



The Compact Agreement between the Trust and its Residents

MAIDSTONE HOUSING TRUST

CUSTOMER PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

2006/2007

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MAIDSTONE HOUSING TRUST

CUSTOMER PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT 2006/2007

Introduction

Maidstone Housing Trust (the Trust) is committed to working in partnership to improve the homes and local environment of all Trust customers, by providing good quality services, which are responsive to needs.

This Partnership agreement explains the ways in which our customers can make a difference to the services they receive and to the way they are developed in the future. It will make sure that there are real opportunities to influence decisions. The Trust thinks this can be achieved by working in partnership, listening to tenants, leaseholders and residents and striving to meet those needs.

The Trust is committed to ongoing resident involvement. In the 'Partnership Agreement' we use the word '**customer**' to mean all residents who are involved in tenant participation, including tenants, leaseholders, sheltered scheme residents, shared owners and owner occupiers. We recognise that there are many different words used to describe resident involvement – we have chosen one term to describe all, as we felt that this was the most widely used.

We use the word '**landlord**' to mean ourselves, the Trust.

We believe that customers have a right to be consulted and involved when the Trust is making decisions about their homes, their estates and the housing services they receive.

The Trust intends to maintain a pro-active approach and to ensure an equal relationship with our customers based on full participation. We will listen to, and respect customers' views, and this document sets out the details of the Trust's involvement strategy, as agreed with customers.

We want to provide new opportunities for our customers to have their say, if they wish, at a level and pace they feel comfortable with. It is for this reason that we have developed this agreement between the Trust and its customers, which is called the Customer Partnership Agreement. This agreement represents a genuine commitment to deliver high quality services to our customers.

Everyone involved in producing the Partnership Agreement hopes that you will find it useful and encouraging. It will also challenge us all, board members, staff and tenants to work closer together and take each other's views into consideration. You will see that the agreement sets out principles and standards that we will work to achieve. It also shows you all the varied ways that you can get involved, with a menu of involvement options.

This Partnership Agreement is not set in stone forever, rather we aim to make it a living document that will grow and develop over time. This process will take time and we will aim to review and publish updated versions.

No customer will be discriminated against, harassed or receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, disability, marital status, family commitments, sexual orientation, age, HIV status, religious or political beliefs, social class or trade union activity.

This Compact is available in Braille, large print, on compact disc and can be translated into other languages. Please contact us for more details.

Signed on behalf of customers

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Chairperson – Maidstone Residents Group

Signed on behalf of Maidstone Housing Trust

.....

Chief Executive

Maidstone Housing Trust – Our Vision and Values

Our Vision

To provide decent quality affordable homes and services, strengthen the communities we serve, meet local needs and improve the quality of life for local people

Our Values

Our Key Values are to be Customer Focused, Performance Driven, Creative and Enabling, Open and Positive. We are confident that we are well on the way to achieving our vision to be:

- A landlord and employer of choice, recognised for delivering what we promise
- A professional organisation people are proud to be part of
- Known and valued wherever we work for the quality of our homes and services
- A partner of choice, working with others to make a difference to homes and quality of life in the communities we work in
- A 'Can-do, Will-do, Have done' organisation

Aims and Targets

To fulfil the Trust's vision and values

- To give customers a choice about how much or how little they want to be involved
- To create a flexible structure for residents involvement, which is open and accessible
- To make it easy for customers to get involved in housing services, their development and improvement
- To improve customer accountability and involvement in housing decision-making

Code of Conduct

Resident involvement is a two-way process between the Trust and its' customers to share information and ideas.

Each party will be expected to:

- Respect each others values and feelings at all times
- Conduct themselves in a reasonable manner in meetings and discussions
- Be polite and courteous to other customers and Trust staff

Offensive or disruptive language or behaviour, discrimination or prejudice will not be accepted at any time.

Involvement Options – A Varied Menu YOU CHOOSE!

There are now a wide range of options available to customers who wish to get involved with the Trust. The involvement options set out below are initiatives designed to ensure that customers living in our homes have the opportunity to get involved, should they wish at a level and pace of their choice. We will continue to provide opportunities for customers to have their say in a way that they are comfortable with, and which fits in with their lifestyle. Customers' views will not only be listened to, but seriously taken into account when decisions are made.

All the options will need some commitment. This ranges from a few minutes to several hours a month. To help customers decide which option might suit them we have coded each option and explained the commitment.

We would like to reinforce that any involvement is welcomed at any time and at any level.



For those customers who want a casual, informal, 'as and when' involvement



For those tenants who want a more frequent involvement, concentrating on their local area and issues



For those tenants who would like a higher level of involvement, training and a desire to influence decisions the Trust make



For those tenants wishing to be directly involved in making decisions in partnership with the Trust



For those expressing a desire to govern the organisation. Full commitment, frequent meetings and regular training



Magazine

The Trust's free publication 'TENANTS FIRST', posted to all our customers is dedicated to informing people of the latest developments within the Trust and suggesting ways that residents might like to get involved in our decision making process. It contains information on the Trust's performance and future plans and more often than not, will ask for comments on a range of issues. Tenants First is produced four times a year and is available on Compact Disc (CD). We also post the production on our website and have copies in the area housing office and sheltered schemes. We hope you will enjoy reading it and will find it informative and useful.



