

REPORT TO COUNCIL

REPORT OF: Director of Tenancy Services

REPORT NO.: TSE12

DATE: 12 October 2006

TITLE:	LARGE SCALE VOLUNTARY TRANSFER HOUSING ACT 1985 - SCHEDULE 3A STAGE 1 - CONSULTATION
FORWARD PLAN ITEM:	Yes
DATE WHEN FIRST APPEARED IN FORWARD PLAN:	16 November 2005
KEY DECISION OR POLICY FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL:	Policy Framework Proposal

COUNCIL AIMS/PORTFOLIO HOLDER NAME AND DESIGNATION:	Organisational Development & Housing Services - Councillor F Cartwright Resources & Assets Councillor T Bryant	
CORPORATE PRIORITY:	Priority A - Affordable Housing Priority B - Housing Management	
CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS:	None	
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT IMPLICATIONS:	This report is available via the Local Democracy link on the Council's website www.southkesteven.gov.uk	
INITIAL EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT	Carried out and appended to report? Not Applicable	Full impact assessment required? No
BACKGROUND PAPERS:	Housing Stock Options Appraisal report by EBWNL - May 2005 Report DRS24 - 5 January 2006 Report LSVTPM01 - 25 May 2006 Report CHFR6 - 12 June 2006 Report TSE9 - 7 September 2006	

1. INTRODUCTION

At its meeting on 26th May 2005 the Council considered the report from the Stock Options Appraisal Commission on the options for the housing stock. The Council resolved in minute 30 to support the proposal to consult tenants in respect of a large scale voluntary transfer of the Housing Stock.

Prior to commencement of formal consultation with stakeholders, it was necessary to promote the formation of South Lincolnshire Homes Limited (as the new landlord) and for South Lincolnshire Homes Limited to adopt a number of key policies. At its meeting on 20th July 2006 the Council considered the indicative valuation of the Council's Housing Stock and the draft text of the Formal (Stage 1) Consultation Document and resolved (minute 51) to proceed with consultation of the Council's tenants and leaseholders.

The proposed transfer of council housing to South Lincolnshire Homes Limited has been the subject of wide ranging consultation with council housing tenants and leaseholders. The purpose of the consultation has been threefold:-

To make tenants and leaseholders aware of the proposed transfer and provide opportunity to voice concerns, opinions and queries.

To gauge an expressed preference of tenants and leaseholders so that the Council can decide to go ahead and formally ballot tenants.

To establish if there are terms of the proposal or offer document which should and can be amended either to clarify the proposal or make the proposal more acceptable.

1.3.4 The Government initially stated that it would announce the councils included in the 2006 Transfers programme during September. That announcement had not been made at the time of drafting this report but it is anticipated imminently. It is anticipated that South Kesteven District Council will obtain a place on the programme and an update will be given at the meeting.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the joint Working Group meeting it is recommended to the Council that:-

2.1 the responses of tenants and leaseholders (as set out in this report) be noted.

2.2 a formal Stage 2 letter be issued to the Council's secure tenants confirming:

- the terms of the Council's offer as set out in the formal (Stage 1) consultation document with the addition of the text shown in Section 4 below

- Tenants' right to communicate objections to the Council's proposals to the Secretary of State within 28 days from the Stage 2 Letter.
- the ability of the Secretary of State to withhold consent if a majority of affected tenants do not wish the transfer to proceed.

2.3 Electoral Reform Services Limited be instructed to carry out a formal ballot of tenants in respect of a transfer to South Lincolnshire Homes.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

3.1 The purpose of this report is:

- to describe the consultation process undertaken and advise Members of responses;
- to consider potential amendments to the offer; and
- following the joint meeting of the LSVT Working Group and the Offer Review Group, to recommend future action including moving forward to the formal ballot.

