

# YOUR HOME



# YOUR CHOICE

## Information about the future of your home

# “Giving tenants the standards they want to see”

a message from the Leader of the Council,  
Councillor Colin William Lambert.



“Over the years, we have always worked hard to repair and improve your homes and provide good quality services. That’s why, in 2002, we set up an Arms Length Management Organisation, known as Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH), to manage the housing service.

“RBH has had nine successful years and has always performed well and received high satisfaction ratings from tenants.

“However, the extra funding which the Council received for RBH came to an end some time ago and the Council has had to start thinking about how it maintains and improves the quality of our homes in the future.

“The Council does not have the money available when it is required to meet the standards that tenants are telling us they want to see. In fact, without stock transfer,

homes are likely to become non-decent again within the next five years, If transfer goes ahead and RBH was to become your new landlord, the transfer would make available money at the time it is needed to make sure that homes could be kept at a high standard for generations to come – something the Council cannot guarantee.

With Rochdale being at the heart of the cooperative movement, the Council and RBH want to build on the borough’s rich legacy and create something quite unique. If transfer goes ahead, RBH would become a truly mutual housing organisation – owned together by tenants and employees.

“However, it can only go ahead if tenants vote in favour of the proposal later in the year. I ask that you read all the material we send you in the coming months so that you can make an informed choice when the time comes to have your say.”

## What transfer would deliver – double glazing a priority

Over the last nine years improvements have been carried out to more than 11,000 homes to ensure Rochdale Borough Council’s housing meets the Government’s Decent Homes Standard.

The Council’s homes reached the Decent Homes Standard in March 2006, four years ahead of the Government’s deadline. RBH currently maintains 98% of homes to the Decent Homes Standard.

If transfer goes ahead, RBH will start a programme of works that will see £169 million invested over the first five years of a 30 year programme, allowing it to undertake work (where necessary) to make properties warm, safe and secure including:

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

Through this work, and other energy saving services which RBH aims to develop over a period of time to other homes in the borough, will save a significant percentage of tenants’ energy bills.

## Transfer on tour

Look out for the Transfer Roadshow this summer as it tours the whole of the borough as part of the stock transfer consultation.

The transfer team will be on board to meet tenants to answer any questions you may have about the proposal.



There will be examples of double glazed units, front and back doors as well as kitchen and bathroom fittings which the Mutual RBH will be putting in homes that need them if transfer goes ahead.

Everyone is welcome - we will be letting you know when the Roadshow will be in your area.

## Dear Tenant,

The Board of Rochdale Boroughwide Housing is proud of both the quality of service provided and the investment in homes and communities that it has delivered over the past nine years.

We are not complacent, however. We know that we need to develop our services to better meet your requirements and to make them more efficient. We know that we need to do more to meet local housing need. We know that we need to invest not just in physical improvements to homes and estates but also in services that assist tenants into work, reduce fuel bills, support older and vulnerable tenants and improve access to financial services and advice.

To do this we will need to find new and creative ways of working and to work better and smarter with the Council and a range of other partners.

More importantly though we will need the input of tenants and our front line employees in shaping our services of the future – better using the knowledge of those who receive our services and those who deliver them on the ground by increasing scrutiny at all levels.

That is why we are absolutely committed to this transfer proposal and the creation of the new mutual RBH, genuinely community owned and with services shaped by tenants and employees together.



Noel Chambers – Chair



Phil Renshaw – Vice Chair

# The mutual model explained

**If transfer takes place, RBH will become a not-for-profit independent social landlord. The aim then is that within a maximum of 15 months following the proposed transfer, RBH would become a mutual housing organisation owned by its tenants and employees.**

As a mutual housing organisation, RBH would still be a not-for-profit independent social landlord registered with, and regulated by, the Tenant Services Authority.

Becoming a mutual housing organisation means that RBH would actively involve tenants and employees in decision-making, working together to improve services and make things happen for your homes and communities.

Only tenants and employees would be able to become members of the new mutual and thereby play a significant part in the development of policies and reviewing their implementation.

