

Your Home, Your Say

Issue 6
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The countdown to a decision about the type of landlord that could own and manage your homes in the future has begun.

As you will remember, Council representatives and the Housing Futures Customer Group (our tenants' consultation group) have been working together to look at ways to give tenants in Stockton Borough the quality of homes and housing services they have a right to expect.

Together we believe that, at the present time, the best way to achieve this is to transfer the ownership and management of the Council's 10,600 homes to a new, not-for-profit, local housing organisation, often known as a housing association.

Transfer – a reminder

An independent survey has shown that, over the next 30 years, the Council's homes need around £600million worth of repairs and improvements to bring them up to the modern standard you have a right to expect and maintain this standard.

The Council does not have and will not be able to get enough money to bring homes up to the standard you expect and also do other improvements to your homes and neighbourhoods, that you have told us are important to you in recent surveys.

There are a number of reasons why we do not have enough money.

We now need to consider the type of landlord that could own and manage your homes in the future. As part of this process Councillors, tenant representatives from the Housing Futures Customer Group and Trades Unions (representing the views of staff), have been brought together to form a Joint Reference Group. Their role will be to move the process forward by looking in detail at the type of landlord the Council and tenants would like to see own and manage homes in the future, if transfer were to go ahead.

This newsletter will recap on some of the key issues faced by the Council and why it is looking at transfer. We will also update you about the information being considered by the Joint Reference Group.

- 1 The rent we get does not cover the cost of running the housing service and paying for the improvements to homes. The Council has to pay a percentage of the rent it collects to the Government.
- 2 The Government has cut the amount of money it gives to local authorities. Tristar Homes, the organisation that currently manages homes for the Council as its Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO), is funded by the Council, so the amount of money it receives is also limited.
- 3 The Council is not allowed to borrow the money needed.



Landlord type - Reminder

In the last issue we explained the various options for the type of landlord you could have in the future. Here is a brief reminder:

Option 1 – To create a new, not-for-profit, local housing organisation. This would be a completely new organisation set up by the Council, especially for tenants in the Borough of Stockton, operating independently from any other organisation.

Option 2 – To create a new not-for-profit, local housing organisation which would operate in partnership with one or more other housing organisations as part of an existing group. The existing partner or partners would already own and manage housing.

Option 3 – To create a new not-for-profit, local housing organisation which would form a brand new partnership or group with another housing organisation. The partner would already own and manage housing.

Option 4 – Transfer housing to an existing not-for-profit housing organisation which would operate independently or be part of an existing group or partnership. The existing group or partner would already own and manage housing.

The Joint Reference Group has looked closely at these options and has agreed that what is important is that a new landlord should:

- Be locally based and understand what is important to you; and
- Continue to keep a local identity – even if it is part of a housing association group.

Knowing that these issues are important to you, option 4 has now been ruled out by the Joint Reference Group and it will now only consider options 1, 2 and 3

Here is a summary of the key facts about the type of new landlord proposed for the future. Options 1, 2, and 3 will ensure the new landlord would:

- Be based locally in the Borough
- Be run locally in the Borough
- Provide a housing service for people in the Borough
- Be run by the same familiar faces
- Be run on a not-for-profit basis
- Ensure all the money from your rent would be spent in the Borough, ***NOT*** elsewhere

Choosing a partner

The Joint Reference Group is now looking at possible partners who could work with the Council if transfer is to go ahead.

A shortlist of possible partners has been agreed and the group has spent the last few weeks interviewing and visiting the organisations to assess their suitability and what benefits they would bring to tenants in the Borough.

Here are the shortlisted organisations and how they would work if transfer goes ahead:

Tristar Homes -

This is the Arm's Length Management Organisation that currently manages your homes on behalf of the Council who continues to own them.

Tristar was created in 2002 and since then has been working to deliver improvements to properties to bring homes up to the Government's Decent Homes Standard. It manages and maintains around 10,600 for Stockton Borough Council.

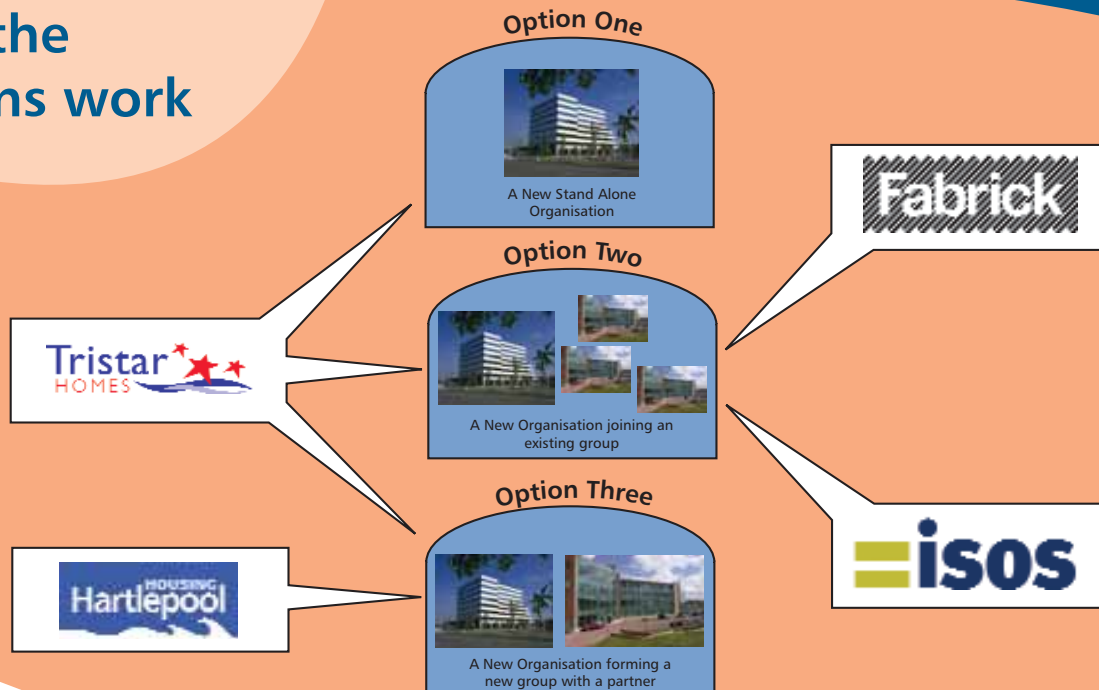
How would it work?