3.2 Under the provisions of Schedule 3A of the Housing Act 1985, the Council is required to consider representations made during the Stage 1 consultation and whether any changes should be made to the offer. The Council is also being asked to proceed to the formal Stage 2 of the Consultation process and to ballot the Council's secure tenants

3.3 Consultation

Written Responses

The formal consultation or Stage 1 Offer document contained a tear off sheet which allowed tenants to express their view and express a preference for or against the proposed transfer. The Stage 1 offer document was posted on 21st August 2006 and tenants were allowed a period of over 4 weeks (ending on 25th September) to provide comments.

The table below sets out the preferences of tenants as recorded in the tear off slips.

The views of the tenants ordered by "For", "Against", "Not Sure" are reproduced anonymously in Appendix 1.

For	Against	Not Sure
66	59	17

A formal consultation document was also provided to the Council's Right to Buy leaseholders. This also contained a tear off sheet which allowed leaseholders to express their view and express a preference for or against the proposed transfer. The Stage 1 offer document was posted to leaseholders on 22nd August 2006 and leaseholders were also allowed until 25th September to provide comments.

The table below sets out the preferences of leaseholders as recorded in the tear off slips.

The views of the leaseholder are reproduced anonymously in Appendix 2.

For	Against	Not Sure
0	1	0

Independent Tenants' Advisor

Libra Housing Advisory Services, the Tenants' Independent Advisors, who were appointed by the Tenants' Working Group, have operated a freephone helpline and email advice service throughout the consultation period. 34 enquiries have been received by Libra.

A full report of Libra Housing Advisory Services on the Stage 1 process is attached at Appendix 3.

Leaseholders

As set out above, all of the Council's RTB leaseholders have been written to and Appendix 2 sets out the results.

Door step visits

From the 29th August staff from the Council's Tenancy Services Department started a programme of visiting all Council tenants' homes within the District.

A total of 4989 doorstep consultation forms were completed where access was gained (82.5% of the 6081 properties). Where access could not be gained a card was left giving the tenant the opportunity to arrange a return visit or to ask any questions on the telephone helpline.

Tenants were not asked their voting intentions on the doorstep but visiting staff were asked to gauge the tenant's reaction and assess their attitude to transfer following their doorstep visit. The table below sets out the perceived attitude of tenants to transfer.

For	Against	Not Sure
1486	781	2722

3.4 **Other Initiatives**

A 15-minute DVD has been produced and widely distributed to tenants. Tenants wishing to have a video rather than a DVD have received one as a replacement.

The Council has operated a Freephone telephone helpline and email advice service throughout the consultation. The Council's helpline has received 112 Offer related calls, mostly concerning arrangements for visits or requests for videos but several asking questions on specific topics and these have all been answered. 4 emails were also received all with questions and these were answered.

All the above information on responses to the Offer was made available to Members at the joint meeting of the LSVT Working Group and the Offer Review Group held on 29th September 2006. Members of the joint Working Group endorse the recommendations contained in Section 2 of this report.

4. **SUGGESTED CHANGES TO THE OFFER TO BE PUT IN THE STAGE 2 NOTICE**

Although, as stated in Section 7 below, there is no requirement to change the Offer, it has been pointed out by the Council's Legal Advisors, Trowers & Hamlins that mention needs to be made in the Stage 2 letter about the 5 year rent increase guarantee not having been drafted into the proposed tenancy Agreement. This will require a paragraph in the Stage 2 letter as follows;
 "At a special meeting on 12th October 2006 the full Council met to read and consider all of these comments. Following this the Council decided that the clauses relating to the protection of your rent contained within the form of tenancy agreement should be strengthened. This does not change the assurances given about rents in Section 5 of the Consultation Document, and I can confirm that your rent would be the same if you stayed with the Council or transferred. The draft tenancy agreement is included in Section 12 of the Consultation Document. The effect of this change is that the tenancy agreement will have wording added to it at Condition 5(b) to incorporate the rent guarantee set out on page 29 of the Consultation Document. This will limit annual rent increases in the first 5 years after transfer to the rate of inflation plus 0.5% plus £2.17 a week until target rent is reached. In the event that target rent is reached before the end of the five year guarantee period, South Lincolnshire Homes would be subject to the Government's rent guidance which states that annual rent increases should be no more than inflation plus 0.5%."

