

Proposed Housing Transfer from Rochford District Council to
Rochford Housing Association - Offer Document

13th September 2006

NOTE:

fifth draft

Revitalising Rochford District

This document is called an offer document. It contains full details of the Council's proposal to transfer the homes to a new, local, not-for-profit housing association called Rochford Housing Association.

Tenants' Forum statement:

"As members of the Rochford Tenants Forum we appreciate that the Council is concerned to look after the interests of all its tenants.

We all care passionately about the future of Rochford's council housing. That is why since 2004 several of us have been tenant representatives on the Rochford Housing Options Appraisal Board and later on the Joint Transfer Steering Group that have worked to determine the best way forward.

It is clear to us that, while the Council might just be able to achieve the Government's 'decent homes standard' by 2010, the only way it will be possible to maintain this and to meet the higher 'Rochford Standard' that we know tenants want would be to transfer the stock to a local housing association. This will also make sure of improved services to tenants.

Having worked closely with the Council's officers and councillors and with Hereward Housing, we are convinced that tenants' interests will be best served by joining the Rochford Housing Association as part of the well established and respected Sanctuary Housing group.

You now have the opportunity to decide who should run our properties and how our homes and environment can be improved.

We think the Council's proposal is a good one and strongly urge everyone to read it and to vote in the ballot.

If you require further information or do not understand any area of this document you can call the Council on **0800 169 7326** or the independent tenants advisor, Your Choice, on their free phone number **0800 917 8909.**]

Council statement

The Council has always worked hard to maintain and improve its homes to a high standard, but after very careful consideration of the finances available now and in the future, it has concluded that it will not be able to improve the homes in the way that tenants deserve.

All parties on the Council have worked together, with the tenants and with help from Hereward Housing Association (see page 49), to make the best possible proposal for the future of the Council's homes.

The Council thinks transfer to Rochford Housing Association is in the best interests of tenants, providing high quality homes and improved services into the future. It will be a local organisation, but will be supported by Hereward Housing which itself is part of Sanctuary Housing Group.

We hope you will now read the document carefully and use your vote when the time comes.

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If you require this document in another format, for example Braille, large type, audio tape or another language please call the Council on Freephone **0800 1697326**.]

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Part A: The Council's housing transfer proposal

60-second summary

- *Transfer means that Rochford Housing Association will take on the ownership and management of your homes.*
- *Rochford Housing Association is a local, not-for-profit, charitable housing association set up by the council and tenants with help from Hereward Housing and Sanctuary Housing Group.*
- *Rochford Housing Association will be able to afford substantial improvements that the council can't, because it will have different financial rules.*
- *Rents will be set in the same way as they are with the council. They will not increase to pay for the improvements*
- *Your rights as a tenant will be guaranteed*
- *All secure and introductory tenants will be able to vote on whether or not this goes ahead.*

What is the Council proposing?

The Council is proposing to transfer all its Council housing to a new, local, not-for-profit charitable housing association called Rochford Housing Association. More than 160 Councils have transferred all or part of their housing in this way, because they wanted to improve housing services.

What is housing transfer?

Housing transfer is where the ownership and management of a Council's housing stock transfers to a not-for-profit housing organisation registered with the Housing Corporation and sometimes known as a registered social landlord (RSL) or housing association.

This will only happen if tenants support the proposal. This means that if a majority of tenants voting in a secret ballot are in favour, and the Council and the Government agree, then the proposed local association will become your landlord after reaching a financial settlement with the Council.

Have any other Councils done this?

More than 160 Councils have transferred their housing, wholly or partially, or are about to. There are many other examples of transfers in areas like Rochford District, including Maldon and Chelmsford.

What is Rochford Housing Association?

Rochford Housing Association is a new, not-for-profit, charitable housing association based in the Rochford District, which the Council and tenants have helped to set up. Four Rochford tenants will be on the Board. Rochford Housing Association will work together with, Hereward Housing (part of Sanctuary Housing Group). It will be a housing association regulated by the Housing Corporation. Any surpluses made will be re-invested in homes or services. For more information on Rochford Housing Association and the Housing Corporation, see Part I.

Why is the Council asking you to consider this change?

The Council has always aimed to provide good quality, well-managed and well-maintained homes at a reasonable rent. However, due to financial constraints, the Council has had to reduce services in recent years and cannot do all of the improvements that tenants have said they would like. The reasons why the Council does not have enough money are explained in this document.

The Council is also concerned that it will no longer have the money to provide the housing service at its current level and does not want to see the service level further reduced. Without transfer all aspects of the housing service would be vulnerable to reductions in standard. Tenants and the Council do not want this to happen. They want to see the service improved.

In autumn 2004, the Council commissioned an independent survey of the condition of homes. This showed that around £40 million needs to be spent on major repairs and improvements to Council homes and estates over the next 10 years (about £23,000 on average for each home in the next 10 years).

The Council expects to have just £16 million to spend in the same period.

In April 2004 the Council set up the Rochford Housing Options Appraisal Group. The main task of the Group was to look at the future needs of the housing service and the available options (these are detailed in Part K).

After looking carefully at the possibilities the Rochford Housing Transfer Appraisal Group asked the Council to look further at transfer to a new, local and charitable housing association. So the Council is now proposing to transfer the ownership and management of the Council's homes to Rochford Housing Association. The Council believes this is the best way to raise the money needed to invest in the repair and modernisation of your homes and improving your services. It also gives you a greater say in the running of the housing service than you have currently, or would have, under the other options that were considered.

What are the key benefits of transfer?

The Council believes that there are many benefits to transfer, the main one being a massive investment in your homes and services while rents stay the same as you would pay with the Council.

The key benefits are:

- **1. A full programme of £40 million spent on major repairs and improvements to the homes and estates over 10 years.** £27 million of this will be spent in the first 5 years to bring the homes up to a modern standard - The Rochford Standard. In contrast, the Council estimates it could spend only **£16 million** on major works and improvements during this period, with £8 million spent in the first five years. In addition to the £40million, Rochford Housing Association hopes to benefit from a scheme that will mean considerable savings on value added tax on the cost of the works. If so, any money recovered under this scheme will also be used to benefit people in Rochford.

Rochford Housing Association plans to ensure that within five years of transfer all homes will meet the Rochford Standard. This means that that all homes that need them will have:

- ? *good quality, modern kitchens and bathrooms (these will be better quality than the Council has been able to afford);*
- ? *good quality, modern, efficient central heating;*
- ? *effective security measures including 'secure by design' standard for all new front and back doors, external lighting and ground floor window locks in all new windows;*

? *improved estate security measures; and*

? *good thermal insulation*

Once homes are brought up to the Rochford Standard they will be maintained at that standard in to the future. See Part C for more details.

- 2. Action on anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisance.** Rochford Housing Association will be committed to taking prompt and effective action on anti-social behaviour and its staff will work with local organisations like the Police and designated staff of Rochford District Council to help deal with anti-social behaviour.

Rochford Housing Association will join the Rochford Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and play its part in meeting targets set by the local Crime and Disorder strategy to prevent and tackle these problems, which are so important for all communities.

See Part E for more details.

- 3. Improved housing services.** Rochford Housing Association will:

- set high standards for customer service and ensure all staff are trained to meet those standards
- improve the repairs service and make the handyman service available for more people
- have two accessible local offices for all tenants' enquiries
- provide assistance with gardening for elderly and vulnerable tenants
- hold regular estate inspections involving local residents;
- give all tenants a welcome pack and ensure that new tenants fully understand their responsibilities;
- continue to have a dedicated tenant liaison officer and improve tenant participation to ensure tenants have a big say in the delivery of services

See Part D for more details.

- 4. Investment to improve security and the environment.** As well as new security doors, and ground floor window locks where they are needed, Rochford Housing Association will also have a budget for crime prevention and environmental improvements, such as landscaping, lighting and parking.

See Parts C, D and E for more details.

5. Improvements to services for sheltered housing tenants.

- Sheltered housing tenants will be consulted about a programme for spending a budget of £5.4 million which will be set aside for improvements to upgrade their homes and communal facilities. This will include the opportunity to replace their bath with a walk in shower and include the conversion of the remaining bed sits to flats.

See Part F for more details.

- 6. Long term rent stability.** Government policy requires registered social landlords (like Rochford Housing Association) and Councils to charge the same rents for identical properties in the same area by 2012. This Government policy also limits the annual increases that can be charged by registered social landlords and Councils.

See Part B for more details.

- 7. The protection of your rights.** Your rights as a tenant will be guaranteed through both your Tenancy Agreement and a contract between the Council and Rochford Housing Association. This will include preserving tenants' security of tenure.

See Part H for more details.

- 8. Direct involvement in the management of your home.** As well as more opportunities for all tenants to have a say, Rochford Housing Association will have tenants on its controlling Board. The 4 Tenant Board Members will have the same voting rights as the 4 Council Board members and the 4 Independent

Board members. Together the Board Members will make all important decisions about policy and the direction of the association.

See Part G for more details on how Rochford Housing Association plans to work with tenants.

9. New affordable housing to meet local housing needs.

Tenants and the Council have said that they want to see new homes in the area for future generations and Council is committed to working with housing associations to provide affordable housing to meet local needs

Rochford Housing Association, working with Hereward Housing, will aim to provide at least 50 new affordable homes each year in the Rochford District.

The Council will support Rochford Housing Association and other partner housing associations in bidding for funding to provide more homes for local people and will, whenever it can, provide free or low cost land for development.

10. Fully trained staff you know

If the transfer goes ahead, the Council's housing management staff will also be transferred to Rochford Housing Association. This means that you will continue to deal with people you know. Rochford Housing Association will make sure that all staff are properly trained and supervised, and have the equipment they need to provide the best possible service.

Why doesn't the Council have the money needed?

There are a number of reasons why the Council does not have the money to do all the repairs and improvements that it and tenants will like.

One key reason is that each year the Council has to give money from the rent it collects to the Government for use elsewhere in the country.

This year it has to give nearly half a million pounds (£473,000). This means each household gives an average of £4.80 per week to the Government.

