

**AGENDA ITEM NO. 13**

**WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL**

TO : HOUSING COMMITTEE - 25<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2000

SUBJECT : TENANT EMPOWERMENT GRANT - OPTIONS STUDY AT FALLOW HILL

FROM : HOUSING

1. **Purpose of Report**

1.1 To report progress on the DETR funded Option Study undertaken by Partners in Change and Warwick District Council with the residents of Fallow Hill.

2. **Background**

2.1 In November 1998 a meeting and site visits of Fallow Hill and Crown Way were undertaken by the Tenant Development Officer and Mr Paul Lusk, a Director of Partners in Change. Following from this, open drop in meetings were arranged for the tenants of the Fallow Hill estate in December 1998 and January 1999. These open meetings were held in morning and evening sessions to allow access and include as many tenants as possible to attend.

2.2 In February 1999, Partners in Change, supported by Warwick District Council applied to the DETR for funding to conduct Options Studies on both sites. This was duly granted.

3. **The Options Study**

3.1 Between March and November 1999 a series of open meetings were held at which tenants identified issues relevant to Fallow Hill. At these meetings Partners in Change and officers of the Tenant Services Development Unit explained various options for tenant participation.

3.2 During the early meetings the tenants decided against forming a Tenant and Residents' Association but did express a wish to participate in Housing and other Council services affecting their estate.

3.3 After examining all options for participation a survey of the estate was undertaken. The results indicated that the tenants wished to be represented by a Customer Panel and that this Panel will seek to enter into an Estate Agreement with Warwick District Council. A detailed report of the Options Study, its outcomes and an Action Plan are attached to this report.  
(Appendix A)

4. **The Customer Panel**

4.1 To promote representation from all parts of the estate, it has been agreed that Fallow Hill be split into ten 'blocks' ( Appendix B), and that each block be represented by no more than two residents.

- 4.2 The Customer panel will not seek recognition through a formal constitution but through the following.
- 4.2.1 Any Estate Agreement reached between the Panel and Warwick District Council will begin with a Code of Conduct, which shall detail terms of appropriate behaviour for the continuance of partnership working.
- 4.2.2 The Panel will not receive direct funding, but a sum of £200 (equivalent to a normal Start Up Grant), from the existing tenant participation budget will be made available to cover any expenses incurred by the Panel
- 4.2.3 The Housing Business Unit and Customer Panel will jointly organise an annual ballot of all tenants to elect the following years block representatives.
- 4.2.4 The Tenant Development Officer will act as service officer to the Panel's needs by organising meetings, venues, agenda's, relevant training and circulating minutes.
- 4.2.5 The Estates Officer will lead in servicing the terms of any Estate Agreement reached between the Panel and Warwick District Council.
- 4.2.6 The Engineering and Leisure & Amenities Business Units would attend relevant meetings as part of the agreement. However, this remains to be negotiated with those Business Units.

5. **Key Issues Strategy**

- 5.1 This report supports the Corporate Strategy and Key Issues :
- 5.1.1 "We will consult with local people so that they can help shape services and influence our performance".
- 5.1.2 "We will promote equity and equal opportunity of access and participation for everyone".

6. **Recommendations.**

- 6.1 That the members approve the Options Study Action Plan as laid down in Appendix A

John Magee  
Tenant Development Officer

**Background Papers**  
Nil

**Contact Officer :** John Magee  
Direct Line: (01926) 317846

**Areas in District  
Affected :** Sydenham

# ú **OPTIONS STUDY FOR THE FALLOW HILL ESTATE, LEAMINGTON SPA ,**

## **WARWICK DISTRICT: DECEMBER 1999**

### **Warwick District Council**

#### **Partners in Change**

#### About this report

This report is a draft which should be agreed jointly between Warwick District Council and the Fallow Hill Customer Panel and then submitted to the Government's Department of Environment, Transport and Regions (DETR), which funded the study.

The report consists of:

- An executive summary
- A report on the work undertaken at Fallow Hill
- An Action Plan

Once agreed, the Action Plan must be signed by the Council and by the residents' representatives (in this case the Customer Panel). There will be a monitoring visit about a year after completion of the study, and the outcome will be reported to DETR.

The Action Plan includes an outline of a proposed estate agreement which reflects the results of consultation of residents through meetings, exhibitions and surveys. The draft estate agreement will be publicised to all residents on the Fallow Hill estate with opportunities for comment. The estate agreement is subject to annual review and renewal.

