

Six of the twelve members of the Transfer Options Development Group are tenants. They are:

- George Hawkins (Chairman)
- Ron Butcher
- Colin Greenwood
- Carole Matthews
- Tony Coleman
- Jean Key

What is the Partner Selection Panel and who is on it?

The Transfer Options Development Group has set up a sub-group called the 'Partner Selection Panel' that has started the search for a preferred Housing Association partner. There are eight members of whom three are tenants.

How will the Council choose the Housing Association to which your homes may transfer?

Following the placing of advertisements, a 'bidders conference' was held on 27th January 2006. At the conference, tenants' representatives, Councillors and Council officers explained to Housing Associations what Fenland is looking for from the transfer. This includes improvements to homes and neighbourhoods, enhanced tenant participation and a genuine partnership between the Housing Association and its tenants. Interested Housing Associations submitted expressions of interest during February 2006. The Partner Selection Panel has now short listed five associations that have been requested to provide additional information. These are:

- Circle Anglia
- Granta
- Nene
- Flagship
- Hereward

You will have an opportunity to meet the associations that are being considered in April. This will be at open events held throughout Fenland that will also be attended by tenants' representatives and the Independent Tenants' Adviser. The dates are:

Wednesday 12th April 2006:
Whittlesey – 8.15am to 1.30pm.
Wisbech – 3.00pm to 7.00pm.

Thursday 13th April 2006:
March – 8.15am to 1.30pm.
Chatteris – 3.00pm to 7.00pm.

What is the Shadow Board and who is on it?

It is envisaged that the transfer Housing Association would have a 'group structure' with a Board appointed to manage the Fenland homes. A third of the members of the Board will be tenant representatives, a third Council nominees and a third independent people. A shadow board is therefore being appointed that will work with the Council in the run-up to the transfer and - if the tenants vote in favour of transfer - would then become the Fenland Board. There are fifteen places on the Board, of which five are to be taken by tenants. The five tenants who have been appointed are:

- Colin Greenwood
- Keith Haylett
- Brenda Reynolds
- George Hawkins
- Jean Key

What does the Tenants' Forum think about transfer?

The Tenants' Forum is supporting the recommendation of the Options Fenland Working Group that transfer is the best option for the tenants for the future. It will provide all the services that tenants have come to expect and most of the aspirations tenants say that they would like in the 'Fenland Standard'. All this would be done with equivalent tenancy conditions, same rent rules and the same staff as now with the Council.

Housing Associations do not have to give any money to central government so straight away we would have more than £2million a year to provide what tenants want. However, to stay with the Council would mean that tenants would not enjoy the same services and same standard of repairs and refurbishment as they do now.

We have already had reductions in our sheltered accommodation service and do not want to see more. Don't forget that the Council would have to continue to give central government over £2million of your rent money each year.



Documents prepared by Fenland District Council are available in community languages, large print, Moon, Braille, audio cassette and electronic format upon request.



Fenland Tenants' Friend

A newsletter published jointly by the Fenland Tenants' Forum and the Independent Tenants' Adviser

Welcome to the First Edition of the 'Fenland Tenants' Friend'

This is a new newsletter for tenants of Fenland District Council that is published jointly by the Fenland Tenants' Forum and the Independent Tenants' Adviser that will give Fenland tenants the FACTS about the proposed housing stock transfer.

In this edition we look at:

- Why are we looking at stock transfer?
- What would stock transfer mean for tenants?
- What are tenants saying about their homes and neighbourhoods now?
- Who is looking after tenants' interests?
- Who is the Independent Tenants' Advisor and what does he do for tenants?
- What is the Transfer Options Development Group and who is on it?
- What is the Partner Selection Panel and who is on it?
- How will the Council choose the partner Housing Association?
- What is the Shadow Board and who is on it?
- What does the Tenants' Forum think about transfer?
- How can tenants get involved?

options development process. The dates of these meetings are:

MARCH – 10th April 2006 at Morton Avenue at 7.30pm

WISBECH – 11th April 2006 at Queen's School at 7.30pm.

WHITTLESEY – 12th April 2006 at St. Mary's House at 7.30pm.

CHATTERIS – 18th April 2006 at the Council Centre at 7.30pm

THORNEY TOLL – 20th April 2006 at the Village Hall at 7.30pm.

Any tenant who would like transport to these meetings should contact Sally Taylor on the freephone line 0800-169-0655.

Tenants can contact the Independent Tenants' Adviser through a freephone helpline on 0800-028-3365.

The Independent Tenants' Adviser has a website at www.awics.co.uk/fenlandita and can be contacted by e-mail on Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk.

Tenants can also get involved through their local Tenants' Association. Contacts for the Tenants' Associations are shown below:

Chatteris – Colin Greenwood 01354-693782 or Keith Haylett 01354-693048

Manea -George Hawkins 01354-680626

March – Jean Key 01354-652933

Thorney Toll – Tony Coleman 07961-957878

Come and Meet your Tenants Friend?

The Independent Tenants' Adviser and Tenants' Forum are arranging meetings in all parts of the district to ensure that all tenants are aware of what is going on and can participate in the transfer



Whittlesey – Irene Henson 01733-208368

Wisbech – Ron Butcher 01945-582094

Fenland District Council can be contacted through a freephone number 0800-169-0655.