Letters and leaflets

The Trust will write to you throughout the year on a variety of issues. Some letters will be confirming repairs that you have reported or give you news about your rent account. Regular rent statements will be sent to you throughout the year. Other letters may ask for your views on services provided or invite you to special events.

These require very little commitment. Some letters you receive are purely to keep you up to date. Others may invite your views, which you can choose to reply too if you wish – we hope that you do!



Local Area News Sheets or Street Newsletters

The Trust will encourage the production and distribution of more local newsletters to customers in the areas in which tenants associations or recognised representatives operate. Each edition will let you know what's happening locally, what was discussed at tenants' and residents' meetings (TRAs) and what has been done about points raised. We will also encourage our recognised Resident Representatives to feedback to tenants in their areas at least twice a year on their activities.

Maidstone Residents Group (MRG) is the main consultative body to the Trust and their aim is to support and encourage groups and representatives to inform the Resident Involvement Team of local issues and news to be included in the newsletters.

Newsletters are handy and local information delivered to your door that requires very little time and energy to read.

The Trust will produce other publications throughout the year. These include our annual report and local performance plan. These documents are designed to keep you informed about the Trust's performance and plans about the 'bigger picture' – not just your home or area.

These documents can take some time to read as they contain complex information; but never the less are well worth reading.



Suggestion Boxes

The 'Suggestion Box' is in our reception area, at Shepway Area Housing Office, so you can pass on your suggestions, to further improve our services.

This is an easy way to get your views across to us if you visit Shepway Area Housing Office. All suggestions will be considered and you will be responded to. So don't be shy – tell us today!



Annual Open Events

Informal days giving you information about the work of the Trust and MRG. Talks and displays from different departments within the organisation will give you a flavour of what the Trust gets up to and how your views and suggestions really do make a difference.



Maidstone Housing Trust Website

A new improved website has been developed by the Trust. Our aim is to broaden and expand the site further. You are now able to request repairs, and report issues about your neighbourhood. The site will publish details of MRG Open Days and meetings. Details of resident association meetings will also be announced. The Trust will also advertise well in advance Public Consultations and Area Housing Panel meeting dates.



www.maidstonehousing.org.uk

There is currently a 'Get Involved' page which is updated regularly.

Log on when you want and see what is happening within the different resident groups. Look out for chances online and share your view with us.



Estate Inspections

Housing Managers will attend the published estate walkabout inspections with residents, to keep up to date with estate issues in the areas served by the Trust. Tenants and Residents Associations (TRA's) wishing to send representatives to accompany the Housing Managers and other residents are very welcome to join in as well. For more information on your next area inspection, please contact your Housing Manager.

This is an easy way to get informally involved and have your say about your neighbourhood with minimum time commitment. It is an ideal opportunity to build a dialogue with your Housing Manager.



Estate Champions

The Trust has recently developed a scheme called 'Estate Champions', whereby residents can monitor, for instance our grass cutting services or tell us

how well, our cleaning and caretaking services are provided. We will explain our standards and how to monitor them. We will also provide feedback on your comments. Estate Champions are encouraged to attend the published estate inspections to work with Trust Officers to ensure that your communities are safe and vibrant place to live. This again is a simple way to participate and make a real difference.

We have also established the 'Eye-Spy' scheme, whereby residents can report one-off issues of concern in their neighbourhoods to Housing Managers. This is an easy way for you to make a make a difference and have a positive influence in your community.



Focus Groups

Our aim is to create small gatherings of between 6 and 12 customers usually in one-off sessions designed to gather information on specific or current issues. Meetings would last between one and two hours and refreshments and out-of-pocket expenses, such as transport costs, will be paid. Focus groups form a key part of our reviews, which look at improving specific areas of the Trust's work such as the repairs service, the way we let our properties and how we manage the area you live in.

These are suitable for customers who wish to share their views on specific issues, without a regular commitment.



Area Panel Meetings

The Trust are working towards introducing a pilot scheme of Area Panels in neighbourhoods not traditionally served by an active Tenants and Residents Association. These are to be keynote meetings, for instance on themes such as repairs or regeneration. There will also be officer supported surgeries operating before the meeting to allow residents to bring individual issues to the Trust's attention. These will be Trust led and Trust driven with full participation from Maidstone Residents Group. The development of these panels will allow customers to participate in areas of interest to them.



Customer Panels

Customer panels are a good opportunity to influence how services are delivered and are proving highly successful. The Trust has many examples, such as Customer Talk Back, whereby customers sign up to the scheme and are regularly surveyed on aspects of the Trust's services. New members are always welcome. As an incentive for joining 'TalkBack', panel members are eligible for entry to a prize draw!

Other examples of successful panels, are:

- Customer Repairs
- Publication Panel – which looks at the production of the Trust's publications
- Web-Site Development – which gives us feedback on our Web-page

- Horticultural - which looks at contracted services
- Kitchen and Bathroom Panels
- Service Review Groups
- Gas Servicing
- Equality and Diversity
- Staff Induction
- Various Programmed Works Panels

These groups meet from time to time to look at specific issues and would require a more frequent involvement. If you are interested in any of our customer panels, please contact the Community Involvement Team for more details on 01622 212537



Area/Street/Road Representative

This is another really great way to get involved – especially if a residents group or association does not operate in your area, road or street. As a recognised representative you act as an advocate for local people speaking on their behalf. You are also eligible to attend meetings of the Maidstone Residents Group and vote.

