

TENANT INVOLVEMENT OPTIONS STUDY

Rochdale Boroughwide Housing



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1. Background

- 1.1 RBH is a mature ALMO, responsible for managing council homes on behalf of Rochdale Council. The organisation was set up on 1st April 2002. Rochdale Council owns 13,900 properties. RBH provides all the landlord services to these properties and also provides services to 500 leasehold properties.
- 1.2 Along with many other early round ALMOs, RBH and its parent council is facing a number of major challenges in the next few years. These include:
- An increasingly difficult budget position due largely to the current national funding system for Council housing – the Housing Subsidy system
 - It is becoming increasingly difficult year on year to maintain 100% decent homes – again largely due to the Housing Subsidy system
 - The need for RBH to respond to the increasingly high expectations of tenants in terms of the level of service provided
 - The need for RBH to play a major role in place making and the regeneration of neighbourhoods, and the impact that regeneration programmes will have on RBH's business plan
 - How to broaden tenant involvement in shaping housing services to maximise accountability to tenants
 - How to strengthen tenant influence of, and involvement in, formal governance structures
- 1.3 For the last year Communities and Local Government (CLG) and HM Treasury (HMT) have been carrying out a joint review of the current national system for funding Council housing. This review is due to report in the next few weeks and could provide new opportunities for local councils and ALMOs to meet some of the challenges above. There have also been a number of exciting developments in how tenants can become involved in decision making including "mutual" housing models. It is important therefore that RBH, RMBC and tenants understand these opportunities, agree locally how best to respond and decide on the best long term approach for the borough.
- 1.4 As a result RMBC and RBH established an Investment and Involvement Commission which will, between September 2009 and spring 2010, explore the best options for securing long term investment in the housing stock and neighbourhoods, ensuring that the ability of the landlord body to contribute to place making is maximised, and for maximising tenant involvement in decision making. The Commission consists of senior Councillors, RBH Board members and tenants. It is chaired by an independent expert of national standing within the housing sector. In spring 2010 the Commission will produce a final report for the RBH Board and RMBC setting out its recommendations for the future.
- 1.5 One tenant from each of the borough's four Townships is a member of the Commission. These tenants are neither RBH Board members nor Councillors.

- 1.6 In addition RBH wishes to ensure that there is broad ranging tenant involvement in the process of looking at options for the future. The Commission is the first stage of a longer future options development and implementation process. As such RBH has expressed a commitment to establishing a mechanism for wider tenant involvement in the process - initially to work in parallel to the Commission and to shadow its work.
- 1.7 Libra's role is to explore with tenants the options for how best to establish such a mechanism and, once agreed by the Project Steering Group, to work with RBH and tenants to speedily establish it.
- 1.8 Libra is well aware of the heritage of tenant participation in Rochdale and of the role of Rochdale Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations (RoFTRA).
- 1.9 RoFTRA agreed with RBH and RMBC that in view of the wider context of developments in the social housing sector and the need to explore future options, a review of the best mechanism for ensuring broad ranging and inclusive collective tenant involvement should be explored.
- 1.10 The first stage of this is to ensure a broad based and inclusive collective involvement in shadowing the Commission and examining future options. This is the subject of this project.
- 1.11 It is intended that following on from this study, and also from the work of the Commission itself, a clear view will emerge as to the best way of ensuring collective involvement in decision making in the future. In view of this, RoFTRA has agreed to put its work on hold pending the outcomes of this project.
- 1.12 Libra was commissioned on 3rd August to undertake the Tenant Involvement Options Study.
- 1.13 The first stage of the project, i.e. the recommendation of a preferred mechanism, is to be completed by 18 September 2009 in the form of a final report to the RBH Policy Manager.

2. Context

- 2.1 A key aim of the TSA is 'to ensure that tenants of social housing have the opportunity to be involved in its management'. In February 2009, following large scale research with social housing tenants, Ipsos Mori produced the report Understanding Tenant Involvement for the TSA. This report highlighted that:
 - 2.1.1. Many tenants wish to be involved, but question the influence that they can have.
 - 2.1.2. Many tenants support involvement, but do not themselves wish to be involved.
 - 2.1.3. Housing providers most keen to involve tenants in Housing Management tend to have the most satisfied tenants.

- 2.1.4. There is a recognition that not all tenants will get involved.
- 2.1.5. It is acknowledged that some tenants do not feel the need to get involved as they are satisfied with the services that they receive.
- 2.1.6. There is a misconception about the type of person who gets involved in tenant groups and the amount of time that this type of involvement requires.
- 2.2 The Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry are quite clear about what is expected of a 3 star service in terms of resident involvement, some of which is pertinent to this review:
 - 2.2.1. Produces information on why and how management decisions have been made and distributes this widely to service users.
 - 2.2.2. Treats Resident Involvement as an integrated and important element of the service designed for the service user's convenience.
 - 2.2.3. Can show that involvement begins at an early stage and that service users' views are taken into account before key decisions are made.
 - 2.2.4. Actively canvasses the views of service users and uses them to review or improve services.
 - 2.2.5. Has resident board members who are aware of and/ or understand their responsibilities as directors.
 - 2.2.6. Has set up training for potential service user board members to widen the scope of possible applicants.
 - 2.2.7. Can demonstrate that service users have used training opportunities and/ or their skills and abilities to make a real impact in improving services.
 - 2.2.8. Has delivered improvements to the service as a result of resident involvement
- 2.3 Resident Led Self-Regulation is expected to be a key priority for social housing landlords. This involves ensuring that residents are involved in providing a scrutiny role within the organisation.

3. The Approach

- 3.1 Our aim was to find out what works well within existing structures and what could be improved. We also considered whether there were any gaps that needed to be filled and how a wider number of tenants could have an influence on future priorities and spend with RBH. The approach adopted by Libra is outlined below:-

3.2 The Story So Far

3.2.1. We commenced the project by meeting with the Project Manager and Chief Executive of RBH for a briefing on the background to the commission, the triggers and reasons for initiating the project, the expectations and outputs required, the issues that may be around and the report approvals and decisions process. This meeting helped to build a picture of the activities that have taken place in the last two years, since Libra last worked with RBH, and outlined how the current position has emerged.

3.3 Hopes and Fears

3.3.1. The Libra team also held meetings with key representatives from each of the three main stakeholders – RBH, Rochdale MBC and RoFTRA. The purpose of these meetings was to establish the hopes and fears of each stakeholder in terms of the outputs and outcomes of the Options Study. The common hopes helped to provide a clear agenda for the future. Where there were fears, then this gave an insight into some of the areas that needed caution and sensitivity.

3.4 Developing a narrative

3.4.1. There were two strands to this: an informal strand based upon dialogue with individuals, outside the current formal involvement structures; and, a formal strand based upon dialogue with existing representative and involved organisations. The purpose of the consultation was to explore the potential future options to deliver a tenant involvement structure which will meet the expectations in terms of Resident Led Self Regulation and will ensure full tenant involvement in examining future options.

3.5 Engagement with individual tenants:

3.5.1. Libra provided a free phone telephone number for all tenants throughout the duration of the project. This number was publicised in all newsletters and other literature to tenants in order that individual tenants could contact the Libra team at any point to give their views or to ask questions.

