
What Tenants Want !

resource 3:

sources of good practice on information
for tenants



Acknowledgements

i2i would like to thank Tamsin Stirling who produced this resource with support from Monica Keeble, Simon Inkson, Liza Fleming, Elin Jones, Jo Baldwin and Keith Edwards.

We would also like to thank the individual local authorities in Wales, Scotland and England who provided help and advice together with staff at IDeA and the Tenant Information Service and a number of Independent Tenant Advisors.

The work of **i2i** is supported by the Heads of the Valleys programme.

November 2006

Introduction

This resource has been produced for the Welsh Assembly Government **i2i - inform to involve** heads of the valleys support project. It should also be seen as part of a wider Assembly objective to give all tenants the *Right to Know* how their local authority or registered social landlord will achieve and maintain WHQS – the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.

i2i has been established to help ensure that tenants of heads of the valleys local authorities have access to clear, accurate and appropriate information about how their landlord will achieve WHQS. We also aim to share our learning with the wider welsh housing community.

This resource has been produced from research which involved a website, literature and case study review of the information provide to tenants about Decent Homes in England, and the Scottish Housing Quality Standard in Scotland. It is the third part of a suite of resources developed by **i2i** in the *What Tenants Want!* Series that also includes:

- **resource 1: WHQS information template**
- **resource 2: WHQS information guide**

Because the process of providing information is on going we welcome feedback on the resource to help improve current and future resources developed by the **i2i** project. We aim to make the *What Tenants Want!* and other materials available as a web based resource that can be easily updated.

How to use this Resource

The guide provides a source of information that can be used to help local authorities and tenants organisations engage tenants in the WHQS process and should be used in conjunction with the *What Tenants Want!* guide and template. The resource has the following sections:

- *Section 1:* this includes **examples of effective practice** from organisations in England, Scotland and Wales

- *Section 2:* contains a selection of **useful websites**

- *Section 3:* contains a selection of **useful publications**

Although aimed at tenants we hope the resources in the *What Tenants Want!* series could help develop thinking on the information requirements of other key stakeholders such as staff and elected members

Section 1: Examples of Effective Practice

This section of the report sets out a number of examples of effective practice identified during the brief research undertaken as part of this project. The examples are not intended to be definitive, but to provide an indication of how some of the issues have been tackled in practice. They are divided into two types:

- those examples that have been validated as effective in one way or another, eg by the winning of an award or inclusion in an online database of validated effective practice
- those that have not been validated by any external body, but which the researchers consider are effective on the basis of information provided to them during this project and will be of interest to those involved in providing information to tenants on the Welsh Housing Quality Standard

Validated examples of effective practice

Communication strategy

Slough Borough Council won an IPR excellence in communication award (PDF file, 7 pages, 255 KB) for best consultation during its stock transfer programme. Its consultation and communications strategy identified two distinctly different tenant groups:

- tenant activists who were knowledgeable about the proposals and vociferous in their opposition to them
- the general tenant body who were confused about what was being proposed and why, and felt alienated from both their council landlords and their activist neighbours

The communications strategy looked at ways to involve both groups including comment boxes and notice boards in the tower blocks affected by the transfer, a free telephone hotline, door to door visits and weekly surgeries.

[Source: IDeA Knowledge]

Written communication 1

Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council produced an award winning campaign for its stock transfer involving creating a tabloid newspaper 'The big switch' , to get its message across to the community. The campaign won several IPR awards including North West Best Community Campaign IPR Cream Awards. The Big Switch was used to brand all leaflets and promotional items to ensure a raised profile of the campaign for stock transfer.

A presentation on the campaign is available online at:

<http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/aio/70655>

[Source: IDeA Knowledge]

Written communication 2

The Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames created a new magazine called 'Housing choice' , which acts as a conduit for consultation with residents over the proposal to transfer stock to a not-for-profit organisation.