If transfer does not go ahead, this amount is expected to rise to more than £1million in the next five years and the average household would be giving more than £10 per week each to the government.

Rochford Housing Association will not have to pay this money to the Government.

Another reason why the Council doesn't have enough money is that it has £11 million of housing debt. This debt is currently costing the Council £1 million each year from the rental income. However, if the transfer goes ahead the Government will help to write off these debts.

Rochford Housing Association will use **all** of the rental income to fund your housing services, including the modernisation and improvements needed to homes.

Why can't the Council borrow the money needed? Government rules restrict the Council from borrowing the money needed to pay for repairs and improvements. The Council does not currently have the income available to meet the extra cost of interest and loan repayments on the money the Council would need to borrow.

Why can't the Council use the money received from Right to Buy sales? Three-quarters (75%) of the money that the Council receives from Right to Buy sales will be paid to the Government. This leaves only a guaranteed 25% for the Council to spend. This does not leave the Council enough money to provide the services that you have requested and that the Council would like to provide.

Why will Rochford Housing Association be in a better financial position than the Council?

Rochford Housing Association will be in a better position to repair and improve houses and provide better services because:

- every pound (£1) of rent received by Rochford Housing Association could be spent on the housing service. It will not have to pay any money to the Government to help with housing elsewhere in the country.
- Rochford Housing Association will be able to raise money from banks or building societies. It will not be restricted in the same way as the Council in what it can borrow. It will be able to pay back money over a period of about 30 years at

competitive interest rates, using the rents to fund the repayments. It will not have to increase rents to do this

- The Council has historic housing debts of £11 million. Repaying these debts currently costs tenants £1million a year. Following any transfer, Rochford Housing Association will not have this debt and will use all the money it receives from tenants' rents to improve the housing service and carry out the repairs and improvement set out in this document

How is the price that Rochford Housing Association will pay for the homes worked out?

The price Rochford Housing Association pays for the homes is based on the fact that the Association will continue to manage them as homes let at affordable rents. This is known as the tenanted market value. As the Association is not able to sell them later on the open market, the price is very different from the value of homes sold on the open market or to tenants under the Right to Buy.

The price takes account of:

- the cost of the significant programme of repairs and improvements that is planned by Rochford Housing Association;
- the fact that tenants keep their main tenancy rights
- the fact that the housing must be kept available for rent at affordable levels (unless the tenant uses their Preserved Right to Buy);
- the likely rents payable by tenants over a 30-year period; and
- the costs of managing the homes over that period.

The method of working out the price is approved by the government, and ensures that Rochford Housing Association is able to afford all the improvements promised in this document.

Where will Rochford Housing Association get the money from to pay for the housing?

Rochford Housing Association will get help from Sanctuary Housing Group to raise the money from lenders such as banks and building societies at competitive rates.

Rochford Housing Association will only borrow what it could afford to pay back over a long period of time, based on a rigorous business plan. Rochford Housing Association's business plan and borrowing will take account of the rent levels set by the Government. So your rent will not go up more than is set out in Part B .

Will the Council still have a role in housing after transfer?

Yes. If the transfer goes ahead, the Council will continue to work in close partnership with Rochford Housing Association but will no longer be your landlord.

The Council will monitor the performance of Rochford Housing Association to ensure it carries out the promises set out in this document. These promises will be the subject of a legally binding contract between the Council and Rochford Housing Association.

The Council will receive regular reports on how:

- Rochford Housing Association is providing the works and services outlined in this document;
- Rochford Housing Association is contributing to the Council's strategic housing role and its homelessness strategy; and
- Rochford Housing Association is providing adequate and suitable properties to people nominated from the Council's Housing Needs Register.

The Council will remain directly involved in the housing service through its nominated Board Members on Rochford Housing Association's Board.

The Council will also:

- have responsibility for assessing housing needs and conditions in the Rochford District and developing strategies to meet these needs;
- have a legal obligation to provide housing advice and assist homeless people;
- maintain the Housing Register and nominate applicants to Rochford Housing Association and other Registered Social Landlords in the Rochford District;
- work to improve standards in private rented housing;
- continue to be responsible for Housing Benefit, refuse disposal, street cleansing and other such services; and
- support partnership arrangements to provide new affordable homes in the area.

What role will individual Councillors have?

Councillors will be involved in the ways described above. They will still be able to act on your behalf if you have problems with your housing. Rochford Housing Association will provide a designated officer to liaise with Councillors on housing issues. The Council and Rochford Housing Association will agree formal processes and response times for dealing with complaints and queries.

What would happen if the transfer does not go ahead?

If the transfer does not go ahead, you would remain a tenant of the Council. The Council would deliver as good a service as it could afford, but it would have approximately £24 million less than it needs for major repairs and improvements of your homes over the next 10 years.

The Council would have to review all its housing management services and make changes to fit with the money available. This would inevitably lead to cuts in the housing service and much-needed improvements to homes would not be carried out.

All Councils are required by the Government to make sure that homes meet a basic standard of repair and modernisation by 2010. This is called the Decent Homes Standard.

On the present financial rules which councils are obliged to follow, the Council believes that it could meet this basic standard. But it would not have the money to keep its homes up to this standard in the future. Under current rules, it would never have the money to carry out the works which tenants have said they want and which Rochford Housing Association would carry out.

Is transfer the only option?

Transfer is the option that the Council thinks will provide the best possible housing future for tenants. Working with tenants, the Council looked at a range of other options for the housing, as well as other ways of raising the money needed (explained in Part K). **None of the other options available can provide the same levels of investment as the proposed housing transfer.**

For more information about what works could be carried out by Rochford Housing Association compared to the Council, see Part C.

What is the timetable for consultation?

The current plans are:

- ? **October 2006.** This is the period of formal consultation on the proposed transfer (called Stage 1). Council staff will take every opportunity to meet you to discuss the proposal and answer your questions. There will be tenants' meetings, home visits by officers, and a short video produced by the Council.
- ? **November 2006.** The Council will consider tenants' comments on the transfer proposal. The Council will decide whether or not this proposal needs to be altered, in light of what you and other tenants say, and whether to go ahead with the ballot of all the Council's secure and introductory tenants. If the Council decides not to go ahead with the ballot, then the process will stop.
- ? **November 2006.** If the Council decides to go ahead with a ballot, we will send you a letter called the Stage 2 letter. This will describe what changes, if any, have been made to this proposal and whether the Council has decided to proceed to a ballot. It will also explain your right to make representations to the Government via the Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government.
- ? **November/December 2006.** A confidential ballot will be conducted by an independent organisation. Every secure and introductory tenant will have a vote; this means that joint tenants will each have separate ballot papers. Neither the Council nor Rochford Housing Association will know which way you have voted. If the ballot result is in favour of transfer, and the Council agrees to go ahead, the Council will then ask the Secretary of State to give consent before the transfer can take place. The Secretary of State will not give consent until Rochford Housing Association had achieved registration with the Housing Corporation (see Part I for more information on the Housing Corporation). If all of this happens it is expected that the legal transfer of the ownership and management of your home should take place around **Summer 2007** and the work promised in this document will begin.

What is the role of tenants in this consultation?

The Council is committed to an open and detailed consultation process with tenants, and you have a major role to play in the consultation. Tenants' views have been taken into account at every stage of the process and will continue to be.

The Tenants' Forum has been very active in the development of this proposal. They have put in many hours of work over a long period of time, to ensure that this is the best possible offer to all tenants. There are also tenants on the Steering Group working alongside staff and councillors.

Tenants have also been asked to comment at Tenants' Association meetings, roadshows and in telephone surveys.

You have a major role to play in the consultation

At the front of this document, there is a comment form. Please return it to reach the Council by midday on [13 November 2006] at the latest using the freepost envelope provided.

The Secretary of State will only agree to the transfer if satisfied that a majority of tenants are not opposed to the transfer. This means that the transfer **will only** go ahead where a majority of tenants who vote in a ballot are in favour of the proposal.

It is very important that, whatever your views, you do use your vote.

What is the role of leaseholders in this consultation?

The Council would also like to know the views of leaseholders. They will be sent a separate letter and will be able to see a copy of this document. There will also be a special meeting for leaseholders. However, leaseholders do not have the same legal right to be consulted as the Council's secure and introductory tenants and they will not be asked to vote on the proposal. Leaseholders are able to join the Tenants' Forum and the Board of Rochford Housing Association. Currently, there is one leaseholder on the shadow Board.

Is there independent advice available?

Yes. The Independent Tenants' Advisor is called Your Choice. Your Choice was chosen by the Tenants' Forum to provide independent advice and information on the transfer

proposal to all the Council's tenants and leaseholders. It is an independent consultancy, representing the interests of tenants.

If you have any questions about anything in this proposal and want an independent opinion, you should contact Your Choice on their helpline **0800 917 8909**. Calls to this number are free from landlines, but you will be charged at your usual rate if you use a mobile phone.

See Part M for more contacts.

Part B: The rent and other charges you will pay

60-second summary

- *Rents will be set in the same way as they are with the Council. They will not increase to pay for the improvements*
- *Rochford Housing Association will give a rent guarantee for the first five years after transfer;*
- *there will be one rent rise each year; and*
- *you will still be entitled to claim Housing Benefit.*

What will happen to rents?

At the expected time of transfer, each tenant will pay the **same** rent to Rochford Housing Association as they were paying to the Council. As with the Council, the rent increases will be due in April of each year. It is proposed that the transfer takes place in Summer 2007 therefore the first rent increase by Rochford Housing Association will be in April 2008.

The Government introduced a new system for setting rents in 2002. This aims to ensure that by 2012 the rents charged by councils and housing associations (like Rochford Housing Association) are the same for identical properties in the same area.

This means that whether your landlord is Rochford Housing Association or the Council, you will pay the same rent for an identical property in the same area, regardless of whether the transfer takes place.

The Government has developed a formula for working out the rent levels (called a target rent) for each type of property. This formula is being used by the Council and will be used by Rochford Housing Association to work out target rents in exactly the same way. Over the next 5 years, rents of all properties will move from their current weekly rent towards this target rent.

