

TENANTS' VOICE

An independent newsletter produced for tenants and leaseholders

TIME TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Rutland County Council is having to look again at the future of our Housing Service.

Readers with long memories will remember they did this back in 2004, when they decided to transfer the management of our homes to a Not-For-Profit Registered Social Landlord – Spire Homes.

Now the Council needs to look again at the future of our Housing Service:

- **Can the Council soldier on and continue to own our homes, and if so, how?**
- **Or will it have to transfer the ownership as well as the management of our homes to a Not-For-Profit Registered Social Landlord, and if so, which one?**

Remember, if the Council did decide on a Transfer, it cannot happen without a secret ballot of all tenants.

Back in 2004, Tenants from the Rutland Tenant & Leaseholder Partnership (RTLTP) were at the forefront of the search for a top-class Registered Social Landlord to take over the running of our Housing Service.

Now in 2008 the Partnership are again playing an active part in this new review of the future of our Housing Service.

Needless to say, it is money that is at the root of this "review" of the Housing Service. Not only is the Council expected to meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard and bring all our homes up to scratch, but it also has to pay for the day-to-day running of the Housing Service.

Over the next few years the Council may not be able to pay for day-to-day repairs and housing services at the level that Tenants want. What is called the 'Housing Revenue Account' is not allowed to go into the red.

What do you think? Get in touch – get Involved!



Over the next two months, a Stock Options Appraisal Group made up of Tenants and Leaseholders, Council staff, staff from Spire Homes and our elected Councillors are going to take a long, hard look at the future of the Housing Service. Once all the facts and opinions have been weighed up, the Council expect to make a decision about the future of the Housing Service in March 2008.

So now is the time to get in touch – get involved
Use the tear off slip on this newsletter or phone DWA
Freephone 0800 0855 492

It is important you let the Council know what you think.

DON'T WAIT – HAVE YOUR SAY NOW.

A message from Rutland Tenants & Leaseholders Partnership (RTLTP)

RTLTP is a group of tenants and leaseholders of Rutland County Council. They give their time voluntarily, with the aim of improving the services we all receive. Our reason for contacting you with this newsletter is to let you know what is happening.

The review of the Housing Service (called a 'Stock Options Appraisal (SOA)' will be a detailed process, but Tenants and Leaseholders have expert advice and guidance from our Independent Tenants' Advisors, **DWA**, who helped us in 2004 with the previous look at the Housing Service.



Tenants and leaseholders meet to discuss the options.

Please make sure you read everything you can about the review.

If you want to find out more DWA will be running a series of Drop-In Sessions:

**Drop-In Session 1: Uppingham – Samuel Court, Branston Road
Tues 5 February, 11am - 1pm**

**Drop-In Session 2: Ketton – Carver Court
Tues 5 February, 3pm - 5pm**

**Drop-In Session 3: Ryhall – Francis Court, Rutland Way,
Fri 8 February, 1pm - 3pm**

**Drop-In Session 4: Oakham – Victoria Hall, High Street,
Fri 8 February, 4.30 - 7pm.**

Call in any time!

Get in touch – Get involved

If you want to contact RTLTP ring **DWA** free on 0800 0855 492 and we will ask someone from RTLTP to get in touch with you.

DWA
A NOT-FOR-PROFIT HOUSING
CONSULTANCY COMPANY

**Genuinely
Independent Advice
This is NOT a Council
newsletter**

It has been produced with local tenants and leaseholders and **DWA**, your Independent Tenants' Advisors
**FREEPHONE
0800 0855 492**

ARE YOU A LEASEHOLDER?

This affects you too. You have a right to be consulted too.
Get in touch – get involved

Our day-to-day Housing Service in Rutland already comes from a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) – Spire Homes, who have been running our Housing Service since 2006.

USE OUR REPLY SLIP TO GET IN TOUCH OR FREEPHONE DWA 0800 0855 492

This newsletter is available in other languages and formats such as CDs and bigger print. If you know anyone who needs this kind of help please let us know. You can also visit our website on: www.dwa-housingconsultants.co.uk and click on Tenants' Zone – Rutland. Remember – there must be a secret ballot of all tenants. Get in touch – get involved.