#### **Executive Summary**

Options Studies are a new Government programme funded by Tenant Empowerment Grant under Section 16 of the 1986 Housing and Planning Act. They are short pieces of work to enable council tenants, working with other residents and stakeholders, to identify the main changes they would like to see in their housing and related services. With the help of independent advice, residents decide on the best way to become empowered to bring about these changes. The outcome is an Action Plan which must be agreed with the Local Authority. The aim is a sustainable, long-term commitment to resident-led change.

The Department of the Environment Transport and Regions (DETR) invited Tenant Participation Agencies and local authorities to pilot Options Studies at the end of 1998. Warwick District Council invited Partners in Change to work with it in Fallow Hill.

The outcome of the Fallow Hill study is a proposal for an estate agreement with a customer panel and dedicated estate budgets. This proposal has been very firmly endorsed by residents in a ballot, and the new customer panel is now in place.

In the short term, the customer panel will work with Council officers to appoint an estate supervisor, make changes in landscaping and resolve problems of waste management. They

will monitor these services under the terms of an estate agreement. The agreement can later be extended to cover other services, such as repairs, community safety and housing management.

The Fallow Hill customer panel is a significant step forward for resident empowerment in Fallow Hill. It will be a local compact under the new Tenant Participation (TP) Compacts arrangements. It is a model which can be replicated in other parts of Warwick District and so form part of the Council's offer to tenants under its service-wide TP Compact arrangements. By monitoring budgets as well as service standards, and influencing service priorities and delivery, the customer panel will help to ensure best value in local services. The combination of an estate agreement, customer panel and dedicated estate budgets is innovative and could be of wider interest to the national social housing audience.

### **The study team**

This options study was carried out by Paul Lusk, one of the directors of Partners in Change.

It would not have been possible without the very active co-operation and support of Warwick District Council and its officers. In particular, John Magee (Tenant Development Officer) and Paul Wilson (Research Officer) briefed Partners in Change and supported the study at every stage. Senior housing managers monitored the work, met the study team at key stages and ensured that the study outcomes were ones that could be properly resourced by the Council. Amanda Ball (Estates Officer) attended meetings with the tenants and gave a positive lead in formulating Council responses. Mick Kemp (Housing Officer) puts in a high level of personal commitment to staying on top of problems on the estate. His work was invaluable, especially in the survey and in developing the customer panel. Ian Coleman (Building Supervisor from Property Services) came to meetings with tenants, taking some personal hostility in the process and worked to respond to detailed issues raised by tenants in connection with estate improvements.

## **Report on the Options Study**

### **1. About the Study**

The Fallow Hill options study was undertaken at the invitation of Warwick District Council. The Council had allocated about £150,000 for improvement work on the estate commencing in the 1998/9 financial year. It had consulted tenants on the priorities for this improvement programme, and was spending the money on security works including an entry phone system to restrict access to the central area of the maisonette block; resurfacing of footpaths; provision of galvanised steel fencing to provide front gardens for downstairs maisonettes; and fencing to an existing play area. The Council wished to promote greater tenant involvement in estate management in parallel with this investment.

### **2. About the Fallow Hill estate**

The estate is a short distance from the centre of Leamington Spa. It consists of two different property types. There are four-storey blocks comprising 2-storey maisonettes with walk-up access to a balcony serving the upper storey, and a small number of flats. The maisonettes overlook a central grassed open space which includes a small play area. There are 97 maisonettes or flats altogether, mainly rented but with a small number of leases. Access to upper storeys is entryphone controlled. Access to the central grassed space and to downstairs maisonettes opening onto it is also now entryphone controlled.

On 3 outer sides of the estate, there are rows of bungalows some of which are occupied by people with disabilities. There is a footpath between the maisonette block and the bungalows, so that the outlook from the front of the bungalows is straight on to a maisonette block. The bungalows have small front gardens and rear patios. There are 28 bungalows altogether, 7 of these being owner occupied.

In the centre of the 4-storey block is a grassed area including a small toddlers' play area. The estate is well provided with local services with shops, a post office and a pub nearby and a primary school, a secondary school and supermarket within a few minutes walk.

Adjoining the estate is vacant land where there are plans for new private housing and a community centre. Also adjoining the estate is a sheltered housing scheme where a communal meeting room is normally available for hire by outside groups.

Fallow Hill estate has a mixed population including families with children in the maisonettes, single people and older residents including people with disabilities in the bungalows. There tend to be differing priorities between bungalow residents and those in the maisonettes and there has been conflict over the behaviour of children and teenagers. Some of the more elderly residents of the bungalows say that they find the estate insecure and do not go out at night. However the estate is regarded by most residents as reasonably secure and community safety does not emerge as a significant concern. The ethnic mix is mainly white with a few Asian and mixed race households.