3.5.2. A postal survey was designed and distributed to all tenants. The purpose of the survey was to establish how tenants wished to give their views, how they wanted their views to be represented and to establish their priorities in terms of future involvement and future stock options.

3.6 Consultation with existing organisations:

3.6.1. Libra offered to attend meetings with the officers of the 40+ established Tenant and Resident Associations and EMBs to ensure that the views of those in the existing structures who currently contribute a lot of their time to tenant involvement activities were fully considered.

3.6.2. Libra met with the existing RoFTRA committee to ensure that the views of those in the existing structures who currently contribute a lot of their time to tenant involvement activities were fully considered.

3.7 Changes to planned approach

- 3.7.1. We intended to attend 4 Area Board Meetings to explore their views on existing involvement structures however, the sequencing of meetings did not allow this.
- 3.7.2. We had hoped to organise meetings with some tenants who were not members of TRAs, but time did not permit and we felt that all tenants would have the opportunity to channel their views and feedback through the questionnaires.
- 3.7.3. We attended the Disability Working Group and had some valuable contributions, including the issue of contacting tenants with known vision or literacy problems.
- 3.7.4. We held an additional meeting with staff at RoFTRA to gain their insight into the best models of involvement for the future.
- 3.7.5. We found that there were some organisational weaknesses and inconsistencies in the way some TRAs worked which meant that more time had to be spent sending follow-up letters and trying to contact the groups by telephone.

4. Outcome of Consultation with Key Stakeholders

4.1 RBC

- 4.1.1. RBC has many consultation structures in place to cover their Regeneration activities and also Housing Market Renewal (HMR) areas e.g. Resident Sounding Boards, Consultation Panels, Engagement Plans. These work well and could be replicable / deployed across the borough.
- 4.1.2. RMBC has a team in place for each of the HMR areas: Spotland & Falinge; Newbold; Deeplish; Sparthbottoms and Kirkholt, each led by a director and with a steering group for each area and sub-groups representing special interests reporting to each steering group.
- 4.1.3. RMBC also has a separate Consultation Framework led by the Community Affairs Team.

4.2 RBC are currently looking at an Environmental Improvement Programme of £7m. Each Council estate is graded environmentally and the 5 worst estates from each township (25 total) will get a share of money for environmental works. This money is allocated through a Strategic Group made up of 5 Tenant representatives 1 from each Township (volunteers from Newsletter not electees) 2 representatives from RBH plus 2 council officers. This group also consults local people on their priorities.

- 4.2.1. The LSP also has different areas with their own consultation framework e.g. Quality of Place Partnerships.

4.2.2. RBC have documents and a Guidebook that explain how their consultation structure works.

4.2.3. The issues for RMBC :-

- Quite a lot of areas don't have TRAs. Whatever is in place needs to be about getting tenants' views, whether or not they are represented by a TRA.
- Tenants see themselves as RBH tenants rather than Council tenants. It needs to come across that they are Council tenants
- The involvement structure needs refreshing because it is currently based upon a very limited number of people who have been involved for some time
- There is a need to consider timetabling of consultation so that there is better coordination and use of structures and events.

4.3 RoFTRA

4.3.1. RoFTRA had an industrious Tenant Involvement Team and used to engage with every estate in the borough to put the tenants' case.

4.3.2. RoFTRA believed that tenants should be setting the agenda, rather than responding to agendas set by others. It was suggested that tenants could elect representatives to represent them and the Tenant Participation Unit could deal with training.

4.3.3. RoFTRA feel that there is a good tenant involvement structure and system in place and it will be better to tune the current structure and system to make it work, rather than to try to replace it. The concept of Area Panels is good, there is just a need to get them working better. Evolution is easier to manage than revolution.

4.3.4. The TRAs within townships have previously come together and worked effectively. When Townships are planning things they should go out and talk to the TRAs.

4.3.5. Existing structures and systems should be used but there is a problem in that they can be very formal. There is therefore a need for more variety, particularly informal methods of involvement.

4.3.6. There was a belief that people are not always clear what they are being consulted about and what the parameters are for them to influence things. Also feedback is often lacking to confirm that the feedback has been received, explain how it will be used and demonstrate how it has influenced a decision.

4.3.7. There was an acceptance that the successes of RoFTRA in securing external funding for community development probably led to a degree of complacency about its Tenant Representation role.

- 4.3.8. RoFTRA's community development and sports development events were frequently well attended, often by the groups who would not normally engage with tenant involvement events, such as young people. The opportunity to link community development and tenant involvement was missed. It was felt that RBH should recognise the opportunity to link tenant involvement to any opportunity to get tenants together, whether that is a social or sports event, or community development.
- 4.3.9. RoFTRA do not believe that most tenants understand how to get involved and further felt that there are some tenants who don't want others to be involved because it may weaken their powerbase. There is a need for whatever is established to prevent the establishment of powerbases.
- 4.3.10. RoFTRA felt there were a number of barriers to involvement: communication; unfulfilled promises; lip service; language (plain English, and translation); apathy; fear (of criticism), and time.
- 4.3.11. There was acknowledgement that RoFTRA would have engaged better if there had also been representatives of RMBC and RBH on the Board.
- 4.3.12. RoFTRA felt that the way forward for Tenant Involvement was to be proactive not reactive. There is a need to hand-hold and support people and groups and not just leave them to get on with it. There is also a need to look beyond the formalities and structures. Consider themed consultations looking at planned projects and events, "piggy-back" social events. Empower local people with training and resources to do their own consultations. Support people to do it for themselves.

5. Results from Consultation with TRAs and Groups

- 5.1 First of all, it is important to stress that there was a great deal that was positive in the findings from the consultations. The formal involvement structure, from local Tenant and Resident Associations, SHIP, Disability Working Group, Area Panels, RoFTRA as a federation to represent Tenant and Resident Associations, to the more recently conceived Service Improvement Panels, offers a sound structure on which to move forward.
- 5.2 Generally, the groups consulted said that they felt involved, though the extent to which they felt they had influence varied widely.
- 5.3 The system of servicing the formal involvement structures through the Tenant Participation Unit is also logical and sensible.
- 5.4 Generally, the people and groups were very complimentary of the individuals involved in the delivery of support and the volunteers who work tirelessly, without reward, to put forward and represent tenant interests as best they can.
- 5.5 The financial support offered to groups was highly praised as was the scope for groups to be involved in how financial resources are deployed in neighbourhoods and estates.

