



11 December 2008

Dear

COUNCIL HOUSING REVIEW, LATEST NEWS

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, which contains important information for all Swindon Borough Council tenants and leaseholders.

As you are hopefully already aware, we are looking at the different ways Council housing could be managed and owned in future. We aim to ensure your homes will be of a good quality, not just now, but also in many years to come.

As part of this process, called an Options Appraisal, independent experts have carried out a thorough survey of our housing stock. They have identified the repair and improvement work required over the next 30 years. They have also looked at our finances and calculated how much this work would cost.

The conclusion of their report is clear: large scale stock transfer is the only option that can deliver the investment needed to keep all our homes at the required standard. No other option will deliver this level of investment.

Please be reassured there is no reason to be worried at the findings of this report. Your homes and rights are completely safe. The Council has made no decision about the report, rather it now wants to move forward and listen to tenants' and leaseholders' views about the future of the service.

So what is the next stage? With the help of your Independent Tenant Advisors, we will be finding out how you feel about this. We are also on hand to explain anything you don't understand.

You can call us on: (01793) 445503 between 8.30am and 5.30pm on weekdays, except Bank Holidays. Please also ring if you want to request a home visit so things can be explained in person. If you prefer you can call your Independent Tenant Advisor DWA on 0800 0855 492. More information can be found on the Council's website at www.swindon.gov.uk/housing and any queries can also be sent by email to housing@swindon.gov.uk. You may also find the Question and Answer section overleaf useful.

We appreciate this is a busy time and there is no need to hurry – your questions can wait until after Christmas, if you wish, but we have a duty to inform you as soon as possible. DWA will be holding an open day on **Saturday 17th January 2009 at STEAM, Museum of the Great Western Railway, Kemble Drive, Swindon**. You are invited to come along any time between **11am and 3pm** to hear more from the Council about the results of the Options Appraisal, and have your say.

So who gets the final say? You do. The ownership and management arrangements of your homes are controlled by strict Government rules and can only change once the majority of tenants have voted in favour of it in a formal, secret ballot.

I hope you will take these opportunities to find out more and share your views.

Yours sincerely



Bernie Brannan
Director of Housing and Leisure

Questions and Answers

Why is this happening?

All Councils, which still own and manage their housing must develop and review a long-term business plan for its Council housing. The Options Appraisal is part of this process.

Has it happened before?

Yes, Swindon Borough Council was among the first local authorities to have its Options Appraisal approved by the Government in 2003.

Are we repeating the process because of the credit crunch?

No. This Options Appraisal started in March and is unrelated to the current economic conditions. The process is all about planning for the future and making sure we have the resources to maintain and improve your homes to the required standard.

What standard is that?

We aim for your homes to continue meeting and exceeding the Government's Decent Homes Standard. All Council tenants who want it now have central heating and PVCu double glazing. Work is also under way to make your homes meet the "Swindon Standard", which takes improvements to a higher level. But these improvements do not last forever, which is why we need to find out what it will cost to maintain this level of quality.

Are tenants and leaseholders already involved?

Yes, very much so. A Resident Engagement Group (REG) has been set up and representatives from Swindon Tenants' Voice, Leaseholder Link, and the Tenants Association for Sheltered Housing are part of this. Consultation with tenants and leaseholders is really important, so please get involved, and let us know what you think.

The independent report talks about "stock transfer" – what is that?

Stock transfer means the ownership and management of Council homes are transferred to a not-for-profit organisation, such as a Housing Association or Trust. This organisation, known as a Registered Social Landlord, can keep all rent money, unlike the Council, which currently has to pay millions of pounds of it to the Government. They also have more freedom to borrow money to invest in improvements and building new homes.

If that happened, would all our rights and rents change?

No. You would become Assured Tenants of the Registered Social Landlord. You would keep your Security of Tenure and all major rights. Your rents would not be affected by transfer. Whether you stay with the Council or not, your rents can only rise in line with a Government formula.

What happened to the other options I read about in Housing Matters?

The Options Appraisal has explored a variety of different ways Council housing could be owned or managed, for example through Stock Retention, a Private Finance Initiative or an Arms Length Management Organisation. According to independent experts, none of these options is economically viable.

So who gets the final say? You do. The arrangements of who owns your homes 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.