

Your Home, Your Say



December 2009

Information about the future of your home

Massive investment in home improvements in the first five years

If transfer goes ahead and the new-style Tristar Homes becomes your landlord, £600 million would be invested in your homes over the next 30 years. In the first five years the new-style Tristar Homes would be able to invest around £140 million on homes and services - compared to around £60 million that it is estimated would be available to the Council in the same period.

This multi-million pound investment would bring homes up to the "Tristar" Standard – the standard tenants have told us they want for their homes and neighbourhoods.

Because the new-style Tristar Homes would be governed by different financial rules to the Council, it would have more money to spend on improving and modernising homes, while still keeping rents affordable.

How does transfer work?

- At the moment the Council is your landlord and Tristar Homes manages your homes on its behalf.
- The Council is proposing that Tristar Homes becomes a housing association.
- As a housing association Tristar Homes would both own and manage the homes.
- Transfer would mean millions of pounds would be invested in homes and estates in the first five years and £600 million invested over the next 30 years. This would keep homes at the "Tristar" Standard.
- You will receive lots of information about the proposal from the Council in the coming months and all the details will also be set out in full in a formal 'Offer Document', which will be sent to tenants early next year.
- Tenants will then be asked to vote on whether transfer should go ahead in a confidential ballot.
- Transfer can only go ahead, if the majority of tenants who vote in the ballot, vote in favour.

Using the views of customers as a starting point Tristar Homes is currently developing the "Tristar" Standard in consultation with Stockton Council and our tenants' consultation group, the Housing Futures Customer Group. Examples of the improvements that are being considered to be completed in the first five years include:

- Ensuring all homes are double glazed
- Providing modern kitchens and bathrooms where appropriate
- Insulation and heating improvements
- Environmental and security improvements
- Health and safety improvements

Further details of the "Tristar" Standard and work that would be carried out in the first five years after transfer will be given in later editions of this newsletter.

Maintaining homes in the future

A message from Councillor Steve Nelson



Transfer is not just about improving homes to the standard tenants want to see, it is about maintaining them to that standard for years to come.

Councillor Steve Nelson, Cabinet Member for Housing & Community Safety, said: "It's clear that the extra money that transfer would bring would make an enormous difference to the quality of life for our tenants, now and in the future. The figures speak for themselves. There is a stark difference between what the new-style Tristar Homes could deliver, if it became the new landlord, compared with what would be possible if things stay as they are.

"The 'Tristar' Standard will be set in consultation with tenants but it can only be achieved if you vote for it. The Council is committed to ensuring that tenants get all the facts about the transfer before we ask you to vote on the proposal next year."

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Transfer Facts

Fact

Transfer is not just about improving homes, it is about improving services and the environment.

Fact

You would continue to see the same familiar faces. The staff you have got to know and trust would continue to work within the new-style Tristar Homes with their terms and conditions protected.

Fact

If transfer goes ahead the money would be unlocked to tackle important issues such as anti-social behaviour.

Fact

You would still be entitled to claim Housing Benefit after transfer.

**Any Questions?
Freephone
0800 432 0891**

Making a difference to your homes

The Decent Homes Standard Explained

In 2000 the Government brought in new rules about the quality of the homes which tenants rent from councils or housing associations.

The rules were brought in because the Government believes all council and housing

association tenants have the right to live in a home that meets a basic standard. This is called the "Decent Homes Standard".

In Stockton Borough, under Tristar Homes' management, we will have met the basic Decent Homes Standard by the end of 2010,

but tenants are telling us they want to see more than this basic standard.

Under the Decent Homes Standard, for example, a home could be classed as decent even without double glazed windows and with a kitchen and bathroom that are decades old.

The "Tristar" Standard

You said you wanted your homes improving to a higher standard than the Government's basic standard – the "Tristar" Standard. This means improving and maintaining homes up to a modern standard but also providing improvements to the outside of your home, for example, walls, fences and gates, environmental improvements and security measures, as well as improving how services are run.

Once homes are up to the "Tristar" standard, there would be money available to ensure they are kept that way and to

ensure improvements to your housing estates and environment.

In our recent telephone survey you said the following were important to you:

- Double Glazing
- New doors
- New Kitchens and bathrooms
- Re-painting programme
- Better parking provision / off street parking

You have also told us you want to see improved services to deal with anti-social behaviour, and help for older people and vulnerable tenants



Rents explained

You can rest assured that rents would remain affordable if transfer goes ahead.

Several years ago the Government introduced a rent policy which is designed to create a fairer rent system. This means that you would pay a similar rent if transfer goes ahead, as you currently pay.

The key difference is that you would get more for your rent money if transfer to the new-style Tristar Homes goes ahead. The new-style Tristar Homes would have the money to bring homes up to the standard tenants have told us they want to see.