Option 1 – Tristar would become a new housing organisation (it currently only operates as a management organisation) which would operate independently as a stand-alone housing organisation.

Option 2 – Tristar would become a new housing organisation and operate as part of an existing housing group. (i.e. with the Fabrick Group or the Isos Group)

Option 3 – Tristar would become a new housing organisation and form a new housing group with another existing housing organisation. (i.e. with Housing Hartlepool).

How the options work



The Isos Group -

Isos Housing Group was launched in October 2005. It is made up of several housing associations – NomadE5, Castle Morpeth Housing and Tynedale-based Milecastle Housing. The group manages around 11,500 homes across the North East, some of which are based in Stockton-on-Tees, and is also actively involved in local regeneration activities, including building new homes for rent.

How would it work?

Option 2 – This would involve setting up a new local housing organisation which would operate in partnership with other organisations as part of the wider Isos Housing Group.



Housing Hartlepool -

Housing Hartlepool was set up in March 2004 following the transfer of homes from Hartlepool Borough Council and owns around 7,000 homes.

Housing Hartlepool is actively involved in community investment, local regeneration activities, including building homes for rent and shared ownership.

How would it work?

Option 3 – This would involve setting up a new housing group made up of two housing organisations, Housing Hartlepool and the new organisation for Stockton-on-Tees.



The Fabrick Group -

Set up in April 2008, Fabrick Housing Group is made up of Middlesbrough-based Erimus Housing and Tees Valley Housing Ltd and between them they own around 15,000 homes. The Group's properties are located between Tyneside and York with the majority being located in Middlesbrough and Stockton.

How would it work?

Option 2 – This would involve setting up a new local housing organisation which would operate in partnership with Erimus Housing and Tees Valley Housing as part of the existing Fabrick Housing Group.

The way forward

The Joint Reference Group will now carry out a detailed assessment of proposals and information from interviews and visits to each of the potential landlords. The group will then recommend to the Council's Cabinet, (the Council's decision making body), a preferred partner who they feel would work with the Council to develop a transfer proposal.

Cabinet will then decide on the type of housing organisation they would want to transfer the Council's housing to and to continue with consultation on transfer.

Remember, ultimately it would be tenants who decide if transfer goes ahead in a ballot. Transfer will only happen if the majority of tenants who vote in the ballot, vote in favour.

Your questions answered

Here we answer some of the questions raised by tenants about as to what would happen if transfer goes ahead :

What does transfer mean?

It is the transfer of the ownership and management of all the Council's homes to a "not for profit housing organisation.

Who would run the housing organisation?

It would be run by a board, made up of tenants, Councillors and independent people.

Who will make the decision about the type of landlord?

The Joint Reference Group will make a recommendation to the Council's Cabinet (the Council's decision making body). Cabinet will then consider these recommendations before making a final decision.

Who would decide if transfer goes ahead?

You will. If the majority of tenants, who vote in the ballot, vote "yes" – all of the Council's homes would transfer to the new housing organisation. If the majority vote "no" – all of the Council's homes would stay with the Council.

Any more questions?

A "pocket guide" has been produced which provides more detailed answers to these and more of the questions that are being asked, and is available from a number of access points including:

Stockton Borough Council:

- Options Appraisal Team, (see contact details below)
- Housing Benefits Team, 16 Church Rd, Stockton-on-Tees
- Main reception, Municipal Buildings, Church Rd, Stockton-on-Tees

Tristar Homes :

- Stratford House, Ramsgate, Stockton-on-Tees
- All local Neighbourhood Housing Offices
- Tristar Homes Main Reception, Lockheed Court, Preston Farm



Want to know more or want to get involved?

Contact details:

For more information on the Housing Futures/Options Appraisal and how to get more involved please contact either

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council -

Options Appraisal Team:

Freephone 0800 432 0891

E-Mail: – stock.options@stockton.gov.uk

Engage Associates - Your Independent Tenants Adviser:

Phone: (01845 537145)

E-Mail: info@engage3.org

Your Home Your Say information webpages:

<http://www.stockton.gov.uk/yourhomeyoursay>

OR follow the links on the homepage of the Stockton Borough Council website.