

Your Home, Your Say

Welcome to the second issue of our "Your Home, Your Say" newsletter.

If you would like this information in any other language or format for example large print or audio please telephone 0800 432 0891

The first "Your Home, Your Say" newsletter distributed in early November 2007, gave some brief information about the options the Council are considering as part of their examination of the future for Council housing in Stockton Borough. This process is known as a Stock Options Appraisal.

The purpose of the "Your Home, Your Say" newsletter is to keep all Council tenants and leaseholders informed and up to date on the options appraisal which is being undertaken by the Council in partnership with Tristar Homes. The option appraisal will consider how best to secure future investment to make sure both the Council's and your aspirations for the future of housing in the Borough are met.

As part of this appraisal process, the Council needs to get the views of tenants and leaseholders about their homes and the places where they live. In the last issue we included a brief questionnaire, which gave all council tenants and leaseholders an opportunity to highlight the issues that are important to you. Thank you to all who have taken the time to complete and return the questionnaire either by post or online via our WebPages. At the time of printing this newsletter, we have received over 1600 responses, the vast majority of which were returned in time to qualify to be entered into our prize draw.

The two lucky winners of a £25 voucher to be spent at a shop of their choice were:

Michelle Rea from Billingham and Mr G Alcock from Stockton.

Congratulations to both winners who will be receiving their vouchers shortly.

A full analysis of your priorities as detailed in the questionnaire is currently being collated and will be published in the next "Your Home, Your Say" newsletter. However, we have included an initial brief overview of what you have told us are your priorities so far, at the end of this newsletter.

Since the first newsletter was issued, "Your Home, Your Say" web pages have now been set up, and are accessible via both the Council and Tristar Homes' websites. These pages include information from our first newsletter plus general information relating to the options appraisal and the activities of the Housing Futures Customer Tenants Group. Some documents relating to the Group are available for you to download. These pages can also be accessed by typing <http://www.stockton.gov.uk/citizenservices/32923/yourhomeyoursay> into your web browser.

May we take this opportunity to wish everyone season's greetings and best wishes for the New Year



Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Your Home Your Say Workshop

On 5th November a “Your Home Your Say” workshop was held at the Destiny Centre, Norton.

The event was arranged by your Independent Tenants Adviser (Engage Associates) in conjunction with SRCGA (Stockton Residents and Community Groups Association). The event was very successful and was attended by approximately 50 tenants, leaseholders and members of resident groups. The purpose of the event was to raise awareness regarding the ongoing Option Appraisal and to encourage more tenants and leaseholders to be involved in the process.

Four workshops were held on the day, each focused on different options that are being considered as part of the Option Appraisal process. Each attendee was given the opportunity to attend two of the workshops.

In summary the workshops discussed the following options:

Workshop 1 – ‘Staying as we are’. – This workshop focused on what could happen if the Council retained current ownership of the Housing stock. The potential alternatives discussed within this option included:

- The Council retains ownership of the housing stock which would continue to be managed and maintained by Tristar Homes.
- The Council retains ownership of the housing stock and the management agreement with Tristar Homes is ended. This would involve bringing management of the properties back under the direct responsibility of the Council. Tristar staff would transfer back to the Council.

Government regulations prevent local councils from being able to attract additional investment from the private finance market, therefore other methods of financing improvements to homes and services would need to be explored.

Workshop 2 – Transfer of the housing stock to an established Registered Social Landlord – This workshop discussed the transfer of ownership and management of Council homes to an established Registered Social Landlord (also known as a Housing Association). This workshop identified that:

- A Registered Social Landlord would have the potential to raise investment to fund the maintenance and property improvements from the private finance market.
- Obtaining this kind of private investment is not an option open to the Council should it retain ownership of the housing stock.

Workshop 3 - Transfer of the housing stock to a newly established Registered Social Landlord – Workshop 3 considered setting up a new Registered Social Landlord specifically to own and manage the Councils housing stock. The possible alternatives discussed included;

- Tristar Homes becoming a Registered Social Landlord and taking over ownership of properties.
- Setting up a new Registered Social Landlord who would take over the ownership and management of council properties.
- An existing Registered Social Landlord setting up a new organisation to own and manage properties transferred from the Council. This new organisation would operate as part of the existing Registered Social Landlords group structure.

A new Registered Social Landlord would have the same potential as an existing organisation to attract investment for improvements from the private finance market.

Workshop 4 – A mix and match of options – The final workshop looked at the possibility of using a range of options in different parts of the borough. Workshop members considered varying tenant aspirations in different areas and that different property types may require varying levels of investment.