Whether or not transfer goes ahead:

- each year the **maximum** increase allowed by Government policy will be inflation plus 0.5% plus up to £2 per week, until the target rent is reached.

- in Rochford District rents are already moving towards their targets, so that increases will be less than this for many tenants. **The average rent increase is therefore be less than inflation plus 0.5% plus £1.30 per week.**
- after your target rent has been reached, under current government policy, weekly rents should rise only by inflation plus 0.5% a year.
- even if Government policy changes and housing associations are allowed to charge more, Rochford Housing Association will guarantee that your weekly rent will not increase by more than inflation plus 0.5% plus £2, each year until 2012. After that, Rochford Housing Association's policy is that rents will go up in line with Government policy.

What will happen to service charges?

At the moment, some residents pay a separate service charge for heating, caretaking and cleaning. Some older tenants in sheltered housing receive help from scheme managers. Where the Council currently collects charges for these services, Rochford Housing Association will continue to collect them after transfer.

Rochford Housing Association will not introduce any new service charge for existing services. Rochford Housing Association will only consider introducing new services if, after consultation, it was agreed with tenants or their representatives. New services will then carry a service charge based on the actual costs of the **new** service.

Under the Government's current rent policy, existing service charges will increase by no more than inflation plus 0.5% each year.

What methods could you use to pay your rent?

Rent will still be payable weekly in advance. You will still be able to pay your rent in similar ways as with the Council. These include:

- payment by Standing Order;
- payment by post;
- cash/cheque payment at Post Offices;
- payment by phone;
- Payment by debit card.

- Payment through the ATMs (cash machines) at Council offices
- Payment online through the internet.

Rochford Housing Association will also look at introducing payment by direct debit.

So that you know how your rent account stands, Rochford Housing Association will send tenants a regular rent statement and will also provide them on request.

What about Housing Benefit?

The transfer will not affect your entitlement to claim Housing Benefit. Under current rules, existing service charges will be covered by Housing Benefit, or by the Government's Supporting People Benefit. Housing Benefit applications will still be made to the Council.

Advice on Housing Benefit will be available from both the Council and Rochford Housing Association.

What rents will new tenants pay?

New tenants are people who are not currently secure or introductory tenants of the Council, and who move into a property for the first time after the date of transfer. Rochford Housing Association will charge new tenants the target rent.

What will Rochford Housing Association's policy on rent arrears be?

Your rent will be used to fund the improvements to the homes and services. Rochford Housing Association believes non-payment or persistent late payment of rent is not fair to those tenants who do pay their rent on time. It also recognises that some tenants do sometimes have financial difficulties through no fault of their own.

As with the Council, Rochford Housing Association will have a firm, but fair policy on rent arrears. This will be reinforced in the Tenancy Agreement (see the proposed Tenancy Agreement as set out in Part L). A member of staff will contact any tenant who gets into arrears as soon as there is a problem. They will be able to provide advice on benefits and be able to work out a payment plan to clear any outstanding debt. As a last step, Rochford Housing Association, like the Council, will take court action to end a tenancy. It will seek the court's agreement to evict tenants who do not pay their rent in compliance with a court order.

Part C: Improvement works

60-second summary

Rochford Housing Association will invest £40 million in the homes in the first 10 years.

This will mean that, where needed, homes will get:

- new kitchens, with a choice of finish and colour;*
- new bathrooms, with a choice of finish and colour*

at a better standard than previously provided by the Council.

There will also be, where needed:

- upgraded central heating; and*
- new doors with security locks, and*
- other security measures*

There will be overall budgets over the first 10 years of more than £3million for environmental, safety and security improvements and £1.25 million for aids and adaptations for disabled tenants.

MAJOR WORKS AND IMPROVEMENTS

Extent of works

Rochford Housing Association will be able to spend more than £40 million to ensure homes are modern, warm and secure homes within the first 10 years after transfer, with most of this (around £27 million) being spent in the first 5 years.

Over the same 10-year period, the Council would have only around £16 million and would have to make service cuts to spend the money on improvements. It expects to spend only around £8 million on home improvements in the first five years.

What work standards will Rochford Housing Association have?

The Council is required by Government **as a minimum** to bring all homes up to a set standard of repair and modernisation by 2010; this is called the **Decent Homes Standard**. However, this Government standard is very basic and says that all homes must be:

- wind and weather proof;
- in reasonable repair;
- fit for habitation; and
- have reasonably modern facilities.

This means that your home could still meet the Decent Homes Standard even if your kitchen and bathroom were more than 30 years old. This Decent Homes Standard does not include security and environmental measures and other works that tenants have told the Council that they want to see, and it does not cover service improvements.

The Council and tenants want to see a new standard for Rochford - the Rochford Standard. This will ensure that all homes that need them will have:

- a modern kitchen (at a better standard and with more choices than the Council has been able to provide);
- a modern bathroom with shower (also at a better standard and with more choices than the Council has been able to provide);
- modern electrical standards;
- modern heating systems that are energy efficient;
- a high standard of thermal insulation
- modern standards of home safety (for example, ground floor window locks to all new windows);
- doors that are safe and provide good security;
- all homes and estates will be maintained to a high standard with building elements (structure, roofs, windows services etc) being renewed to modern standards when they have reached the end of their economic lives.

(we will put this para in a box on the page, not as part of the general text)

Show homes

In order for tenants to see what The Rochford Standard will mean, **a house in Salem Walk, Rayleigh and a sheltered flat at Millview Court, Rochford** have been upgraded to these standards, and will be open for you to inspect during the consultation. The opening times have been included in the pack in which you received this document.

Sheltered schemes

In addition to the improvements to be carried out to all general tenants' homes, sheltered scheme residents could also benefit from:

- Open level access showers for all tenants who want them;
- A replacement scheme managers' call system incorporating a video door entry control for every sheltered unit within 2 years following the transfer;
- A budget of £2.3 million for the upgrade of communal facilities in consultation with tenants; and
- A budget of £1.7 million for the conversion of existing bed sits to flats.

See Section F for more details.

Will Rochford Housing Association carry out the works if I do not want them to?

No. Rochford Housing Association will consult tenants on the work to be carried out inside the home and will only carry out the internal works which tenants want (unless there are serious maintenance or health and safety implications).

Comparison chart - Major works and improvements

The Council does not have the money to carry out the repairs and improvement needed to its homes without cutting other services. This table compares what Rochford Housing Association will provide over the first 10 years following a transfer, with what the Council could afford.

Work	The Council could provide:	The improved services Rochford Housing Association will provide:
Overall	£16 million in the first 10 years, with	£40 million in the first 10 years,

Work	The Council could provide:	The improved services Rochford Housing Association will provide:
investment	£8 million in the first 5 years	with £27 million in the first 5 years
Day to day repairs	A limited repairs service and cutbacks will be made in the future.	A higher quality repairs service developed in consultation with tenants and restore the cuts made to repairs of landlord provided fences and tap washers.
Major repairs e.g. roofs, gutters and re-wiring	Essential repairs where funds are available	All essential repairs and replacements will be carried out to the Rochford Standard as part of a long term programme.
Kitchens	Current replacement of some kitchen units would continue but thereafter, essential repairs only where funds are available. The Council will be able to replace less than 250 kitchens by 2010, and this will be to a lower standard than those provided by Rochford Housing Association.	<p>More than half of all general tenants' homes (those that are not in sheltered schemes) will get a new kitchen, with most being done in the first 5 years.</p> <p>At least 650 homes will benefit from new kitchens within the first 5 years. The remaining 210 homes not already at a modern standard will be improved between the 6th and 10th year following the transfer.</p> <p>High quality kitchens will be installed, with a choice of colours for the units and worktops, matching wall tiling and vinyl flooring.</p> <p>Kitchen improvements will include re-wiring to provide more power points and extractor fans to help reduce condensation and improve</p>

Work	The Council could provide:	The improved services Rochford Housing Association will provide:
		ventilation. Lever taps will be installed if tenants choose.
Bathrooms	<p>Current replacement of some bathrooms would continue but thereafter, essential repairs only where funds are available.</p> <p>The Council will be able to replace 100 bathrooms by 2010, and these will be to a lower standard than those provided by Rochford Housing Association.</p>	<p>More than half of all general tenants' homes (those that are not in sheltered schemes) will benefit from bathroom improvements, with most being done in the first 5 years.</p> <p>Some 665 homes will get good quality bathroom improvements within the first 5 years. The remaining 200 not already at the standard will be improved between the 6th year and the 10th year following a transfer.</p> <p>Improvements will include new baths with electric over-bath shower, wash-hand basin, toilet, heated towel rail and a choice of colours for the wall tiling and vinyl flooring. Extractor fans will be fitted to help reduce condensation and improve ventilation.</p> <p>Tenants in sheltered homes will be offered the option of a level access shower instead of a bath, together with grab rails if required.</p>
Heating systems	Repair heating or, if repair not possible, replace with basic modern standard system in accordance with legislation.	<p>Around half of all homes will get heating improvements.</p> <p>Full central heating will be installed in all homes where there is none, or where there is only a partial heating system fitted.</p>

Work	The Council could provide:	The improved services Rochford Housing Association will provide:
		<p>Older systems will also be replaced or upgraded as necessary. The upgrades will include energy efficient boilers, thermostatic radiator valves and programmable controls.</p> <p>Around 400 tenants will benefit from this work within the first 5 years, with a further 400 tenants benefiting between the 6th and 10th year following a transfer.</p>
Insulation	The Council is currently carrying out a programme of basic insulation works compliant with current regulations .	Rochford Housing Association guarantees to complete this programme. In addition RHA will improve the insulation of “solid brickwork” homes.
Entrance Doors	Repair doors and, if repair is not possible, replace with timber style.	<p>Substantially more than half of all general tenants’ homes (those that are not in sheltered schemes) will be fitted with new doors.</p> <p>More than 700 homes will be fitted with new doors within the first 5 years. Between the 6th and 10th year following the transfer, a further 400 homes will be fitted with new doors.</p> <p>The new doors will be properly secure and a choice of colour and style of front doors will be provided</p>
Windows	Maintain existing window locks only.	All new windows will be fitted with security locks. They will comply with current regulations with regard

