

YOUR HOME



YOUR CHOICE

Information about the future of your home

Autumn 2011

A new deal for tenants – shaped by tenants

Tenants have played a key role in shaping the Offer Document to ensure a new Mutual Rochdale Boroughwide Housing would both maintain the quality of homes, services and neighbourhoods and strengthen local communities.

This would only happen if the majority of tenants who vote in a ballot to be held later this year vote in favour of the Council transferring ownership of its homes to RBH.

The Tenants' Panel has played a major role in developing these proposals on what transfer would mean for you.

Please take time to read the formal consultation document, the 'Offer Document', which is in your pack.

This Offer Document explains exactly what the transfer would mean for you and your home.

It also covers important issues such as what transfer would mean for rents, your key rights and entitlements and tenant involvement.

It also explains how, if transfer goes ahead, tenants and employees could become members of the new Mutual organisation and have a real say in how it would be run in future.

This is your Easy Guide to the Formal Offer Document

contained within this pack. It is designed to give you a brief summary of what transfer means for you and where you can find more information in the Offer Document about issues which are important to you.

Transfer is an important decision and one which deserves your careful consideration.

Please read the Offer Document to see what transfer means in reality – for you, your family and your home.

This is a very important proposal and probably the most important decision that you will ever be asked to make about your home.



Your questions – your views

Over the coming weeks, on behalf of the Council, staff from RBH will be visiting tenants to check you have received your formal consultation document and answer any questions you may have.

They will all be carrying formal identification so please check their details.

If we miss you, we will let you know we have been and will call back at a different time.



Tenants will decide the future

The offer that is being made has been shaped by tenants. Now it is tenants who will decide on transfer in a ballot planned for later this year.

The Council believes transfer is the best way forward and we are committed to giving you the full facts before you make the decision.

Please use your vote!

Press PLAY for transfer information

You will have received your transfer DVD in this pack.

The DVD which sums up why the Council is proposing transfer and what promises are being made is presented by local actress Sue Devaney.

Please set aside 10 minutes or so to watch the DVD and learn how the new Mutual RBH would be run if tenants vote in favour of transfer.



TRANSFER – TENANTS WILL DECIDE THE FUTURE

Key facts from the offer document



The formal Offer Document is broken down into chapters which are colour coded to make it easier to follow. Throughout this document there are transfer facts highlighting key points that you need to know. Most importantly, the Council wants to hear about your views on the proposal before it decides whether or not to go to ballot - this pack also contains a free to reply card, for you to respond.

Section 1 – Summary and how you can comment

This section gives tenants details of the Council's proposal and includes information on the promises that would be delivered if there is a 'yes' vote in the tenants' ballot. It also includes information on what would happen if transfer doesn't proceed, so tenants can make an informed decision about the future of their home. Tenants can tell the Council what they think about the contents of this document, using the free-to-post reply card contained in this pack.

Your views

Section 2 – Why the Council is proposing transfer

The proposed transfer aims to safeguard the future of homes and neighbourhoods whilst giving tenants a real voice in shaping the future of their housing services. The transfer proposal builds on the borough's rich co-operative history and would create a unique type of mutual housing organisation – owned together by tenants and employees.

Transfer explained

Section 3 – About the transfer and the new Mutual RBH

This is about much more than bricks and mortar improvements to homes themselves. RBH will convert to a Mutual within 15 months of transfer. Tenants would directly elect the majority of representatives to serve on a new Representative Body, which would work with the Board of RBH to develop future plans and strategy. It would monitor the delivery of services and provide a link between tenants, employees and the Board.

The new Mutual RBH

Section 4 – Your opportunity to get involved

Tenant involvement would be at the heart of RBH. All tenants would be invited to become members of the new Mutual RBH and to be involved in decisions about homes, services and neighbourhoods. RBH would build on the range of opportunities it has in place for involvement and look at new ways for tenants to get involved.