In addition, Members of the Joint Working Group agreed, subject to Agreement from South Lincolnshire Homes Shadow Board, that the final sentence of paragraph 4k of the proposed Tenancy Agreement should be removed. The Shadow Board has since agreed to its removal.

As a result it is suggested that an additional paragraph be added to the Stage 2 Notice as follows;

"The Council also reached agreement with South Lincolnshire Homes that the final sentence in clause 4k of the proposed South Lincolnshire Homes Tenancy Agreement which relates to succession (other than to spouse or civil partner) should be removed. This sentence stated "We may seek possession if, six months after your death, there has been no grant of probate or letters of administration." and it will no longer appear in the final version of South Lincolnshire Homes' transferring tenants' tenancy agreement. The effect of removing this sentence is to give additional protection to the person taking over the tenancy."

5. COMMENTS OF SECTION 151 OFFICER

The cost of the ballot will be met from the £1m provision previously agreed by Council to progress the outcome of the Stock Option Appraisal.

6. COMMENTS OF MONITORING OFFICER

Whilst there is no statutory obligation to proceed to the stage 2 consultation, it is acknowledged that the Tenant and Member Steering Group requested that this be done in any event. I cannot see that the Council has any other option but to proceed as recommended.

Electoral Reform Services Limited are the only organisation nationally with experience of conducting ballots in respect of stock transfer.

7. CONCLUSION/SUMMARY

Summary

The consultation process has been comprehensive. All tenants and leaseholders were sent the formal proposal documents and had the opportunity to return their written views (on a pre-paid form).

The Council can be confident that every reasonable opportunity has been given to tenants and leaseholders to express their views and fully understand the basis of the proposed transfer.

The preferences expressed in written responses are statistically close to those received on the doorstep visits. What cannot be confidentially predicted is how many tenants will vote in a postal ballot.

The comments that are listed in the Appendices have no indicative theme which would indicate, to the joint Working Group, any requirement to change the proposed offer as set out in the formal (Stage 1) consultation document other than with the inclusion in the Stage 2 Notice of the wording shown in Section 4 above.

Conclusion

The Council has now carried out detailed and meaningful consultation with the tenants and leaseholders in respect of large scale voluntary transfer to South Lincolnshire Homes.

It is now proposed that the Council instructs Electoral Reform Services Ltd (part of the Electoral Reform Society) to carry out a formal postal ballot of all tenants and that the offer to tenants and leaseholders be confirmed.

8. CONTACT OFFICER

Tony Campbell 01476 406501
t.campbell@southkesteven.gov.uk

Tenant responses

“In favour”

1. That there will be more money for repairs and refurbishment to all Council Housing.
2. I dislike how people moan to the Council about new kitchens and then get them installed. I'm still waiting 3 years on.
3. We like the points system for burglar alarms etc. We are in agreement of improving housing standards both inside outside properties.
4. When can I move?
5. The proposals for Sheltered Housing interested my husband and myself. We have living in Edmonton Close 9 years. Also views on anti-social behaviour.
6. Any repair/refit is carried out to the full.
7. We can be given rewards for looking after our home; garden etc and we pay full rent on time about time I can be rewarded for good behaviour. At last a driveway, I keep asking, cars keep being damaged. How many points do each household get and do we get more points for good behaviour. Gas fire & boiler checks will these continue? Staffing will they be Council workers, vetted contractors etc, and will they clean up after themselves etc, because this is my home some Council workers aren't aware of this.
8. No comment received.
9. I like the idea of having burglar alarms and better driveways & fencing. Also new bathrooms would be excellent. I would like more information on rent arrears (advise on current circumstances).
10. Congratulations on the booklet & video as I found it easy to understand. I would like to ask the following questions - My house was revamped 1976 so far electrics roof windows & doors replaced with good results. How long would it be (if a yes vote) before I could have my kitchen & bathroom modernised also the points system as I could do with security lighting and water butt, essential for a gardener or how long for a no vote?
11. I think the proposal is fair and just what the tenants need.
12. No comment received.
13. No comment received.
14. No comment received.
15. This presentation can't help but impress, it lists everything that is good! I would be interested in the views/objections of the people who are against the transfer. I did ask one of your officers and he said he had no access to this information at that time.
16. Like - no confusion about improvements. Like - strong anti-social agenda.
17. I like the extra money available for improvements.