For further information on tenants' participation contact Sally Taylor on 01354-602150 or by e-mail on staylor@fenland.gov.uk.

We will send you further editions of this newsletter as we progress towards the stock transfer. These, alongside the Options Fenland newsletter, will ensure that tenants have all the FACTS so they can make up their own minds about transfer. We are determined to make sure that Fenland tenants know what is going on and have opportunities to participate and to make their voices heard. We hope that you enjoy reading this newsletter.

Why are we looking at stock transfer?

A Housing Stock Options Appraisal was carried out in Fenland during 2004 and 2005. This involved looking at whether different options for the future ownership and management of council houses would benefit tenants.

As part of this, all tenants were asked about what improvements they would like to see to their homes and neighbourhoods. This led to the identification of the 'Fenland Standard' that included:

- Better home security
- Off-road parking
- A full-time warden for each sheltered scheme Internal improvements that go beyond the government's minimum standard

There is a shortage of affordable housing in Fenland and tenants also wanted to see more affordable homes for rent being provided.

The Working Group found that while the Council could continue to own and manage council housing, it could not afford all the services and improvements that tenants wanted.

One problem that the Council has is that over £2million of the rent that it collects has to be paid into a government pool to fund housing in other parts of England.

The Working Group found that if the Council were

to transfer the homes to a Housing Association, the Housing Association would be able to afford the services and improvements that tenants want.

It is estimated that transferring the homes to a Housing Association would give the Council extra cash to build more affordable homes for rent in Fenland.

The tenant-led working group therefore recommended that the Council should transfer its council homes to a Housing Association. In a consultation held during May 2005 this recommendation was supported by 52% of tenants who responded.

So – the Council is now planning for a stock transfer. Tenants are fully involved in this process. It is expected that a ballot of tenants will be held in November 2006. Stock transfer will only happen if a majority of tenants who vote support the stock transfer proposal.

What would stock transfer mean for tenants?

Stock transfer means that tenants would have a new landlord. The new landlord would be a Housing Association with a good track record that would be committed to delivering what Fenland tenants want.

Rents would increase at the same rate as they would if the Council continued to manage the homes. Tenants would still be able to claim housing benefit from the Council in the same way.

The intention is that the transfer options development group will put together a detailed transfer proposal. This will identify the Housing Association to which the homes would be transferred and the improvements to homes and neighbourhoods that it would offer tenants.

This proposal will then be put to all tenants in a postal ballot, and the transfer would only proceed if a majority of tenants voted for it.

What are tenants saying about their homes and neighbourhoods now?

More is being done to identify tenant aspirations and to make sure that the offer to tenants meets key needs. Focus groups have been held in all

parts of the district and covering all groups of tenants. The aim is to identify what different groups of tenants value in their homes and neighbourhoods and where they think that improvements could be made.

Tenants have identified that there is a need to:

- Build more affordable homes
- Tackle anti-social behaviour
- Speed up the system for giving people aids and adaptations
- Set up a handyman and redecoration service for the elderly and disabled
- Introduce a gardening service for the elderly and disabled
- Introduce an 'easy moves' service for the elderly and disabled.

One thing that tenants clearly want is more affordable housing in Fenland. A combination of low incomes and increasing property prices and rents mean that many people in Fenland are not able to live in decent homes unless these are provided by the Council or Housing Associations. It is important to ensure that the Council and the Housing Association reach an agreement on how many new affordable homes are to be built and how they are to be financed.

It should be noted that whatever the final agreement on this is, more affordable housing should be delivered through transfer and there would be a reduction in new affordable housing if the council remains your landlord.

Who is looking after tenants' interests?

Tenants' interests are being looked after by tenant representatives supported by an Independent Tenants' Advisor.

Who is the Independent Tenants' Advisor and what does he do for tenants?

In November 2005, Council tenants re-appointed Adrian Waite of 'AWICS' as their Independent Tenants' Adviser to champion their cause as options for the transfer were developed.



Adrian Waite's role between now and September 2007 is to work with tenants and their representatives to make sure they have access

to all the information necessary. It is crucial that decisions for the future of housing in Fenland are made with tenants' needs and interests as the overriding priority.

On his original appointment he pledged to ensure that all tenants had the access to the information they need to make decisions about the future of their homes and neighbourhoods. Adrian said: "The job that I have to do is very clear. I must use my expertise to make sure that tenants can analyse, question and challenge every fact and figure that is produced about the options for the future of council homes in Fenland.

"The option appraisal for housing in Fenland must be open, honest, and transparent - and it must deliver results that improve homes whilst protecting tenants."

Our objective during 'Transfer Options Development' remains the same. It is to make sure that tenants are empowered to take decisions about their homes and to ensure that improvements are made to homes, neighbourhoods and services.

What is the Transfer Options Development Group and who is on it?

The Transfer Options Development Group is overseeing the transfer process. They are here to make sure that everything is done properly and with tenants' interests uppermost. Their job is to:

- Inform and involve tenants at every stage
- Ensure that what is on offer meets tenants' wishes
- Select a Housing Association partner
- Make sure a Housing Association partner can deliver what is on offer
- Provide all the facts tenants need when voting to decide on who manages their homes