This will require a more frequent commitment to represent views of others around you. The Trust will support and assist you in every way possible to help you work effectively on behalf of others. You will be required to gain evidence of support from local people, renewable every 2 years. It is also highly recommended that accredited representatives, who secure grant funding from the Trust, feedback progress to their residents by way of 2 meetings and 2 newsletters per year. The Community Involvement Team and Maidstone Residents Group can help you with this.



Membership of the Trust

If you are a tenant or leaseholder of the Trust, you may have the right to apply for membership. Membership of the Trust gives you a vote in important decisions regarding the management of the organisation. As a member you will receive the Annual Report and accounts have the opportunity to vote on any changes to the Trust's constitution and receive a members certificate.

Trust membership is a valuable way of demonstrating your involvement in decisions affecting your home and community.



Tenants' & Residents' Associations (TRA's)

These are a great way of getting involved and groups often hold social and leisure activities, as well as representing the views and concerns of local residents. Regular meetings, run by local people for local people, are held where local issues can be discussed. New residents are always welcome to attend even on a one-off basis or issue of special interest. Residents' groups are very often estate-based and to be recognised by the Trust they will need to

be constituted, (that is having agreed and adopted a written agreement), and have an elected committee.

Recognised Groups are eligible to receive grant funding from the Trust. Groups who receive grant funding, will be required to comply with some simple conditions, which are explained later in this document. We will also encourage and work with residents who wish to form a group by offering training, administrative help and other support in partnership with Maidstone Residents Group.

Membership of a TRA is very rewarding for those involved. Committee members can help resolve local issues and get things done for local people. Elected Chairs and Vice-Chairs are eligible to sit on the Maidstone Residents Group and help decide policy and become involved in all the other work that MRG have an interest in. Commitment can vary depending on how involved in a residents' group you wish to become. If you decide to volunteer for committee membership this could mean a regular commitment to attend meetings.

We also recommend that new groups register with the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS).



Leaseholder and Sheltered Housing Forums

These forums have been established to further the aims of Leaseholders and Sheltered Scheme residents and to participate in meetings and the activities of MRG. Membership is open to all Leaseholders and Sheltered Scheme Residents. A bi-annual representation exercise will be required in order to re-confirm clear recognition status.

The business of these forums will be guided by the membership and will meet as necessary, but not less than 2 times a year.

Leaseholders and Sheltered Scheme residents will be invited to join MRG in all training opportunities, away days and conferences.

This participation options requires a regular attendance undertaking and a genuine interest in Leaseholder and Sheltered Housing issues.



Maidstone Residents Group

Maidstone Residents Group (MRG) is the recognised consultative body of the Trust. The Trust consults the MRG on new policies, updates and practices. MRG meet every two months and provide support and information to its members. Members are drawn from representatives of Tenants' and Residents' Associations or may be a block, street or area representative. MRG in addition welcome 'interested tenants', such as Leaseholders and Sheltered Scheme Residents to attend meetings as guests. Guests will have an opportunity to participate in discussions.

MRG is an important group that acts as one voice on our customers behalf. The Trust is committed to working with, and supporting MRG. A dedicated Community Involvement Team provides practical and administrative support to motivate inspire and the group.

This participation option requires a regular commitment in attending meetings, reading and commenting on documents and sharing information with TRA's. You will also have the opportunity of organising the annual open event, should you wish. Opportunities for training sessions to develop your skills will be offered regularly and we encourage you to participate in these. Reasonable expenses will be paid. The Trust and MRG will work together to refine a comprehensive expense claim protocol.

Meetings take place in local venues accessible to all.

MRG will hold an Annual General Meeting which will be open to all customers and all members will have the opportunity to participate in its organisation.



Customer Working Groups

From time to time special groups will be formed to progress project based work. Examples include estate regeneration such as the Trust's proposals for the Coombe Farm Estate, improvement of sheltered housing services and improvements to Leaseholder services. When the need for such joint working arises the Trust will actively pursue a dialogue with affected residents with an aim to create an appropriate project group.

Customer working groups are likely to meet quite frequently to progress a project, usually to an agreed timetable or schedule. Commitment therefore will be high, however benefits are significant as participants have a real opportunity to make a difference to Trust services or local communities. A willingness to undertake training and interpret complex information will be required. Training provided can be formal or informal to suit you!

Membership of working groups is open to all.



Trust Board Membership

Five tenants (including the possibility of a leaseholder) are elected to represent customers views at the highest level of the organisation, the Board of Management. The Board acts in the same way that a Board of Directors would work in a large company. They make strategic decisions and guide the overall strategic direction of the Trust. Managers report directly to the Board and are accountable to them. Being part of the management board is a big responsibility.

Board Membership is vital to the success of the Trust and requires a high degree of commitment. Experience is not needed, broad life skills are required.