- 5.6 However, we encountered a high degree of scepticism about the extent to which tenant involvement structures and systems are able to make a difference to policy, strategy, local service delivery, service standards and performance. The statements made were usually passionately delivered and represented genuine perceptions of how things were. In some instances, we must accept that the perceptions are not necessarily accurate, but they illustrate that there is much work to be done to establish trust in the systems and structures.
- 5.7 There is an illuminating statement in the Ipsos MORI Report for the TSA, Understanding Tenant Involvement (Feb-2009) – “Where housing providers do not cede any power to tenants, where certain people dominated meetings or where meetings are erratic or just ineffectual, negative perceptions about involvement and strengthen this barrier to involvement”.
- 5.8 The underlying issues that appear to be affecting how the structures and systems work are: relationships; administration; communication, and motivation.
- 5.9 In terms of relationships, there seemed to be a gradient with RMBC being at the lower end of the trust curve, RBH having built some degree of respect and confidence through its perceived achievements but not seen as particularly responsive, individual officers generally liked and respected but seen as not proactive and unable to influence things within the organisation. There was a common criticism that it is always the same people who tend to get involved and turn up at all the meetings. Some individuals were seen to dominate proceedings. Some individuals (officers and tenants) were notably seen as more able to influence delivery and get things done.
- 5.10 There was evidence of weaknesses in various administrative processes. At its most basic, the process for making contact with TRAs and organising meetings was not robust – in some cases TRAs we found were dormant or on the verge of winding up. In other cases the internal administration processes meant that letters and telephone messages either did not reach the right person (e.g. TRA secretary), or the secretary did not communicate with others on the group. This was variously represented as a criticism of RBH or Libra, where-as the communication shortcomings appeared to be within the group itself.
- 5.11 A frequent frustration was that Area Panel minutes are not produced within a reasonable period after the meetings; it was stated that the minutes were only issued just before the next meeting, which meant a gap of almost 3 months (in which time people had forgotten what was discussed and the answers to questions that had been asked were apparently passed over). Tenants were unaware how to get items onto Area Panel agendas and were also unaware how to get issues onto the RBH Board agenda.
- 5.12 A common theme was that people get lots of written information and, in some cases, felt overwhelmed by the volume, variety and level. Much information was felt to be over-complex and was consequently passed over or ignored. There was also a criticism of over-reliance on the internet, website and email. One person said that there were only two people in the TRA who could

download emails. Also, there was a criticism that information was often last-minute and gave people inadequate time to respond. Generally, the view was that there should be more face to face dialogue rather than letters, newsletters, bulletins and notices.

- 5.13 Generally people felt that there was little information on how to get involved, the roles of the various representative structures, how to raise issues within those structures and what happens to issues that are raised.
- 5.14 There was strong feeling that RBH is prepared to listen, but it is not very good at acting and it is even less good at giving feedback on how views have been taken into account.
- 5.15 The principle motivation for the people who get involved seems to be to access the various funding streams to support resident involvement, and to improve facilities and services in the areas. Whilst there was much praise for the level of funding, there was scepticism about the level of influence that tenants have over the plans of RMBC and RBH, and the extent to which they are able to influence decisions. A number of groups said they felt that decisions had often been taken before they were “consulted”, and in some cases they said that decisions were taken and implemented without consultation. There were a number of examples where tenants said that they had asked questions, in some cases over quite a long period, and been unable to get answers. Officers attending the meetings did not have the authority or knowledge to answer questions and it was not possible to get people from RMBC or RBH with the authority or the knowledge to attend meetings. There was also concern that the agendas for the important meetings, such as Area Panels, were set by others and tenants were unable to influence the agenda.
- 5.16 Within all this, the thing that was most striking was the level of inconsistency – for every organisation or individual that said things did not work and they had no confidence in their ability to influence anything, there as a counter view that said that things generally worked fine and they felt they had the right level of involvement and influence.

6. Survey Report and Freephone Findings

- 6.1 A survey form designed by Libra was distributed by RBH to 13,567 tenants in the week commencing 17th August. Tenants were asked to complete and return the form, in the freepost envelope provided, to Libra by Friday, 4th September. All forms completed and returned were entered into a prize draw for the tenant completing the form to win £50 of shopping vouchers.
- 6.2 A freephone telephone number was provided throughout the project in order that tenants could contact Libra with any comments or queries throughout the project.
- 6.3 The purpose of the survey was to provide an understanding of what issues would drive involvement, what methods of involvement are likely to be most

successful and what type of involvement structure would be most widely supported.

- 6.4 RBH hold a list of tenants who have alternative media requirements. Libra were given details of tenants on the list for whom RBH hold a telephone number in order that these tenants could be contacted to offer an opportunity to complete the survey over the telephone. Two attempts were made to contact each tenant on the list. None of those tenants successfully contacted were willing to complete the survey over the telephone and many of them stated that they were unaware that they had been identified as having alternative media requirements.
- 6.5 A total of 1375 completed surveys were returned by the slightly extended deadline of Monday, 7th September. A further 41 surveys have been received since the extended deadline, but have not been included in the full survey analysis report which is attached at Appendix II.
- 6.6 Tenants responding to the survey indicated that they feel it is most important for them to be able to influence issues affecting their home and their estate. Issues affecting the township were the least important for tenants to be able to influence.
- 6.7 45% of respondents indicated that they would like to be involved in deciding the best options for making sure there is future investment in their home and neighbourhood.
- 6.8 33% of residents were aware of a Tenant and Resident Association operating in their area and 12% stated that they had attended a meeting of a Tenant and Resident Association.
- 6.9 Newsletters and postal surveys were the most popular preferences as methods for tenants to be involved. The least popular methods indicated through the survey results were board membership, boroughwide panels and Area Panels.
- 6.10 There was not a lot of interest from the tenants responding to the survey in joining a body or organisation that speaks on behalf of the borough's tenants with only 24% indicating that this would be of interest. However, 65% said that they would want the opportunity to vote for tenants who would speak on their behalf.
- 6.11 48% of survey respondents indicated that they would be interested in being on a contact list to be consulted on how RBH might develop services and take things forward. The vast majority of respondents indicated that they would prefer to be contacted by post, but it was interesting to note that over 200 tenants provided an email address.
- 6.12 A total of 12 calls were received to the freephone number throughout the duration of the consultation. The majority of the calls were from tenants wishing to explain why they would not be completing the survey which was usually due to ill health or their age.

- 6.13 The freephone telephone number was also used for Tenant and Resident Associations to arrange meetings with Libra.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 There are only two recommendations in terms of developing the structures for Tenant Involvement. The first is to establish a core tenant representative body that can mirror the RBH Board, represent and reflect tenant opinion, act as a central scrutiny panel for service standards and Board and Council plans and decisions and have a standing item on Board and relevant Council agenda papers. The core tenant representative body could be called the “RBH Tenant Panel” and would be trained and supported by the TPU to start setting its own agenda to represent the best interests of all tenants. The RBH Tenant Panel’s first role would be to link with the Investment and Involvement Commission. They should also be the commissioning body for Service Improvement Panels (SIPs) or Scrutiny Panels.
- 7.2 The second structural recommendation is to establish, manage and develop a contacts database of tenants that have expressed interest in being consulted and involved in matters relating to the management of their homes, estates and neighbourhoods. Approximately 600 tenants confirmed their interest in being consulted and / or involved so this opportunity should be quickly seized to establish them as a recognised, though informal, group. For the sake of identity, we refer to this as the Rochdale 600. The interest should be nurtured, the relationships should be developed and the contacts should be actively used and managed, to represent at least a “sounding board”, and at best a pool of potential contributors, helpers, organisers and successors to the more formal representative positions within official structures. Classify interests to target involvement.
- 7.3 Membership of the RBH Tenant Panel will need to be carefully developed. The aim will be to establish a fair and representative structure, probably made up of tenant members from each of the Area Panels or elected tenant members from a broader base of constituencies including Area Panels, TRAs and the Rochdale 600. However, that will take time to develop and to ensure that the panel is quickly established, perhaps membership for the first twelve months should simply be based upon application and selection (by an appropriate panel of interested parties – RBH, RBC, Libra).
- 7.4 There were suggestions about the need for an independent Tenants’ Federation, even to the extent of a company to represent tenants’ interests, similar to RoFTRA, but generally, there was not an appetite for this level of formality. In the timescale to respond to the need to support the Investment and Involvement Commission, an RBH Tenant Panel will be the easiest to establish and it would not preclude this evolving into a federation in the future, if it was felt there was a need.
- 7.5 Other representative structures, TRAs, Area Panels, SHIP and DWG would continue to be developed and evolve but their effectiveness would need to be