18. I like the ideas about how improvements will work I think the points scheme is an excellent idea and it will really work and I hope that the anti-social behaviour will work.
19. As long as you carry out the proposed things that I have read about, that is ok. We certainly need ant-social behaviour sorted. We have spent thousands on our own home to improve it already because it's the only way to get it done.
20. No comment received.
21. No comment received.
22. You seem to have covered almost everything, we can find nothing to dislike and cannot think of anything more at this stage that can be improved upon.
23. No comment received.
24. You seem to have covered almost everything, we can find nothing to dislike and cannot think of anything more at this stage that can be improved upon. None, this information has been very well presented throughout and the dvd was very informative. Thanks to all concerned.
25. No comment received.
26. There will be more money for the places that need improvements. Some areas are in pretty bad ways. To be honest something good is sure to happen. On where the extra money will be spent in more detail and how this will effect secure and non-secure tenants in more detail.
27. No comment made.
28. Promise of new kitchens and bathrooms nothing has been done since they were built over 40 years ago. We are getting on in years and would like a bit of luxury.
29. The improvements of kitchens and bathrooms.
30. No comment made.
31. South Lincolnshire Homes has more money to carry out repairs and improvements.
32. After reading this book and watching the dvd. I believe that changing over to South Lincolnshire Homes would be a very good move. I am very impressed by what I have read and only hope the promises will be full filled.
33. No comment made.
34. I find that the board is made up of the following.6 from Grantham, 5 from Bourne, 2 with no address, 1 from Deeping and 1 from Stamford (who works in Dorset). I feel this is unfair as Stamford & Deeping will be out voted every time and will be the last to get any improvements.
35. No comment made.
36. I certainly like the fact that there will be money for home improvements, very badly needed. My kitchen is well over twenty years old and certainly needs updating badly.

37. In view of drug dealers and improvements to road safety, Uplands Drive. i.e. Speed Ramps and get rid of druggies, reduce noise levels, motorbikes.
38. Offers Tenants a lot of opportunity to become involved in the management of their homes and making choices.
39. Like the idea of the properties being brought up to date.
40. No comment made.
41. No comment made.
42. I feel this is the only way forward for the future. I think I would like there to be more properties for middle-aged people with health problems. (Depression) with gardens and not have to placed on OAP developments.
43. To make sure that the rent & council tax will not be beyond our means as pensioners we have only a set amount of money to live on. Better heating for our homes, electric is so expensive, storage heaters not very economical for pensioners.
44. No comment made.
45. No comment made.
46. I am in favour of Transfer because a Housing Association will have control of finances to spend the money received will be able to meet improvements in all areas and not have to send part of rent to Government, which they send to other Councils who are badly managed.
47. I like the fact that all rent paid will be used on Tenant's housing and home improvements be made.
48. Allocations should be dramatically overhauled so that the elderly on GOPD's should not suffer from anti-social behaviour relating to Druggies being foisted on them as neighbours. This is a cynical for of anti-social behaviour on the part of SKDC.
49. I hope allocations will be dealt with more care for example, not putting young drug addicts with the elderly so causing great distress and disturbance. Too many GOPD schemes are being used for this. Also dealing quicker with anti-social behaviour in these areas.
50. I like the whole concept and would like to see it into practice. Can we rely on the process? Or is it a lot of hot air? So much needs to be done in that's to update them. With money available - we hope for great things, which has not happened with SKDC.
51. I like the look of the home improvement plan for the individual. Money kept out of Government pot and concentrating on matters in our own district.
52. No comment made.
53. No comment made.
54. Improvement to properties being done earlier with the transfer. With bathroom being small would prefer both taken out and stand up shower installed in its place.
55. No comment made.
56. I like the idea of tenants being on the Board and being in control of their own money.