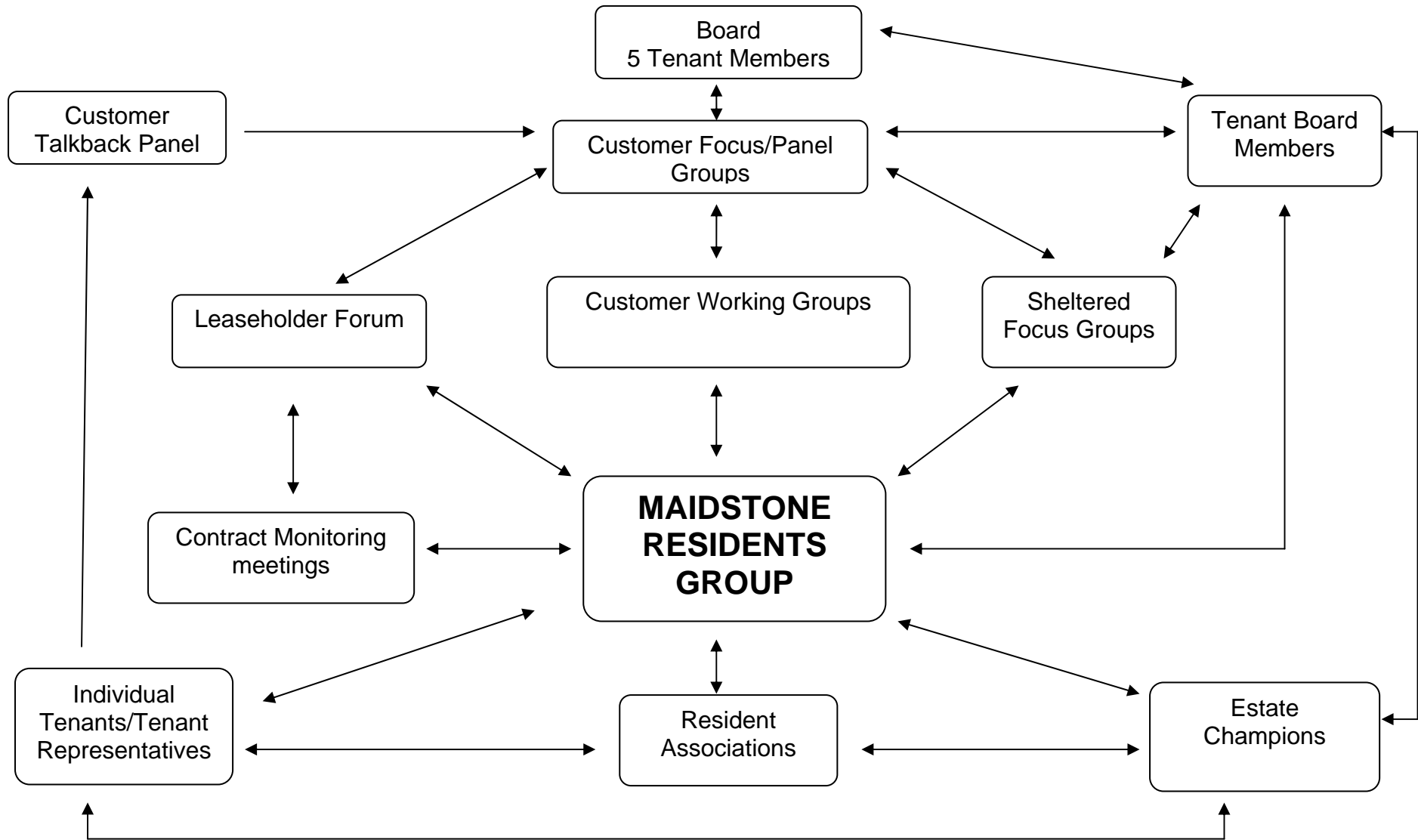
Frequent training opportunities will be offered. Support from other Board members and staff will also be extensively available.

Being a Board Member requires a high level of regular commitment and can make a positive impact to people's lives. By working collectively with other Board Members you can:

- help the Trust deliver its promises
- shape business objectives
- direct future strategy
- keep an eye on the finances of the Trust
- Monitor the Trust's performance and service standards
- Receive reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses

This is a voluntary unpaid role.

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT CHART



Training Opportunities

The Trust is committed to providing quality, relevant and accessible training to all who represent our customers. Training may be formal or informal and delivered internally or externally; via

- Seminars
 - Conferences
 - Small focus groups
 - Peer mentoring
 - Leaflets and booklets
 - Workshops
 - Joint away-days with Board members
- **Skills Audit**

We will conduct a skills audit once a year (as part of our review) talking with all our recognised groups and representatives to determine their training needs. We will develop in consultation with MRG appropriate upskilling and working together opportunities. The Trust and MRG will encourage customers to attend as many events as possible. MRG will undertake an annual appraisal of TRA's and resident representatives taking into account specific training requirements.

- **TPAS**

The Trust and the MRG are members of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), a national body promoting and supporting tenant participation and involvement. They run training programmes for customers. Other organisations and national bodies also offer excellent ranges of courses and conferences and where possible other types of training will also be offered.

- **Training support**

Training and conference information will be available from the Community Involvement Team. The Trust will provide appropriate and reasonable support to enable customers to take part in training and conference opportunities.

MRG highly recommend that its members endeavour to attend a minimum of 2 training or conference opportunities.

The Trust aims to provide a dedicated Customer Resource Centre that will be accessible to all.

Annual Customer Event

MRG working with the Trust will host an annual event at a local venue. There will be a selection of interesting stands and activities related to housing, local communities and lots, lots more.

Details of this event (s) will be published through:

- The Trust web-site
- 'Tenants First'
- Local tenants groups and representatives
- Area offices
- Local radio and newspapers
- Posters/flyers on community notice boards
- Community Centres
- Via the various area panel groups

Support for Community Involvement

Resident participation has the highest priority and extensive support is available to resident groups, area representatives and the Leaseholder and Sheltered Housing Scheme Forums to assist them; whether they are formally recognised or operate on an informal basis. All groups will need to show that they are accessible and are run democratically. The Trust will not support any group that restricts access or membership.