Work	The Council could provide:	The improved services Rochford Housing Association will provide:
Smoke alarms	These are installed when electrical upgrading works are carried out to Council homes	to 'means of escape' regulations and include safety features where there are young children. Provide smoke alarms or detectors where not currently installed
Disabled adaptations	£65,000 each year for disabled adaptations	More than £100,000 each year for disabled adaptations guaranteeing improved levels of service.
Sheltered schemes		
Door entry systems	Maintain existing	Within 2 years of the proposed transfer, provide a 24 hour video-tel style door entry system in all sheltered schemes, allowing people to open the outside doors from within their own home.
Communal areas	Maintain existing	<p>£2.3 million to fund communal improvements in consultation with tenants, on a scheme by scheme basis.</p> <p>A budget of £800,000 will be available for the first two years following transfer to provide immediate benefits. More major works will be planned in consultation with residents over a longer period- see Part F.</p> <p>Improvements could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wheelchair and buggy storage Improved wheelchair access Improved communal kitchen facilities Refurbishing and redecorating of lounges Fencing and landscaping
Individual	Sheltered scheme flats will be	Refurbished bathrooms, including level access

Work	The Council could provide:	The improved services Rochford Housing Association will provide:
flats	included in the overall work explained above	showers Improved kitchens where needed Other improvements, where needed, as above in the general section.
Environment, safety and security		
Works to your neighbourhood	Carry out essential health and safety works and very limited improvements to estates and neighbourhoods.	More than £300,000 each year over 10 years to fund improvements in consultation with tenants and residents. Rochford Housing Association is particularly keen to look at improvements that will help to 'make crime more difficult'. It will work with tenants in local areas to decide the best way to spend the money, but improvements could include: Estate lighting Landscaping and paving Car parking

In addition, Rochford Housing Association will maintain the Rochford Standard so as to ensure that homes remain to a modern standard for the next 30 years. The Council does not have the money to make a similar commitment.

How will major works and improvements be prioritised?

Spending £27 million over the first 5 years following transfer will require careful planning by Rochford Housing Association. In consultation with tenants, a clear, detailed programme will be drawn up showing what work will be done, and where, in the first five years. The programme will be based on dealing first with homes in the worst condition, or those with old facilities (for example, homes with kitchens that are over 20 years old).

Will Rochford Housing Association consult tenants on the major works and improvements programme?

Yes tenants will be consulted. Each major works scheme will have a named person responsible for liaison between individual tenants, tenant representatives and the contractor; this will start at the planning stage and continue through until completion of the works.

Where possible, Rochford Housing Association will give you a choice of style and colour options to choose from (for example, in the style of kitchen units).

As with works completed in the past by the Council, if any major disruption is likely, Rochford Housing Association will consider offering alternative short-term accommodation. However it is not expected that this will be necessary.

What will happen about adaptations for people with disabilities?

Rochford Housing Association will have a budget of over £100,000 each year for adaptations where required in tenant's homes. (Currently the Council has only £65,000 available per year). Rochford Housing Association will arrange for occupational therapists to make recommendations for adaptations which will help elderly and disabled tenants to live more independently in their own homes. This is in addition to the standard programme of fitting level access showers for sheltered schemes.

Will Rochford Housing Association consider the environment?

Yes Rochford Housing Association will:

- review energy contracts to ensure the best value for energy for residents with communal heating schemes
- use sustainable products in the works programme wherever possible;
- involve tenants in the assessment of environmental impact prior to the agreement of the major works and improvement programme; and
- ask all works and repairs contractors to submit environmental policies before being awarded contracts.

What about environmental improvements?

Tenants have also told us about the improvements they want for the areas around their homes. If the transfer goes ahead, Rochford Housing Association will have more than £300,000 a year in each of the first 10 years to maintain and improve the environment and communal areas around general needs homes, with future budgets to maintain them properly. It will hold discussions with individuals and tenant groups to determine their priorities. It will then carry out those works of environmental improvements which residents have identified as a priority. Those works could include:

- work to “design out” crime, looking especially at badly lit areas
- installation of better door entry systems to improve security in blocks of flats
- improvements to the environment such as the renewal of fences and gates, repairs to tarmac and concrete drives and repair of paths;
- upgrading floors and stairways of communal areas so that these become easier to keep clean and maintain;
- the improvement of garage sites and parking areas to make them safer to use
- the provision of new parking areas where parking provision is poor and new parking is practical.

See section F for more details about improvements in sheltered housing schemes

Part D: Delivering better local services and repairs

60-second summary

If transfer takes place Rochford Housing Association will:

- *have two local housing offices*
- *improve the current repairs service*
- *deal promptly with anti-social behaviour*
- *double tenants' access to a handy man service*
- *improve decorating and gardening services for older people*
- *improve cleaning at sheltered schemes;*
- *ensure all staff are properly trained*
- *involve tenants in monitoring the services they receive*

REPAIRS

An improved repairs service

Rochford Housing Association will provide an efficient, responsive and high-quality repairs service. It will:

- Restore the repairs service to the level it was before the Council had to introduce cutbacks. This will mean that Rochford Housing Association will not only carry out repairs that the Council does now, but will also reinstate the repair or replacement of items such as fences that have been provided by the Council. It will also replace tap washers, free of charge.
- Bring in a clear appointments system.
- Review contracting arrangements to ensure the highest quality services were delivered at best value.
- Focus on getting the job done right the first time, every time
- Double the access for tenants to an enhanced handy man service. Rochford Housing Association will consult tenants on how this should best be provided.

How quickly will repairs be done?

Rochford Housing Association will aim to exceed the Council's current repairs targets and will provide an out of hours emergency repair service.

Repairs to Empty Properties

Rochford Housing Association will establish a standard for letting empty properties, in consultation with tenants. This will aim to ensure that empty properties are in a good and habitable condition before they are let by Rochford Housing Association.

How will tenants be involved in repairs contracts?

In the early years after transfer, the current contracts will continue, and you will still be dealing with the people you know.

After the transfer a tenant working party will be established to

- review standards of services
- to be involved in the selection of contractors to undertake work in the future.
- review repairs priorities
- suggest improvements to the repair by appointment system.

Contractor performance will be one of Rochford Housing Association's top priorities and tenant representatives will be involved in regular reviews to ensure that a quality service is provided.

Tenants will be asked for feedback on how well repairs and other works are carried out. Their views will be closely monitored and acted on.

When current council repairs contracts are due to run out Rochford Housing Association will look to negotiate new contracts with a higher level of service. Tenants will be involved in the selection of contractors for the new contracts looking at such things as customer satisfaction and quality of work done. Tenants will also be involved in the selection of contractors for other future contracts.

See Part G for more information on tenant involvement.

Day to day repairs and cyclical maintenance

Rochford Housing Association will set a budget of around £750,000 per year for day-to-day repairs which includes small jobs such as mending dripping taps, easing doors and repairing gutters, and for repairs to vacant properties to make sure they are fit to let to a new tenant. Key aims are to provide an effective, good quality, value for money repair and maintenance service, which meets the obligations to tenants and leaseholders.

In addition, Rochford Housing Association will continue to provide cyclical works with a further budget of around £250,000 per year. These are maintenance works that are programmed to happen on a regular basis. These will include:

- External painting
- Servicing gas and other types of heating
- Servicing door entry systems and lifts
- Electrical safety checks
- Internal decoration of communal areas
- Any other component replacement works that are required

What are Rochford Housing Association's plans for other services?

If transfer takes place, Rochford Housing Association will work with tenants to improve existing services and develop new services. Rochford Housing Association plans to have:

- ? **a high quality service** - all Rochford Housing Association staff will be trained and given clear standards for providing services such as repairs, responding to telephone calls, making appointments and dealing with tenants' concerns. These will be monitored and reported to the Rochford Housing Association Board which will be responsible for making sure high quality services are delivered. Tenants will have four places on the Board.

- **two local housing offices** - these will be accessible for all residents and cover all housing management matters. Rochford Housing Association will consult with residents on the location of these offices.
- ? **increased security** - security works will be carried out to your homes and the area surrounding your homes. For more information, see Part C;
- ? **Extra funds to spend on environmental works**- these funds could be used to improve the tidiness, lighting, security and general appearance of estates. They could include access for wheelchairs and buggy stores. Rochford Housing Association will talk to tenants about what is needed in their area and will carry out those works which residents have identified as their priority.
- **Regular, publicised estate inspections with local residents** - these will ensure that any problems could be resolved quickly.
- **Tenants involved in decisions on how services are provided** - Rochford Housing Association will establish an inspection programme for tenants to visit estates, monitor, record and report on the quality of services being delivered.
- **Improved handyman, decorating and gardening services for older and disabled tenants** - The Council's existing handyman, decorating and gardening service will be expanded. Priorities will be agreed with tenants on how this service will be delivered.
- **A welcome pack for all tenants** - this handbook will be developed with tenants to ensure that useful information is provided in an easy to read format;
- **user-friendly information available in plain English and a range of formats** (such as Braille, large type, audio tape and other languages);
- **Better value for money** - and efficiency in local housing services through being part of a larger group of housing associations
- **Working with the Council** - to tackle issues such as anti social behaviour and to help the Council meet its wider targets for housing and community services.

LETTINGS POLICY

How will homes be let to new tenants?

Rochford Housing Association will let homes in a similar way to the Council. Priority will be given to people in housing need. In order to provide balanced communities

Rochford Housing Association would look to have, where appropriate, local letting priorities. As with all registered social landlords in the area, the Council will be able to nominate people in housing need to most empty properties.

Rochford District Council will have nomination rights to most of the new homes which Rochford Housing Association will provide.

Rochford Housing Association may participate in a new South Essex Choice-based letting scheme that is currently being devised. This will give tenants and applicants more choice over the areas where they would like to live.

