

Annex 4: Consultation documents

Document 1: Covering letter

Dear xxx (*personalise*),

Have your say on how we look after your home

Your home is currently looked after by East Kent Housing on our behalf. They carry out safety checks, manage repairs, collect your rent etc.

Earlier this year we discovered serious problems with a range of safety checks at some properties looked after by East Kent Housing. I am sorry if that caused you to worry.

I am pleased to say we have made an enormous amount of progress in fixing those problems.

To make sure the same thing does not happen again, we have asked a range of experts to look into what went wrong.

We have also looked at how we should manage our council housing in the future.

We have come up with four options:

Option 1: Keep East Kent Housing and improve the way they work

Option 2: Close East Kent Housing and create a team at each council to look after your home

Option 3: Close East Kent Housing and work with nearby councils to look after your home

Option 4: Ask an outside organisation such as a housing association to look after your home

We think **Option 2** is the best way forward which means closing East Kent Housing leaving council staff to look after your home instead.

The advantages and disadvantages that we see of each way of doing things is explained in the attached information sheet.

We want to know what you think about our proposal and would ask you to spend a couple of minutes taking part in our survey.

You have until Friday 20 December and the easiest way to reply is online at canterbury.gov.uk/consultations (*link to be amended to be specific to each council*)
We have enclosed a paper copy and freepost envelope in case you prefer to do it that way.

If you want to find out more or have a chat about our proposals before making up your mind, we are holding some drop-in events:

- Add details of drop-in event 1 for the relevant district
- Add details of drop-in event 2 for the relevant district

If you need any help or support, for example if you need this information in a different format such as large print or Braille, or you'd like to talk to someone about the proposals over the phone or in person, please contact Mike Bailey, Corporate Consultation Manager at consultations@canterbury.gov.uk or on 01227 862 059 who can arrange this for you.

We will tell councillors, the people you vote for to run the council on your behalf, how you feel about the plans early next year before they make any final decisions.

When councillors have taken those views on board and decided on what they think is the best way forward, we will write to you again.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Madeline Homer

Chief Executive

Document 2: Information sheet

What is East Kent Housing? East Kent Housing is a company that looks after council housing on behalf of Canterbury City Council, Dover District Council, Folkestone and Hythe District Council and Thanet District Council. It does not make a profit because it was designed to provide a service rather than make money for the councils.

The four councils jointly own East Kent Housing which manages approximately 17,000 homes.

East Kent Housing is overseen by an independent board which is made up of an elected councillor for each council area, a tenant from each council area and four independent members.

East Kent Housing was created on 1 April 2011 and is now in its ninth year of operation.

Why was East Kent Housing set up? The four councils felt it would provide better quality services for tenants and leaseholders, increase efficiency and save money.

Why are we thinking about the way the system works? Before the problems with safety checks were discovered, the four councils were worried about how East Kent Housing was performing.

Concerns included how they managed a number of contracts, how they were collecting rent and the progress they were making on getting a new computer system up and running.

The four councils and East Kent Housing all signed up to an improvement plan aimed at fixing these problems.

In May this year, it then became apparent gas safety checks were not being carried out.

This led to the discovery of problems with electrical checks, lift inspections, legionella checks and delays in fire prevention work being carried out. Action has been taken on all of these and they have been fixed or are in the process of being fixed.

By now, the four councils had reported themselves to the government body that oversees council housing, the Regulator of Social Housing. In September, the regulator issued formal notices against all four councils telling them improvements needed to be made.

Why are we saying East Kent Housing should be closed and the four councils should look after council homes themselves?

This is what is known as **Option 2** in our covering letter. We think the advantages of the councils taking back control are:

- The councils would be able to make decisions about their council homes more quickly
- The councils would be able to rebuild the strong relationships they had with tenants before East Kent Housing was created and talk directly to their tenants again
- The decisions around council housing would be made locally
- There could be opportunities to increase investment in council homes
- There could be cost savings from removing duplicated jobs

We think the disadvantages are:

- Performance around repairs and maintenance might dip while the changes are made
- Key staff might not want to work for one of the councils

Why did we rule out the other options?

