

# YOUR HOME



# YOUR CHOICE

Information about the future of your home

# Tenants to vote on housing future

Over the past months, the Council, along with tenant representatives, has been looking at the options for making sure that its homes continue to receive the investment needed to keep them up to a decent standard in the future.

At the moment, the Council is your landlord and Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH) manages the homes on its behalf.

The Council is now looking at transferring the ownership of homes to RBH in order to ensure that there is enough money available to spend when it is needed on improving and maintaining homes and at the same time ensure tenants have a real say in how homes are managed in the future.

The transfer could only go ahead if tenants say they are in favour of the proposal following a detailed consultation and subject to agreement from the Government. This newsletter is the beginning of the consultation.

Leader of the Council, Councillor Colin Lambert said: "The Council wants what's best for tenants and while we are proud of what we and RBH have achieved, we want to make sure tenants have modern, safe, affordable homes for generations to come.

"We have looked at the options open to us and we believe that transfer is the way forward but it will be for tenants to decide."

He added: "We also see this as an opportunity to create something very



special for this borough by making RBH an organisation that will be owned and run by tenants and employees alike. This would be a mutual housing company run by, and accountable to, local people, for local people and local communities."

Over the coming months the Council will be consulting with tenants and explaining the detail of the transfer proposal before asking tenants to vote on whether it should go ahead.

**A note of caution:** For the Council to be able to proceed to undertake the ballot, the Government will need to agree to write-off a large portion of the Council's historic housing debt.

The Council is currently in discussion with the Government and is seeking to reach agreement for this very important project to go forward.

## What is a mutual organisation?

Rochdale is most famous as the birthplace of the co-operative movement and it is with our rich heritage in mind that we want to create a housing organisation based on similar principles - a not-for profit organisation run by local people.

As RBH Chief Executive, Gareth Swarbrick, explains, the link to the past could be the key to our future.

"If transfer goes ahead and RBH was to become the new landlord we want to make it a mutual organisation, governed along similar lines to the co-operative movement. We see it becoming a company which is jointly owned by tenants and employees for the mutual benefit of the communities we serve.

"That means that tenants and employees could become members of the organisation and be at the heart of everything we do. With a shared vision, I believe we could deliver housing services in a new and pioneering way."

**TRANSFER – TENANTS WILL DECIDE THE FUTURE**

# Our place in history

**The Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers was a group of 28 weavers and other artisans in Rochdale and was formed in 1844.**

These tradesmen decided to band together to open their own store, selling food items they could not otherwise afford. They designed the now famous Rochdale principles, and over a period of four months struggled to pool together £1 per person for a total of £28 of capital.

On 21st December 1844, they opened their store with a very meagre selection of butter, sugar, flour, oatmeal and a few candles. Within three months, they expanded their selection to include tea and tobacco, and they were soon known for providing high quality goods. Ten years later, the British Co-operative Movement had grown to nearly 1,000 co-operatives.



# Tenants shaping the future

**Over the last 18 months, Councillors, members of Rochdale Boroughwide Housing's Board and tenant representatives have been exploring all the options available for the future ownership and management of the Council's housing stock.**

Council tenants from across the Borough gathered at the Rochdale Borough Tenants Conference, held at Richmond Hall on Saturday 9th April, for the opportunity to shape the services that they will receive in the future.

All Council tenants were invited to the event, held to give them an insight into the options that the Council has been considering.

During the day, tenants had the opportunity to have their say, collectively and individually, in a

workshop which explored tenants' views on four key areas of service they receive; 'Your Home', 'Living and Working', 'Neighbourhoods' and 'Getting Involved'.

Chair of the Tenants' Panel, Lynne Brosnan, admits that helping to develop the transfer proposal is hard work but very worthwhile.

She said: "We believe that tenants should be at the heart of the Council's housing plans for the future.



"These are our homes and we want to make sure that good quality affordable homes are available now and for future generations. Everyone on the Panel has made a commitment to work together to shape the plans. We have looked at all aspects of the housing service and have put forward our suggestions for how homes, services and estates can be run in the future."

# Transfer worked for me

**Council homes in Tameside in Greater Manchester transferred to New Charter Housing Trust over 10 years ago. Great grandmother Vera Anderton, 61, has lived at her flat in Assheton House, Ashton for the past 20 years.**

Although she originally voted “no” to transfer, she hasn’t looked back since and is delighted with the improvements made to her home.