57. I like the proposal as it offers so much more than at the present time from the Council, plus we will benefit from so much with this transfer. Upgrading the kitchens and bathrooms in our homes, how long would it take for these to be upgraded and information on improvements we can have done with the point's scheme.

58. I have always been satisfied with the Council and have heard a bad report about Housing Assoc. If you can sell them so cheap to them why not to the tenants who have been in them so long?

59. Ref: Section 9C of Tenancy agreement. This is ok for normal refuse, but no arrangements first for yellow bag collection of incontinence items, pads etc and dressings, which currently are left for 1 week in our skips (I am sure the RDO's are not aware of the content of some black bags they are taking to the tip. This must be considered regarding section 10 health and safety A) care of surrounds, current contactor, Emlyn's is laughable (I spend money on my garden whilst able but my ability will not last forever) B) Kitchen improvements (i.e. timescale) and content.

60. I like the idea of points to choose certain things to have done to the house. I was surprised to find internal doors on the list surely they would be on a rolling replacement. Will be projected repairs be a continuation of the Councils or will they be reset to a new date!

61. All for a change, could at least improve repairs which are needed and don't get done when reported

62. I think the proposal of transfer is good. If they say what they say in the book.

63. I consider most of the promises are very good, but I wonder how they all be carried out, as each time one asks for any kind of help from SKDC they have no money. Will the houses be sold at a cheap rate, could tenants buy for the same rate. More attention to be given the conduct tenants gardens. Also cleanliness of houses by an inspection.

64. No comment made.

65. No Comment made.

66. The deciding factor for me is that all rents paid to SLH would be used for tenants housing not a percentage being handed to Government for use by other Councils.

Tenant responses

“Against”

1. If the Council were strict about the way Tenants treated their properties and gardens they wouldn't need extra money. I can't see a Housing Assoc doing any better.
2. Prefer things to stay as they are.
3. No comment made
4. I am not in favour of the proposal as I wish the houses to stay with the Council as they've have always looked after us. The Housing ass would put the rents up and it takes them a long time to do any repairs that need doing. So please don't do this as none of us want it.
5. At the age of 90 I would prefer to stay with the Council housing.
6. Housing Assoc has given my wife and me only BAD memories. In my opinion Housing Assoc are the worst possible way for the sheltered units to go. What does an Army Officer know of running a project like this? Nothing.
7. No Comment made.
8. I Think the Council do a great job and change isn't always a good thing. I', more than happy to stay with the Council and don't want any change.
9. Don't like any of it.
10. I don't like any of it.
11. No comment made.
12. We are totally against the transfer of our home from yourselves previously to moving to Deeping we were with a Housing Trust initially they were fantastic, they then became inefficient and totally indignant towards their tenants and rents increased rapidly and no money for repairs. We like South Kesteven District Council they are good. Keep it Rents? Home improvements? Services Charges?
13. No comment made
14. No comment made
15. I am content being a SKDC tenant. This Council has always responded to any repairs I have asked for, the staff have always been pleasant. I do not need stars for being a good tenant. When we sign the tenancy agreement it is to keep the house tidy and the garden neat.
16. The proposal you put forward in my opinion is unworkable. The fact of the matter 2 years down the line there will be exorbitant rent increases.
17. Your information in places contradicts itself. It is my opinion that this brochure is doing nothing more than trying to BRAINWASH tenants.
18. Sounds like a Gestapo No way I would vote for this.

