

# Your Home, Your Say

## Issue 4 August 2008

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### Welcome to the Fourth issue of the "Your Home, Your Say" newsletter.

This issue follows on from our previous newsletters and provides you with progress on our Options Appraisal. Many of you will recall that in 2001 council tenants voted to set up an Arms Length Management Organisation – Tristar Homes. The reason for this was to gain substantial extra funding to improve council housing to the government's decent homes standard. This work is

coming towards its end and the Council is now considering what we need to do to effectively manage and maintain our council housing in the future. As we have explained in previous newsletters, this is known as an Options Appraisal and to help in this process we have set up the Housing Futures Customer Group (volunteer tenants and leaseholders who we have been working with to gain their views)

In this issue we focus on the work the group have been doing and look forward to what is next for the group.

## The Housing Futures Customer Group - What have we done so far?

The group, established in February 2007, has brought together people keen to be involved in shaping the future of housing in the borough.

One of the first tasks as part of the Options Appraisal was to get as much up to date information as possible about the condition of the housing stock so we are aware what work will be required to maintain it over the next 30 years. The Housing Futures Customer Group played a part in overseeing this work and members of the group worked alongside Council and Tristar Homes officers in interviewing and appointing a suitably qualified surveyor to carry out this work. The information gathered from this survey is being used along with other financial information to decide what the best options are.

To help the group and be available to offer advice on the Options Appraisal to other tenants and leaseholders, an Independent Tenants Adviser (ITA) called Engage Associates was appointed. Again members of the group worked with Council and Tristar Homes Officers to interview and appoint Engage Associates, who have been offering support throughout the Option Appraisal process.

Membership of the group has been advertised widely in other issues of this newsletter and was also promoted during a "Your Home - Your Say" workshop organised by the ITA and SRCGA (Stockton Residents and Community Groups Association), held at the Destiny Centre in Norton in November 2007. From this a number of new members have been recruited to the group.

With the support of the Independent Tenants Adviser the group has:

- Agreed their role and created their own code of conduct.
- Worked with the Council to agree a number of objectives. (See the back page of this issue)



- Discussed the financial aspects of the options appraisal and restraints on Council finances set by government.
- Discussed the results of the Stock Condition Survey.
- Discussed aspirations for future services and standards.
- Looked in detail at all of the options available:
  - a) **STOCK RETENTION:** (The Council keeping current ownership and management arrangements of homes)
  - b) **PRIVATE FINANCE INITIATIVES (PFI):** (The Council again would keep ownership of homes but gain additional financial support for partnerships between the public and private sector)
  - c) **STOCK TRANSFER:** (The Council would transfer ownership and management to an existing management organisation or housing association, OR to a newly created organisation)
  - d) **A MIX OF THE ABOVE OPTIONS** (Different options to be introduced throughout the borough).

If you are interest joining the group, or would simply like to know more about their role in the Options Appraisal, please get in touch with one of the contacts listed on the back page.



# Being a member of the Housing Futures Customer Group

The group has had to deal with some very complex issues. To help members fully understand these issues and the options appraisal process the group have carried out a number of information gathering tasks. These tasks have included :

- Investigating the history of social housing and housing associations.
- Undertaking a full tour of the Borough to understand for themselves issues on housing estates that some group members may not be familiar with.
- Discussed the Governments Decent Homes Standard programme and how this has been implemented within the Borough.
- Met with tenants from other Councils who have recently gone through a similar process and discussed the option chosen in that area:
  - Tenant representatives from Hartlepool and Middlesbrough visited the group to tell them of their experience of stock transfers which had taken place in 2004 and have provided finance to allow

significant improvements to services and standards.

- The group visited Durham to discuss the option chosen in that area which was to retain the housing stock and enter into a finance partnership with a development company. This has allowed considerable redevelopment and environmental improvements to take place in the past couple of years.
- A trip to Wansbeck Council area also took place to meet with tenants and leaseholders who had been involved with a stock transfer earlier this year.

When regular group meetings began in September 2007 they were chaired by the Independent Tenants Adviser. However, since that time, group members have grown in confidence and knowledge of the subject they are dealing with and now feel able to chair the meetings themselves. There is no formal Chair of the group - the group elect a chair at the beginning of each meeting.

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## What is it like being a member of the Housing Futures Customer Group?



