

# Housing Choice

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Improving Homes and Services

Issue Three January 2004



Welcome to the third issue of "Housing Choice". This is the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames' consultation with you on the possibility of transferring the ownership and management of its homes to a new, not-for-profit landlord.

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Council Freephone  
Stock Transfer Helpline  
**0800 358 5475**

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## At your service

One of the aims of the transfer proposal is to preserve what you like about the current housing service, but also to improve it where possible. Following detailed consultation with tenant and leaseholder representatives and others, the Trust's main service pledges will be to:

- ⇒ Continue to provide local services from within the borough including those for tenants of sheltered housing.
- ⇒ Allocate more resources for tackling anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisance, to improve the quality of life for everyone living on the estates.
- ⇒ Provide an improved repairs service, including an appointments system so you do not have to wait in all day for a repair.
- ⇒ Introduce a new Minor Repairs Team/Handypersons to provide a fast local service for minor repairs that are the Trust's responsibility.
- ⇒ Provide improved facilities for refuse storage, collection and recycling.

The Trust would also consult you about other service improvements including the idea of introducing a savings scheme or credit union.

The service would be delivered in the main by staff you already know, who would transfer from the Council.

## Proposal . . . coming soon

The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames' formal proposal to transfer your homes to the newly-formed KT Housing Trust, will be heading your way at the end of February.

The proposal will contain details of the works that KT Housing Trust would do if the transfer goes ahead, what rents it would charge, what service improvements it is planning and how the organisation would operate. You will be able to compare this with what the Council believes it will be able to do if the transfer does not go ahead.

The Council will launch its formal proposal on Monday 23 February 2004 with an exhibition at the Market House in Kingston Town Centre. You are welcome to visit the exhibition and chat to councillors, officers, trust board members, the independent advisers and others. The exhibition will be open from 2 pm to 7 pm to allow those who work to attend.

# The residents' column

## Getting a good deal for residents

As your residents' representatives, we have the job of making sure that Kingston's tenants and leaseholders get a good deal. That has been our job over the years and we can point to a number of successes, such as:

1. **A growing network of Residents' Associations looking after your interests.**
2. **Negotiating a good deal for you and your home.**

Today the job offers more potential to make a real success of housing and housing services. The government has told every Council that it needs to bring its housing up to what is called the "Decent Homes Standard" (DHS) by 2010 - in Kingston, 42% of you as Council tenants, are living in homes that **do not meet** the Decent Homes Standard! That is a lot of families who don't enjoy a good basic standard. The DHS isn't about gold taps and fancy kitchens - it is quite modest really, concerned about the basics, decent heating, windows that keep the weather out, and modern facilities.

## Did you know:

- Some tenants still have kitchens that were built in the 50's - they'll be coming back into fashion!
- Nearly 400 older people are living in bed-sits and sharing bathing facilities with up to four of their neighbours.
- Around half of you need double glazed windows.
- Government Rent Setting Policy means that your rent will be the same whether you remain as a Council tenant without major improvements **or** vote for KTHT as your new landlord that can provide the major improvements, and more besides.
- There are still people relying on electric overnight storage heating that goes cold by tea time.
- Tenants want improved security in and around their homes.
- More than £100 million needs to be spent over the next 10 years.
- An average of just under £50k needs to be spent on homes over the next 30 years.
- Every year that passes, the bill for meeting the DHS gets higher as homes deteriorate.
- The Council can only expect to have around half of the money needed.

The Federation and the Leaseholder Forum both know the reality of what the Council can afford - most of its money is spent on essential work, with very little earmarked for improvements.

So, we've looked at the options for getting a good deal and creating this brand new housing association - KTHT is the most reliable solution - but it isn't just about money, we want a change of culture too - and more choice for residents.

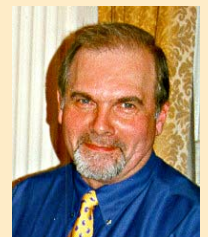
That is why we are working towards getting the best possible deal for tenants and leaseholders in Kingston.

The "deal" will provide:

- Quality repairs and major improvements to your home.
- Changes to improve the general environment and security for everyone.
- Controlled entry systems for the majority of tenants (living in blocks of flats).
- Certainty about the future of our homes.
- Decision making by a board of seven residents, five Council nominees and six independent people.

How does that sound as deals go? How does it compare with the idea of ever increasing problems to be solved with only a few more resources - that is all that the Council can offer us.