The Council has no difficulty in letting the estate. However, it is considered to be among the less popular housing in the district which reflects the high density, a background of some social tension and a rather unattractive environment offered by walk-up maisonettes.

### **3. About the Council housing service**

Warwick District Council housing department manages all its housing from a central point in Leamington Spa. Housing officers are each responsible for around 700 homes. Housing officers are supervised by the Estates Officer who reports to an Estate Manager. All repair requests are fed to one point in a central office and a small central team undertakes repair inspection and ordering. Repairs are undertaken by private contractors. Some estates have a caretaking service provided by Estate Supervisors who are supervised by the Estates Officer. Maintenance of the housing department's landscaped areas is managed by the Leisure Services department on behalf of housing, with private contractors undertaking the work. Major and cyclical contracts are now managed by a property services department on behalf of the housing department.

### **4. Tenant involvement in Fallow Hill**

Fallow Hill had a residents' association in the past. This was successful in establishing the play area and running social facilities, but it was also a focus of disputes which became personal and unpleasant. Many people on the estate recall these disputes and are averse to re-forming a resident or tenant association. There is also aversion to the idea of a "committee".

Warwick Council is keen to encourage user involvement in services and supports a district-wide federation of tenant associations. There is also a housing user panel.

## 5. The Options Study

The options study started with two open meetings held on the estate in January. These took place in the communal room at “The Sycamores” sheltered block. They were attended by about 20 people altogether. Residents had a number of questions about the planned works on the estate. We held two further open meetings in February and preceded this with a newsletter giving details of the proposed works including the cost, contracting arrangements, contract period and details of the works. The newsletter also explained the purpose of the options study and the Council’s intention to encourage greater tenant empowerment. The open meetings in February were marred by vociferous disputes with abuse directed at Council officers. Bungalow residents were aggrieved that they were not to benefit from new garden fencing. Some residents objected to the security work with entryphone-restricted access to central areas. Some less prominent design changes had been made without consultation. Other grievances concerned the quality of work and security of supplies and waste on site. There were specific requests for changes in detailed plans. The meetings were successful in facilitating some of these, and in identifying tenant priorities for longer-term service improvements. However, there was also danger of the options study becoming bogged down with environmental works contract issues. It was clear that residents were not keen to form a conventional tenants’ association, and it was therefore important to clarify what other structure the Council could work with and what powers it might have.

While keeping in touch with individual activists, Partners in Change prepared a report for the Council on some of the problems identified by residents in the contract management process and seeking clarification on the shape of a possible estate agreement. Two main questions were about whether the Council could offer a dedicated estate budget and how much influence tenants could have in staffing. A report was prepared for Council officers setting out three possible options or an estate management agreement.

There were meetings with senior Council officers in June and July and agreement was reached on a further round of work. This included a newsletter and a full-day drop-in held in September. Specific opportunities were offered for tenants to raise any remaining grievances and concerns about estate improvement works. However the main focus on the options for tenant empowerment. More than 20 people attended the drop-in. Responses showed a very strong support for the idea of a customer panel and an estate agreement and confirmed the main priorities for management service improvements.

A further newsletter then gave a report-back on this event, together with a questionnaire survey asking for residents to respond to the idea of a customer panel and an estate agreement and to agree the specific priorities for the estate agreement and the basis for representation on the customer panel.

This questionnaire was collected by door-to-door visits in November 1999.

The results of the survey were as follows:

In favour of an estate agreement: 60

Against: 0

Not sure: 3

In favour of a customer panel: 55

Against: 0

Not sure: 8

In favour of the proposed division of the estate into 10 blocks: 45

Against: 3

Note sure: 15

15 people said they were willing to join a customer panel, representing 8 of the 10 blocks.

Two open meetings were held to report back on the survey results and to enable any further comments to be made. Because of the temporary closure of "The Sycamores", these were held at the comprehensive school about a 10 minute walk from the estate. About 12 residents attended these altogether. The outcome of the survey was endorsed and no new issues were raised.

Several customer panel volunteers offered to host meetings in their homes since it was agreed that the school was too remote. The first panel meeting was held in December 1999, and agreed on a job description for an estate supervisor. A date was set for a second meeting in January 2000.

During the study, training and information was provided for residents on estate agreements, performance indicators, customer/contractor roles within the council and job descriptions and contract specifications as they affected the issues identified by residents. Information was provided on estate budgets for cleansing and estate supervisor services. This training and information should be consolidated and formal training offered to the customer panel before the study is concluded. This will be undertaken by PiC working in partnership with the Tenant Development Officer and other council staff. The council has also arranged for outside training through its TPAS membership.