19. Why not let the tenants buy their house at bargain price if they want too?
20. Cannot support what I consider to be the biggest financial scam in the areas history if this proposal goes through.
21. No comment made.
22. I believe that the Council houses have been built with the people's money and as the representative of the people of South Kesteven you should keep them for the people.
23. I have been a tenant for over 50 years and have been happy with SKDC as a Landlord I understand changes have to be made at times.
24. I prefer to remain directly under the local authority, my local Council.
25. It's best the devil you know than the devil you don't know. After sixty years in the same house. Thank you.
26. I don't like the idea of not being a SKDC tenant. I've always been a Council tenant and SKDC have always been there for repairs on time and other matters that have arisen. I prefer to stay as a SKDC tenant.
27. No comment made.
28. No comment made.
29. I am pleased with this as we are now.
30. No comment made.
31. With the Council we have got the security with the Council workers carrying out repairs etc. Would we have this security with the Housing Association with different contractors?
32. No comment made.
33. No comment made.
34. Secure tenancy changed to assured tenancy. Tenancy can be changed without notice. Will not feel secure with assured tenancy.
35. No comment made.
36. I disagree with the amount of money, which is being spent, on the build-up to the proposed transfer. If it is such a good idea why spend thousands of pounds on all this expensive printing etc? I would like to know the actual cost of the scheme so far. Is there a bottomless pit for financing it?
37. No comment made.
38. No Comment made.
39. I have been a Council Tenant for over 50 years and have been looked after; I think quite well changes won't make any difference.
40. ALL.

41. No comment made.
42. If you are as long in refurbishing my kitchen after 52 years as Stamford Council, we should stay as we are.
43. No comment made.
44. It has been the Council for all these years and would like it to stay the Council.
45. Non-profit making!!! Who would invest in property if they were not going to make money out of it? Who is going to supervise the so-called ballot? As though a decision has already been made.
46. Quite satisfied with the present with the Council. Lived here since 1970, I do not want the change. Thank you.
47. Is this SLH a new entity, if not what are their past achievements over the last 5 years? Promises look favourable at present but is there any guarantee that these promises will come to fruition.
48. We have always been satisfied now SKDC have done things in the past. We have been in this house 47 years (sight improvements could be made). We do not fully understand our situation if these houses are sold to SLH.
49. No comment made.
50. Insecurity if Council sell off property to housing association.
51. It should stay as we are. We have no complaints at all.
52. More than happy with the Council. See no reason for any change.
53. We do not wish to leave the Council because we will not feel secure moving to a Housing Association as their rents are well known to be higher than Council rents. Plus we feel that would not be able to maintain the assorted services in the long term as efficiently as the Council over the past number of years we have been tenants.
54. I am satisfied as things are.
55. No comment made.
56. We have lived here since 1947 and we've always been satisfied with the services from the Council. It's been excellent and we don't see any reason to change.
57. During the past year, the service has been very poor. It is more difficult to contact a manager of any department. Jobs are often 'lost' on the computer, repairs are taking much longer and tenants are having to chase these up. The gardening service has been abysmal. Transferring everyone over into the new scheme will not improve this. You need better staff. Apart from an initial improvements on our properties (which some could wait 5 years for). I can't see any other advantages for anyone in sheltered accommodation.
58. Used to Council now from pre war days, take a lot of getting used to if change over. Tenants rights - dos and don'ts.
59. Far too much emphasis on how 'our lot' will improve with little /no solid proof/evidence. Far too much gloss SLH has agreed to extend your rights (page 47) MAGNANIMOUS

statement, but rights are to be 'negotiated' by anyone. So why should I trust these people - or even how can I trust these people. 1) What legal guarantees do we have to ensure all promises are kept? Which laws? Enforcement procedures? 2) Cost involved in producing DVD/Document? 3) Security - will SLH stay local? How do we ensure this? 4) Various points make out SKDC not able to fulfil commitments (i.e. Estate caretaking/ Anti-social behaviour) But SLH can. How?/Why? 5) Details (independently proven) of SLH business plan published.