Each issue responds to the main concerns raised by readers which are broken down into areas such as rents, rights and modernisation of homes. This enables its audience to see key facts at a glance. A more detailed booklet, questions and answers on stock transfer has also been produced. It includes 60 questions covering issues such as: services for older people; the ballot process; and financial issues; which have been designed to provide councillors, staff, tenant and leaseholder representatives and others with answers to the most commonly asked questions.

A copy of the magazine is available online at

<http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/aio/70527>

The questions and answers booklet is available online at

<http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/aio/70525>

[Source: IDeA Knowledge]

Reaching out to communities 1

Peterborough City Council arranged a meeting for its deaf-blind tenants at the headquarters of the charity DeafBlind UK, in Hampton, Peterborough, to explain what stock transfer would mean. Tenants and their interpreters were able to communicate, through the centre's hearing loop and by manual alphabet, with council officers about the plans and have their questions answered on the authority's formal offer document.

[Source: IDeA Knowledge]

Reaching out to communities 2

When the London Borough of Barnet was considering the regeneration of the Grahame Park Estate which will be managed by housing associations, it responded to the needs of its naturally smaller neighbourhoods, by holding eighteen neighbourhood meetings across the estate.

These gave residents, particularly those whose first language is not English, the opportunity to meet in small groups to discuss the regeneration proposals. They were attended by officers from the council, expert staff from the housing associations and Solon, the tenant's adviser, who were able to respond to the regeneration proposals, answer questions and deal with any concerns.

Engaging hard-to-reach tenants and residents was achieved through appointment of a community support officer by Barnet Council, who visited older and vulnerable tenants and provided information in nine other community languages as well as production of a video for all homes on the estate to clarify the balloting process.

[Source: IDeA Knowledge]

Other examples of effective practice

Enabling tenants to be involved in selecting the option

One ITA who fed information into the project noted the importance of tenants having a chance to decide on the appropriate option.

In Scotland, Stirling Council fully informed tenants of all the options and tenants went for the stock transfer option. By comparison, in East Dunbartonshire, tenants were given all the options and the tenants' preference (and the Councils) was stock retention with prudential borrowing.

[Source: ITA email survey]

Involving tenants at an early stage

The Newport Housing Commission involved 5 tenants and 5 independent members who spent 10 months taking evidence, receiving and considering evidence.

The Commission concluded that stock transfer was the only viable option with the new organisation set up in such a way that it could evolve into a tenant-led organisation in the future, if that is what tenants want. Tenant participation is noted as a key issue for the new organisation.

On the role of tenants in the Commission, the preface to the report notes the following:

'the work of the tenant members of the Commission has proved to be critical in reaching a balanced conclusion and it must be noted that their contribution has been as significant as that made by any other member.'

[Source: Newport City Council]

Making empowerment a principle

Mansfield District Council developed a Tenant Empowerment, Communication and Consultation Strategy in relation to stock options which was based on the authority's commitment to:

'involving the community in all aspects of our work. We firmly believe that tenants and residents should have the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their homes and communities ensuring better decision making that properly reflects local needs and that, in turn, leads to sustainable communities.'

The strategy clearly set out roles and responsibilities for tenant representatives, the Independent Tenant Advisor, specialist Housing Liaison Officer, Councillors, the Community Housing Task Force and council officers.

[Source: Mansfield District Council]

Reaching out to communities 3

One ITA who fed information into the project noted that it took them over a year to 'reach' the Somali and Yemini communities in Liverpool. The ITA had a specific strategy and devoted a lot of staff time to it.

'Sometimes you just have to keep at it and not be discouraged'.

The ITA noted similar needs in relation to younger people – their IT consultant is currently looking at using texting for young people and making their website more interactive.

[Source: ITA email survey]

Taking the message to communities

The City and County of Swansea are currently undertaking a road show with an information trailer which will visit 120 venues, including carnivals and community projects.

The trailer has samples showing the standard and choices of kitchen units, doors and windows, door and worktop options and bathroom designs. The trailer is being staffed by a combination of council staff and the Independent Tenants Advisor.

The aim is to enable as many people as possible to see what the Welsh Housing Quality Standard means in practice and to ask questions of staff.

A newsletter listing all the venues, dates and times was produced and circulated widely.