- improved by improving planning, agenda management, communications, training and support.
- 7.6 The revised structures, roles and Terms of Reference should be documented and could be incorporated into a Tenants' Compact or similar, and include guarantees of levels of access and support with defined service standards against which the TPU can be measured.
- 7.7 The RBH Tenant Panel would work with RBH to develop a Tenant Involvement Strategy and Annual Plan. The Plan will cover the key issues to be addressed, the involvement and community events that might be utilized and the involvement programme for the year. The plan would take account of RMBC's plans and those of any other relevant bodies (e.g. LSP) so that all consultation and involvement can be coordinated.
- 7.8 Active Agenda Management is crucial to ensure that information flows smoothly through the involvement structure. The Tenant Involvement Strategy and Annual Plan should establish the key agenda points to be covered over the course of the year and the RBH Tenant Panel should be able to set its own agenda.
- 7.9 The RBH Board should have a standing agenda item "Matters from RBH Tenant Panel and Area Panels" that will allow the RBH Tenant Panel and Area Panels to raise matters at Board level and receive decisions, action or feedback.
- 7.10 The RBH Tenant Panel should have standing agenda items for "Matters from RBH", "Matters from RBC", "Matters from Area Panels and TRAs" and "SIP Reports". They should also be able to access information and feedback from the 600 tenants on the contacts database.
- 7.11 Area Panels should have standing agenda items for "Matters from RBH Tenant Panel" and "Matters from TRAs".
- 7.12 The TPU should be responsible for communicating any issues, recommendations, decisions, information or feedback arising from any meeting in a briefing note to members of the appropriate panel. Such briefing notes should precede formal minutes.
- 7.13 The parameters for any tenant communication should be clearly set e.g. Information – we are telling you about something. Consultation – we are asking your opinion on something. Involvement – we want to involve you in the discussion, debate and options etc. There should then be a standard cycle - Listen, Respond / Acknowledge, Act, Feedback – You said... We Did...
- 7.14 To widen opportunities for involvement, there should be a 3 year time-limit on service of officials on TRAs, Area Panels and the RBH Tenant Panel, following which officials must stand down for 12 months. The progression cycle for officials would be - Year 1 learning; Year 2 consolidating; Year 3 planning for succession to the role. We accept that when volunteers are in short supply, this may seem to work against involvement, but if implemented and managed

carefully it should provide a method to keep representation fresh and broaden involvement.

- 7.15 The TPU need to focus on proactive development of relationships with TRAs and with the 600 tenants who have expressed interest in the contacts database. Relationships should be such that the TPU know the key officials in each TRA and are able to organise meetings through personal contact rather than relying on correspondence.
- 7.16 We recommend the development of a Tool-kit for Involvement, which is publicised in newsletters, on the website, and available from the TRAs and community groups. The Tool-Kit will explain how to get involved and what help is available.
- 7.17 The involvement structure should welcome and facilitate the involvement of informal groups and social committees. Many residents will be more comfortable with informal groups and local social committees, where-as they may be deterred by the formality and structures of TRAs.
- 7.18 All newsletters to have standard box feature on how to get involved and the RBH website should have a tab on How to Get Involved, with a link to the Involvement Structure.
- 7.19 A register should be established of all community organisations and groups, with where-ever possible a timetable of forthcoming community events, social occasions and community development initiatives so that the these opportunities can also be used to consult and engage with tenants.
- 7.20 RoFTRA was successful in making a very material contribution to community development and the social and economic development needs of communities. To some extent, this success may have distracted the organisation from its original purpose as a representative body for tenants. There is a separate need to consider how best to continue the community development role.

8. Next Steps

- 8.1 If these recommendations are accepted, Libra will support the TPU in establishing the RBH Tenants' Panel, the Rochdale 600 contacts database and in documenting and implementing a more consistent and resilient Tenant Involvement Structure.
- 8.2 Libra would propose commencing this work with a meeting with the whole of the TPU to discuss the findings of the review in more detail.
- 8.3 Libra would develop a selection process, Terms of Reference and a constitution for the RBH Tenants Panel, for consultation with Panel members once they are selected.
- 8.4 A panel made up of representatives from Libra, RBH and RBC could be formed to select initial members for the Tenants' Panel.

8.5 As an additional role, Libra could produce a Tool-kit for Involvement.

Rochdale Tenant Involvement Option Study

Survey Results

September 2009

Background

As part of the tenant involvement option study being carried by Rochdale Borough Council and Rochdale Boroughwide Housing, Libra was commissioned to carry out a survey with residents to identify how tenants wish to be consulted and involved and in which areas of the service.

A short survey was sent to all 13,567 residents of Rochdale Boroughwide Housing. The surveys were distributed by RBH in the week commencing 24th August. Residents were asked to return the completed surveys by 4th September and a Libra freepost envelope was provided. All returned forms completed with contact details were eligible to be entered in a prize draw to win £50 in shopping vouchers.