Tenant responses

“Not sure”

1. Improvements could be made better providing more information for people who have only been Tenants for a short while and what their rights are. We have lived at this property since Feb 06 and we have concerns about the Right to Buy. Would we have the Right to Buy with SLH as we do not have the Right to Buy from the Council for 5 yrs.
2. To have proper contractors to do repairs not bodge repairs as is happening in High Street Thurlby. Shortened times to get repairs done not 6-8 weeks without hot water.
3. These bungalows were built over 30 yrs ago. The Council started alerting the kitchens and bathrooms, which they did in the villages around us. Our villages around us, our village was Langtoft, all one after losing one of our senior citizens. A young person was housed, soon after the kitchen, bathroom was altered.
4. Both my husband and I are in our late eighties. We are having our bedroom, entrance back & front decorated this weekend and both kitchen and bathroom needs decorating. Can you tell us how long it will be, before you could be able to do what's necessary if you get enough votes?
5. Improvement plans - rents reviews etc.
6. In favour of more money to be spent on repairs/maintenance & anti-social behaviour. I would like more information on security of our tenancy. As if the new landlord is not regulated as much by the Government. Will they be able to make their own rules up, so to speak?
7. I don't understand any of it, it makes no sense at all.
8. I would like more in depth detail concerning the calibre and qualifications of the people who will be entrusted to implement this proposal changes? Plus would continued tenancy be assured should either of us be deceased?
9. South Lincolnshire Homes offer to tenants sounds very interesting as long as their promises are carried out. I will probably vote for the transfer and hope I am doing right thing. No mention has been made of how much the stock is being sold for. Is it being sold off cheap? How was the sale price arrived at?
10. Please could you tell me in the event of my death, could the tenancy be transferred over to my son aged 40 who lives with me?
11. About the point system. I'm in need of off street parking. 2500 points. We also would like to have French or patio doors. Once we have used our points, how long would be the wait for our second choice.
12. Just can't be done without big rent increases and to the Council tax.
13. No comment received.
14. Would be great if they could help me get out of my flat and into a proper family home with a garden for my children

15. Right to Buy, more information requested.
16. It looks good on paper. Don't like it that we are unable to buy it for the same price. We need a new kitchen, as it hasn't had anything done to it since it was built in 1952, on what we have done. We need parking for the car as it in the lay by across the road. My husband is disabled.
17. 17. No comment received.

Leaseholder responses

“Against”

- 1) No comment made.



Report of Libra Housing Advisory Service

South Kesteven District Council Large Scale Voluntary Transfer Stage 1 – Consultation

September 2006

1. Background

Libra Housing Advisory Services were appointed to the role of Independent Tenant Advisor (ITA) for the proposed large scale voluntary transfer in South Kesteven in August 2005. The appointment was made through a formal written tender submission followed by a presentation and interview. The selection was done by a group of active tenants, and Libra were appointed to carry out the ITA role pre-ballot.

2. Work with Active Tenants

From the outset of the project over a year ago, the Libra team has worked closely with active tenants. This has predominantly been through the work with the Tenant Working Group (TWG), but has also involved attending meetings of Local Compact groups around the District, and circulating an 'Active Tenants Bulletin' to all tenants involved in the Local and District Compacts.

The Libra team has worked closely with the TWG throughout the project on a range of key issues:

Choice of Landlord: One of the earliest decisions that the TWG was actively involved in was the choice about whether to propose a transfer to a stand alone organisation or whether to join a group structure. Active tenants were fully engaged in this process. Libra delivered presentations and information on the advantages and disadvantages of each of the options, joined tenants on the visits to other organisations to ensure that they understood all of the information and asked questions, and provided support to tenants through the decision making process.

Tenant Board Member Selection: Libra provided lots of information to active tenants about the role of the tenant board members. Libra also trained a team of 4 tenants in recruitment and selection so that they could then take on the role of assessing applications and carrying out interviews with potential tenant board members.

Policy Development: Small working groups of officers and tenants were set up to develop each of the key policies including repairs, anti social behaviour and allocations. Libra attended each of these meetings to assist tenant members in ensuring that their views were taken into account. Libra also provided examples of policies from other transfer organisations to be used as a comparison.