The Trust will provide sufficient funds in the Community Involvement budget to maintain and develop effective participation.

The budget will include financial support in the following areas:

- Salaries – community involvement staff, scheme co-ordinators etc
- To continue to pay the annual subscription to TPAS and other professional publications
- Production of Tenants First
- Production of MRG Newsletter
- Local area/block/road Newsletters (photocopying)
- Venue hire and refreshments for meetings (start-up grants)
- Promotion of community involvement and community events, such as Area Panels
- Reasonable childcare, carer, travel costs
- Training costs
- Funding for delegates to attend conferences and seminars
- The provision of a dedicated Resident Resource Centre
- Funding provision for local 'Open Events' promoting resident involvement

- Reasonable resources to be available to develop and profile MRG, Leaseholder and Sheltered Housing Forum's in pursuit of their objectives, i.e re-branding to MRG

The Trust's Support Package Maidstone Residents Group, Leaseholder Forum

- An annual grant of £450 for a Christmas social activity – MRG to be empowered to have the autonomy to decide how and what type of event to arrange
- Annual exceptional allowance of up to £450 to facilitate MRG's AGM and showcase their year's activities. This grant would only be made available if facilities outside the Trust's own accommodations were required and agreed
- Continued administrative, secretarial, promotional, facilitation support from the Community Involvement team and other Trust officers
- Payment of reasonable expenses to Chair-person and Vice-Chair-Person of the MRG and Leaseholder Forum (when and if a chair is elected). Payment of reasonable expenses to other executive officers of MRG committee and Leaseholder Forum by arrangement with the Community Involvement Team
- Special allowance controlled by Community Involvement Team, allowing discretionary support for purchasing equipment or services for Chairpersons of MRG and Leaseholder Forum to allow them to fully carry out the work required by this position. Examples of support would be the purchase of a PC if none exists, installation of IT package, upgrade of internet to broadband. The allowance is to a maximum of £500 pa
- Continued payment of reasonable expenses for attendees to official MRG, Leaseholder and Sheltered Scheme meetings, to facilitate active involvement. An example of this would be a mileage allowance, claimable as per the expense protocol. Payment of £15 to Treasurer of MRG per bi-monthly meeting for the provision of refreshments. In relation to the Leaseholder and Sheltered Scheme Forums, Trust Officers will provide refreshments
- Taxi provision where necessary and where no other transport can be provided
- Funding provision to MRG to produce a members newsletter
- Funding provision to MRG, Leaseholder and Sheltered Scheme Forums to develop and profile their aims

- Facilitation and funding of annual tenants event of up to £3000. Terms of reference on event and spending to be agreed
- Adequate and reasonable funding to develop and equip a Resident Resource Centre
- MRG/Leaseholder and Sheltered Scheme Forums to be consulted over future budgetary provision and forecasting at an early stage

The Trust's Package for Support of TRA's

New Groups

With effect from April 2007, increase in start-up grant to £75 on application – this would help rural groups in particular who may not have a Trust sheltered scheme closely located to hold an initial meeting. The Trust staff will provide support to help residents with this process.

New Area/Block/Road Representatives

The Trust's officers will provide secretarial and advocacy support together with help for photocopying and compilation of newsletters. An annual grant of up to £50, will be available to representatives who satisfy a simple qualifying criteria. For more details of how to become a recognised representative and qualify for funding, please contact the Resident Involvement Team

Recognised Groups

- Annual grants of up to £300 to fully constituted groups, completing the application form, which will require information about the groups aims, a simple action plan for the future, a balance sheet/bank statement, fulfilment of three community criteria, evidence of resident representation and a copy of the minutes from the most recent AGM showing the democratic election of officers. In consideration of grant funding groups will be required to hold 4 reasonably attended public meetings, per year, and produce feedback newsletters.
- An IT grant of £500 to newly formed (fully constituted) TRA's who fulfil the TPAS eligibility criteria. This will be in place until the Trust's new resource centre is available. This will be subject to evidence of adequate household insurance cover. Maintenance of equipment will be the responsibility of the user and in the event that the group dissolves will become the property of the Maidstone Residents Group.
- Continued officer support from the Trust

To qualify for an annual grant, groups and representatives must provide evidence that at least 25% on the residents in the area are 'signed-up' to supporting the group or person – at least 60% of these should be Trust

tenants or leaseholders. Please contact the community involvement team for a supply of 'sign up forms'.

A Constitution is a simple set of rules setting out how a group should conduct its activities. The Trust recommends that a TPAS model constitution be adopted. For more information please contact your Community Involvement Team.

Staff Support

- **Dedicated Resident Involvement Staff**

The Trust will employ sufficient Community Involvement staff to support meaningful involvement, participation and community development. This work includes:

- advice and guidance for groups and individuals
- facilitation of training
- office and administrative support
- design, copying and print provision
- funding advice
- help with community projects
- and much more

The staff will respond to your needs and suggestions as far as possible. The remit will be to promote involvement especially the establishment of new groups and resident representatives.

MRG will appoint a mentor to act as a 'buddy' for newly established groups.

- **Housing Managers**

The Trust employs a team of Housing Managers who have the daily responsibility for managing homes and estates. They can help residents deal with issues relating to their neighbourhoods. They will work in partnership with all customer groups.