Keeping your rent money in Stockton Borough

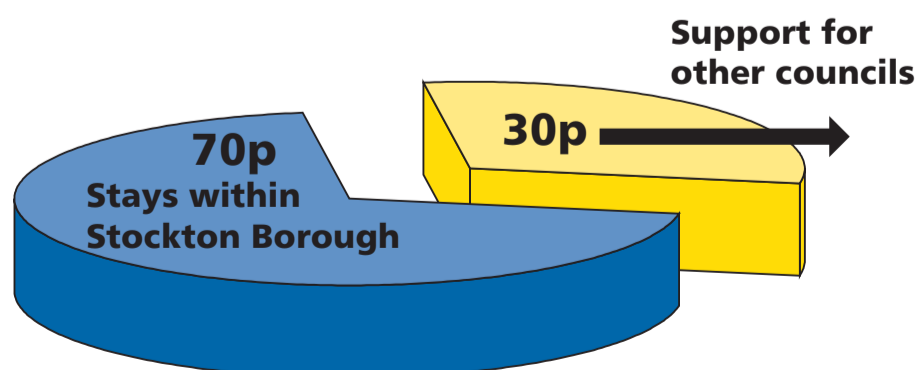
At the end of the current financial year it is estimated that a massive £9.7 million of the rent money paid by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council tenants will go to the Government and be used to support other councils across the country.

The £9.7 million of your rent money goes into a central pot that some councils have to pay into and some receive money from. The Government decides how this money is shared between other councils for them to repair their homes and run their housing service. Some councils gain money from this process, but Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council loses out.

To put this into real terms – about 30p from every £1 of your rent is lost.

If transfer goes ahead the new-style Tristar Homes would get to keep this £9.7 million. This means, unlike now, ALL the rent money you pay would be used for the local housing management service in the Borough.

What happens to each £1 of your rent



“We should be able to keep all our rent money”

Liz Kidd – Chair of the Housing Futures Customer Group.

Tenant Liz Kidd and other members of the Housing Futures Customer Group, our Tenants’ Consultation group, are helping to develop the “Tristar” Standard and details of the transfer offer.

“If a new-style Tristar Homes became our new landlord, it is clear that it would have access to substantial additional funds to improve and modernise our homes.

“I, like the rest of the group, was shocked when we discovered that 30p of each pound of our rent, almost a third, goes to central Government to support council housing in



other areas. Transfer will ensure that ALL rent money is kept within Stockton in the future.

“I’ve been involved throughout this process and I have great confidence that if Tristar Homes became a housing association they would continue to do us proud.”

Rights and Entitlements would be protected

Tenants would have their key rights and entitlements protected if the Council’s homes are transferred to the new-style Tristar Homes.

Tenants, who can buy their home now with the Council, would still be able to buy their home with the new-style Tristar Homes under the Preserved Right to Buy scheme.

In addition, your years as a Council tenant would still count towards discount with the new-style Tristar Homes too.

And don’t forget, your entitlement to claim Housing Benefit would not be affected.

Here we compare the difference between the rights with transfer and those you currently have now:

	Your right with Stockton Borough Council	Your right with the new-style Tristar Homes
The Right to Buy (this would be known as the Preserved Right to Buy)	✓*	✓
The Right to pass on your tenancy when you die (succession)	✓	✓
The Right to be given information about the management of your home	✓	✓
The Right to be consulted about housing management	✓	✓
The Right to have repairs carried out within set timescales	✓	✓
The Right to transfer or exchange your home	✓*	✓
The Right to make improvements and in some circumstances receive compensation for them	✓*	✓
The Right to live in your home without the threat of being evicted without good cause (security of tenure)	✓	✓
The Right to sub-let part of your home with approval and to take in lodgers	✓*	✓
The Right to complain	✓	✓
The Right to Manage (set up a tenants management organisation)	✓	✗

* = These rights are not available to Introductory tenants. And remember, the new-style Tristar Homes could only change your tenancy agreement with your written consent.

Tenants would only lose one right if transfer goes ahead, the Right to Manage. However,

since 2008 a new Act of Parliament has made it simpler for tenants to exercise the right.

Whilst no one in Stockton Borough has taken up this right, the new-style Tristar Homes would seek to work with tenants on ways to support and facilitate greater tenant management of their homes.

Staying with the Council: What it would mean

You have been asking us what would happen if transfer does not go ahead. Here we explain what the Council expects would happen in the future:

- The Council could not afford to deliver the improvements or maintain properties to the standard that tenants want.
- Improvements to services would not be possible, due to lack of cash. The Council would not be able to improve the services that are important to tenants, for example, dealing with anti-social behaviour
- Without adequate funding the appearance of neighbourhoods would likely deteriorate.
- Current Government rules mean that millions of pounds of rent money keep leaving the area every year, With transfer, ALL your rent money could be used by the new-style Tristar Homes to spend on local homes and services and the running of the housing business.
- Environmental improvements to estates, including fencing and security, would not be possible, due to lack of cash.