As with the Council, Rochford Housing Association will continue to operate a tenants' transfer policy. This will enable tenants who need to move to bigger, or smaller properties, or to another type or location of property, to be considered for a move. Rochford Housing Association will also link its transfer policy with policies on harassment, anti-social behaviour and domestic violence.

As with the Council, tenants will have access to mutual exchange (home swaps), both in Rochford Housing Association's properties and with other Registered Social Landlords. It will participate in the national HOMES and HOMESWAP schemes.

Who will provide the housing service?

Housing management staff you meet and deal with at the Council, including the housing officers and sheltered scheme managers from the sheltered housing schemes, will transfer to Rochford Housing Association. They will be managed by a new local chief executive responsible for ensuring that high service standards are met and maintained. Rochford Housing Association will have training programmes to ensure that all staff are able to deliver the high standard of service promised.

Rochford Housing Association will also work with the Council and local agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, police, adult care services and the local health primary care trust to ensure that a high standard of service is provided for you.

Part E: Anti-social behaviour and crime prevention

60-second summary

Rochford Housing Association will:

- **have a designated anti-social behaviour officer**
- **take prompt action on nuisance, crime and anti-social behaviour**
- **ensure that all tenants know their responsibilities**
- **improve security systems to help prevent crime (see Section C on improvements)**

Rochford Housing Association's commitment to tackling anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour can cause misery and disruption to people's lives. Rochford Housing Association believes that no tenant should be expected to put up with any form of harassment or anti-social behaviour whilst in their home or on their estate.

Rochford Housing Association will work to uphold the rights of tenants and their families to live in peace and without fear for their own safety.

Rochford Housing Association will play its part as a member of the Rochford Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership in meeting the targets and actions in the local community plan and the Crime and Disorder Strategy.

How will Rochford Housing Association deal with anti-social behaviour?

Rochford Housing Association will give a high priority to dealing with nuisance and anti-social behaviour. It will work in close partnership with the police, the Council and other agencies to tackle anti-social behaviour affecting its tenants and leaseholders. It will take firm and prompt action against any form of anti-social behaviour or nuisance and will report progress to tenants and to the board.

Rochford Housing Association will seek to tackle anti-social behaviour promptly and effectively in a number of ways, including:

- **Designated anti-social behaviour officer** - who you could talk to in confidence if you experience or witness nuisance, anti-social behaviour or crime. This person will handle your concerns promptly and aim to find an appropriate resolution.

- **Home visits** - to ensure that staff listen to all sides and understand the nature of the problem;
- **Mediation service** - This confidential and independent service will help people involved in a dispute to reach an agreement with the help of a trained impartial mediator;
- **Acceptable Behaviour Contracts** - these agreements which have been found to work well, will be signed by the person causing the nuisance as a pledge to stop their unacceptable behaviour;
- **Injunctions** - where necessary, Rochford Housing Association will apply to the court for an injunction to stop a particular unacceptable activity or to make someone do something;
- **Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs)** - these orders involve the police and courts and aim to regulate behaviour;
- **Notice of Seeking Possession** - in serious cases, Rochford Housing Association will serve a Notice of Seeking Possession as the first step towards evicting a tenant. This notice will clearly set out how the tenants had broken the terms of their Tenancy Agreement and will give sufficient detail for them to know how to put it right;
- **Possession action** - if there is no improvement in a tenant's behaviour following the service of a Notice of Seeking Possession, Rochford Housing Association will take the next step by applying to the court to evict them. The court will listen to the evidence on both sides and will decide if the tenant's actions were serious enough to grant a possession order;
- **Demoted Tenancies** - if appropriate, Rochford Housing Association could apply to the courts to demote a tenancy. A demoted tenancy will mean that a tenant loses some of their rights making it easier for Rochford Housing Association to evict them if there is more anti-social behaviour.; or
- **Eviction** - in the most serious cases the court may grant Rochford Housing Association a possession order. Tenants who become homeless because of anti-social behaviour may be considered by the Council to have made themselves homeless intentionally and are therefore unlikely to be re-housed.

What will Rochford Housing Association do to help prevent anti-social behaviour?

Rochford Housing Association will help to prevent anti-social behaviour by:

- **having an induction** for new tenants which makes it clear what behaviour is and is not acceptable;
- **sending a clear message** to those who cause nuisance to others that it will not be tolerated by using the remedies shown above;
- **having clauses in the Tenancy Agreement** to deal with anti-social behaviour, racial and other harassment, noise and nuisance.
- **giving clear information and practical advice** on what tenants can do to help deal with anti-social behaviour;
- **assessing the support needs of tenants** and, where appropriate, making a referral to a supporting agency so that the tenancy could be successfully maintained;
- **visiting new tenants** following their induction to check that they have settled in and that there are no unresolved issues;
- **inspecting estates** on a regular basis to maximise contact with local residents to help understand where and why problems occur;
- **monitoring** anti-social behaviour using sound recording equipment, video and digital cameras

In addition, Rochford Housing Association will carry out security improvements to homes and estates in consultation with tenants. These will include installing secure external doors, window locks to new windows that comply with current safety standards and providing security lighting and door entry systems.

Part F: Services for people in sheltered housing

60-second summary

Rochford Housing Association will;

- *invest £5.4 million in the first 5 years in improvements to sheltered schemes across the District*
- *have more than £100,000 each year for aids and adaptations (on top of the £5.4m);*
- *install walk-in showers in all sheltered flats where wanted;*
- *install door-entry systems to all sheltered schemes;*
- *have a budget for each scheme for communal improvements;*
- *extend the gardening and handy man service;*
- *prioritise older people's security improvements' at no extra charge*
- *provide a 24-hour alarm service;*
- *look at the possibility of providing an 'extra care' scheme*

Will services for older people continue and be improved?

Most of the Council's tenants are over the retirement age. About a quarter of the Council's homes are in sheltered schemes, with an alarm system and the services of a sheltered scheme manager. Many other homes are occupied by older people.

Rochford Housing Association wants to provide high-quality homes and services for older people. It wants these to match what older people want and need.

It will do this by aiming to improve all its homes in the ways set out earlier in this document, and also by having a special programme for **improving sheltered housing** (see below).

Rochford Housing Association will also:

- have an increased **aids and adaptations** budget of over £100,000 each year (for things such as ramps, grab rails, raised toilet seats and so on) and will make sure that assessments from occupational therapists are not delayed;

- expand the existing service to help older and vulnerable people with their gardens and expand **the handyman service**;
- expand help with **decorating**;
- prioritise **security improvements** to older people's homes; and
- provide a 24-hour **alarm call service**.

Sheltered housing service

Rochford Housing Association is keen to provide good quality housing for those tenants who need some assistance to live independently. It will work with tenants, their relatives and other agencies to ensure that the sheltered schemes meet tenants' needs, conform to legislation, and meet the needs of the area.

The facilities and services currently provided by the Council, including sheltered scheme managers, communal lounges, laundries and a 24-hour community alarm service, will continue. Where needed these will be improved.

Improvements to sheltered schemes

The Council's sheltered schemes are:

Bell House (Great Wakering)

Britton Court (Rayleigh)

Chignal House (Rayleigh)

Frances Cottee Lodge and Clarence Road (Rayleigh)

Goodmans (Great Wakering)

The Lavers (Rayleigh)

Millview Court (Rochford)

Pembroke House (Rochford)

Romney House (Rochford)

Rupert Jarvis Court (Hockley)

Spa Court (Hockley)

Wedgwood Court (Rochford)

If transfer goes ahead, all of these schemes will transfer to Rochford Housing Association.

All schemes will get:

- **Works carried out to the Rochford Standard and the service improvements** as set out in earlier parts of this document.
- **A new door entry system installed within two years of transfer.**

This will be linked to a video system to allow tenants to see their visitors and let them in without needing to go to the front door. These new systems will allow vulnerable residents to be given safety devices like wireless fall detectors or heart monitors. These systems will improve safety and security, which is something that residents in all sheltered housing schemes have been asking for.

- **An initial overall budget of £800,000 for “immediate” improvements to communal areas available for spending in the first 2 years.** This could be spent on decorating and refurbishing the lounges, improving access arrangements, communal kitchens and/or laundries, better security, fencing and lighting. This money will be spent in the way each scheme thinks best.

Other scheme improvements

Because some schemes have had work done already, the improvements will not be the same in every scheme. The proposed improvements will be discussed with residents and, where needed, schemes could have:

- ***improved security measures*** including high quality secure doors, increased levels of communal lighting, better fencing around schemes as well as the door entry/video systems referred to above.
- ***improved access*** by upgrading and the installation of lifts and ramps where appropriate.

There will also be a rolling programme of major improvements where needed.

In 2008 Rochford Housing Association will start to upgrade **Spa Court** in Hockley and **Britton Court** in Rayleigh. These will be upgraded first because they contain many unpopular bedsits and it is clear that most people prefer to have a separate bedroom.

All residents already in Spa and Britton Courts will be able to carry on living there of course. By 2009, there will be many extra one bedroom flats available for people, after the bedsits are improved. Priority for moving into these new homes will go to people already living in sheltered housing schemes who need rehousing.

Improvements to individual sheltered flats

All individual homes that need them will be able to choose to have the same improvements as general tenants, as listed in Section C. Sheltered tenants will have the additional option of level access showers.

Rochford Housing Association believes that these improvements will benefit everyone currently living in sheltered housing, but as long as there were no maintenance or health & safety issues, tenants could choose not to have improvements done if they preferred to leave things as they are.

Extra care housing schemes -

These are sheltered schemes where more facilities and services are available for frailer older people. Rochford Housing Association will consider introducing extra care schemes in the District (where personal support and a daily hot meal is available) as part of its programme for new housing. This could mean building new schemes or it could mean upgrading an existing one (after consultation with tenants living in it).

How will sheltered housing services be paid for?

Sheltered housing tenants will continue to pay their rent, and charges for services such as communal lighting, heating, payment towards the sheltered scheme manager services, alarm and other services, as they do now. Sheltered housing tenants will still be able to claim Housing Benefit from the Council. Better services, such as cleaning or gardening may involve an increase in service charges. In such cases, residents will be fully consulted before services are changed.