## **6. Main issues on the estate**

From responses at meetings and from questionnaire surveys, the clear priorities for future action emerge as:

*Caretaking and cleaning* - the post of estate supervisor has not been filled for about 18 months and cleaning has been undertaken by a contractor. Residents attach a high priority to seeing a dedicated service restored. The main priority tasks are cleaning, waste management and general estate tidiness including attention to planted areas.

*Waste management* - waste from flats and maisonettes is emptied into large circular wheeled bins, one of which is secured in a locked store fed by the chute from upstairs while other bins are left outside awaiting collection. They do not have lids and this is a source of aggravation especially in hot weather. Rotating bins is a supervisor duty. Contractors monitored by the District engineer's department attends twice weekly and empties full bins only. There is supposed to be a normal weekly collection from the bungalows, but many bungalow residents do not rely on this but empty their rubbish into the large communal bins. Residents of maisonettes, especially those living near the bin collection points, would like to see an end to open wheeled bins left outside.

*Grounds maintenance* - There is heavy planting at certain points of the estate and prickly shrubs attract a lot of rubbish which is difficult to remove. Some trees are overgrown and residents would like to see them pruned.

*Play area maintenance* - part of the grounds maintenance contract is to maintain bark chippings in the play area and keep the area clean. Residents find the current service inadequate with dangerous rubbish left in the area and some bark chippings having unsafe sharp points.

*Bungalow fencing* - Bungalow residents are very upset that existing timber fences have been retained while maisonettes have benefited from new steel railings where there were no fences previously. The bungalow fences (consisting of two parallel horizontal planks held up with posts) have benefited from some repair, but remain easy to sit on and thus attract groups of teenagers and do not inhibit movement of dogs. Advice from the council about that feasibility of replacing these has varied but the final position was that the cost of £20,000 was not affordable in the near future and no promise of a review has been given.

*Neighbour disputes and complaints* - there are complaints of antisocial behaviour and requests that matters of complaint be resolved more quickly. However this concern does not emerge as strongly and the level of concern varies from time to time. During the period of study we have seen the Council take appropriate action.

## **7. Options considered**

The options considered during the study were

- forming a tenant management organisation
- forming a residents' association
- developing an estate agreement
- having a customer panel
- having regular consultation forums

There was strong aversion to forming a residents' association and very little prospect that a TMO could attract the necessary level of support. At the same time tenants clearly did want more influence over their service than could be offered by regular forums. There was very strong support for the idea of a customer panel combined with an estate agreement.

## **8. Conclusion**

The estate agreement with customer panel is strongly supported by residents. It has the support of the council and the capacity to make significant progress in tackling issues on the estate. This is the recommended solution.

**Action Plan for an Estate Agreement and Customer Panel for the Fallow Hill Estate, Warwick District**



## Introduction

The chosen option for the Fallow Hill estate is an estate agreement with a customer panel. Under this action plan, this proposal will be implemented in three stages:

- Stage 1 -** from January to March 2000, the Council will work with the customer panel to address the first three immediate priorities, i.e. appointing an estate supervisor, changing waste management and changes to soft landscape.
- Stage 2 -** April to October 2000 - monitoring and reporting systems will be set up.
- Stage 3 -** October to December 2000: the agreement will be reviewed, priorities for 2001 set and the range of services covered by the estate agreement will be expanded. The Council will arrange for residents to be consulted, surveyed and balloted on the new estate agreement and the membership of the customer panel for the year 2001.

#### Servicing arrangements

The lead officer responsible for the service delivery side of the estate agreement will be Amanda Ball, the Council's Estates Officer. She will normally attend customer panel meetings. She will be assisted and supported by the Housing Officer, Mick Kemp, who will also normally attend customer panel meetings.

The officer responsible for servicing and supporting customer panel members will be John Magee, the Council's Tenant Development Officer. He will be responsible for arranging for panel meetings to be minuted, for agendas to go out and for consultation of the wider estate to take place.

The Council's Research Officer, Paul Wilson, will be responsible for performance reports to be prepared for customer panel meetings in the second stage of the action plan.

When appointed, the new estate supervisor will attend customer panel meetings and make a short report.

It will be important for the Council to make a careful analysis of the staff time required by the estate agreement and to ensure that commitments are made in line with achievable delivery.

Customer panel members will benefit from training especially in performance reporting and monitoring, accountability and fairness and staffing and contract matters. Initially this training will be provided by Partners in Change, TPAS and Council staff. The Council must ensure that such training is available on an annual basis.