Involvement

Section 5 – Investing in your home

Transfer means homes would be maintained to the Decent Homes Standard through a 30 year investment programme. If there is a 'yes' vote, RBH would invest £169 million in the first 5 years. That would include, where necessary, new double glazed windows, new external doors and new or upgraded kitchens, bathrooms and central heating systems. It would also include disabled adaptations as well as secure fencing and environmental works.

Improvements

Section 6 – Maintaining your home

RBH and the Council understand that a good repairs service is the top priority for tenants. One of the reasons transfer is being proposed is to make sure there are enough resources available to meet the demand for repairs. RBH would aim to improve responsive repairs times and provide more flexible appointments for tenants. It would ensure there is a range of ways to report repairs and deliver a service that is straightforward and which gets work done promptly and efficiently.

Repairs

Section 7 – Your rights and responsibilities

Tenants' key rights and entitlements would be protected after transfer in a new assured tenancy agreement. Transferring tenants who are entitled to buy their home now would still be entitled to buy it after transfer. Tenants would still be able to pass on their home (succession). Any previous succession with the Council would be disregarded. This means that if you received your tenancy via succession following the death of a relative you would be able to pass on your tenancy to a relative living in the property via succession.

Rights

Section 8 – Your rent and other charges

Rents would remain the same or very similar to what the Council would charge - RBH would be subject to the same Government policy and regulations on rents that applies to councils. Transferring tenants would also receive a 5 year rent guarantee, to give them added peace of mind about rent levels. This guarantee is not something the Council would be able to offer.

Rent

Neighbourhoods

Section 9 – Improving your neighbourhood
Environmental improvements, community caretaking and the effective tackling of nuisance are vital elements if neighbourhoods are to be places where tenants are proud to live. If transfer goes ahead, RBH would continue to work with tenants to deliver its successful environmental improvement programme, to create a new Neighbourhood Quality Standard to ensure estates are well maintained and to further develop the anti-social behaviour response service.

Better Services

Section 10 – Improving your services
RBH would continue to review its standards annually and involve tenants in that process, to provide the best service for its customers. RBH would give support to those tenants who might need assistance to make their tenancy successful and provide help, where needed, through its Money Matters team. If transfer goes ahead, RBH would look to set up a permanent facility for training as many of its tenants and young people as possible.

Communities

Section 11 – Strengthening your communities
RBH recognises that no 'one size fits all' approach would meet the needs of the different communities across the borough. RBH would be committed to a neighbourhood investment approach. If transfer goes ahead, the ability of the new Mutual RBH to borrow, together with available grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency, would be used to deliver much needed new homes.
Investment in new and existing homes would be used to boost apprenticeships and training opportunities. RBH would work with tenants to identify the key issues affecting each neighbourhood and put local action plans in place to address them.

Services for all

Section 12 – Meeting everyone's needs
RBH would be able to invest more in improving services for its tenants, many of whom have differing needs. Transfer would not only mean that older people's accommodation would be improved and new homes developed but the range of services available to older tenants and their families would be enhanced. RBH would continue to offer an accessible service to tenants from black and ethnic minority backgrounds. It would also continue to promote good citizenship amongst children and young people across the borough and the new Mutual RBH would have a junior membership scheme for under-18s.

Next steps

Section 13 – The next steps
The Council wants to give tenants the opportunity to comment on the Offer Document. The Council will consider any comments it receives by the date given in the letter and free-to-post reply card which is in this pack. The Council will send out another letter after it has considered tenants' comments. This will tell tenants if there are any significant changes to the proposal as a result of their comments and advise whether the Council has decided to proceed to a ballot.

Tenancy Agreement

Section 14: Your tenancy agreement
Tenants' key rights and entitlements are covered in the new tenancy agreement that RBH would issue. Unlike now (under the Council) these key rights and entitlements would only be able to be changed with a tenant's individual written consent except for rent and other charges. The agreement covers details of rent, RBH's obligations, tenants' obligations, rights and grounds for possession.

Glossary

Section 15: Explanation of terms
A plain language guide to terms and phrases relating to the transfer proposal that you may find helpful.