Contact us, your residents' representatives, through The Federation's offices at 1 Tadlow, Washington Road, or through your Independent Adviser, Sheila Adamson Associates Limited, on **Freephone 0800 027 1920**. Whatever your questions we are here to offer you our help. Factual independent information is available from Sheila Adamson Associates Limited.



Derrick Johnson,  
Chairperson  
Kingston Residents  
Federation

# KT Housing Trust - who's who

KT Housing Trust is run by a voluntary board of management. If the transfer goes ahead, this board would become responsible for overseeing the work of the staff of the Trust, in much the same way as the Councillors are at present.

The board is made up of three groups of people: tenant and leaseholders, Council nominees and independent members of the community. Here we introduce the current members of the board and how they were chosen.

Type of board member	How they were chosen	Who they are	How they would be chosen in the future
Tenant and Leaseholder (7 - up to two of whom may be leaseholders).	The tenants and leaseholders on the board were selected by the Kingston Housing Consultative Committee. This is the main forum in which the Council formally consults tenants and leaseholders about its housing policies.	Ray Austin (Chair) Gaynor Brown Angela Byrne June Kitchener Jean Vincent Debbie Webb  There is currently one vacancy.	The proposal is that four are nominated from local area forums, one from the Leaseholder Forum, and two from a new borough-wide Tenant and Leaseholder Council.
Council (5)	These were nominated by the Council. Some are serving councillors.	Andrew Bull Paul Johnston Chris Priest Penny Shelton Ben Young	The Council would nominate its chosen board members.
Independent community (6)	These members were chosen by the tenant, leaseholder and Council nominees from those who responded to an advertisement in the press.	Rod Bullough Neil McCall Roger Smith Pam Watson (Vice-Chair) John Westbrook  There is currently one vacancy	These would be elected by the members of the Trust, which would include tenants, leaseholders and the Council.

## Leading from the front

At a recent meeting, the board of KT Housing Trust elected Ray Austin, a leaseholder, as Chair of the board. Ray said "I think it is a reflection of the board's wish to put the needs and wishes of tenants and leaseholders at the heart of the organisation, that they elected me as their Chair. It is a great honour, and I will be working hard to make sure that we all continue to work for the benefit of tenants and leaseholders. It is important that people understand that the Trust only exists to benefit the community - it is not run for profit. The Trust's aim is to provide good quality homes at reasonable rents for people who need them. We want to create places where people want to live and we will work with tenants and leaseholders to make that happen".

The board elected Pam Watson, a solicitor, as Vice-Chair. Pam added "I have been a Council tenant in Kingston, so I do understand the issues that tenants are concerned about. If tenants give the go-ahead to the transfer, and the Trust becomes their landlord, we will do everything possible to deliver the best possible housing service".



Ray Austin  
Chair  
KT Housing Trust Board



Pam Watson  
Vice-Chair  
KT Housing Trust Board

# What's next?

<b>February</b>	Launch of Council's formal proposal. You will all receive a copy of this proposal and will be invited to send your comments on the proposal to the Council.
<b>March/April</b>	The Council will be holding consultation sessions at each of the Neighbourhood Forums.  Council officers will be out and about visiting tenants in their homes to answer any questions.  Drop-in sessions will be run throughout this time. Please look out for more information on these.
<b>April</b>	The Council will consider the comments you have made on the proposal and decide whether it needs to be changed before moving to a ballot.  An independently run ballot would be run for tenants with a separate vote for leaseholders.

Throughout this period you can contact the Council on **Freephone 0800 358 5475**. If you prefer you can call your Independent Tenant and Leaseholder Adviser on **0800 027 1920**.

## **Regeneration** - improvement works to housing estates

Regeneration consultants have been asked to help develop ideas for major environmental improvements to the Council's larger estates.



Consultants have met with local residents to discuss the estate improvements which may be possible with the additional investment that stock transfer would offer.



A number of ideas have been put forward, such as:

- Repairs to tarmac, concrete drives and paths on estates.
- Putting gates on footpaths to increase security or moving paths away from buildings.
- Providing new fencing, railings, low walls or planting around blocks to improve the boundaries.
- Renewing and improving the use of communal drying areas.
- Providing private gardens to flats on the ground floors of blocks, and semi-private communal gardens for use by residents of a block.

If transfer goes ahead, tenants and leaseholders would be fully consulted about improvements to individual areas before work went ahead.



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