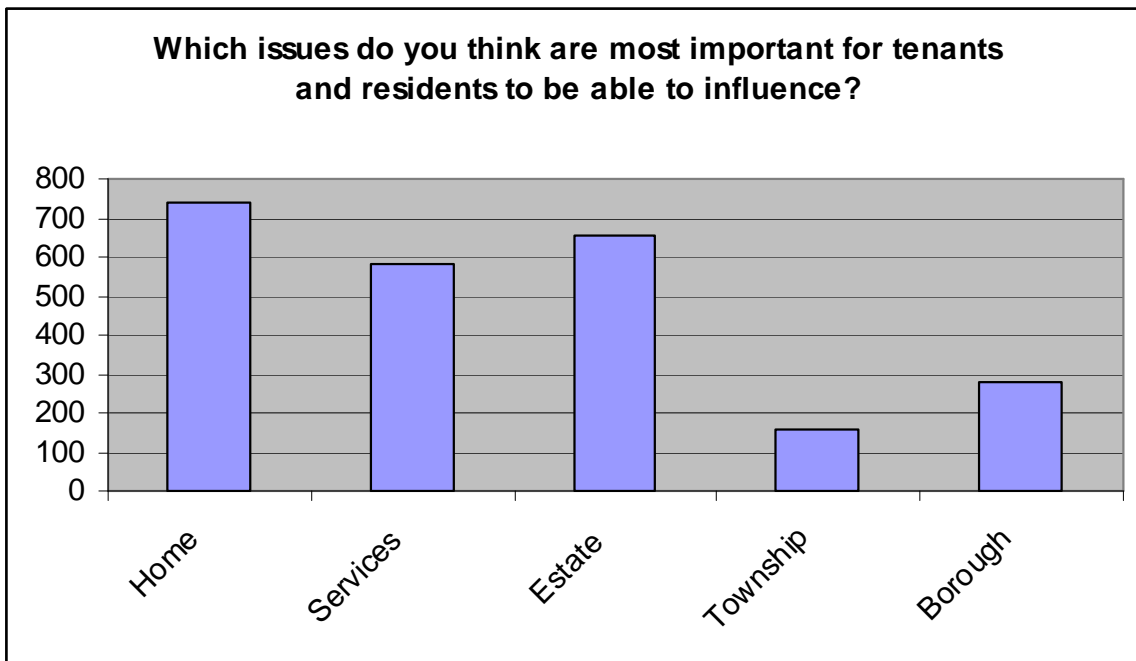
The aim of the survey was to inform Libra how tenants wish to be informed, consulted and involved, and in which areas of the service provided by RBH, and to enable Libra to make recommendations to RBH on an involvement structure which meets residents and Government expectations.

Survey Results

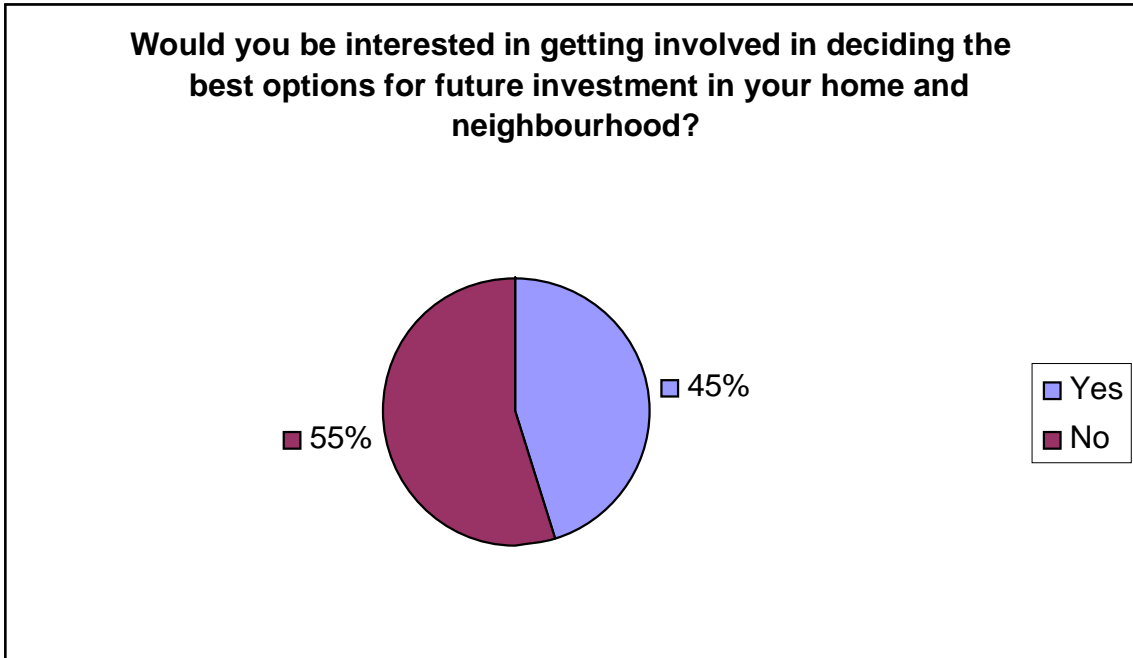
A total of 1375 surveys were completed and returned by the deadline. This represents a return rate of 10.13%. 1260 respondents included their name on the survey, 1257 provided addresses, 814 provided telephone numbers, and 249 provided an email address.

At the time of writing a further 41 surveys had been returned but were past the deadline and have not been included in this analysis.

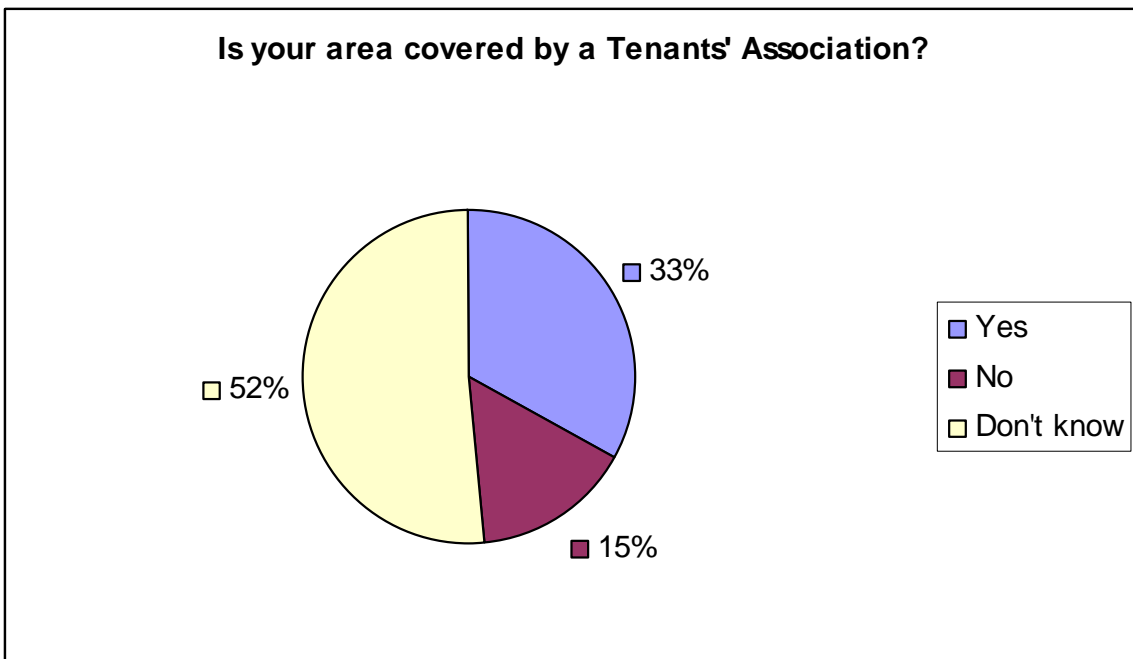
The first question asked residents what issues they think are most important for tenants and residents to be able to influence. The most popular responses were residents' homes, the services they receive and their estate or neighbourhood. The least popular responses were residents' township, and RBH and the borough as a whole.



The second question asked residents whether they would be interested in getting involved in deciding the best options for making sure there is future investment in their home and neighbourhood. A slightly higher proportion of residents answered no (704 responses) to this question than those who said they would be interested in getting involved (573). 98 respondents left the question unanswered.

