

Consultation on management of housing services in Eastbourne



Consultation report | February 2024

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Background

Housing services in Eastbourne are currently managed on behalf of Eastbourne Borough Council (and its housing brand, Homes First) by Eastbourne Homes Limited (EHL), which is an arm's length management organisation (ALMO).

At the time EHL was set up, the council was able to access 'Decent Homes' funding to improve the standard of housing across the borough. It also enabled us to make our housing services more community-focussed and has achieved many positive things over the years. Crucial to this has been the positive impact of the EHL Board and its oversight of the delivery of housing services.

Eastbourne Borough Council has been looking carefully at the pros and cons of continuing the current arrangements of EHL managing our housing, versus bringing

the service back into Eastbourne Borough Council, continuing as part of Homes First.

Eastbourne Borough Council is facing increasing financial pressures, much like many other local authorities across the country. These pressures are due to the cost-of-living crisis, the dramatic increase in homelessness and numbers of people in need of council housing and the increased pressure on Repairs and Maintenance budgets, which have been challenging to manage alongside increased need for investment in our housing stock.

Returning the governance of our housing services to the council would put us in a strong position to respond to these pressures.

Making this change would have no negative impacts for tenants, leaseholders or housing staff but it would provide benefits including greater financial stability and longer-term security of the council's housing services.

The review of the current ALMO arrangement has been informally discussed with tenant representatives and those we have spoken to so far have been supportive of change.

No staff are employed by EHL and the proposal seeks to ensure continuity of service delivery.

In recent years, central government has brought in new laws for how council housing services must be run. These aim to increase service quality and safety for tenants. To make sure we are meeting the new standards we need strong governance for our housing services.

Along-side the financial challenges of the cost-of-living crisis and an increase in homelessness, changes to government housing policies have added further pressure to councils' housing budgets. These include the Government's rent cap. The costs of repairs and maintenance services have also increased significantly. Crucially, the additional funding opportunities for arms-length management organisations, which central Government brought in, no longer exist.

The council would also be able to simplify many of its back-office systems and operations if this change happens.

The proposed changes

From a tenant and leaseholder's perspective there would be no change to the way services are delivered.

The EHL Board - where governance and decision-making currently takes place - would end in its current form.

In place of this there would be two options for governance and tenant involvement.

1. The EHL Board remains in place as an advisory / scrutiny body rather than a decision-making body.
2. The EHL Board is combined with Residents Voice, making this the combined strategic tenant body.

Both options would provide transparency of decision making but the consultation asked whether tenants respondents had a preference between the two options.

How we consulted

We invited comments from housing tenants, residents, partner organisations and other stakeholders on our proposal to bring the governance of our housing services back into the council and the future of the EHL Board and Residents Voice.

We wrote to all existing housing tenants in Eastbourne by including a letter in the regular Tenants Open Voice magazine, giving details of the proposals and consultation.

A page was published on the council website, with comprehensive FAQs and an online survey to help respondents structure their feedback.

Paper copies of the survey were available on request, as were copies of the consultation information in different languages and formats, such as audio and Easy Read.

We promoted the consultation through a press release to the local media, the news section of the council website, an email to our 20,000 news and consultation email alert subscribers. We promoted the consultation repeatedly through the council's social media channels.

The consultation was promoted to council staff through a range of communication channels in the run-up and during the consultation period. This included opportunities to ask questions in person at internal staff events.

In-person engagement

We held a series of events where interested residents could speak to staff about the proposed change.

Sessions took place on:

- **Hampden Park Willingdon Trees Area Panel** at Hampden Park Community Centre on Friday 5 January 2024 from 10am to 12 noon
- **Retirement Housing Forum** on Monday 22 January 2024 - please raise any questions you have with your retirement housing representative in advance of the forum meeting.
- **Residents Voice** at Eastbourne Town Hall on Tuesday 23 January 2024 from 10am to 12.30pm
- **Hampden Park Willingdon Trees Area Panel** at Hampden Park Community Centre on Friday 2nd February 2024 from 10am to 12noon

- **Eastbourne Area Panel** at Eastbourne Town Hall on Tuesday 13 February 2024 from 10.30am to 12.30pm

Members of Eastbourne Borough Council / Homes First attended above meetings to speak about the proposals and answer any questions.