As well as the questions raised at the “Your Home, Your Say” workshop, a number of questions are also being raised by tenants who were not able to attend the workshop. Here are a some of the most frequently asked questions, together with their answers :

Q. Who is my landlord - Tristar Homes or the Council?

A. Many tenants appear confused as to who their landlord is. Stockton Borough Council owns the housing stock and is therefore your landlord. Tristar Homes are the Council’s “Arms Length Management Organisation” (ALMO) and are responsible for the management and maintenance of your home on behalf of the Council. The partnership between Tristar Homes and Stockton Council is a 10 year agreement.

Q. The Housing Futures Customer Group meet during the day. I work or have other commitments – how can I still get involved?

A. If you can’t attend , but would like to get involved please contact the Independent Tenant Advisers. At the moment daytime meetings are convenient for the majority of those already

involved, however, if it becomes evident that demand for a meeting at other times is warranted then special evening meetings may be considered.

Q. Whatever option is chosen, will rents significantly increase?

A. Since April 2002, all Councils and Registered Social Landlords are required to set their rents on a new, fair and consistent basis. This means that future rents will be calculated in exactly the same way and set at the same level whether the property stays with the Council or transfers to another organisation. A process is now underway to ensure rents of the Council and Registered Social Landlords reach the same level no later than 2012. Therefore, the rent for the type of property in which you live would be similar whatever option is chosen.



Discussing the issues at the workshop

Want to know more?

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

Tristar Homes Limited - Customer Involvement Team:
Phone: (01642) 527777 / 527676
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/citizenservices/32923/yourhomeyoursay> OR follow the links on the homepage of the Stockton Borough Council or Tristar Homes websites

Housing Futures Customer Group

As mentioned in the first "Your Home, Your Say" newsletter a tenants' consultation group has been established. The Housing Futures Customer Group was initially formed from members of existing tenant and resident groups. More recently, the Group has expanded as more tenants have expressed an interest to attend. Membership is open to all council tenants or leaseholders and new members are always welcome. Meetings are held fortnightly on a Friday morning commencing at 10am, at the Education Centre, Junction Road, Norton. Transport is provided or travel costs reimbursed. Meetings normally finish around 1pm after a working lunch.

Details of meeting dates and how to join the group can be obtained by contacting either the Options Appraisal team or the Tristar Homes Customer Involvement team. All group members are asked to accept and comply with a code of conduct which has been developed by the Group.

In addition to the fortnightly meetings, the Group have recently toured the Borough to see the different issues that exist on various estates and have also undertaken a site visit to Durham Council. This is the first of a number of visits to councils who have recently undertaken an Options Appraisal, to give the group the opportunity to explore the advantages or disadvantages of some of the options chosen.

If you are interested in the work of the group, but are unable to attend the meetings, minutes of Housing Futures Customer Group meetings can be downloaded from the "Your Home Your Say" web pages. If you would like to discuss any issues from previous meetings or have any issues you feel the group should be dealing with, please contact your Independent Tenants Advisor (contact details on page 3)



A message to all Tenants and Leaseholders from the Housing Futures Customer Group

As members of the Housing Futures Customer Group, we would like to use this newsletter to let all tenants and leaseholders know that we are 'championing' issues that are important to them. Our role is to challenge the Council and Tristar Homes and we can assure you we do this at these meetings.

We are aware that not all council properties have received 'decent homes' work and that those tenants affected are becoming increasingly frustrated about when this will happen. On your behalf we raised this matter with officers from the Council and Tristar Homes at our last meeting. We know that tenants and leaseholders want to know exactly what decent homes work will take place. We have been informed that properties which have not yet received any decent homes work are being surveyed and assessed to determine what specific work is required to bring them up to the Governments Decent Homes Standard. Survey work is ongoing now and is about two thirds complete. In order to ensure tenants waiting for decent homes work are kept up to date, we have been told that once the survey work is completed all remaining tenants will be written to and in this letter they will be given a clear indication of what work they would be receiving and when it would take place.

Signed : Members of the Housing Futures Customer Group

Your Views Count

In our last issue we asked you to return the questionnaire included to give us your opinion on the top 5 issues important to you under the headings "Your Home & Neighbourhood" & "Your Environment"

A full analysis of the results will be published in our next issue in the New Year as the results continue to be analysed in detail and responses are still arriving. However, at the time of printing this newsletter the top 3 main issues of those responses analysed so far under each heading are:

Your Home & Neighbourhood

- Keeping Rents Affordable
- Providing a fast and efficient repairs service
- Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour

Your Environment

- Keeping areas clear of rubbish and graffiti
- Improving the appearance of an area
- External improvements to homes