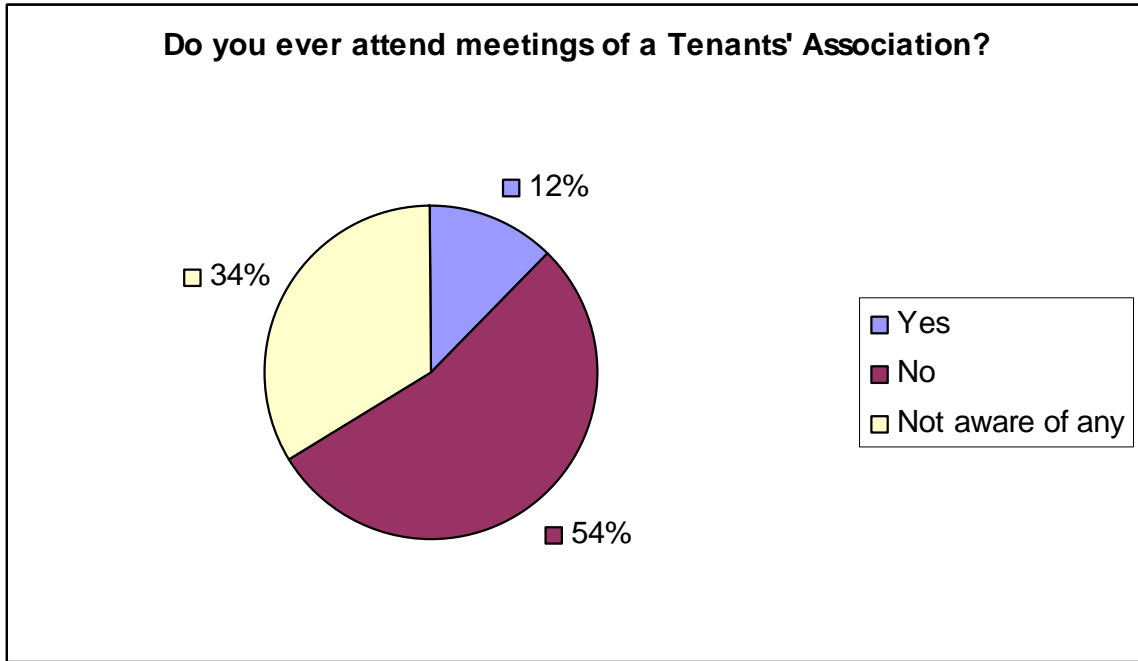


The third question asked residents whether their area is covered by a Tenants' Association. A large proportion (687 responses) said that they don't know whether their area is covered or not. 43 respondents left the question blank.



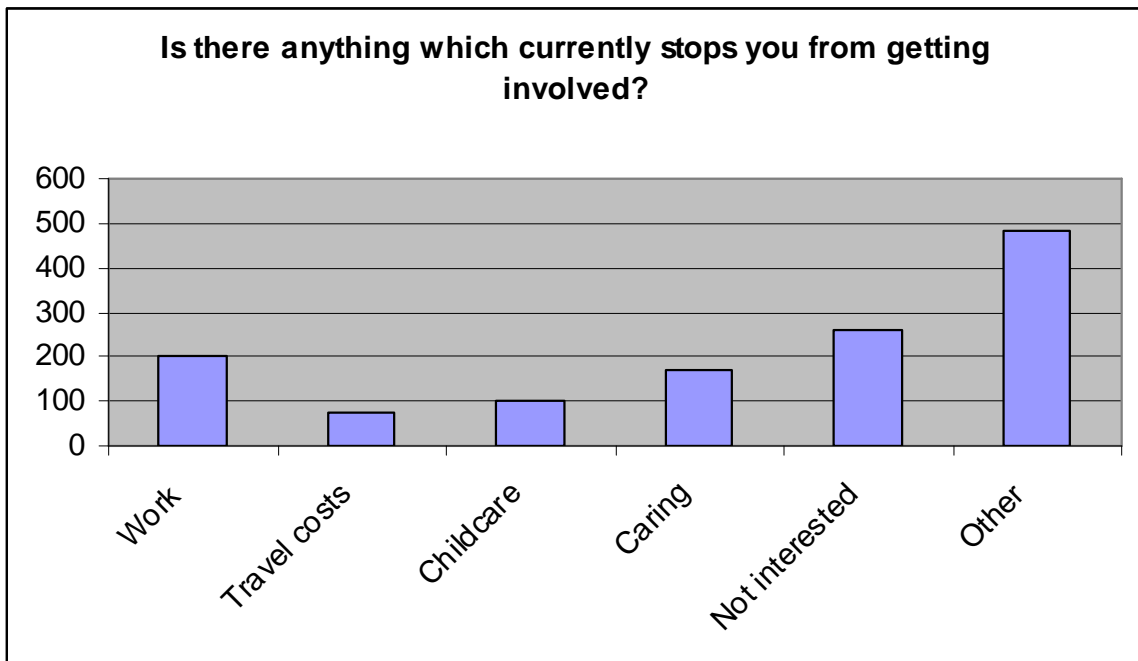
The fourth question asked residents whether they ever attend meetings of a Tenants' Association. The answers to this question were looked at regardless of the response given for question three. The highest proportion (722 responses) said that they never attend a meeting. The next highest response

rate was from people who aren't aware of any meetings (454 responses). 167 respondents said they did attend meetings, and the remaining 32 left the question blank.



Question five asked residents whether there is anything which currently stops them from getting involved. The options offered to residents were:

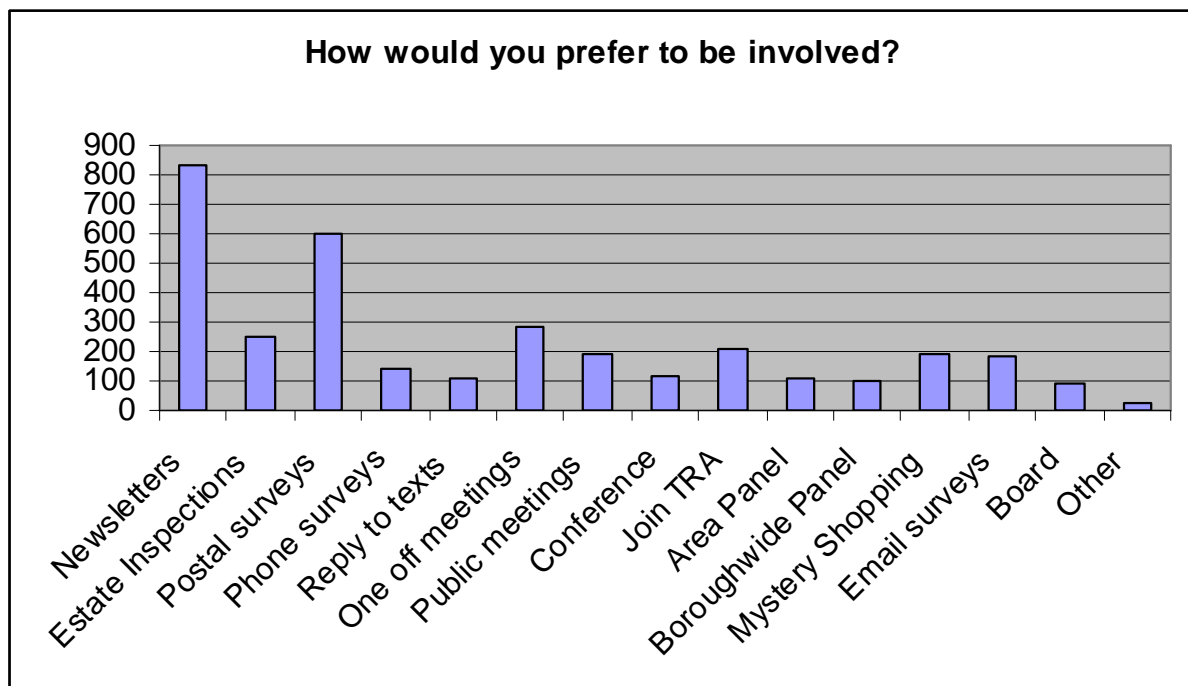
- Work commitments
- Travel costs
- Childcare
- Caring responsibilities
- Not interested
- Other