[Source: City and County of Swansea]

A town centre location

Stirling Council has opened a centre to advise council tenants on a proposed housing transfer in the town centre. The bureau in the Thistle Centre will offer information to council tenants who will be asked to vote on whether Stirling Council should transfer its housing stock to a not-for-profit organisation later this year.

The new centre has displays showing tenants what the new kitchens and bathrooms will look like. Advisors will also be available to answer questions about the transfer plans.

[Source: Stirling Council]

Providing comprehensive web-based information

Both Torfaen and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Councils have a wide range of web-based information on WHQS and how the authority is proposing to meet the standard.

Torfaen's website www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/living/index.php/mid=2045~sect= includes:

- information about the Welsh Housing Quality Standard
- the options appraisal report
- stock condition survey summary
- a jargon buster
- frequently asked questions and answers on a wide range of issues
- relevant presentations
- copies of the authority's tenant newsletter
- leaseholder consultation issues
- draft policies for comment

Rhondda Cynon Taf's stand-alone site <http://www.rctbetterhomes.co.uk> includes sections on:

- what is the housing investment review?
- next steps
- Community Mutual Housing
- frequently asked questions and answers on a wide range of issues
- the Independent Tenant Advisor with copies of their newsletters
- the Independent Staff Advisor with copies of their newsletters
- an online survey through which tenants can indicate their priorities for improvements to their home
- a listing of forthcoming events

[Source: Torfaen and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council websites]

Testing communications

The City and County of Swansea commissioned an independent company to undertake a telephone survey of a random sample of 500 tenants in July 2005 and February 2006. The survey asked tenants:

- what they felt about the various communication mechanisms being used by the council
- whether they read and understood the newsletters
- about their awareness of the proposed stock transfer

The findings suggested that:

- communication is working
- the newsletter is being read and understood and that it is the preferred method for being kept informed
- awareness of the proposed transfer increased between the two surveys

[Source: City and County of Swansea]

Using a range of methods

One ITA who fed information into the project noted that, over the years, they had used the following methods:

- a freephone number
- newsletters
- personal letters
- social activities
- web pages
- roadshows
- conferences
- stands at supermarkets and shopping centres and in local offices
- invite ourselves to church services, playgroups and other local activities

- take note of mobile numbers and text tenants to let them know about events or public meetings
- go round the sheltered schemes and keep the wardens fully informed
- use the local radio and papers
- use local tenants and residents groups and community councils to host meetings, and
- in remote rural areas, 'we have employed and trained our own door knockers'

[Source: ITA email survey]

The following example provides an indication of how an authority presented information comparing retention and transfer on the work to be carried out on tenants' homes. The research did not identify an effective example of a clear comparison of information on retention and transfer options across all aspects of the issues of importance to tenants provided in advance of the offer document.

Providing a comparison between retention and transfer

The following comparison table on major works and improvements was provided in a special edition of Mid Devon's transfer newsletter which summarised the offer to tenants.

Major works and improvements

	Mid Devon Homes would	The council could
Saving fuel and energy bills	Improve the average energy efficient rating for all council homes to 65 SAP within 5 years	Achieve an average energy efficient rating for all homes of 65 SAP within 10 years
Insulation	Achieve higher than minimum insulation standards and provide cavity wall insulation to all homes within 5 years	Meet the minimum insulation standards to satisfy the Decent Homes Standard within 5 years
	Mid Devon Homes would	The council could
Heating systems	Provide new modern heating systems and upgrade existing partial heating systems to all homes within 5 years	Provide a new modern heating system where there is no existing system within 5 years
Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors	Fit all homes with mains powered smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors within 5 years	Fit all homes with mains powered smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors within 14 years
Door entry systems	Fit door entry systems to all communal entrances within 2 years	Fit door entry systems to all communal entrances within 7 years
Electrical systems	Have a planned programme for upgrading electrical systems so that all homes meet modern standards within 5 years	Provide a limited programme of electrical upgrades in empty properties