Part G: Involving you in running the service

60-second summary

Rochford Housing Association is committed to improving tenant participation and is keen to know your views on all aspects of the housing service.

How will Rochford Housing Association involve tenants?

Rochford Housing Association will:

- ?? involve tenants in all areas of the housing service including repairs, works and improvements, tenancy management, estate management, policy and strategy development and business planning;
- ? offer tenants a choice about their level of involvement from simply receiving information, to giving their views, participating in decisions or managing their services;
- ? offer tenants different ways to get involved including joining a local or district wide tenants' group, attending one-off meetings, completing a survey, going on an estate inspection or reading a newsletter or visiting the website;
- ? involve tenants in all aspects of decision-making from planning new services, monitoring performance and reviewing services;
- ? involve tenants in decisions which affect their own homes and tenancies, their communities and their landlord services;
- ? work with local agencies and contractors to provide efficient services;
- ? provide full and open information, for example, through newsletters, an annual report and a Tenants' Handbook;

Becoming a Member of the Board

Tenants will hold 4 out of the 12 places on the Board of Rochford Housing Association. The Board will make decisions about the policy and direction of Rochford Housing Association. As a Board Member, a tenant elected to the Board will need to attend

Board meetings and will be responsible, with the rest of the Board, for making decisions about services and major works.

Joining a tenants' group

You could join:

- a district-wide group, like the Tenants' Forum, which could, for example, be involved in developing new policies and prioritising budgets;
- a focus group, which will deal with one-off issues such as developing a new service, or reviewing service standards; or
- a local tenants' and residents' association, to be involved in your local housing service and community issues.
- Rochford Housing Association will support all of these groups to ensure residents have a real say in the work of the association, including the nomination of members to represent residents on the board and committees of the association.

Giving your views

Rochford Housing Association will actively seek your views, for example, after works and services have been carried out through postal and telephone surveys or focus groups, in order to:

- make sure services and contractors are up to standard;
- ? plan new services and review existing ones; and
- ? measure and monitor resident satisfaction with services, the results of which will be publicised.

What support will be available for involvement?

Rochford Housing Association will improve on the high levels of involvement already available from the Council. It will create a new agreement between the Board and tenants.

The new commitment will provide support through:

- financial assistance of up to £18,000 each year to cover travel, meeting expenses, printing, copying, training and other expenses ;
- more training for tenants;
- specialist staff
- good facilities for meetings.

If you will like a copy of the current Tenants' Compact, see Part K.

Part H: Your rights

60-second summary

Your rights will be the same as they are now or better - except for one right you will lose (this is explained in the following pages). Your rights could only be changed if you personally agree to the change in writing.

- ♦ your rights will be protected by contract;
- ♦ you will still have security of tenure;
- ♦ you will have the Preserved Right to Buy (if you currently have the Right to Buy with the council);
- ♦ you will have the right to pass on your home; and
- ♦ you will have the right to stay in your home (the association will have no more rights to make you move than the council has).

How will your rights be affected if the transfer goes ahead?

Council tenants are Secure tenants. With Rochford Housing Association you will become an Assured tenant.

The main difference is that as a Secure tenant the rights you now have are set down in law by Acts of Parliament. As an Assured tenant with Rochford Housing Association, your rights will be covered partly by Acts of Parliament and partly by a legally binding contract (your Tenancy Agreement) between you and Rochford Housing Association.

The rights of an Assured tenant can be less than for a Council Secure tenant. Rochford Housing Association has, however, agreed to extend your rights to match your existing Council tenancy rights. This extension is in the Tenancy Agreement and forms a contract between you and Rochford Housing Association (see the proposed Tenancy Agreement in Part L). **This contract cannot be changed by Rochford Housing Association without your agreement in writing.**

How will your rights compare?

The table compares the rights Secure tenants now have with the Council with those that you will have with Rochford Housing Association if the transfer goes ahead.

Rights	With the Council as a Secure tenant	With Rochford Housing Association as an Assured tenant
The Right to Buy your home with a discount	Yes	Yes (called the Preserved Right to Buy)
The right of succession (the ability to pass on your home after death)	Yes	Yes
The right to transfer and exchange	Yes	Yes
The right to sub-let part of your home with permission or take in lodgers	Yes	Yes
The Right to Repair	Yes	Yes
The right to carry out improvements and receive compensation	Yes	Yes
The right to be consulted	Yes	Yes
The right to information	Yes	Yes
The right to manage	Yes	No (however an alternative is available, see below)
The right to claim Housing Benefit	Yes	Yes
The right not to have your Tenancy Agreement changed (except for rent and service charges) without your individual consent	No	Yes
The Right to Acquire	No	Yes

What rights will you lose?

The only right you will lose (because Rochford Housing Association cannot offer it) is:

- **the statutory right to manage** (which allows tenants to set up a Tenant Management Organisation, subject to certain rules), as this does not apply to Assured tenants of Registered Social Landlords. However, Rochford Housing Association will support greater tenant management of their homes and have

included provision for this in the set up of the organisation. See Part G for more details.

What rights will you gain?

- **the right to approve any changes to your tenancy** - You will be asked to sign a new Tenancy Agreement (see the proposed Tenancy Agreement in Part L). Once you and Rochford Housing Association sign the Tenancy Agreement, your rights in that agreement cannot be changed without your permission. **This provides greater protection against change to the agreement than exists with the Council.** The only things that can change are the annual rent and service charges. See Part B for more details on rent and service charges.

The new Tenancy Agreement has been drafted in accordance with guidance published by the Housing Corporation - the body that regulates all Registered Social Landlords. The Tenant's Forum and, Your Choice, the Independent Tenants' Advisors, were extensively consulted in drawing up the new Tenancy Agreement.

- **The right to acquire** - tenants of Rochford Housing Association (including existing tenants transferring from the Council) will be able to buy their home under the Right to Acquire scheme as long as certain criteria are met. This scheme is based on a grant rather than a discount which is applied with the Right to Buy. The maximum grant for homes in Rochford (as set by Government) is currently £[16,000]. Tenants who are eligible for the Right to Buy will continue to be (see below). You cannot, however, use both the Right to Acquire and the Right to Buy.
- **The ability to pass on your home (succession)** - Rochford Housing Association's Tenancy Agreement allows the same people to take over the tenancy (when a tenant dies) as under a Council Secure tenancy. As with the Council, your home can only be passed on once, other than in exceptional circumstances. Please note you will be counted as a successor if you were a joint tenant at transfer and later become a sole tenant.

However, Rochford Housing Association's Tenancy Agreement will ignore any previous successions to the tenancy with the Council. This means that if the transfer goes ahead, all tenants will start again with a right of succession, even if they have already used their right of succession when they were tenants with the Council. **This gives an additional right of succession to some people.**

What happens to the Right to Buy?

If you have the Right to Buy your home with the Council, you will continue to have what is called a Preserved Right to Buy with Rochford Housing Association, and the same discount will apply and will continue to increase while you remained a tenant of Rochford Housing Association (up to the maximum discount, which is currently £34,000).

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These rights remain with you, or any member of your family who succeeds you (takes over your tenancy). They remain even if you later move to another home which is owned by Rochford Housing Association, as long as it is not exempt from the Right to Buy. Also, if you have the Preserved Right to Buy and later move to a Council home in another area, you will still have the Right to Buy.

Some homes are currently exempt from the Right to Buy, such as sheltered housing accommodation, and this would continue to be the case with Rochford Housing Association. Tenants housed by Rochford Housing Association after the date of transfer will not have the Preserved Right to Buy. They may, however, have the Right to Acquire (see above).

The Right to Buy discount that you can claim is limited by a Government rule called the "cost floor rule". This means that you cannot buy your home for less than the money that has been spent buying, building, repairing or improving the property over a certain period of time. With the Council, the period the rule applies for is 10 years. If the transfer goes ahead the period would change to 15 years. This could also include the cost of works that Rochford Housing Association plans to carry out to your home if the transfer goes ahead.

Because of the high value of property prices in the area, the cost floor rules are not likely to affect any tenants' Right to Buy.

What about transfers or exchanges?

Rochford Housing Association aims to make best use of its housing by assisting with tenant transfers and exchanges both within its stock and with other landlords.

Rochford Housing Association will participate in HOMES (the Housing Organisations Mobility and Exchange Scheme) and the HOMESWAP scheme that helps people to move to Council or Registered Social Landlord homes outside Rochford.

You will retain the right to exchange your home with another Council or Housing Association tenant. You will also retain the right to pass on your tenancy in your lifetime to a person who would have been entitled to succeed to your tenancy upon your death.

Will you still be able to sublet your home?

Yes. You will be in the same position with Rochford Housing Association as with the Council. You will be able to sublet part of your home with permission of Rochford Housing Association

Will Rochford Housing Association have more rights to obtain possession of tenants' homes?

No. Rochford Housing Association will have similar rights to obtain possession as the Council, and tenants have security of tenure to match what they have under their current tenancy with the Council. For further details, see the proposed Tenancy Agreement in Part L.

Rochford Housing Association **will not** be able to use the mandatory ground for possession in ground 8 of schedule 2 to the Housing Act 1988. This ground requires the court to grant possession if an assured tenant has eight weeks of arrears of rent owing at the court date.

Rochford Housing Association **will not** be able to use Ground 11 of Schedule 2 to the Housing Act 1988. This ground allows the court discretion to grant possession where the tenant has persistently failed to pay rent even if no rent is owing at the court date.

Will you still have a right to have repairs carried out?

Yes. This means that if Rochford Housing Association or its contractors failed to carry out certain types of repairs within set time limits, you could require Rochford Housing Association to appoint another contractor to do the repairs. You have the right to compensation if that contractor also fails to do the repairs within a set time limit.

Will Rochford Housing Association consult you?

Yes. Rochford Housing Association will consult with, and provide information to, all its tenants. This is one of the terms in the Tenancy Agreement (see the proposed Tenancy Agreement in Part L).

