

Your Home, Your Say



September 2009

Information about the future of your home

For Tenants to decide whether transfer goes ahead in a ballot, it is important that you have all the information you need to make an informed choice.

This is the first in a series of a new look "Your Home, Your Say" newsletters you will receive in the coming months to tell you more about the Council's transfer proposal. Please read this information carefully.

Tenants will decide homes future

A multi-million pound investment could be made in the Borough's Council homes - if tenants vote for change.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has agreed to give tenants the opportunity to consider the proposal to transfer the ownership of its 10,500 homes to a new-style Tristar Homes

The Council believes that the proposed change would unlock funds for the improvement of homes across the Borough.

As part of the proposal, Tristar Homes would be changed from an Arm's Length Management Organisation into a not-for-profit housing association, registered with the Tenant Services Authority as a provider of social housing. It would own the homes, as well as manage them.

The decision by the Cabinet (the Council's decision making body) to make this proposal was taken following detailed consultation which included considerable tenant involvement. Council

representatives and tenants representatives from the Housing Futures Customer Group (our tenants' consultation group) have been working together as a Joint Reference Group to look at what kind of organisation would own and manage the homes in the future if the transfer went ahead.

The Cabinet has also agreed that under the proposal the new-style Tristar Homes would form a new housing group with another local housing association - Housing Hartlepool. Working together as part of a group would provide the opportunity for both organisations to increase their capacity to deliver what their tenants really need by sharing their expertise and experience.

Over the coming months the Council will be running a major consultation exercise to make sure tenants have all the facts about what transfer would mean if the new-style Tristar Homes became your new landlord. The Council will be working in partnership with tenants to draw up a formal "Offer Document", which will contain all the details about the proposed transfer.

Remember, transfer is not a foregone conclusion. It can only go ahead if the majority of tenants who vote in a ballot, planned for next year, are in favour.

Giving Tenants the Standards they want to see

A message from Councillor Steve Nelson



"Over the years, we have always worked hard to repair and improve your homes and provide good quality services. That's why, in 2002, we set up an Arm's Length Management Organisation, known as Tristar Homes, to manage the housing service, while the Council continued to own your homes.

"By setting up Tristar Homes, we were able to access money which otherwise would not have been available to the Council.

"However, this extra funding which the Council received has come to an end and, as your landlord, the Council has had to think about how it maintains and improves the quality of our homes in the future.

"Under current Government rules, the Council does not have enough money and cannot afford to borrow all the money needed to bring homes up to the standard which tenants in the Borough want to see. However, should Tristar Homes become a housing association, it could borrow all the money needed to improve homes and estates and keep rents affordable. Should this happen, the transfer of housing to Tristar Homes would unlock funds for improvement which are not available to the Council.

"It would also mean that every penny of your rent would be ploughed back in to homes and the housing service you receive. At the moment, part of every tenant's weekly rent has to be passed to central Government to subsidise housing in other parts of the country. If transfer went ahead, this would stop.

"The Council wants to see what's best for tenants. We believe that this proposal is good for tenants and good for staff. However, it can only go ahead if tenants vote in favour of the proposal next year. I ask that you read all the material we send you in the coming months so that you can make an informed choice when the time comes to have your say."

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The key benefits of transfer:

- Repair and improvement of homes to a higher standard
- Affordable rents.
- More say in how your homes are run
- Key rights and entitlements protected
- More funding to Improve services
- More funding to Improve local communities
- New Homes built

Any Questions?
Freephone
0800 432 0891

A new housing organisation for Stockton Borough

The ownership and management of the Council's homes would transfer to a new-style Tristar Homes which would give the tenants of Stockton, Billingham, Thornaby and other parts of the Borough a landlord that would :

- Own and manage all the Council's homes and provide a housing service for people in the Borough of Stockton.
- Only manage homes in the Borough of Stockton.

- Be based locally in the Borough of Stockton.
- 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.
- Be managed by a board made up of local tenants, council nominees and independent local people
- Be able to borrow the money needed
- Be part of a brand new housing group in partnership with Housing Hartlepool



Why form a new group with Housing Hartlepool?