The Customer Panel will have a code of conduct which will be reviewed annually and included in training.

#### The Fallow Hill customer panel

Under the estate agreement, the Council will recognise the customer panel for Fallow Hill and agree to negotiate with it as a representative body for Fallow Hill tenants and residents on housing and related matters.

Under the agreement, Fallow Hill is divided into blocks including seven blocks with flats/maisonettes and three blocks of bungalows. The Council will aim to ensure that each block

is represented on the panel by one or two volunteer residents. There will be an opportunity for residents who may object to an appointment to do so confidentially. The split into blocks will be part of the annual review of the estate agreement.

The customer panel is not an independently constituted voluntary organisation. It will not have its own offices or banking. However, the panel will be able if it wishes to send representatives to meetings of the Warwick District Tenant and Resident Federation, and so will be included in this and other arrangements for district-wide consultation under the TP compact.

The Council makes a grant to recognised tenant groups of £200 (?) per year. This money will be allocated to the Fallow Hill customer panel which will control this budget, the money being held on its behalf by the Council. The customer panel will normally meet monthly. Its standard agenda will include

- major discussion topic
- block representatives issues
- estate supervisor's report (when appointed)
- performance reports (phased in)
- estate officer/housing officer reports
- panel issues: panel budget and training
- district-wide issues

## **Short term actions**

### **Appointment of estate supervisor**

Consultation with residents showed that estate-based caretaking services were a major priority for residents, and that the main duties should be cleaning and general estate tidiness. At its first meeting, the customer panel decided to ask the Council to appoint an estate supervisor on the Council's standard job description. Under the agreement, the Council will identify a specific estate budget for estate caretaking and will report on the expenditure against this budget in pricing salary costs and equipment and materials. Reports will identify amount of time spent by the supervisor on different tasks including time spent off site.

The panel has requested that this should be a resident post and agreed an outline proposed person specification. The Council will recruit, short-list, interview and appoint in the normal way. Short-listed candidates will meet the customer panel and join them on an estate "walkabout" prior to interviews.

The estate supervisor will normally attend customer panel meetings and present a short report and answer questions.

### **Waste management**

Waste collection and bin emptying arrangements for the estate will be reviewed, with the aim of providing a more frequent collection service and eliminating the need for large wheeled bins to be left in the open air. This will require a representative of the District Engineers to attend the customer panel meeting, and probably to report thereafter on an annual basis.

### **Landscape**

The Council will allocate an immediate budget for changing planting on the estate. The revised planting scheme will be costed and agreed with the customer panel. It should be publicised on the estate, with opportunities for residents to comment, prior to implementation.

## Outline of estate agreement - year 2000

### 1. Priorities.

The Council and residents of Fallow Hill have agreed the following priorities for service changes in the year 2000:

Caretaking services  
Waste management services  
Planting scheme

This changes will be agreed by 31 March 2000, and monitored after that by the customer panel in accordance with this agreement.

### 2. The Fallow Hill Customer Panel:

Appointment  
Meetings  
Code of conduct  
Servicing  
Agendas  
Reporting to Fallow Hill residents

### 3. Estate Supervisor Services

Budget  
Staffing arrangements  
Reporting arrangements

### 4. Grounds Maintenance Services

Budgets and service standards for grounds maintenance contracts, supervisor provided services and play area maintenance  
Monitoring arrangements

### 5. Waste Management Services

Service standards  
Reporting arrangements

### 6. Review of this agreement including review of priorities for 2001

## Approaching the Estate agreement - year 2001

The Fallow Hill estate agreement will be reviewed annually. The 2001 agreement, subject to this review, should include:

Priorities for the year 2001

Composition of Customer panel for 2001

Services covered:

The same list as 2000 but with additions, possibly:

- repairs
- lettings

Service standards and performance indicators:

- Estate supervision services (with budget)
- Grounds maintenance (with budget)
- Waste management

- Housing management matters included in the agreement for 2001:
  - v reletting times
  - v complaints and disputes

- Housing repairs (with budget)

**Fallow Hill Customer Panel**  
**Block Representation**

Customer Panel representatives will be from the following blocks:

106 - 136 (upper and lower)

60 - 68 & 98 - 104 (lower)

70 - 96 (lower)

34 - 58 (lower & upper)

2 - 32 (lower and upper)

164 - 194 (upper)

138 - 162 (lower)

1 - 21 (bungalows)

23 - 37 (bungalows)

39 - 57 (bungalows)