Transfer Letters with the Housing Futures Team

Transfer Letters is your opportunity to put the Council on the spot. Send your questions into the Housing Futures Team and they will answer them in the next issue. Here are some questions currently being asked by tenants in the Borough.

Q: I know where I stand with the Council, what guarantees are there that the new-style Tristar Homes would keep its promises?

A: Firstly, all the promises made will be featured in the formal Offer Document that tenants will receive and will be legally enforceable. The Council would have a contract with the new-style Tristar Homes to ensure it keeps its word. Secondly, the Tenant Services Authority, the Government's social housing regulator, would monitor the new-style Tristar Homes to ensure performance standards are met and that promises are delivered. Finally, tenants would sit on the Board and they would ensure that the new-style Tristar Homes delivered on its word to their fellow tenants.

Q: It all seems too good to be true, what's the catch?

A: You could say that the only catch is that transfer, and the £600 million investment it would bring over the next 30 years, can only go ahead if tenants vote in favour of it in a ballot. Transfer is not a foregone conclusion. That's why it is important that tenants use their vote to have their say on whether transfer goes ahead in the ballot.

Q: What would happen to Tristar Homes' staff?

A: Jobs would be safe. Tristar Homes employees would stay with the new-style Tristar Homes and their terms and conditions would be protected.

Q: It feels like 'better the devil you know' to me, why should I vote for this change?

A: Tristar Homes has achieved a great deal over the last seven years. But now the additional funding the Council secured when Tristar Homes was established has run out and it is time to look at what changes can be made in order to provide tenants with the standard they want to see now and in the years to come.

Transferring the homes to the new-style Tristar Homes would unlock the £600 million needed over the next 30 years to improve and maintain tenants' homes, and housing services, while keeping rents affordable.

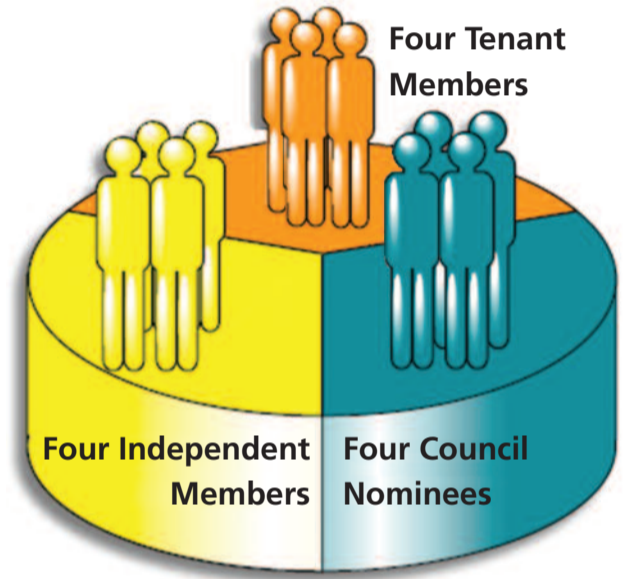
Q: What happens if there is a 'no' vote?

A: The Council would continue to be your landlord and Tristar Homes would continue to manage your homes on the Council's behalf. Tristar Homes would have to do the best it could with the funding the Council expects to have available in the next five years. But, as you can see from this newsletter, this means far fewer improvements would be possible.

Who would run the new-style Tristar Homes as a Housing Association?

The new-style Tristar Homes would be run by a Board made up of four tenants, four Council nominees and four independent people chosen for their specialist skills.

- All Board Members serve on a voluntary basis.
- They are all unpaid except for reasonable out-of-pocket expenses.
- Staff who currently run the service would work for the new organisation - so you would see the same familiar faces.



- Tristar Homes would have to be registered with and regulated by the Tenant Services Authority, the new independent regulator for affordable social housing.

Want to know more or want to get involved?

For more information on the Housing Futures and how to get more involved with please contact either:

Stockton Borough Council – Housing Futures Team:

Address : 16 Church Rd, Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 1TX

Freephone : 0800 432 0891

E-Mail: – housing.futures@stockton.gov.uk

Tristar Homes Limited - Customer Involvement Team:

Phone: 0844 736 0007

E-Mail : resident.involvement@tristarhomes.co.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

If you would like this information in any other language or format for example large print or audio please contact 'Housing Futures Team' on 0800 432 0891.

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'Housing Futures Team' ਨੂੰ 0800 4320891 ਨੰਬਰ ਉੱਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ

PUNJABI

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