Housing Hartlepool is a not-for-profit charitable housing association and was set up in March 2004 following the transfer of homes from Hartlepool Borough Council. It owns and manages around 7,000 homes, in Hartlepool and the surrounding villages. It is currently building more than 200 new homes with plans for a further 300 by 2011. Acting on behalf of Hartlepool Borough Council and Hartlepool New Deal For Communities they are also overseeing the frontline delivery of the regeneration and renewal of some older parts of the town.

Here is why Housing Hartlepool was chosen to set up a new housing group with Tristar Homes:

- Housing Hartlepool has delivered the promises it made to tenants before transfer and has continued to improve services
- Housing Hartlepool has a very good record in building new homes and in regeneration within the wider community
- Working together as a housing group could make the management and maintenance of homes more efficient by sharing costs.

Transfer - a reminder

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

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 carry out 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.

- 1) Under current rules the Council has to pay a percentage of the rent we collect to the Government. The rent the Council keeps is not sufficient to cover the full cost of running the housing service and paying for the home improvements you have said you want.
- 2) The Government limits the amount of money it makes available to local housing authorities. Tristar Homes, as the organisation that currently manages homes for the Council as an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO), is funded by the Council, so the amount of money it receives is limited in the same way.
- 3) Current rules mean that the Council cannot afford to borrow the money needed.

Keeping you informed

The Council wants to make sure that every tenant is fully consulted on transfer and by law has a duty to consult with tenants on any proposed changes to their housing service and keep everyone up-to-date at every stage of the transfer consultation process.

The Council will make sure that every tenant has received all the information they need to make an informed decision in the ballot planned for next year.

- This is the first in a series of newsletters you will receive in the run-up to the ballot. Each issue will help explain how transfer works and what it would mean for tenants and their homes, if it goes ahead. Over the coming months you will have the

opportunity to tell us what you want from transfer.

- Tenants will receive a formal consultation document before the ballot. It will contain all the information you need about transfer on issues such as rents, rights and entitlements and the housing service. It is important that when you receive this document next year, you take time to read it carefully.
- Once you have read the document you will have the opportunity to tell the Council what you think about the proposal. Your views will be taken on board and considered by the Council, which could result in changes to the original proposal to reflect what you want for the future of your home and housing service.

Check the facts

We recognise that people will have different views about the transfer proposal. During the consultation, it is possible that people who are opposed to transfer may publish their own literature about transfer.

Whilst we respect everyone's right to their own opinion, the Council has a legal duty to ensure its tenants have the facts about the proposal. If any literature is sent out which

contains inaccuracies or misinformation, we will correct them.

If you receive any literature on transfer that is not from ourselves or your Independent Tenants' Adviser, Engage Associates, please check the facts for yourself.

All the information we send to you has to undergo a rigorous set of checks by the Government, specialist lawyers and your Independent Tenants' Adviser. The Tenant

Services Authority (the Government agency responsible for registration and regulation of housing associations) checks all information relating to compliance with its registration and regulatory requirements. Literature from other groups and individuals does not have to undergo any such checks.

Remember you can ring the Council's freephone line on 0800 432 0891 or you can ring Engage Associates, your Independent Tenants' Adviser, on 01845 537145.

Transfer Letters with the Housing Futures Team

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

Q: What does transfer mean?

A: It is the transfer of the ownership and management of all the Council's homes to a not-for-profit housing organisation. Tristar Homes would become a housing association which means it would own and manage homes, and be run on a "not-for-profit" basis.

Q: Who would run this organisation?

A: It would be run by a board, made up of local tenants, Councillors and independent people. In the early stages leading up to the ballot the board would be set up but it would operate in "shadow" form only. It would not become a full working board unless tenants voted for the transfer to go ahead. Shadow board members will be recruited shortly and details of how tenants can be considered for a place on the shadow board can be found on page 4 of this newsletter.

Q: Would I have to move home if transfer goes ahead?

A: No, you would not have to move home. Only the ownership and management of the Council's homes would transfer to the new-style Tristar Homes.

Q: Who will decide if transfer goes ahead?

A: 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-style Tristar Homes. If there is a "no" vote – all of the Council's homes would stay with the Council.

Q: Would rents stay affordable?