- **Trust Staff**

Regular update and feedback sessions take place for all staff on community involvement initiatives. When new staff or board members join the Trust they have to attend an induction course that introduces them to the organisation. This course includes a presentation on community involvement to ensure that all new staff and board members are aware of how much the Trust values customers' views and opinions. Representatives from MRG and the board will be encouraged to attend staff induction sessions.

Due diligence is encouraged by all Trust staff to resident involvement values. Sufficient staff are to be available to attend local resident association meetings and area panel meetings.

Board members are encouraged to link with MRG and Leaseholder Forums and attend meetings on a rota basis quarterly, with the aim of embedding interaction.

- **Trust Offices**

Head Office reception area to display appropriate information on resident involvement. Shepway Area Office/Resident resource centre to display information about active associations operating locally, and details of MRG, Leaseholder and Sheltered Scheme meetings.

Standards for meetings

These standards apply to all consultation, involvement and information meetings with groups of customers which are hosted by the Trust, Board members or MRG.

Notice and Papers

- At least seven calendar days notice will be given of all meetings along with all necessary papers. Late or additional papers will only be accepted with the prior approval of the meeting Chair, (or for meetings chaired by Trust staff, a majority of those present and voting at the meeting)
- Notices shall state the time, date and venue for the meeting, along with the issues to be considered

Meeting Venues

- All meetings facilitated by the Trust will be fully accessible
- All meeting venues will be selected on the basis of maximising people's ability to attend the meeting, although regard shall also be given to cost and availability
- Appropriate provision will be made for individual requirements

Meetings

- Meetings facilitated by the Trust will begin at the advertised time, unless there are exceptional circumstances and will not start earlier than stated
- Meetings will be conducted in a fair and democratic way, allowing everyone the chance to speak should they wish, and ensuring that everyone is aware of what is being said or decided
- Minutes, notes or records shall be taken at all meetings and shall be distributed to those who attended or sent their apologies
- Newcomers will be welcomed to the group by the Chair at the beginning of the meeting
- MRG to appoint a liaison officer to act as mentor for new attendees groups, representatives or guests

Assistance

- The Trust will offer appropriate assistance to help customers attend meetings facilitated by the organisation. This may include the reimbursement of reasonable out-of-pocket expenses, paid in accordance with the expense protocol. Please contact the Community Involvement Team for more information.

Standards for information

- **Key standards for information**

All information to customers provided by the Trust will maintain the following standards:

- Plain, jargon free language will be used
- Offers of information to be made available in larger print, Compact Disc and other languages via a translation service
- Principles agreed by the Equality and Diversity Group to be applied
- Use of acronyms to be kept to a minimum, but where they are used they will be spelt out in full at the point they first appear. For example: Maidstone Residents Group - MRG
- Confidential information contained in reports, committee papers etc, will not be released to customers unless the individual is a member of a committee of governance which will consider that document
- Confidentiality contracts to be signed where appropriate by customers
- **Information for New Tenants**
 - The Trust will advise new customers of opportunities for involvement and will promote details of local associations or tenant representatives when they take up their tenancy.
 - MRG to work towards compiling a professionally produced colour leaflet explaining its work to be incorporated in the sign-up pack

- **Other Information**

Website will be regularly updated and published policies such as the Trust's:

- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Equality and Diversity

- Complaints Policy
- Current information on community involvement
- MRG to progress a separate web-page on resolution of the resident resource centre

Standards for Tenant's and Residents Groups (TRA's)

For a tenants and residents association to be formally recognised by the Trust the following criteria must be fulfilled:

- A written constitution (Based on the Tenant Participation Advisory Service – TPAS) model must be adopted by the group, to include an equal opportunities statement and Code of Conduct
- Annual democratic election of committee with roles
- A minimum of 4 public meetings per year. Once of which should be a reasonably attended Annual General Meeting
- Accounts to be checked by an independent competent person. The Trust can provide this service for groups. Accounts to be presented at the Annual General Meeting.
- Recognition Criteria: It will be necessary for at least 25% of local residents to be 'signed up' to supporting the group; of which 60% of those should be Trust customers (evidence of such will be required by the Trust – The Community Involvement Team can offer assistance with the preparation of any election papers, sign up sheets and are happy to invigilate at all Annual General Meetings.
- Policies that ensure that information about the group's activities are widely available and that all residents are encouraged to participate (This could be via – estate leaflet drops).
- Membership open to all.
- Requirement for groups to communicate and feedback to residents, information on their activities and Trust meetings, seminars. Conferences etc attended
- Groups recognised by the Trust are automatically eligible for membership of MRG. No group may have more than two voting nominees, (usually the Chair and Vice-Chair, or their nominees). However MRG warmly welcome the attendance of guests at their meetings. On matters directly related to Landlord issues only tenants may vote at MRG meetings. MRG will encourage Trust recognised groups to participate in MRG activities

- Groups are encouraged to be pro-active in their communities.

Standards for Street/Road/Village Representatives

Where no tenants or residents association exists in an area, individuals can put themselves forward to represent the views of their street/block/village.