**Liz Kidd**, a tenant in Stockton, has been a member of the group since it was first formed. Liz volunteered to represent the group in the interview process which lead to the appointment of Savills Consultancy to carry out the Stock Condition Survey and Engage

Associates as Independent Tenants Adviser. She is also actively involved in other Tristar Homes customer involvement groups.

Liz says "It is very important that tenants get involved with the group as the decisions made will not only benefit tenants now, but also those in the future. Tenants CAN make a real difference if they get involved in decision making". Liz has particularly enjoyed her role as member of the group, especially making visits to other council areas to talk to tenants about decisions made there which they were able to influence. When asked if there was anything about being involved with the group she had found less enjoyable she told us - "some parts of the process have taken longer to be able to understand, particularly those related to finance, but on the whole I am enjoying the experience of being a member and look forward to continuing my time with the group".



**Jennie Shotton** is the most recent tenant to have joined the group. Jennie lives in Billingham and, like many members of the group, is also involved with other resident/tenant groups.

Jennie says "I am pleased I can be part of a group that can really

make a contribution to decision making and making a difference. I feel I am helping my local community by being able to put my views forward". Having only joined the group in March Jennie has had a lot of catching up to do on work that has been completed by the group before she became a member. "Everyone made me feel welcome when I joined the group and my fellow members have been very helpful in explaining some of the things I have missed from earlier meetings".

**Helen Millar** is a Billingham tenant in a high-rise block and has been with the group since it began. With Liz, she also volunteered to represent the group and helped in the appointment of the survey consultants and the Independent Tenants Adviser. Like many of the group members she is also actively involved in other Tristar Homes customer involvement groups.

Helen says "I feel it is important to have a say in what is going to be happening to your home and surrounding areas. As it is a 30 year ongoing project then it is important to be part of something that is going to affect all the tenants and leaseholders of the Borough in the long term and we must get it right." Helen also feels that it is important to have input to

ensure that tenants with special needs are taken into consideration. Wider doors to accommodate wheelchairs to give easier access around buildings as well as allocated parking for disabled people is something that should be considered in any future plans. Helen has enjoyed the varied ways that information has been presented to the group and various tours/visits to other councils and there is nothing she has found daunting or too difficult to understand.



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## What's next for the Housing Futures Customer Group?

The group is currently meeting on a monthly basis and is eagerly awaiting the outcome of the financial assessments mentioned previously so that it can continue its work.

With assistance from the Independent Tenants Adviser, the group will evaluate all available options. They will then formulate a report detailing their opinions which they will present to representatives from Stockton Borough Council and Tristar Homes before a final decision is reached. This will allow the views of the group to be considered in detail by the Council.

# The 10 Objectives the Housing Futures Customer Group agreed with the Council. Each potential option will be measured against these:

- Objective 1:** To secure appropriate investment to fund property and external environmental investment works, i.e. stock improvements, car parking provision, property and estate security improvements.
- Objective 2:** To regenerate and rejuvenate our neighbourhoods.
- Objective 3:** To meet the housing needs of the Borough (improve and increase the supply of affordable housing options for our tenants and residents).
- Objective 4:** To meet the key national and local agendas (i.e. social inclusion, economic regeneration and the 'green agenda').
- Objective 5:** Rents to provide value for money (for both new and existing tenants).
- Objective 6:** Tenants rights to be protected.
- Objective 7:** To provide a 'local' management and presence.
- Objective 8:** To ensure good communication structures with tenants.
- Objective 9:** To deliver opportunities for 'real' tenant involvement, participation and influence at all levels.
- Objective 10:** To ensure continuous service and quality improvement.

## Want to know more or want to get involved?

### Contact details:

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

**Stockton Council – Options Appraisal Team:**  
Freephone 0800 432 0891  
E-Mail: – [stock.options@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:stock.options@stockton.gov.uk)

**Tristar Homes Limited - Customer Involvement Team:**  
Phone: (01642) 527777 / 527676  
E-Mail: [resident.involvement@tristarhomes.co.uk](mailto:resident.involvement@tristarhomes.co.uk)

**Engage Associates - Your Independent Tenants Adviser:**

Phone: (01845 537145)  
E-Mail: [info@engage3.org](mailto:info@engage3.org)

**Your Home Your Say information webpages:**  
<http://www.stockton.gov.uk/citizenservices/32923/yourhomeyoursay> OR follow the links on the homepage of the Stockton Borough Council or Tristar Homes websites.