



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).

COUNCIL HOUSING REVIEW

Readers will recall that Swindon Borough Council is taking a fresh look at the future of council housing.

Before Christmas the council wrote to everyone. The news was that it looks like only a stock transfer to a not-for-profit social landlord could deliver the money needed to modernise council homes and keep services up to scratch over the next 30 years.

So what's the problem?

It's becoming harder for councils to carry on funding housing services and harder to keep homes well maintained and modernised. Swindon council has brought in experts to look at the problem. Their work shows that **at least** £559 million needs to be spent over 30 years just to keep homes at the Government's basic standard. But Swindon council believes it doesn't have all this money available.



Residents discuss the options at a DWA meeting.

The council must pay around £9 million to the Government each year from tenants' rents. The Government is reviewing these rules but unless it makes changes for the better, the council will find its Housing Revenue Account will go into the red from 2017.

But nothing has been decided yet

And don't forget, homes can't transfer without a vote of all tenants and Government permission

What happens next?

The council has set up working parties of tenants and leaseholders, councillors and housing staff to look at the options. More importantly the council must consult with tenants and leaseholders.

**You have a right to be consulted
 You have a right to have your say**

Between now and the spring the council will hold local meetings and events and send out newsletters. And **DWA**, the Independent Tenants' Advisors will also be on hand to make sure you have independent advice.

**Remember - nothing has been decided yet
 Now is the time to 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 keeping a close eye on the council's proposals.

We promise:

- To give you the facts
- To look after the interests of all tenants and leaseholders
- To be independent of the council
- To listen to you

Everyone can help us by telling us their views or by filling in one of our simple survey forms. So please ring our Independent Tenants' Advisors for your copy or to have your say.

If you want to know what other people are saying, ring **DWA** for your copy of the latest survey results.

If you want to get involved too or just want to find out more phone **DWA** on:

0800 0855 492

*Calls from BT are free. Other operator charges may vary.
 Calls from mobiles may be a lot higher.*

Get in touch – get involved

Want to find out more?

- Come to the Open Day on Saturday 17 January 2009 at
- STEAM Railway Museum, Kemble Drive, Swindon.
- Drop-in *anytime* between 11am and 3pm to meet
- **DWA** and the council.

**Congratulations to the winners of our competition
 in issue one:**

Ms H Bettis of Queens Drive
 Mr P Armstrong of Welcombe Ave
 and Mr & Mrs Lancett of Toothill



Leaseholder Link



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**

If you know anyone who needs help with this newsletter 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.

THE FACTS SO FAR

Council homes in Swindon already meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard but more money needs to be spent to keep them at this level and to stop them falling into decline. It looks as if the council needs to spend at least £559 million over 30 years to do this. But the council faces a £19 million shortfall in 5 years - rising to over £130 million in 30 years.

Right now the Government is looking at how it funds council housing. Changes to the rules are due in 2011. Next spring we may know more about whether these changes could help Swindon. But, for now, there are limits on how much the council can spend to manage, maintain and improve homes and local areas.

Even if Government rules change in 2011 there still may not be enough money to carry out all the work needed and improve services. This is because a lot of Swindon's council homes were not traditionally built and so are expensive to maintain and improve.

After looking at the four options the council found that two will not work in Swindon:

- X Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO)** - because the Government no longer gives councils more money to run ALMO's
- X Private Finance Initiative (PFI)** - because it is not an answer for all council homes in Swindon and because PFI can be expensive and slow to set up.
- This leaves the council looking at two remaining options - trying to keep homes at the Decent Homes Standard using existing resources or a Stock Transfer to a social landlord. Councillors still want to hear your views before deciding on the future of the housing service.

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 ● Options Fact ● Options Fact ● Options Fact

Council homes may only transfer to a social landlord, such as a Housing Association.

These are registered by the Tenant Services Authority. They do not trade for profit and are inspected by the Audit Commission. Transfer is not a done deal - no decisions have been made yet.

And don't forget, homes can't transfer without a vote of all tenants and Government permission.

Whatever happens tenants' key rights and rents are protected.

Get in touch - get involved!

ARE YOU A LEASEHOLDER?

This affects you too - you have a right to be consulted
Leaseholders' rights are protected by your lease.
CHECK YOUR LEASE. Get in touch - get involved!

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

Competition Time

How much do you know about what is going on?

Q1. How much money needs to be spent on maintaining and modernising homes over 30 years?

Answer: _____

Q2. No decision has been made yet. (Tick the correct box)

True False

Q3. Swindon council faces a funding shortfall over 30 years of: (Tick the correct box)

£19 million £130 million

Q4. This affects leaseholders too (Tick the correct box)

True False

Send your answers to: Freepost SWC 5119 Telford TF8 7ZA

The first three correct answers will each win a £20 shopping voucher: Don't forget to give us your name and address!

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. Calls from BT are free. Other operator charges may vary. Calls from mobiles may be a lot higher. 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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