A formally recognised individual will be eligible for membership of MRG. Recognised individuals who wish to be part of the Trust's consultative process will also receive full support from the Trust, who will work in partnership and assist in every possible way. This is illustrated by inclusion in resident training opportunities

Becoming a recognised representative

- Individual must be a Trust tenant or leaseholder.
- Individuals seeking to become a recognised representative will be encouraged to attend MRG meetings to gain further insight into the work of the group and the Trust. The Trust also encourages recognised representatives to undertake training opportunities which are frequently offered.
- With assistance from the Trust the individual seeking to become a recognised representative must gain written evidence of support from the road/street/village(s) he is representing. 25% of the road/street/village should be 'signed up, of which 60% of those should be Trust customers. This process should be repeated every 2 years.

Standards for recognised representatives

- Individuals should comply with the Trust's and MRG's confidentiality protocol
- Recognised representatives are to act as advocates for local people. Where possible they should encourage customers to contact the Trust directly. There may however be occasions where that individual may need to represent a persons views or concerns to the Trust and the Trust will provide the recognised representative with a consent form
- Recognised representatives must not use their position of influence to raise issues relating to their own tenancy or lease. These issues must be dealt with through the normal channels.
- Recognised representatives will be encouraged to attend regular MRG meetings. There will be an annual review of members of MRG and the Leaseholder and Sheltered Scheme Forums by the Chair-person.

- Recognised representatives will (with assistance from the Trust) compile and circulate local newsletters within their area, informing residents of their progress. Copies of these, in turn, should be sent to the Trust
- The Trust will conduct an annual review to ensure that the above standards are maintained and assess how best representatives can be supported in their role

Interested Tenants

- Trust staff, Board Members, MRG and the Leaseholder and Sheltered Scheme Forums will work in partnership to actively encourage the formation of new groups and recognised representatives and also assist sustain and support these
- Resident involvement will be pro-actively supported through-out the organisation

Monitoring and Reporting Performance

The Trust wants the ideas encapsulated in this Partnership Agreement to work. In order for this to happen we have to monitor, evaluate and measure its effectiveness. Details of how this will be done you will find below.

- **Reviewing the Partnership Agreement**

MRG working with the community involvement team will review the Partnership Agreement Action Plan every year to measure progress. Feedback will be encouraged from the Leaseholder and Sheltered Scheme Forum and from a Customer TalkBack panel member. A new Action Plan will be jointly agreed and compiled.

- **Maidstone Residents Group**

MRG will undertake an annual self assessment of their activities.

Details of the assessment will be made available by the MRG Chairman to the Trust, Board members, Leaseholder and Sheltered Scheme Forums, and other interested customer panels

Tenants & Residents Associations/ (TRA's) Recognised Representatives

Every year MRG with the Community Involvement Team will conduct an assessment of the work carried out by recognised residents groups and recognised representatives. A member of the Community Involvement team and a member of the MRG will attend all Tenant and Residents Associations AGM's. It is highly recommended that an independent Board member not affiliated to MRG attend MRG's AGM's.

Developing the Partnership Agreement

The ongoing development of the Partnership Agreement is an evolving process and we want this document to grow and respond to the changing needs and aspirations of our customers. As part of this process a development panel will be established to be responsible for taking the Partnership agreement forward over the coming years. It is recommended that the panel will be made up of:

- A Trust Housing Manager
- An independent Board member
- A member of the Community Involvement Team
- 3 members of the MRG
- A member of the Leaseholder Forum
- A member of the Sheltered Scheme Forum
- A Customer Talkback Panel member

Partnership Agreement Panel

- The Trust will facilitate a new panel which will meet annually. The panel will elect a chair and the group will look at all aspects of the Trust's work in regard to resident involvement.
- The panel will review current practice, bench-mark against other examples of best practice and suggest the development of new and creative ways of working.
- The Trust officer assigned to the task and the Chairperson will compile an impact assessment to review success
- Recommendations of the panel will be presented by Chairperson of the group to MRG and the Trust board for approval.
- The Community Involvement Team will review the budget for resident participation annually to ensure sufficient funds are allocated to meet the needs of the Partnership Agreement.
- Members of the Panel will be encouraged to attend the Kent & Sussex Resident Involvement Alliance Group and other groups to share experiences and look at other methods of working and financial support.
- MRG Chairman to attend Board Meeting annually on completion of Impact Assessment to present findings and give an overview of MRG's activities

Customer Agreement Action Plan 2006/2007

This action plan sets out ideas and time-scales for the next 24 months. A summary of these points are outlined below. MRG will monitor these action points and make available the results which will be presented by the Chairperson at the MRG-AGM.

Objective	Action	Target Date	Responsibility
Further develop 'Tenants First'	Introduce a regular letters page. Continue to compile and circulate 4 times a year	Spring, Summer, Autumn 2006/7	PR & Communications Officer
Provide customers with previous editions of Tenants First	Insert 3 previous back copies of Tenants First in Welcome Packs for new customers	Spring 2007	Housing Managers
Groups and reps to produce local newsletters	To encourage all resident groups and reps to feedback to their local community on their activities Groups to produce 4 newsletters. Reps to produce 2 newsletters	Summer 2007	Chair-person of MRG and Community Involvement Team
Annual Tenants Event(s)	MRG to facilitate and host event	By December 2007	MRG in partnership with Trust
Maidstone Residents Group – Web-page	To develop a separate webpage on resolution of resident resource centre	December 2007	MRG working with PR & Comm's Officer and IT Dept
Trust Web Site	Continue to put new policies on web	On-going	Policy & IT Dept With PR & Comms Officer

