

FENLAND TENANTS' FRIEND

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

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

You will have recently received the Formal Consultation Document from the Council and will vote on the Council's proposals in November. This newsletter provides impartial information about the proposed transfer of homes to Roddons Housing Association, and provides a summary of the FACTS about the proposed housing stock transfer

The role of the independent Tenants' Advisor

The Independent Tenants' Advisor, Adrian Waite and his team, were appointed by the Tenants' Forum. Their role is to provide independent and accurate advice and information to tenants. Their work includes:

- Supporting tenant representatives
- Providing information to tenants
- Answering tenants' questions
- Gathering tenants' views
- Ensuring that tenants are listened to



Adrian Waite

The Timetable

- October 2006 – all tenants were sent a copy of the Formal Consultation Document
- 2 November – Closing date for tenants' comments on the formal consultation document
- 6 November – Cabinet meeting to consider tenants' responses
- Early / mid November – Fenland District Council to send a letter to all tenants confirming the offer
- November / December – Secret Postal Ballot
- December – Ballot results announced

The 'Formal Consultation Document'

The 'Formal Consultation Document' was sent to all tenants in October 2006. It is a long document because the law requires it to cover everything to do with the stock transfer. This document covers what transfer would mean for tenants. It is an important legal document, so please keep it safe.

The legally binding Consultation Document is the Council's formal housing transfer proposal. It covers:

- Rent and other charges
- Better local services
- Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour
- Improving and repairing your home
- The sheltered housing service
- Involving you in running the service
- Your rights
- About the Association
- What happens next

It also includes the proposed tenancy agreement and useful contacts.

If you receive any information about the transfer proposals from anyone other than Fenland District Council, the Tenants' Forum or your ITA please check out the accuracy of the facts by phoning your ITA or the Council on the freephone numbers listed on the back page

Tenants are invited to comment on the proposals, and the Council will formally consider all the suggestions made. Please remember to return your completed forms to the Council Offices. The Tenants' Forum and tenant representatives on the shadow board of Roddons Housing Association will make sure that tenants' views are listened to.

Summary

Tenants decide if the transfer goes ahead. The result will be decided by a simple majority of tenants who vote.

The guarantees given by Roddons Housing Association would be legally binding. They would have to carry out the promises in the Formal Consultation Document.

- Roddons would be a not for profit landlord, supported by Circle Anglia, set up to own manage and improve the Council homes in Fenland
- Rents and other charges would not rise any more under Roddons than they would with the Council
- All your key rights would be protected, such as your Right To Buy, and your right to succession
- You would receive better local services for example gardening and decorating services
- A new anti-social behaviour team (including an out of hours response) would be set up to deal with nuisance and anti-social behaviour
- Improving and repairing homes - all homes would be brought up to modern standards
- Involving you in the running of your service - A voluntary board of 15 would run Roddons, including 5 tenants

What is being promised?

The following table summarises what Roddons Housing Association is promising that would not be provided by the Council:

| | With Roddons | With the Council |
|---|--------------|------------------|
| Local services | | |
| Dedicated anti-social behaviour team | Yes | No |
| Welfare benefits advisor | Yes | No |
| Easy moves service | Yes | No |
| Gold service reward scheme | Yes | No |
| £1million community fund | Yes | No |
| Decorating service | Yes | No |
| Gardening service | Yes | No |
| Improvements | | |
| Handyman service | Yes | No |
| Electric showers | Yes | No |
| Off street parking schemes | Yes | No |
| Wooden fencing | Yes | No |
| Security lights to all properties where wanted by tenants | Yes | No |
| Sheltered Housing | | |
| 3 additional scheme managers | Yes | No |
| £10,000 for additional improvements at sheltered schemes | Yes | No |
| New homes | | |
| 500 New affordable homes | Yes | No |

Your protected rights

Under the new tenancy agreement tenants would become 'assured' tenants rather than 'secure' tenants.

An 'assured' tenancy agreement is a contract between a Housing Association and a tenant and once entered into cannot be changed without the consent of the tenant.

An 'assured' tenancy does not automatically contain all the rights that are given to 'secure' tenants. That is why the Independent Tenants' Advisor has been working with Fenland Tenants' Forum and tenant members of the shadow board of Roddons Housing Association to make sure that all the rights that tenants currently enjoy as 'secure' tenants of the Council will be included in the 'assured' tenancy agreement. This has been achieved with the exception of the 'right to manage' that cannot be offered by a Housing Association – but in place of this Circle Anglia and Roddons Housing Associations have both said that they would support tenants who wished to set up a 'tenant management organisation' after a stock transfer. No Fenland District Council tenant organisation has ever requested the 'Right to Manage'.