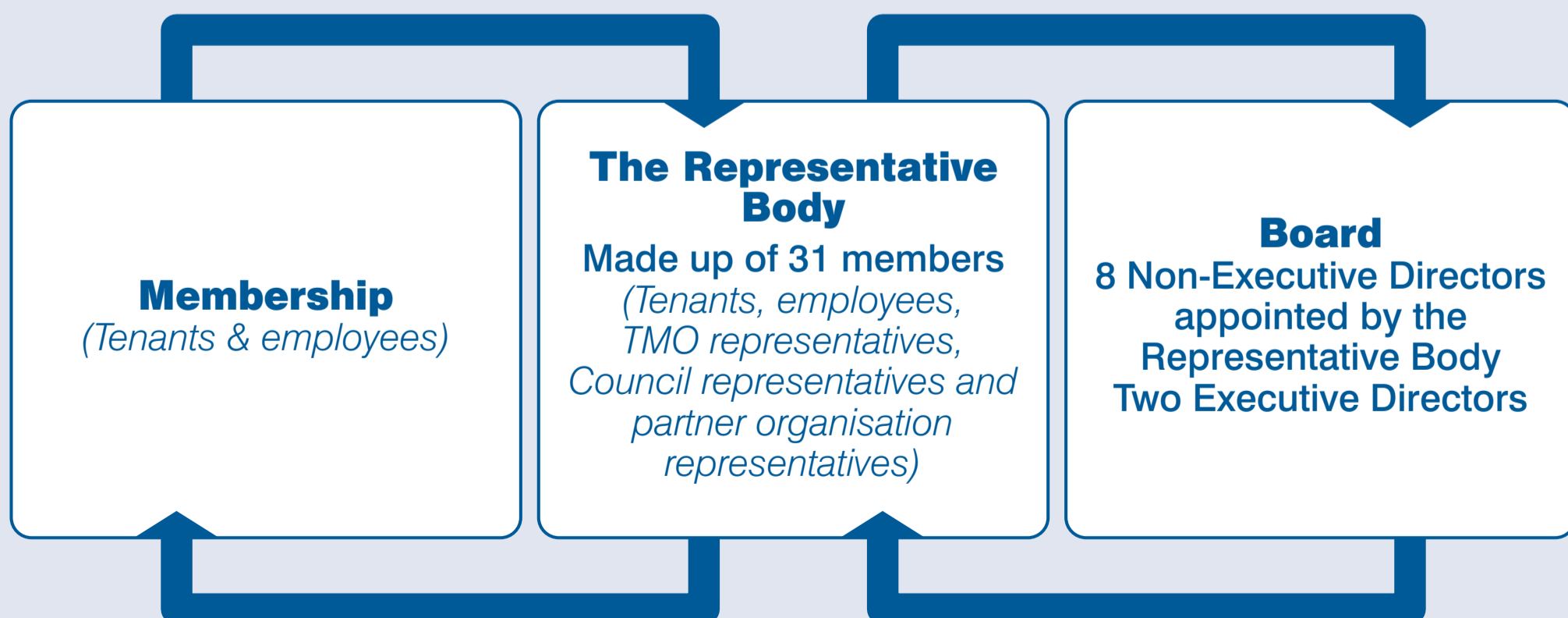
Under the new mutual, there would also be a Representative Body for the community, made up of tenant and employee members plus representatives from partner organisations such as the Council. On this key part of the new mutual's set-up tenants would have a majority of the places (see diagram)

The Representative Body's key roles would be to shape the future strategy and plans of the new mutual, monitor the delivery of current services, plan future services and appoint and remove the majority of the new mutual's Board members.

It would play an important role in the 'thinking' of the new mutual. It would represent and reflect the views of the wider community.

It would work with, and at times challenge, the Board of the new mutual in its delivery of services to tenants.

## The Mutual Rochdale Boroughwide Housing



**COUNCIL INFORMATION LINE 0800 916 6669** (free from land lines)

# Rents – a recap

Several years ago the Government introduced a rent restructuring policy which is designed to create a fairer rent system.

Your rent is currently set by the Council using this system. If transfer goes ahead, RBH would have to continue to set rents for transferring tenants using the same system and as a result, your rents will rise in the same way as the Council plans to increase them.

So you can rest assured that rents would remain the same or very similar to what the Council would charge as they would still be subject to the same Government guidance the Council has to follow.



**TRANSFER FACT**  
Rents would be the same or very similar to what the council would charge.

# Rights and entitlements would be protected

Tenants would have their key rights and entitlements protected if the Council's homes are transferred to RBH as the new landlord.

Tenants, who can buy their home now with the Council, would still be able to buy their home from RBH after transfer under the Preserved Right to Buy scheme. In addition, your years as a Council tenant would still count towards a discount with RBH.

Tenants have been asking would they still be able to pass on their home when they die "the right of succession" – this right would be protected if transfer goes ahead. In addition, you would have an added benefit. If you received your tenancy on the death of a relative, you would still have the right to pass on your tenancy when you die. You do not have this right with the Council.

And do not forget, your entitlement to claim Housing Benefit would not be affected as a result of a stock transfer.

