



Your Homes, Your Future

An independent newsletter produced for tenants & leaseholders
 Editors: Sandys Powell (Freshbrook), Keith Badenski (Central), Ruth Kiddle (Toothill),
 Margaret Hudson (Park North).

New review of council housing

Swindon Borough Council is taking a new look at the options for the future of council housing. Working closely with tenants and leaseholders, the council must decide how best to keep services up to scratch and homes well maintained over the next 30 years.

Why is this happening?

Council homes in Swindon already meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard. Now the council needs to look at how to improve homes beyond this standard as well as delivering good quality housing services, modernising local areas and providing future affordable homes.

This is not a decision the council can make alone. Specialist consultants have been hired to look at all the figures and options for the future. The council must also follow strict Government guidance and, most importantly, talk to and listen to all tenants and leaseholders.

Residents already involved

Members of Swindon Tenants' Voice (STV), Leaseholder Link and TASH (Tenants' Association for Sheltered Housing) are already working with councillors and staff, taking a long, hard look at the options. They have also set up the **Resident Engagement Group (REG)** to make sure all tenants and leaseholders get the information they need and their views are listened to.

You have a right to be consulted

You have a right to have your say

Help is at hand

Tenants and leaseholders have also hired their own specialists

– **DWA** – who are on hand to offer independent advice on the options. Starting in September **DWA** will run local events so that tenants and leaseholders can find out more about the options and have their say about the future of Swindon's council housing.

Once all the facts and opinions have been weighed up, the council expects to make a decision about the future sometime in the spring next year.

Now is the time to get in touch – get involved

It is important you let the council know what you think

Use the tear-off slip on this newsletter

Or phone DWA Free on 0800 0855 492

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

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, Braille and large 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 – Swindon. Get in touch – get involved.

*A message from Swindon's
Resident Engagement
Group (REG)*

REG is made up of tenants and leaseholders of Swindon Borough Council. We are already involved in Swindon Tenants' Voice, Leaseholder Link or TASH and give our 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) will be a detailed process, but tenants and leaseholders have expert advice and guidance from our Independent Tenants' Advisors, **DWA**.



Your tenant editors at work.

Please make sure you read everything you can about the review

We also urge you to get involved and have your say

You can meet our Independent Tenants' Advisors, on Saturday 20th September in Swindon town centre. Visit them between 9.30am and 3.30pm at the BHS corner by the Jubilee clock.

This is an important time for the future of our homes and our communities

Get in touch – get involved

If you want Sandys Powell or Ruth Kiddle of the Resident Engagement Group to contact you, ring **DWA** free* on (*landline calls are free, mobile phone users may be charged)

0800 0855 492



Leaseholder Link



ARE YOU A LEASEHOLDER?

This also affects you. You have a right to be consulted.

Leaseholders' rights are protected by your lease.

CHECK YOUR LEASE. GET IN TOUCH – GET INVOLVED

So what's the problem?

Money is at the root of this new review. The search is on for the best way to deliver a quality housing service that meets Swindon's tenants' and leaseholders' needs. This means finding the money to keep homes in a good, basic condition and improved to a standard people want. The council also wants to modernise local areas, invest in sheltered housing and provide new affordable homes.

What are the options for the future?

The Government says councils may look at 4 options. But, it's not a level playing field - not all options work for all councils. The options being looked at are:

Stock Retention

The council continues to own and manage homes using existing funds. Swindon council would need to find the extra money needed to improve homes above current standards, build new homes, modernise local areas and invest in sheltered housing. The council has to pay around £9 million of tenants' rent money each year into the Government's national 'housing pot' to be distributed to other councils. The Government is reviewing council housing finance across the country. At this stage it is not clear whether Swindon council will get any benefit from this review.

Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO)

This involves setting up a council-owned company to manage homes on behalf of the council. At the time of the last options appraisal in 2003 the Government offered extra financial help to ALMO's who qualified for it. But this funding is no longer available so, although the council could still set up an ALMO, it would attract no extra money and is unlikely to be of any benefit to Swindon.

Private Finance Initiative (PFI)

This is where councils set up a contract with a private sector partner to manage and maintain some homes - this is not seen as a 'whole stock' solution. The Government may offer the council extra financial help to do this. So far housing PFI schemes have been slow and expensive to set up.



Stock Transfer

This is where the ownership and management of some, or all, council homes are transferred to a not-for-profit Registered Social Landlord (such as a Housing Association or Trust). Stock transfer is controlled by strict Government rules and can only happen once the majority of tenants have voted in favour of it in a formal, secret ballot. Registered Social Landlords can keep all rent money and have more freedom to borrow money to invest in improvements and building new homes. Tenants become Assured Tenants of the new landlord but keep their Security of Tenure and all major rights.

Nothing has been decided yet. Now is the time to have your say

Get in touch - get involved

The council is keen to hear your views before they make a decision about the future of the Housing Service. Either freephone us on 0800 0855 492 or use the tear-off slip on this newsletter. Nothing has been decided yet, but now is the time to have your say! **Get in touch - get involved!**

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.

The Government expects councils to pay for this service so that expert professional advice is completely free for all tenants and leaseholders at the point of delivery.

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.

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.



Deborah Walthorne.



David Williams.

Options Fact:

Whatever happens tenants' key rights and rents are protected.

You have a right to be informed and consulted.

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.

True False

Q3. When is the best time for you to get involved and have your say?

Now Later

Q4. Rents and Rights will be protected whatever happens.

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 _____

When we use the word 'tenant' (or 'tenants' or 'all tenants') in this newsletter we are referring to secure and introductory tenants of Swindon Borough Council. You may receive lots of unofficial information over the next few weeks. If you are not sure about anything please check with your Independent Advisors (DWA), to make sure you have all the facts. The Freephone 0800 0855 492 is open between 10am 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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