AT A MEETING IN JANUARY THE RTLP BEGAN ASKING SEARCHING QUESTIONS ON YOUR BEHALF:

QUESTION	If the Council decide to soldier on as our Landlords ANSWER	If the Council decides that a stock transfer is the best way of protecting the Housing Service ANSWER
Will Tenants still have the same rights?	You will still be a Council Tenant and your rights will stay the same. However, the Council may not be able to pay for the day-to-day repairs and Housing Service at a level that Tenants want.	You will not have to move home and the major rights you have as a Council Tenant will be protected (for example you will keep your Right To Buy and your Discount).
Will rents increase?	Rents can only rise in line with the Government's national formula.	Rents can only rise in line with the Government's national formula so transfer would not affect rents.
Will I still be able to get Housing Benefit?	Yes. Your entitlement to claim Benefits is not affected.	Yes. Your entitlement to claim Benefits is not affected.
I am a leaseholder – will my lease be affected?	Your lease is your legal contract, there would be no change.	Your lease is your legal contract, there would be no change.

Nothing has been decided yet. But now is the time to have your say. Get in touch – get involved.

This didn't used to be a problem – what's changed?

Many people have asked us why the Council cannot simply raise the money it needs **without** a transfer. The answer is that Government rules have changed.

In the past if a Council needed an extra few bob for housing:

They Used To Put Our Rents Up!

In the past if the books didn't balance rent rises were often the first port of call for a Council.

- ✗ But not any more. Council rents are now set by a Government formula and cannot go up willy-nilly. Strict Government rules mean that whether you rent from the Council or a Housing Association in a few years' time rents in Rutland will be virtually the same for similar types of homes.

They Used To Move Money Around

In the past if a Council needed extra money for running costs in housing they often dipped into some other pot of Council tax money to top up what is called the Housing Revenue Account.

- ✗ The Government in the 1980s put a stop to that. Nowadays the Housing Revenue Account can only spend housing money – our rents and some Government grants. They can't dip into other pots of Council Tax money to run services.

They Used To Borrow Money

Over the years many local Councils have borrowed money to build homes and run services.

- ✗ Councils can still borrow but now all new borrowing has to follow the Government's Prudential Code. Councils must have the income to be able to pay back the loans – which Rutland does not.

Transferring Council homes to Housing Associations and Registered Social Landlords is not a new idea. Since 1988, over 1,000,000 Council homes have transferred after a secret ballot of Tenants gave the go-ahead.

TRANSFER FACT
Future rents will **NOT** be affected by a Transfer.
Get in touch – get involved.

Competition Time

How much do you know about what is going on?

- Q1. When is the Council going to decide on the future of the Housing Service?
Answer: _____
- Q2. As tenants and leaseholders, there is very little we can do to influence their decision. (Tick the correct box)
True False
- Q3. When is the best time for you to get involved and have your say?
Now Later
- Q4. If there was to be a transfer, it will drive up rents.
True False

Send your answers to:
Freepost SWC 5119 Telford TF8 7ZA
The first three correct answers to arrive will each win a £20 shopping voucher.
Don't forget to give us your name and address!

GET IN TOUCH – GET INVOLVED

If you want to get involved or find out more please use this tear-off slip. Post it to DWA FREEPOST SWC 5119 Telford TF8 7ZA. No stamp is needed.

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Phone number (if you have one) _____ email: _____

Your question or comment _____

If you would like to take part in our survey, please tick this box and we'll send you our survey form. Don't forget to give us your name and address. Watch out for more newsletters, leaflets and local meetings.

YOUR INDEPENDENT ADVISORS

When Landlords are thinking of making any major changes to the housing service Tenants and Leaseholders are entitled to their own independent housing experts to double check what the council is doing or saying.

DWA are experienced Tenants' Advisors. They are a not-for-profit company who strongly believe that Independent Tenant Advisors should be just that – independent.

DWA works for Tenants and Leaseholders. They do not work for the council.

DWA are here to explain the issues and make sure everyone understands what is going on.

Your Independent team of housing experts, community development workers and experienced tenants is led by Deborah Walthorne and David Williams. Their job is to make sure everyone gets the information they need about what is going on.

You may receive lots of unofficial information over the next few months. If you are not sure about anything please check with your Independent Advisors to make sure you have all the facts. The Freephone 0800 0855 492 is open between 10 am and 3pm Monday – Friday. It is free to landline callers. If you use a mobile phone there may be a fee – check with your phone company. Out of hours you can leave a message on our answerphone. We will ring you back if you leave your name and full telephone number – don't forget to tell us your area code. You can write to DWA at Freepost SWC 5119 Telford TF8 7ZA. No stamp is needed.

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