A: Current Government policy on social housing rents, which applies to both councils and housing associations (like the new-style Tristar Homes) means that in the future you would pay a similar rent for your home whether you rent from the Council or a not-for-profit housing association. The key difference is that tenants would get more for their money with the new-style Tristar Homes because, unlike the Council under current Government rules, Tristar Homes would be able to keep all of its rental income to help bring homes up to the standard tenants want to see.



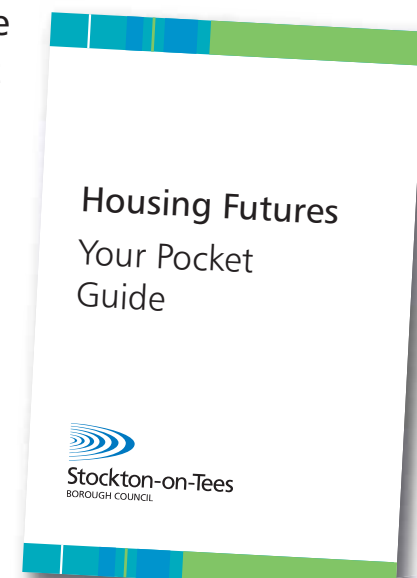
The Housing Futures team -
Standing: Jane Edmonds, Chris Davey.
Seated: Ann Pursey, Kelly Forrest

Q: Would I still get Housing Benefit?

A: Your entitlement to claim Housing Benefit would not be affected by transfer to the new-style Tristar Homes. Housing Benefit could be paid directly to your landlord who will pay it into your rent account.

Any more questions?

A "pocket guide" has been produced which provides more detailed answers to many of the questions that are being asked, and is available from a number of Council and Tristar Homes customer access points throughout the Borough.



A phone call for your views

Some tenants may receive a call in the next few weeks from researchers asking about the Council's transfer consultation.

They will be seeking tenants' views about the proposal and asking what they would like to see included in the transfer plans.

The information will be used to help form the Council's formal offer to tenants ahead of the ballot.

Please take the time to speak to the researcher if you receive a call from them.

Transfer Facts

Fact

Transfer is not a foregone conclusion. Only tenants can decide on whether it goes ahead in secret ballot. Every secure and introductory tenant will receive a ballot paper.

Fact

Tenants' key rights and entitlements would be protected if transfer goes ahead.

Fact

More than 280 transfers have taken place around the country since the first in 1988. This has involved more than one million homes and brought in more than £14 billion for repairs and modernisation. Locally transfer has taken place in Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Sunderland, Redcar and Cleveland, Sedgfield, Chester-le-Street, Derwentside, and Hambleton.

Your Independent Tenant Adviser (ITA)

When work on our Options Appraisal began in 2007, The Housing Futures Customer Group (our tenant and leaseholder consultation group) appointed an Independent Tenants' Adviser (ITA) - Engage Associates. Engage have provided independent information, advice and support to tenants and leaseholders throughout the Options Appraisal and will now continue to do so as information is prepared to help you decide on the transfer proposal

Your Independent Tenants Advisers are:



Eileen Adams



Neil O'Brien

Over the coming months Eileen and Neil will be working with tenants and leaseholders, providing support to the Housing Futures Customer Group and attending tenant/resident group meetings across the Borough to give advice and general information on the transfer proposal.

You can contact Eileen or Neil at Engage by telephone on 01845 537145, or by e-mail via info@engage3.org

How do I put my name forward to become a Shadow Board member?

The new-style Tristar Homes would be run by a board of 12 people - four tenants / leaseholders, four Council nominees and four independent people. In the early stages leading up to the ballot the board would operate in "shadow" form only, but would become a full Board if tenants vote in favour of transfer, making decisions about the policy and direction of the organisation.

The Housing Futures Customer Group have agreed that the appointment of tenant and leaseholder board members be through an application and interview process, with shadow board members being selected by a panel for their skills and experience.

If you would like more information about becoming a shadow board member or an application pack, please contact the Housing Futures team on freephone 0800 432 0891.

We will also be holding a shadow board member information event which will be held between 1:30-4pm on Wednesday 14th October at Stockton Town Hall Council Chambers. At this event, application packs and further information about the role of a shadow board member will be available. Assistance and support in completing application forms will also be given.

Want to know more or want to get involved?

For more information on transfer, the Housing Futures Customer group or how to get more involved, please contact either

Stockton Borough Council – Housing Futures Team:

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