She said: “I originally voted no to transfer about 10 years ago as I thought nothing was going to be done, but I have been very pleasantly surprised and haven’t stopped apologising since!

“I didn’t think we’d benefit from the investment programme and I worried things would only get worse.

“At the time, we were putting up with a scruffy entrance way, a leaking roof and break-ins and the situation was so bad you couldn’t invite people back to your home.

“But the transformation has been amazing since transfer. New Charter Housing put cladding on the outside walls, fitted a new roof and have

enclosed the balconies to protect them from burglaries.

“The foyer has been improved with flagstones and it’s more like a lounge area now with brand new carpets. I’ve also had my kitchen and bathroom done and new windows installed – I feel a lot safer now.




“If I had the opportunity to vote again I’d definitely vote yes as everything’s improved from the furnishings right down to tenant consultation – we’re much better informed about things since transfer.”

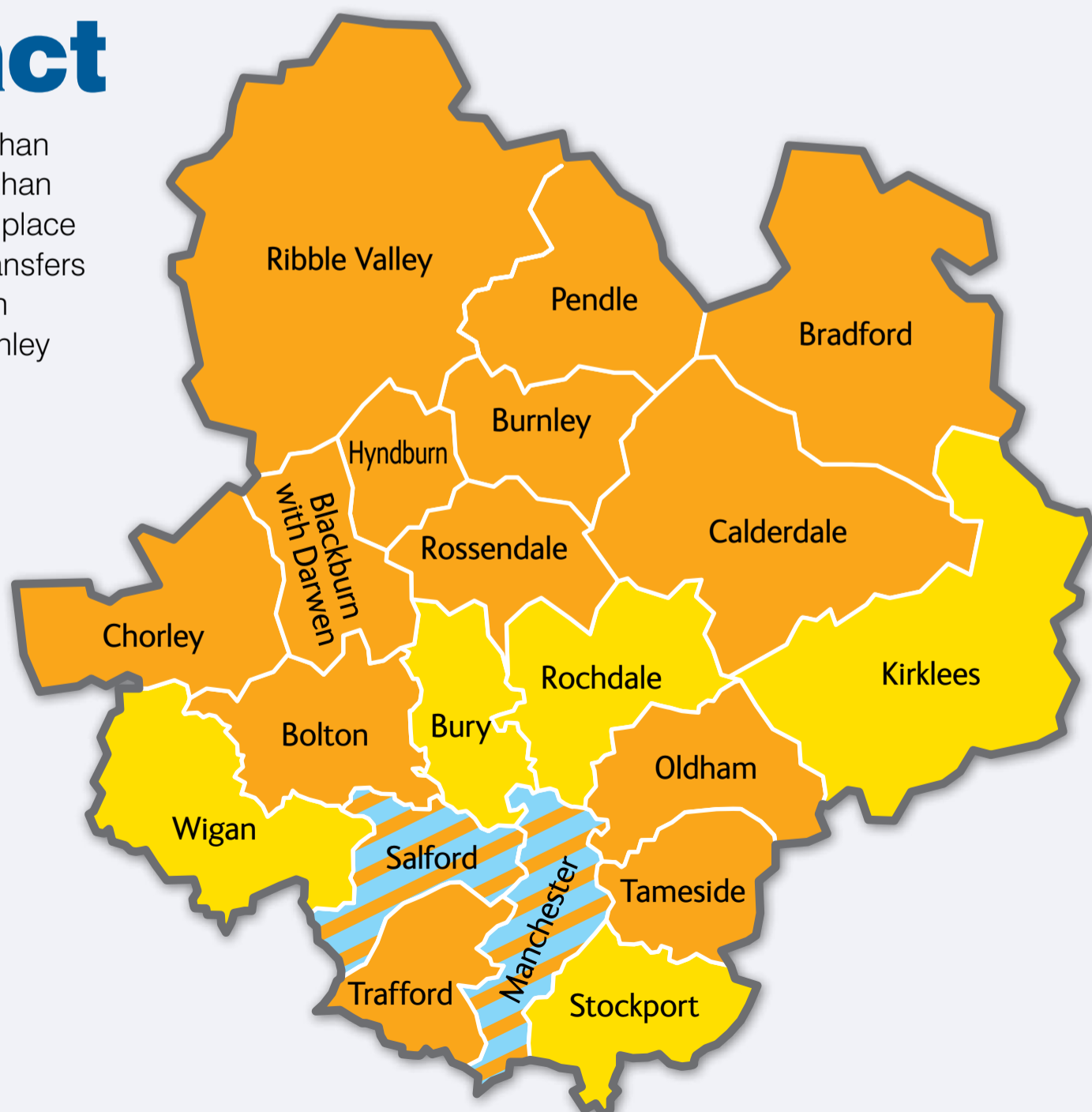


New Charter tenant Vera Anderton

## Transfer fact

More than 300 transfers, involving more than one million homes and bringing in more than £14 billion of new investment have taken place since the first transfer in 1988. Several transfers have taken place locally including ones in Oldham, Trafford, Bolton, Blackburn, Burnley and parts of Manchester.

-  Local authorities which have transferred homes to new local housing associations.
-  In Salford and Manchester, there is a mixed solution of Arm’s Length Management Organisations like Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH), and former council homes which have transferred to housing associations.
-  Local authorities whose homes are managed by Arm’s Length Management Organisations like RBH at the moment.



# ASK Nicola



If you have a transfer question, please write to Nicola at **The Housing Transfer Project Office, PO Box 423, Municipal Offices, Smith Street, Rochdale OL16 1WB.** or email: [housing.futures@rochdale.gov.uk](mailto:housing.futures@rochdale.gov.uk)

## **What would happen to rents?**

The Government has a policy on rents which limits rent increases and which Councils and Registered Providers of social housing (including housing mutuals), must comply with. So regardless of whether the houses remain owned by the Council or transfer to RBH rents will not be significantly different.

## **Would I still be able to get Housing Benefit?**

Yes. Housing Benefit entitlement would not be affected by the transfer. The service would continue to be operated by the Council.

## **Would I get improved energy efficiency in my home?**

The detailed investment proposals are still being worked on but the recent tenants' survey and also the Tenants' Panel, which has been working with the Council, both have said that reducing energy costs should be a priority.