Contacts

Section 16: Key Contacts
Contact details for organisations that can give tenants more information about the transfer. This includes the Independent Tenants' Advisor, PS Consultants.

This transfer proposal: 10 things you need to know

Your formal Offer Document contains a lot of information about transfer. Here are the top 10 highlights.

1. Improvements to your home

If transfer goes ahead, RBH would have a budget of £169 million over the first five years for investment in homes and estates. As things stand the Council does not have the money available when it is required, so without transfer homes could begin to fall into disrepair.

See page 14 of the Offer Document

2. Long-term investment

If transfer goes ahead, tenants and employees would be able to become members of the new Mutual RBH. It would have enough resources to keep homes up to standard for the next 30 years.

See page 35 of the Offer Document

3. A new Mutual RBH

Building on the rich co-operative heritage of the borough the unique new Mutual RBH would bring together tenants and employees as members with a shared interest in delivering excellent services and local approaches to improving services and neighbourhoods. Tenants would have a real say in determining strategy and policies, built in for the long term. This would help to ensure that RBH remained a mutual into the future with a local focus firmly on the borough.

See page 18 of the Offer Document

4. Key Improvements for your homes and service

RBH would be committed to making the improvements to homes and service you have said you want to see.

The key improvements would include

- Double glazing and new windows – 6,900 homes
- New external doors – 6,000 homes
- New and upgraded kitchens - 2,200 homes
- New and upgraded bathrooms – 2,400 homes
- Showers where bathrooms are replaced
- Improved energy efficiency including new boilers and radiators – 2,200 homes
- Improved security including new alarms
- Disabled adaptations including handrails
- Environmental improvements including paths, steps and secure fencing – 6,500 homes

See page 35 of the Offer Document

5. Rents – more for your money

Tenants' rents would continue to be charged on the same basis as now and you would pay similar rents to what the Council would charge. In short you would get more value for your money than if your home remains with the Council.

See page 53 of the Offer Document

6. Improving your estates

Environmental improvements including paths, steps and secure fencing to 6,500 homes.

See pages 39 and 59 of the Offer Document

7. Housing Benefit entitlement continues

Your entitlement to claim Housing Benefit would not be affected by transfer and the Council would continue to provide this service.

See page 57 of the Offer Document



8. Protecting your rights

Tenants' key tenancy rights would be protected in a new tenancy agreement with RBH including:

- The right to buy your home (through the preserved right to buy)
- The right to pass your home on after your death (succession)
- The right to sub-let your home, or take in lodgers
- The right to carry out improvements and receive compensation

The Government's proposals to make some tenancies fixed term would not apply to your tenancy.

See pages 46 and 81 of the Offer Document

9. Tenant involvement

Tenants would be at the heart of decision making in the new Mutual RBH. The Representative Body made up of 31 members, including tenants, employees and appointments from partner agencies, would shape the future strategy and plans for the new organisation. It would monitor the delivery of services, plan future services and be able to appoint and remove the majority of the new Mutual's Board members.

RBH would widen involvement and work for everyone tailoring services to the needs of tenants and taking into account age, ethnicity and disability.

See pages 26 and 30 of the Offer Document

10. Making sure promises are kept

The Council would have a legally binding contract with RBH to make sure that promises made in the Offer Document are kept.

See page 16 of the Offer Document



If you want further information:

Call the Council's transfer team on

0800 916 6669

(free from landlines) or

0300 303 8153

(at local rates from a mobile) or email

housing.futures@rochdale.gov.uk

or call

PS Consultants,

your independent tenants' advisor, on freephone

0800 0192 262

or text

07794 899473

or email **enquiries@psconsultants.org.uk**

for free confidential information and advice.

If you would like this Easy Guide in large print, on audio tape/CD or in Braille, or would like a summary of the information in a different language call the Council information lines on 0800 916 6669 (free from land lines) 0300 303 8153 (at local call rates from a mobile).

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