Summary of responses

1. In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	An Eastbourne Borough Council / Homes First Tenant		88.46%	69
2	An Eastbourne Borough Council / Homes First Leaseholder		6.41%	5
3	A homeowner or private renter in Eastbourne		3.85%	3
4	A partner organisation (please state which one below)		0.00%	0
5	Other (please specify):		1.28%	1
			answered	78
			skipped	4
Other (please specify): (1)				
- Former employee of Eastbourne Borough Council / Eastbourne Homes Ltd				

2. How much do you agree or disagree with the proposal to bring governance of Eastbourne Borough Council housing services back into the council?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Agree		71.43%	55

2. How much do you agree or disagree with the proposal to bring governance of Eastbourne Borough Council housing services back into the council?

2	Neither agree nor disagree		23.38%	18
3	Disagree		5.19%	4
			answered	77
			skipped	5

Do you have any comments on the proposal?

Comment themes:

- Comment about service quality – 5 (comments)
- Agree if it saves money – 4
- Will it lead to improvements in services? – 4
- I don't believe it will make much difference – 2
- Agree with the proposal - 2

3. How much do you agree or disagree with the proposed options for governance and tenant involvement?

Answer Choices	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Response Total
The EHL Board remains in place as an advisory / scrutiny body rather than a decision-making body.	19.44% 7	33.33% 12	44.44% 16	2.78% 1	36
The EHL Board is combined with Residents Voice, making this the combined strategic tenant body.	66.67% 48	18.06% 13	8.33% 6	6.94% 5	72
				answered	76
				skipped	6

Do you have any other suggestions or comments on the proposals?

Comment themes:

- Comment about service quality – 3 (comments)
- Further clarity needed on what the new governance arrangements will be - 2
- Disagree with the proposal - 2
- Don't see the value in tenant engagement - 2
- Agree with the proposal - 2

Equality monitoring questions

4. The following questions are about you.				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Answer questions about me		74.32%	55
2	Skip the questions about me		25.68%	19
			answered	74
			skipped	8

5. What is your age?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	17 or younger		0.00%	0
2	18-20		0.00%	0
3	21-29		0.00%	0
4	30-39		5.17%	3
5	40-49		12.07%	7
6	50-59		22.41%	13
7	60 or older		60.34%	35
			answered	58
			skipped	24

6. Do you have a disability?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		46.55%	27
2	No		46.55%	27
3	Prefer not to say		6.90%	4

6. Do you have a disability?

answered	58
skipped	24

7. What is your Ethnicity?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
White			
1	British	87.93%	51
2	Irish	0.00%	0
3	Other	3.45%	2
Asian or Asian British			
4	Indian	0.00%	0
5	Pakistani	0.00%	0
6	Bangladeshi	0.00%	0
7	Any other Asian background	0.00%	0
Mixed			
8	White and Black Caribbean	0.00%	0
9	White and black African	0.00%	0
10	White and Asian	0.00%	0
11	Any other mixed background	0.00%	0
Black or Black British			
12	Caribbean	0.00%	0
13	African	0.00%	0
14	Any other black background	0.00%	0
Other Ethnic Group			
15	Chinese	0.00%	0
16	Any other Ethnic Group	0.00%	0

7. What is your Ethnicity?

17	I do not wish to disclose my ethnic origin	8.62%	5
		answered	58
		skipped	24

8. What is your gender identity?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Male	37.93%	22
2	Female	58.62%	34
3	Cisgender	0.00%	0
4	Transgender	0.00%	0
5	Non Binary	1.72%	1
6	Prefer not to say	1.72%	1
7	Other (please specify):	0.00%	0
		answered	58
		skipped	24
Other (please specify): (0)			
No answers found.			

Written responses

In addition to the survey, two leaseholders contacted the council expressing support for the proposed changes.