Here we compare the difference between the rights with transfer and those you currently have now:

Your rights with	 ROCHDALE COUNCIL	 RBH Rochdale Boroughwide Housing
The Right to Buy (this would be known as the Preserved Right to Buy)	✓	✓
The Right to pass on your tenancy when you die (succession)	✓	✓
The Right to be given information about the management of your home	✓	✓
The Right to be consulted about housing management	✓	✓
The Right to have repairs carried out within set timescales	✓	✓
The Right to transfer or exchange your home	✓	✓
The Right to make improvements and in some circumstances receive compensation for them	✓	✓
The Right to live in your home without the threat of being evicted without good cause (security of tenure)	✓	✓
The Right to sub-let part of your home with approval and to take in lodgers	✓	✓
The Right to complain	✓	✓
The Right to Manage (set up a tenant management organisation)	✓	*

\* RBH would work with tenants' groups wishing to pursue the 'right to manage' type arrangements.

**And remember, the new RBH could only change your tenancy agreement with your written consent (except for the amount of your rent and other charges you pay).**

# How would the transfer work?

- At the moment the Council is your landlord and RBH manages your homes on the Council's behalf.
- We are proposing that RBH becomes a not-for-profit independent social landlord, regulated by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA).
- This new RBH would both own and manage the homes.
- Transfer would mean around £169 million would be invested in homes and estates in the first five years and around £685 million invested over the next 30 years. This would mean homes could be kept at a standard higher than the Council could achieve.
- You will receive lots of information about the proposal from us in the coming months and all the details will also be set out in full in a formal offer document, which will be sent to tenants later this year.
- You will then be asked to vote on whether transfer should go ahead in a confidential ballot.
- Transfer can only go ahead, if the majority of tenants who vote in the ballot, vote in favour.

**TRANSFER FACT**  
You would not have to move home because of transfer.

# 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)

## Would tenants have to pay extra charges for the improvements?

No. There would not be any extra charge for the improvements carried out to tenants' homes.

## I know where I stand with the Council, what guarantees are there that the new mutual RBH would keep its promises?

There would be a number of safeguards in place, if transfer goes ahead. Firstly, all the promises made will be featured in the formal offer document that tenants will receive and will be legally enforceable. The Council would have a contract with RBH to ensure it keeps its word and RBH will be required to report its performance to the Council on the promises made on a regular basis. Secondly, the Tenant Services Authority, the Government's social housing regulator, would monitor RBH to ensure performance standards are met and that promises are delivered and they would ensure that RBH delivered on its word to tenants. Finally, and most importantly, tenants and staff could become members of the new mutual and help steer decision making. When the new mutual is created, there would also be a Representative Body

for the community, made up of tenants, employees and other key partners including the Council.

## It feels like 'better the devil you know' to me, why should I vote for this change?

RBH has achieved a great deal over the last nine years and is well known and liked by tenants. However, the additional funding the Council secured when RBH was established has run out, so it is time to look at what can be done in order to provide tenants with the standard they want to see now and in the years to come.

Transferring the homes to RBH would ensure that the £685 million needed over the next 30 years to improve and maintain tenants' homes and estates, and housing services is available when it is needed, while keeping rents similar to what the Council would have charged. You would also continue to see the same familiar faces from RBH that you know and trust.

## It all seems too good to be true, what's the catch?

You could say that the only difficulty is that transfer, and the £685 million investment it would bring over the next 30 years, can only go ahead if tenants

## TRANSFER FACT

Safeguards would be in place to ensure promises were kept.

vote in favour of it in the ballot. Transfer is not a foregone conclusion. That's why it is important that tenants use their vote to have their say on whether transfer goes ahead in the ballot.

## Would Council homes be privatised?

No. RBH would become a charity and run on a not-for-profit basis with any surplus cash being pumped back into repairs and improvements and delivering the service. It is not privatisation, far from it. There would be no dividends paid out.

**A note of caution:** For the Council to be able to proceed to undertake the ballot, it requires clearance from the Housing Minister.

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

## Independent advice

PS Consultants have been appointed as the Independent Tenants Advisor for the transfer consultation in Rochdale Borough.

PS Consultants were chosen by the Rochdale Borough Tenants Panel and are independent of the Council and Rochdale Boroughwide Housing.

Tenants and leaseholders can contact PS Consultants for free, impartial and confidential information and advice on the transfer proposal.

Call the ITA advice line on 0800 0192 262 or text 07794 899473 or email [enquiries@psconsultants.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@psconsultants.org.uk)



## Council's information lines

**0800 916 6669**

(free from land lines)

or

**0300 303 8153**

(at local call rates from a mobile)

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).

# TRANSFER – TENANTS WILL DECIDE THE FUTURE