Part I: About Rochford Housing Association

60-second summary

- *Rochford Housing Association will be a new, local housing association set up by the council and tenants, to own the housing and have the interests of Rochford's tenants at the heart of what it does.*
- *It will be run by a Board of Management made up of equal numbers of tenants, council nominees and independent people with relevant skills and experience.*
- *It will be part of, and supported by, Hereward Housing, and Sanctuary Housing Group.*
- *Hereward Housing was itself formed by a Council transfer and so understands the issues fully.*

About Rochford Housing Association?

The council and tenants have set up Rochford Housing Association as a locally governed, not-for-profit, housing association. It will be your landlord if transfer goes ahead. It will raise the money needed and will meet the promises in this document.

Rochford Housing Association is an Industrial and Provident Society. Its registered number is 30108R. It is a not-for-profit charitable organisation and, subject to registration with the Housing Corporation, will be a registered social landlord (RSL). Registered social landlords are bodies that provide affordable rented housing to people in housing need and are registered with the Housing Corporation. There are around 2,000 registered social landlords (sometimes called housing associations) in England, owning more than 3 million affordable homes. Rochford Housing Association has been set up with the help of the Council and tenants specifically to take a transfer of the Council's homes if tenants vote in favour.

If tenants vote against transfer, Rochford Housing Association will be disbanded.

Why is Rochford Housing Association working with Hereward Housing and Sanctuary Housing Group

The council and tenants wanted to ensure that Rochford Housing Association will have financial strength and could provide efficient and cost-effective central services. They also wanted to have some local independence to ensure that decisions about Rochford housing were made locally.

A panel of councillors and tenants looked at all of the housing associations that were interested. The panel followed a rigorous selection process, checking experience, expertise, reputation, performance and financial viability. This panel recommended Hereward Housing and the council agreed.

If transfer goes ahead, Rochford Housing Association will provide the housing service in the area. It will be a separate organisation within Hereward Housing (called a subsidiary) and part of Sanctuary Housing Group.

Hereward Housing was created to accept a transfer of 4,200 homes from East Cambridgeshire District Council in 1993 and now manages 6,500 homes throughout Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex as part of Sanctuary Housing Group.

Sanctuary is one of the largest housing associations in the UK, with more than 50,000 homes in its Group. Hereward's and Sanctuary's experience will be available to Rochford Housing Association and its tenants.

How will Rochford Housing Association be run?

If transfer goes ahead, Rochford Housing Association will be a subsidiary of Hereward Housing. It will be :

- run by a Board with 4 tenants, 4 people nominated by the Council and 4 independent people;
- run on a not-for-profit basis and no dividends can be paid out. Any surpluses made will be spent on improvements to homes and services or repaying loans.
- registered with the Housing Corporation, a Government appointed body set up to regulate and supervise all Registered Social Landlords; and
- based in the Rochford District.

Rochford Housing Association has charitable status, which gives significant tax advantages. Charities are limited as to what activities they can be involved in and who they can house.

Who is on the Board of Rochford Housing Association and what do they do?

The Board is a group of people who are ultimately responsible for the organisation's governance, finance and performance. The way boards work is monitored by the Housing Corporation.

If transfer takes place, the Board will have overall responsibility for managing the homes. It has 4 tenant members (including 1 leaseholder), 4 members nominated by the Council and 4 independent members with particular skills and experience.

Tenant board members will have the same rights on the board as other board members. They will have a direct and equal say in the management of the housing service.

The proposed board (known at the moment as the shadow board) has already started to meet. This is to ensure a smooth transition if tenants do vote for the transfer. If tenants vote against the transfer the board will be disbanded.

The board has been developing Rochford Housing Association's policies and values so that it can provide a quality housing service for the future. The board has also been involved in developing the proposal contained in this document and is committed to delivering the promises if the transfer goes ahead.

How were the Shadow Board Members chosen?

The 4 tenant shadow Board Members were elected by the tenants and leaseholders of the Tenants' Forum following an open invitation to all tenants.

The 4 Council shadow Board Members were selected by elected Councillors.

The 4 independent shadow Board Members are being appointed by Hereward Housing following advertisements in the press and a thorough interview process by Hereward Housing and the tenant and Council shadow board members.

Who are the Board Members?

Tenants

Tom Bennett: Tom has been a resident of the Rochford District as a leaseholder for 2 years, and has represented leaseholders on the Joint Transfer Steering Group for that period.

Doug Gregory: Doug is retired after working in the motor trade, including running his own business. He was a member of Great Wakering Parish Council, and is involved in

voluntary work with the Helping Hands minibus, which gives him a good insight into tenant's problems and their thoughts on housing issues.

Derek Head: Derek is retired after a career in shipping and transport, and lives at one of Rochford's sheltered schemes. He firmly believes in the future of Rochford Housing Association, and aims to work to make it succeed.

Virginia Wade-Bain: Virginia has had various posts as a governess. She is a Rochford resident and tenant, and has a particular concern for elderly and vulnerable people in her area. She has been an active and enthusiastic member of the various committees associated with the proposed transfer.

Council members

Keith Gordon: Keith is a Rochford District councillor as well as being on Rochford and Hawkwell Parish Councils. Keith works for a major builder in the social housing market, and he hopes that this experience, allied to his local knowledge and commitment, will be of value to local residents and to the new housing association.

June Lumley June was elected to the Council in May 2002 representing Rayleigh Grange Ward, has been a member of Rayleigh Town Council since 1996 and is involved with local voluntary organisations. She grew up in Council housing in Wickford, where her parents lived throughout their lives, so has a particular interest in social housing and the provision of more affordable housing locally.

Maureen Vince: Maureen was previously a District Councillor and is Chairman of Rochford Parish Council. She was a member of the group looking into the options for Rochford's Housing and is current Chairman of the Joint Steering Group and the Shadow Board. Her aim is to see all tenants in good social housing which goes well beyond the basic decent standard with the back-up of a good value repair and maintenance service.

Cllr Mrs Carol Weston: Having moved to Hockley, Essex 6 years ago, Carol quickly became involved with local issues becoming a Parish Councillor within Hockley Parish Council. She became Chairman of Hockley Parish Council this year and has been a Rochford District Councillor for two terms. She has direct experience within housing having worked for Hanover Housing Association for 2 years.

Independent local people:

Nigel Barron: Nigel is a Director with a housing association specialising in housing for people with special needs. He has also been a Councillor in Thurrock and worked extensively with credit unions.

Alex Coulson: Alex has recently retired from Rochford District Council with over 30 years experience in housing. He is keen to ensure that the Council's transfer of stock to Rochford Housing Association is successful, as this will provide an opportunity for building more affordable housing in the district.

Robert Hollinshead: was the Chief Executive of Newcastle Building Society, which was a significant lender to Housing Associations. He is a qualified accountant and a Member of the Institute of Taxation. He has now retired and moved to live in Suffolk.

A further member of the Board with legal experience is being recruited.

Do Board Members get paid?

No. Although the Housing Corporation allows a reasonable payment, none is currently proposed and Board Members have been recruited to serve on a voluntary basis. However, Board Members can claim out of pocket expenses incurred in carrying out Rochford Housing Association's business

How will Board Members be chosen in the future?

One tenant Board Member will stand down at each annual general meeting of Rochford Housing Association. This will be the longest serving member. At least a month before this, all tenants will be circulated with information about the role and responsibilities of being a Board Member, and how to apply. Replacement tenant board members will be elected by tenants from interested tenants and leaseholders. Retiring Board Members can be re-elected.

Council Board members will be chosen by the Council and hold office for a period the Council decides.

Independent Board members will be chosen by the other board members of Rochford Housing Association including tenant members (and ratified by Hereward Housing).

Who will provide the service?

Rochford Housing Association will employ paid officers to run the housing service on a day-to-day basis. They will mostly be staff who currently provide the service for the Council, so you will continue to deal with people you know but Rochford Housing Association will have training programmes to ensure that all staff are able to deliver the high standard of service promised.

Who will regulate Rochford Housing Association?

Rochford Housing Association will be part of Hereward Housing and Sanctuary Housing Group. It will have its own board to deal with local matters, but will benefit from the knowledge and experience of Hereward and Sanctuary.

The Housing Corporation is the government body set up to ensure that all housing associations deliver a high quality housing service and are properly managed on a sound financial basis.

The Housing Corporation has a regulatory code which sets out what is expected of housing associations and other registered social landlords. This code is designed to make sure that the association is viable, properly managed and properly governed. The Housing Corporation assesses how well each association meets with the regulatory code and guidance. If an association is not doing well, the Housing Corporation has very wide powers to intervene.

Rochford Housing Association will have to register with the Housing Corporation and meet its registration criteria. The criteria cover the same issues as the regulatory code which include matters such as rents and service charges; quality of new homes; lettings and priorities; residents' rights; repairs, maintenance and improvements and value for money.

Like the council, Rochford Housing Association will be regularly inspected by the Audit Commission.

Its 'parent', Hereward Housing, will also monitor Rochford Housing Association. It will also provide support and guidance to the Board and staff of Rochford Housing Association.

Will the Council have any control over Rochford Housing Association?

Before the transfer can take place, Rochford Housing Association will be required to enter into a formal and legally-binding contract with the Council. This agreement will allow the Council to enforce the promises made in this document. The Council will meet regularly with the Association to check that the contract was being met. It could also, as a last resort, take Rochford Housing Association to Court.

For more information on the Council's role, see Part A.

What will happen if I was unhappy with the service?

Rochford Housing Association recognises that complaints and comments from tenants can be a valuable source of feedback on service delivery. Rochford Housing Association will try to settle your complaint, in accordance with its published complaints procedure.

If you were still unhappy after going through Rochford Housing Association's complaints procedure, you will be able to contact the Independent Housing Ombudsman. Rochford Housing Association will aim to comply with any recommendation made by the Independent Housing Ombudsman.

You will also be able to contact one of your local Councillors or your Member of Parliament in the same way as you can now. Special arrangements will be made for them to contact a dedicated member of staff to act as a liaison in such cases.

What about Rochford Housing Association's staff?

Rochford Housing Association recognises that its staff would be its greatest asset and it would set out to be an employer that people would want to work for. Its aim would be to retain and attract good quality staff. There would be a comprehensive training programme for staff.