Tenants' rights include the preserved 'Right to Buy'. Previous successions would also be disregarded in establishing future rights of succession.

Stock transfer means that the ownership of your home would transfer from the Council to Roddons Housing Association. Tenants would not have to transfer from one home to another.

Your rents

If there was a yes vote, what would it be like under Roddons Housing Association?

- Your rents would not rise any more whether your home is owned by the Council or by Roddons Housing Association - your rents will increase by the same amount, regardless of whether your landlord was Roddons or the Council.

- However, you would get more for your money as Roddons Housing Association would carry out major improvements to the housing and services, which the council would be unable to afford to do.
- Currently, the council has to give over £2million per year to the Government who then distribute it to other Councils and other government budgets. This would no longer happen if Roddons became your landlord.

The transfer to Roddons Housing Association would not affect your right to claim housing benefit, which would continue to be paid by the Council.

Roddons Housing Association

If tenants vote for transfer, the Roddons Housing Association would own and manage the homes and would be supported in this by Circle Anglia. This arrangement is called a 'group' structure.

Roddons would be non-profit making, and would have no shareholders.

Roddons would be a Registered Social Landlord, which means that it could receive public money, and has to be regularly audited to ensure it is performing well. The Housing Corporation regulates all registered social landlords in England. The Audit Commission and Fenland District Council would also monitor the performance of Roddons.

The Shadow Board that has been set up would become the Board of Roddons Housing Association, responsible for managing the homes in place of the Council. There are fifteen places on the Shadow Board, five of which are taken by tenant representatives.

Tenant shadow board members are:

- Ron Butcher (Wisbech)
- Colin Greenwood (Chatteris)
- Keith Haylett (Chatteris)
- Jean Key (March)
- Brenda Reynolds (March)

Remember, all board members work on a voluntary basis.

The Ballot

The ballot will be a secret ballot and no one will know how individual tenants have voted. It would be administered by the Electoral Reform Society, which is an independent organisation.

Every tenant will have a vote, so where there are joint tenants they will have one vote each. It is expected that ballot papers will be out in November 2006 for return by December 2006 in a prepaid envelope to the Electoral Reform Society.

If a majority of the tenants who vote, vote for the stock transfer then the transfer would happen in 2007. If a majority vote against a stock transfer then the homes would remain with the Council.

What if tenants vote no?

The District Council would continue to own and manage the homes, and you would keep your secure tenancy.

If tenants decide to stay with the Council, things would not remain as they are. With current government and Council rules and priorities, the Council would not be able to deliver the same degree of home and service improvements that Roddons Housing Association is proposing.

Independent Tenants Advisor Meetings

The Independent Tenants' Advisor has been visiting all Tenants Associations in Fenland as advertised in the Options Fenland newsletter last month.

The meetings in March, Wisbech, Chatteris, Whittlesey and Thorney Toll have already been held and have been well attended by tenants would were able to ask questions and find out more about the stock transfer. There is one further meeting:

- 6th November 2006 at 7pm – Village Hall, Manea.

If a tenant requires transport to this meeting, please ring the Council's freephone hotline number 0800-169-0655

How can I find out more?

- Read the formal consultation document and summary newsletter
- Watch the Council's video / DVD
- Talk to the Councils staff who are visiting all tenants
- Ring your Independent Tenants Advisors Adrian Waite and his team on 0800-028-3365 or the Councils freephone hotline on 0800-169-0655
- Visit the Transfer Trailer
- Fill in the slip in the Formal Consultation Document and return it to the Council

How else can tenants get involved?

Tenants can contact:

- Independent Tenants' Adviser (ITA) on freephone helpline on 0800-028-3365.
- The ITA by e-mail on Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk.
- Visit the ITA website at www.awics.co.uk/fenlandita
- Council's free helpline at 0800-169-0655.
- Chatteris Tenants Association - Keith Haylett 01354-693048.
- Manea Tenants Association - Nicola Morris 01354-688098.
- March Tenants Association – Jean Key 01354-652933.
- Thorney Toll Tenants Association – Tony Coleman 07961-957878.
- Whittlesey Tenants Association – Irene Henson 01733-208368.
- Wisbech Tenants Association – Ron Butcher 01945-582094.

Remember

Options Fenland is all about making sure that there are improvements to tenants' homes and neighbourhoods and that tenants take the decisions about their homes. Please make sure that you understand what a stock transfer means and make your own mind up about how to vote.

Ron Butcher
Chairman of the Tenants' Forum
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