The answer most often given for this question was not interested, followed by work commitments and caring responsibilities. Of the other reasons given by residents for not getting involved the most common were related to old age, illness, health problems, disability, and mobility problems, and also not being aware of when and where meetings are and a lack of information. Others included:

- Student
- Little happens / don't think my opinion will make a difference
- Lack of English language
- Just moved to the area
- Timing of meetings
- Same tenants speaking over others
- Lack of transport
- Lack of confidence to get involved
- Don't know anyone / not welcoming
- Issues don't relate to me
- Prefer younger people to be involved
- Ineffectual / council never listen

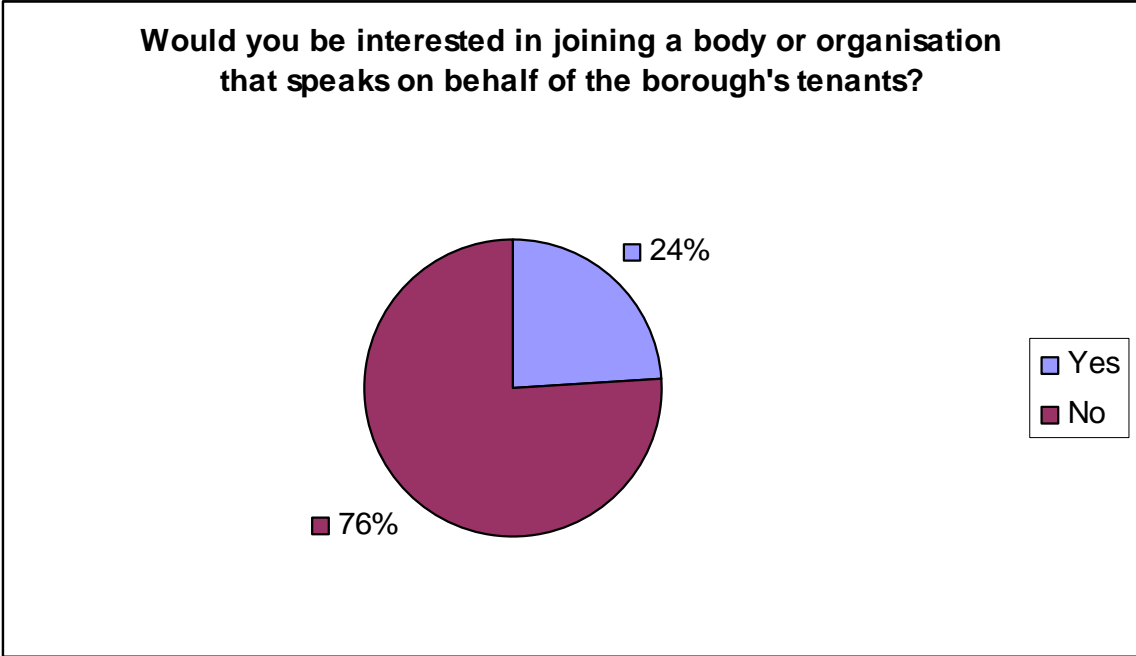
Question six asked residents how they would prefer to be involved. By far the most popular method of involvement is to read newsletters (834 responses), followed by completing postal surveys (599 responses). The least popular methods are joining the Board (89 responses), attending Boroughwide panel meetings (101 responses) and attending Area Panel meetings (108 responses).



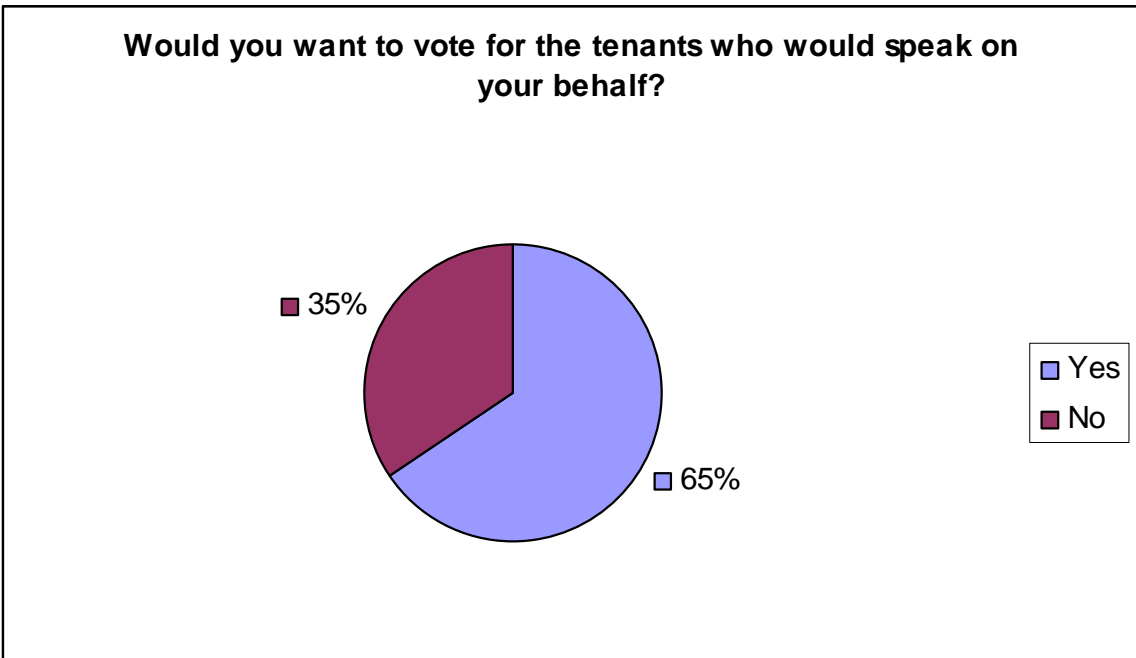
Other methods of involvement given by residents included:

- Give tenants a choice on types of repairs and upgrades
- Access to housing officers and their bosses
- Estate inspector telling residents what is happening
- Minutes of meetings being sent out to residents in the post

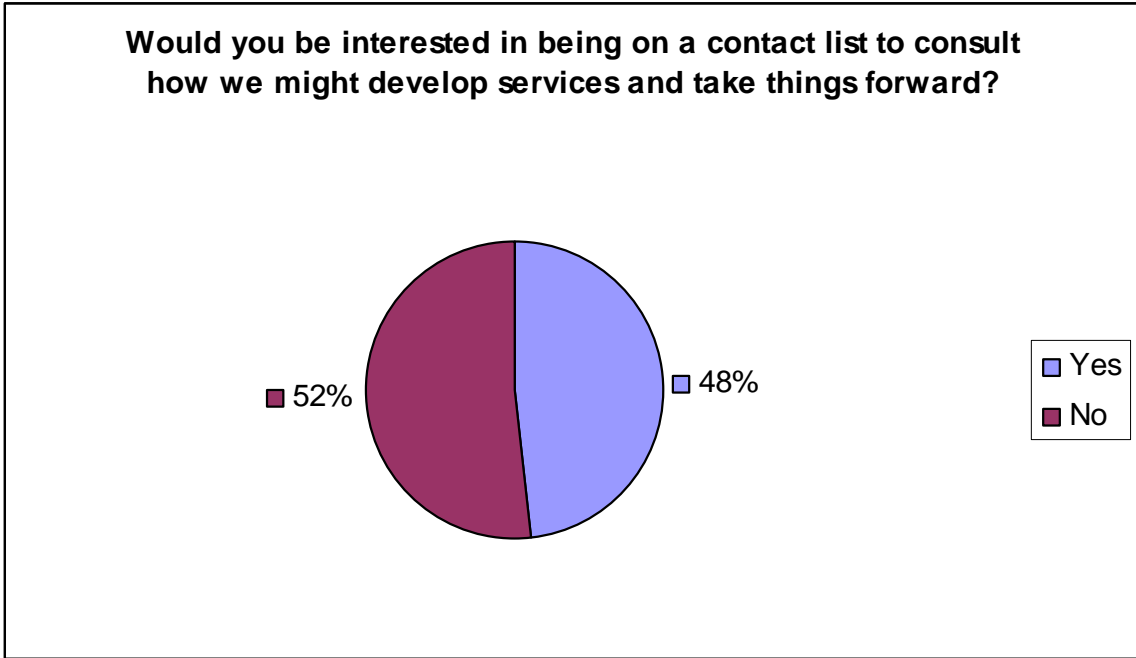
Question seven asked residents whether they would be interested in joining a body or organisation that speaks on behalf of the borough's tenants. The majority of respondents (977) answered no, with 90 failing to answer the question at all.



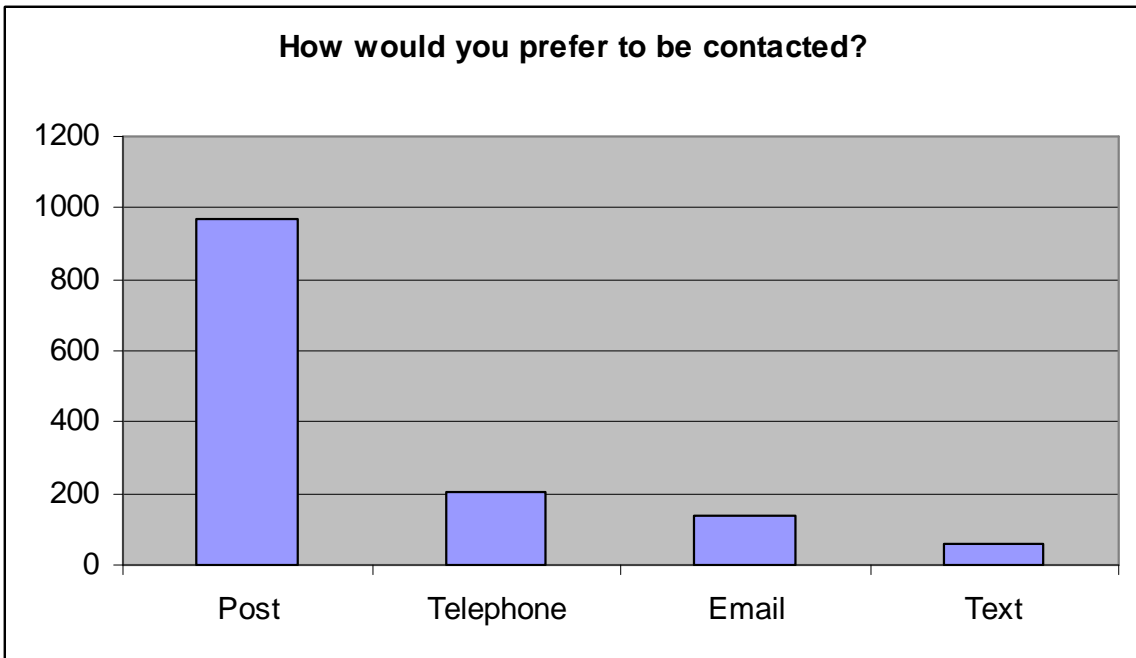
Question eight asked residents whether they would want the opportunity to vote for tenants who would speak in their behalf. The majority (845 respondents) answered yes. 84 respondents left this question blank.



Question nine asked residents whether they would be interested in being on a contact list to be consulted on how RBH might develop services and take things forward. Answers were almost equally divided between yes and no, with 100 respondents failing to answer the question.



The final question asked residents how they would prefer to be contacted. The most popular method of contact is by post (967 responses), and the least popular method is by text (58 responses).



Other comments written on the surveys by residents included:

- Estate walkabouts are a waste of time
- Would be interested in joining an organisation if I thought the Council would listen
- Already involved / member of committee / attend meetings
- Would attend public meetings if I could get there
- Time we went back to the local authority
- Who is Libra? Why can't RBH do the research themselves?
- Previously tried to set up an Tenants Association but no interest
- Never get anywhere / decisions have already been made for us

- Individual opinions not taken into account
- Don't get listened to

Conclusions

The results of the survey show that the areas of most concern for residents are their own home, their estate as a whole and the services provided by RBH. There is currently a lack of awareness amongst the majority of residents on the existence of Tenants' Associations in their area and when and where the meetings of these groups are held.

The most common reasons for residents not getting involved are work commitments, disinterest and health problems, disabilities and mobility problems.

The majority of tenants are willing to have some level of involvement by reading newsletters and completing postal surveys, but there is a much lower level of interest in attending meetings such as Boroughwide and Area Panels, public meetings and conferences. Providing more information in advance of meetings would perhaps increase the number of residents who attend, as a number of residents stated that there is a lack of information.

While there is reluctance for residents to join a body that speaks on behalf of other residents, the majority of residents would like to vote for residents to represent them.

Post remains the preferred method of communication for the majority of residents. However, a total of 249 residents gave an email address, suggesting that perhaps email could be explored as a method of involving residents.