflet *Tenant Participation Compacts: A Guide for Tenants* are available from Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Publications

The publications home page contains information on how and where you can obtain publications produced by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

For general enquiries about Best Value in housing please contact James Gorringer at ODPM on:

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The Best Value in Housing Framework (published in January 2000); *the National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts* (published in June 1999); and *Developing Good Practice in Tenant Participation* (published in July 1999) are more detailed guides available free from:

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