## **Would I still be able to buy my home?**

Yes, if you can buy your home now with the Council, you would be able to buy your home under what is called the Preserved Right to Buy scheme. You would take your discount entitlement with you from the Council to the new organisation. The discount entitlement would continue to grow up to the same limit as with the Council.

## **How will the vote work?**

Every secure and introductory tenant will get a vote in the transfer ballot. The vote will be run by an independent balloting organisation. The vote will be a secret ballot, so neither the Council, RBH or your neighbours will know how you voted.

## **Would I have to move home because of transfer?**

No, you would not. Only the ownership of the homes would transfer.

**If you have any questions you can ring your Independent Tenants' Advisor PS Consultants on the ITA advice line on 0800 0192 262 or text 07794 899473 or email [enquiries@psconsultants.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@psconsultants.org.uk)**

# Transfer home visits

## **As part of the consultation, we will be visiting you at your home to talk about transfer.**

In the coming weeks, you should receive a home visit from an RBH employee who will be able to explain the proposal in more detail and answer any questions you might have.

We want to hear what you think about the proposal and also want you to tell us what matters to you for the future of your home.

Please spare a few minutes to 'talk transfer' when you receive your home visit.

Remember, all RBH employees will carry identification, please ask to see it.

If you would like this newsletter 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).

# THE CHECK FACTS

**We recognise that people will have different views about a housing transfer proposal. During the consultation, it is possible that people who are opposed to transfer may put out their own literature about transfer.**

While we respect everyone's right to their own opinion, the Council has a legal duty to ensure its tenants have the facts about the proposal. If any literature is sent out which contains inaccuracies or misinformation, we will correct them.

If you receive any literature that is not from us or your Independent Tenants' Advisor PS Consultants, please check the facts for yourself.

Remember, all the information we send you has to undergo a rigorous set of checks by the Government, specialist lawyers and your Independent Tenants' Advisor.

The Tenant Services Authority (the Government agency responsible for registration and regulation of Registered Providers) checks all information relating to compliance with its registration and regulatory requirements.

Literature from other groups and individuals does not have to undergo any such checks.

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