More about Sanctuary Housing Group

Sanctuary Housing Group currently combines the experience of six housing associations managing homes across the country.

Two of these associations were formed in the same way as Rochford Housing Association, as a result of a local authority housing transfer.

Each separate housing association within the Group provides services to its own tenants with its own staff, local offices and under the direction of its own board of management.

Within the Group there is a range of housing for people with different housing needs, including;

- housing for families;
- housing for couples and single people
- housing for older people;
- leasehold and shared ownership housing; and
- housing with extra care and support for older and disabled people.

There are separate organisations within Sanctuary Housing Group providing care in nursing homes across the country and providing housing for groups such as health workers and students.

Rochford Housing Association will benefit from the skill and expertise of others in the Group, as well as benefiting from economies of scale. However, it will manage its own local affairs with its own board of management.

Part J: Legal requirements for tenant consultation

The law which states that Councils have to consult their tenants about a proposed transfer of Council housing is set out in Section 106A and Schedule 3A of the Housing Act 1985. The Council and the Secretary of State for the Department for Communities and Local Government must have regard to the views of the Council's Secure tenants. If you are not sure if you have a secure tenancy, please refer to your Tenancy Agreement or contact your area housing office (details of which are included in Part M).

As part of this legal requirement for tenant consultation on a proposed transfer, the Council must write to you informing you of:

- details of the proposal that the Council considers appropriate, including the identity of the organisation to whom the transfer is to be made.
- the likely consequences of the transfer for the tenant.
- the effects of the provisions of Schedule 3A Housing Act 1985 and, in the case of Secure tenants, your preserved right to buy following any transfer.

The details, consequences and effects of the Council's housing transfer proposal are set out in this document.

The effects of the provisions of Schedule 3A Housing Act 1985 are:

- the Council must first write to you (the Stage 1 Notice) giving you the information listed above and informing you that you may make representations to the Council. This document, and the introductory letter accompanying it, forms the Stage 1 Notice.
- the Council will consider any representations received by midday on [13 November 2006].
- after considering those representations, the Council must write to you (the Stage 2 Notice) informing you of any significant changes to the proposal. The Council must inform you that you may write to the Secretary of State with any objections to the proposal within a period of not less than 28 days. This 28 day period begins when the Council's Stage 2 letter is sent to tenants. The Secretary of State will take objections into account in considering any application from the Council for the necessary consent to transfer the stock.

Part K: Other information

What options did the Council consider?

The Council set up the Rochford Housing Options Appraisal Board in 2004 to look at the future needs of the Council's housing service and in particular to consider how to ensure homes met the Decent Homes Standard and the aspirations of tenants. This group of tenants, Councillors, staff and independent consultants looked at a number of options:

Option 1 - Stay as we are

Under this option, the Council would do its best to provide as good a housing service as available funds permit. It would use the resources available to carry out the most important and urgent repairs. It would be able to meet the decent homes standard but it would not have the money to keep its homes up to this standard in the future.

The Council does not believe it has enough money to provide the service that tenants have requested and the full repair and improvement programme necessary to bring and keep homes up to the modern, quality standard requested by tenants. This is explained under 'Why can't the Council spend what is needed?' in Part A.

There are new borrowing powers available to the Council. However, the Council's financial position is such that currently the income is not available to meet the extra cost of interest and loan repayments on the money the Council would need to borrow for the housing service. This is because each year the Council is required to pay 18% of your rents (an average of £4.80 per week) to the Government for redistribution to other areas of the country. This is expected to double in future years. In addition, the Council now has to pay an increasing proportion of its Right to Buy receipts to Government, so that by 2007 only one quarter will be kept by the Council.

Option 2 - Private Finance Initiative

This would involve the Council retaining ownership of the homes but contracting the management of some, or all of them, to a private partner for a long period. The private partner would raise the money needed to repair and improve the homes.

The Private Finance Initiative is still a relatively new idea being tested by a small number of Councils with the approval of the Government. Based on the schemes that are already in place, it works best in urban areas where there are large numbers of homes in very poor repair - conditions that do not apply in the Rochford District.

Option 3 - Arms Length Management Organisation

A number of Councils have recently transferred the management of their homes to a new arms length organisation, set up by the Council. The homes are still owned by the Council. The Council could receive extra money from the Government for repairs and improvements. However:

- under this option the Council would not be able to raise enough money to carry out all the repairs and modernisation works requested by Rochford's tenants, nor would it pay for the same level of increased and improved services that are promised in this document.
- only a few Councils gaining high marks for good performance from the Government's Housing Inspectorate are likely to qualify for extra Government money. The Council is not yet in this category and it has been confirmed that it is unlikely to be for several years.
- under this option the Council would not be able to afford to borrow additional money and a contribution from rents is still payable to the Government.

For these reasons the Council does not believe that this is the best option for its homes.

Option 4 - Transfer to an existing Registered Social Landlord

This option will mean transferring the ownership and management of Council homes to an existing Registered Social Landlord. It will provide the money needed for repairs and modernisation but it could mean transfer to an organisation based outside the Rochford area and which might not have the Rochford's Council's homes as its main focus.

The Council agreed with the views of tenants, leaseholders and staff in consultation that this will not give them the same level of local involvement as Option 5.

Option 5 (the favoured option) - Transfer to a new, local and independent Registered Social Landlord (albeit as part of an existing Group structure)

This is the option that the Council proposes in this document. It involves the transfer of the ownership and management of the Council's homes to Rochford Housing Association, which is a new not-for-profit local housing organisation **with its own local Board including tenants and Rochford Council nominees** that will be part of Sanctuary Housing Group with Hereward Housing as its parent.

The Council believes this is the best way to raise the money needed to invest in the repair and modernisation of homes. It also gives you a greater say in the running of the housing service than you have currently, or will have under the other options that were considered.

What further information is available?

As well as this document, there are some other documents you may want to look at in relation to the Council's housing transfer proposal. If you will like a copy of any of these documents please contact the relevant publisher (contact details are shown in Part M).

The Way Forward for Housing: this is the Government's policy statement on future housing policy. Published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (formally the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister).

Housing Stock Transfer: A Tenants' Guide. A short, clear guide to stock transfer. Published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (formally the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister). Available free of charge from DCLG publications Tel 0870 1226 236 (Quote PC :03HC01706/3)

The Housing Corporation's Charter for Housing Association Applicants and Residents: this document sets down the standards of service you can expect from Rochford Housing Association based on the Housing Corporation's guidelines. Published by the Housing Corporation.

The Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code: this document sets out the Housing Corporation's expectations in the way in which Rochford Housing Association will operate including the protection of tenants' rights, the standards of service provided and the viability of the organisation. Published by the Housing Corporation.

The Tenants' Compact: this is the binding agreement between tenants and the Council that governs tenant involvement in housing and the level of services tenants can expect. Rochford Housing Association will adopt the standards set out in the agreement in full and will seek to enhance it. A copy is available from Rochford District Council

The National Housing Federation's Level Threshold: this is a charter for disabled tenants and leaseholders that sets out service standards and levels of involvement which Rochford Housing Association will adopt. Published by the National Housing Federation.

[Rochford **Housing Strategy:** this is the Council's strategy for providing affordable housing for the Rochford District which was completed in 2005

The Rochford Community Plan: this sets out the Local Strategic Partnership's programmes and proposals for the well being of the local community. **The Rochford Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy:** this statutory plan sets out local priorities for fighting crime and disorder and reducing anti-social behaviour.

Part L: Tenancy Agreement for tenants transferring from the Council

This Tenancy Agreement will come into effect from the date of transfer and will be issued as soon as possible after that date to each transferring secure tenant except:

- Where tenants have a Possession Order from the Court in force against them;
- Where tenants have been served with a notice of intention to seek possession;
- Where tenants are subject to possession proceedings at the time the transfer takes place.

In these cases, the new Tenancy Agreement will be issued if:

- The Possession Order is discharged;
- Notice of intention to seek possession is withdrawn or expires; or
- If the Court decides not to make any Possession Order.

In the meantime, these tenants will become tenants of Rochford Housing Association like all other tenants. They will be assured tenants and the terms of their tenancies will be as set down by law, together with the terms of their existing tenancy with the Council. This means that they will not benefit from all the contractual rights as set out in the new Tenancy Agreement which is shown below.

Rochford Housing Association will be able to enforce the Possession Orders that the Council had obtained and may also be able to obtain Possession Orders for tenancy breaches where the Council had to serve notices before the transfer takes place.

[Insert sample tenancy agreement]

Part M: Useful contacts

Part M: Useful contacts

Rochford District Council

Council's Housing Freephone helpline 0800 169 7326

Email: housing@rochford.gov.uk

Website: www.rochford.gov.uk

Address: Council Offices, South Street, Rochford, Essex, SS4 1BW

Tenants' Independent Advisor

Your Choice Housing Consultants

Freephone Helpline 0800 917 8909.]

Email: yhc@btconnect.com

Website: <http://www.yhc.co.uk>

Address: 7 Meadowland Road, Shotgate, Wickford, Essex, SS11 8XW

Secretary of State

Department for Communities and Local Government

Zone 2/C1 Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU

Tel: 020 7944 3613

Website: www.communities.gov.uk

The Housing Corporation

Stock Transfer Registration Unit,

Attenborough House, 109/119 Charles Street, Leicester LE1 1QF

Tel: 0116 242 4879

Website: www.housingcorp.gov.uk

Government Office for the Eastern Region

Eastbrook,
Shaftesbury Rd,
Cambridge,
Cambridgeshire
CB2 2DF

+44 (01223) 372530

Website: www.go-east.gov.uk

National Housing Federation

Lion Court, Procter Street, Holborn, London WC1V 6NY

Tel: (0207) 067 1010

Website: www.housing.org.uk

Hereward Housing

St Mary's Lodge

St Mary's Street,

Ely

Cambridgeshire

CB7 4EY

Tel: 01353 652650 (Nick Abbey, Chief Executive)

www.herewardhousing.org.uk