Communications: Four members of the TWG were nominated onto a Communications sub group to work with the Project Team and Communications Consultants to agree the content, design and layout of each of the Council's newsletters and other publications as well as the transfer website. Libra team members attended each of the meetings to provide support and also provided comment on the materials produced.

Formal Consultation Document: Libra worked closely with the Project Team and the TWG over a period of months on the development of the Formal Consultation Document. The TWG were involved at every stage in the development of the document, and the Libra team provided support and advice to the group throughout the process, as well as running through examples of Formal Consultation Documents from other organisations with the TWG so that they were fully informed of what options were available.

3. Consultation with Wider Tenants

Although much of Libra's work over the last year has been with the TWG, lots of information giving and consultation has also taken place with wider tenants through a range of methods:

Newsletters: The Libra team have produced and circulated 3 newsletters to all tenants during the project. These newsletters have been produced with the assistance of the TWG and other stakeholders. These newsletters have all carried details of how to contact either Libra or the Project Team for more information, and have provided information on key issues such as; landlord selection, how to join the TWG, how to apply to become a board members and what it involves, key facts about transfer etc. Tenants were also been given the opportunity to return a prepaid form to state whether they agreed with the priorities identified by those tenants taking part in the postal and telephone surveys – all respondents said that they agreed with the priorities identified.

Coffee Mornings: The Libra team was invited to attend two separate coffee mornings in sheltered scheme to provide information about the proposed stock transfer and to answer any questions that tenants may have.

Presentations to Sheltered Schemes: Maggie Carter from Libra attended 3 of the early presentations by the Council's project team to tenants in sheltered schemes. Maggie's role at these presentations was two fold; firstly to ensure that the information being given by the Council was factual and accurate, and secondly to answer any questions that tenants may have.

Postal and Telephone Surveys: Libra carried out a postal survey and telephone surveys with tenants from across the district who were selected at random. The

purpose of the survey was to test whether tenants were receiving information about the transfer, to establish how they would like to receive information in the future, and to ascertain what their priorities were in terms of desired improvements to properties, services and estates. The Formal Consultation Document incorporated the resulting views.

Attendance on the Mobile Display Unit: Members of the Libra team were in attendance at over 90% of the Mobile Display Unit sitings. The role of the Libra team at these events was to ensure that tenants were receiving accurate, honest and factual information, to challenge any misinformation that was being given from any source, and to respond to any queries and questions that tenants may have.

4. Financial Validation

Jerry Whaley, Libra's financial expert has checked all of the information contained within the Business Plan for South Lincolnshire Homes. Having been through all of the information in detail, Jerry and the Libra team are satisfied that all of the financial assumptions and forecasts that have been made are legitimate and valid. Libra is therefore confident that the Business Plan for South Lincolnshire Homes is sound.

5. Formal Consultation Document

As stated earlier in this report, the TWG were fully involved at every stage in the development of the Formal Consultation Document, more so than has been the case on many other transfers on which Libra and its sister company PCA have worked. The Offer to tenants also incorporates the needs and aspirations of wider tenants which have been ascertained through telephone surveys, postal surveys, sheltered scheme visits, local Compact meetings, freephone calls, Mobile Display Unit sessions etc. The Libra team has had direct contact with over 750 tenants during this project. This has left Libra feeling confident that the best offer possible has been made to tenants of South Kesteven, and it is an offer which would allow South Lincolnshire Homes to deliver what tenants have stated that they would like and need.

6. Conclusion

Libra firmly believes that the formal consultation document that has been issued to tenants in South Kesteven has been developed to meet the needs and aspirations of tenants in South Kesteven and has been based on what tenants have said that they want. The close partnership work that has taken place with active tenants has helped to ensure that the Offer to tenants is the best that it could be. From the comments received from both active and wider tenants, Libra do not believe that any changes are required to the Formal Consultation Document.