Customer Expenses	Trust & customers to work together to further develop expense claiming protocol and ensure smooth operation	January 2007	MRG and Community Involvement Team
Maidstone Residents Group	To actively pursue external funding streams to fund for instance newsletter	September 2007	MRG with Community Involvement Team
Profile role of MRG with all Trust's partners	To encourage Trust recognised groups and representatives to participate in MRG activities	January 2007	Chairman of MRG
Improved joint working	To work with Trust to update external partnership protocol	January 2007	Community Involvement Team and Chairperson of MRG
Agreement on Resident Involvement Budgets	To hold 2 meetings per year with The Director of Housing to review resident involvement budgets	Autumn 2007	Director of Housing, Chair of MRG and Leaseholder Forum (if one is appointed)
Closer working between MRG and Board	Annual presentation to Board members by Chair of MRG to present Impact Assessment of CPA and overview of MRG's activities	Jan 2008	Chair of MRG and CIO
To encourage recognised TRA's and Reps to participate work with MRG	MRG to appoint a liaison officer to act as 'friend' when attending MRG meetings	March 2007	Chair-person of MRG to appoint 'mentor' and monitor groups progress
Improved Communication with Board Members	Board members to be encouraged to attend MRG/Leaseholder Forum meetings quarterly by rota	March 2007	Chairman of MRG to provide board members with meeting date details; to include

			leaseholder forum dates
Input at Staff induction sessions	Board members and a representative from MRG to be encouraged to attend staff briefing sessions	As and when arranged	Board members and Chair of MRG
Training For Customers	Offer training 4 times a year in Partnership with MRG – Conduct a skills audit – arrange networking Sessions	Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter 2007	Community Involvement Team to arrange. MRG, TRA's Reps, Leaseholder and Sheltered Scheme members
Membership of the Trust	To encourage MRG, Leaseholders and Sheltered Housing Scheme residents to become members	ongoing	MRG Chairperson and Company Secretary
MRG Annual Appraisal	MRG to undertake an annual appraisal and self assessment of membership	April 07	Chairperson of MRG
Estate Walkabouts, develop Estate Champions	Encourage resident groups and reps to attend published walkabouts.	Spring 2007	MRG and Trust officers
Development of Resident Resource Centre	Fit and equip with MRG a dedicated Customer Resource Centre within Shepway Area Housing Office	December 2007	Trust officers with MRG executive committee members, leaseholders and sheltered scheme residents
Information to New Tenants profiling MRG	Compile professional leaflet for inclusion at signup	February 2007	MRG with PR & Communications Officer

Review Customer Partnership Agreement	Invitations to Board members, Housing Managers and MRG to establish the Panel	Nov 2007	Customer Involvement Team to facilitate
Develop Area Panel meetings in areas with no active TRA's	Themed area meetings to be introduced for a pilot period, to encourage wide participation and involvement. To be predicated by well staffed 'surgeries', dealing with single issues	Pilot in March 2007	Customer Involvement Team and MRG
Continue to support Customer Panels	Continue developing Customer TalkBack. MRG to encourage its groups to promote scheme	Ongoing	CIO with MRG
Notice Boards At Area Housing Office	To display information about the MRG and Leaseholder meeting details	Ongoing	CIO
Publish Partnership Agreement	Arrange for the document to made available	Jan 2007	CIO
Ongoing support to MRG	Continue to profile work of MRG and Leaseholder and Sheltered Scheme Forums within the Trust to embed the tenants of resident involvement	Ongoing	Everyone
Encourage new TRA's & Reps	Trust to continue to develop involvement via these formal methods	ongoing	CIO and MRG

Develop mechanisms for involvement of minority groups	To develop links with partner organisations to improve involvement of minority groups	March 2008	CIO
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Conclusion

This document will be made widely available to Trust customers, staff and board members and other Registered Social Landlords or Housing Associations on request. Copies will be available at the Area Housing Offices, Sheltered Schemes, on request and from the Web-site.

Contact us on the following numbers

Maidstone Housing Trust, Whatman House	01622 212600
Community Involvement Team	01622 212537
Shepway Area Housing Office	01622 212780
Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS)	0161 868 3500
Housing Corporation	0845 230 7000
Audit Commission	020 7828 1212

This information on community involvement is also available in other languages, large print, Braille and audio format on request.

Ky informacion rreth përfshirjes me komunitetin është, gjithashtu, i disponueshëm me porosi në gjuhë të tjera, printim me shkronja të mëdha, me alfabet për të verbërit dhe në kasetë audio.


Ces informations relatives à la participation de la communauté sont également disponibles, sur demande, dans d'autres langues, en gros caractères, Braille et format audio.

Ove informacije o uključivanju u društvene aktivnosti mogu se na zahtjev također dobiti i na drugim jezicima, štampane velikim slovima, u brajici i na zvučnoj traci.

Esta informação sobre o envolvimento da comunidade está disponível, a pedido, em outras línguas, num formato de impressão maior, em Braille e em áudio.

در صورت درخواست، این اطلاعات در مورد دخیل شدن در کارهای محل و اجتماعات، همچنین به زبانهای دیگر، چاپ درشت، خط نابینایان و به شکل صوتی موجود است.

उपभोक्ताओं को शामिल करने से संबंधित यह सूचना आग्रह पर अन्य भाषाओं, बड़े अक्षरों की छपाई, ब्रेल और सुनने वाली कसेट पर भी उपलब्ध कराई जा सकती है।

 **0800 923 2700**