Option 1 involves East Kent Housing continuing to manage council housing on behalf of the councils with improvements to the way they work

We feel the advantages of this approach are:

- The risks are reduced if smaller changes are being made to the service being provided and this is the least complicated option
- There would be no need to ask tenants for their views
- There is the opportunity for East Kent Housing to improve

We think the disadvantages are:

- The councils, who are paying for East Kent Housing's services, would have less control than if they were running things themselves.
- The extra layer of management provided by East Kent Housing could get in the way of necessary changes

- Lots of people, including councillors, have lost trust in East Kent Housing carrying out safety checks when they need to
- East Kent Housing has struggled to carry out its work and manage the people carrying out work for it. It would cost money to put this right

Option 3 is to close East Kent Housing and for some or all of the councils to work together to manage council housing.

In our view, the advantages are:

- The councils would have more control over the service being delivered
- The councils would be able to save money by not duplicating jobs and taking advantage of their greater buying power to reduce the prices of the goods and services they buy

We feel the disadvantages are:

- The councils would lose a little bit of control over buying decisions
- Disagreements between the councils could hamper efficiency and improvements

Option 4 involves asking an outside provider like a housing association to manage council homes.

We think the advantages of this option are:

- An outside organisation might be more efficient because it operates more like a private company and might have more buying power to reduce the prices of the good and services they buy
- Any extra money generated can be ploughed back into other council services

The disadvantages are:

- Any savings that are made might be lost if the council cannot persuade the outside provider to alter the way it delivers its services when things go wrong
- It will take the councils a lot of work to ensure the outside provider manages council housing in the way councillors, and ultimately, tenants want
- Tenants and councillors may not trust an outside provider
- An outside provider would be exposed to the same risks as a private company

What happens if one or two of the four councils decide to stay with the current arrangements while the remaining councils take direct control of their housing service? If the majority of councils decide to close East Kent Housing, it will close. The remaining councils would have to consider their next steps.

If the councils decide to bring the service back under their direct control, would this affect the service I receive? No, the intention is it would simply be delivered by staff at the council instead of at East Kent Housing. They may be the very same staff you deal with at the moment. You would still be able to access housing services at the council office, by telephone or via the council website.

Would the proposal affect the amount of rent and service charges I pay?
No.

Would the proposal affect the work due to be done to my home? No, all programmed work will continue as planned. The council will continue to keep your home to a decent standard.

Would staffing levels change? There is a chance that levels would change overall but staff would still be delivering services and work within the community. The big difference is their employer would change and they are likely to be based in the council's offices.

Would the quality of housing provided change?

The four councils are committed to providing high-quality housing services to all tenants and leaseholders. The aim would be direct management by the four councils would lead to improvements.

Would the transfer affect how I report housing issues? No, each council has a customer contact centre to provide a single access point for council services including housing.

When will you make a decision on whether to bring the service back under council management? Consultation closes on Friday 20 December 2019. What you tell us will be reported to councillors early next year. They will use your feedback to decide how your housing service should be delivered in future.

As soon as a decision has been made, we will write to you again to let you know.

If you decide to bring the service back under direct council control, what happens next? If the council decides to do this, more work would need to be done to manage the process and keep any disruption to a minimum. We would keep you informed on progress.

Document 3: Consultation questionnaire

Questionnaire Have your say on how we look after your home

You can either:

- Complete the questionnaire online at thanet.gov.uk/consultations
- Fill in this paper copy and either:
 - Send it back to us in the freepost envelope provided
 - Bring it to us at one of our consultation events
 - Bring it to the council offices at Cecil Street, Margate, Kent

Please make sure you read the enclosed information sheet before filling in the survey.

Questions that need a response are marked with a red asterisk (*)

1. Which of the following best describes you?

* Please tick one box only

- Council tenant or leaseholder
- Other individual
- A business, organisation or community group, please provide the name: _____
- Other, please state: _____

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to close East Kent Housing and leave it to people working at the council to look after your home (Option 2)?

* Please tick one box only

- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree

2a. Please tell us why:

3. What do you feel are the most important things for the council to focus on for your housing services?

* Please tick up to three options

- Dealing with repairs and maintenance
- Dealing with anti-social behaviour
- Providing value for money for your rent and service charges
- Building new council homes
- Estate services (such as grass cutting, cleaning communal areas etc)
- Dealing with customer enquiries and complaints
- Involving and listening to residents
- Other, please state: _____

4. If you are a tenant or leaseholder, would you like to be more involved in the management of your council home? *(On the online version, this question only to appear to people who ticked "Council tenant or leaseholder" as their answer to Question 1)*

If you would, and you are happy for the council to contact you about becoming more involved, please tick the box to indicate your consent to your email address being used to contact you in this regard:
(insert tick box)

Please provide your email address: _____

5. Do you have any other comments on your housing services?

Thank you for taking the time to give us your views.