Communal TV aerials upgrade	Upgrade all communal TV aerials to digital within 1 year	Upgrade all communal TV aerials to digital within 2 years
New kitchens	Renew 1,110 kitchens within 5 years using water saving taps	Renew 800 kitchens within 5 years using water saving taps
New bathrooms	Renew 1,110 bathrooms within 5 years using water saving taps	Renew 900 bathrooms within 5 years using water saving taps
New windows	Provide 1,400 windows within 5 years	Provide 900 windows within 5 years
Decent Homes Standard by 2010	Not only meet and maintain the Decent Homes Standard but achieve a higher standard of modern, warm and secure homes within 5 years of transfer	Meet the Decent Standard by 2010 but fail it after this date
[Source: Mid Devon Homes and Mid Devon District Council]		

Section 2: Useful Websites

The table below provides links to relevant websites both at a national level and individual housing organisations where these have been recognised as providing good practice or have particular relevance to this project.

Website	Summary of content
English/Scottish reference websites	
Chartered Institute of Housing Information about the Community Gateway Model http://www.cih.org/gateway/	Range of publications available to download tracking progress of implementation of Community Gateway Model
Community Housing Task Force http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1152239	Includes newsletters, good practice briefing notes and a section on change management in social housing
HouseMark www.housemark.co.uk	Subscription service – includes wide range of examples of effective practice and a discussion forum
IDeA Knowledge http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?wx=body_child_0_1&pageId=81583	IDeA Knowledge section on Communicating change: PFI, ALMO and housing stock transfers Includes good practice examples on communications campaigns, face to face communication, the internet and written communication
National Housing Federation www.housing.org.uk	Publications include: - stock transfer questions and answers

	http://www.housing.org.uk/library/viewfile.asp?fid=5048 - stock transfer briefings - briefings from the Decent Homes Pilot Study
Tenants Information Service http://www.tis.org.uk/index.html	Have been involved in over 40 transfer ballots in Scotland of all sizes Publications include Information note for tenants

English/Scottish individual landlord websites	
Ashfield Homes (ALMO) http://www.ashfieldhomes.co.uk/index.cfm/page/services.content.cfm/cid/206/navid/164/parentid/20	Wide range of information to tenants on implementation of Decent Homes Rated excellent services with excellent prospects for improvement in recent re-inspection
Community Gateway Association http://www.communitygateway.co.uk/	First fully fledged community gateway stock transfer association in Preston
Sheffield Homes (ALMO) http://www.sheffieldhomes.org.uk/decent-homes	Information for tenants on Decent Homes programme including local standard
West Kent Housing Association http://www.westkent.org/home.asp	Stock transfer association created in 1989 – only association to have received excellent inspection rating

Welsh reference websites	
CIH Cymru http://www.cih.org/cymru/	Policy information is online at http://www.cih.org/cymru/policy/briefs.htm
Cymorth Cymru http://www.cymorthcymru.org.uk/	
Shelter Cymru http://www.sheltercymru.org.uk/	
Tai Pawb http://www.taipawb.org/	
TPAS Cymru http://www.tpascymru.org.uk/	
Welsh Federation of Housing Associations http://www.welshhousing.org.uk	WHQS http://www.welshhousing.org.uk/policy/3151.html
Welsh Local Government Association http://www.wlga.gov.uk/	WHQS http://www.wlga.gov.uk/content.php?nID=106;IID=1
Welsh Tenants Federation http://www.welshtenantsfed.org.uk/	

Welsh individual landlord websites	
Newport City Council www.newport.gov.uk/ dc/index.cfm?function=housing.homepage	Information from Newport Housing Commission, including report, recommendations and summary Authority has decided to ballot tenants on transfer
City and County of Swansea www.swansea.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=6447	Section of website on delivering WHQS Authority has decided to ballot tenants on transfer

Valleys to Coast Housing http://www.v2c.org.uk	Wales' only stock transfer housing association
---	--

Heads of the Valleys websites	
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/housing/wqhs.htm	Section of housing pages on the WHQS
Caerphilly County Borough Council www.caerphilly.gov.uk/yourservices/housing/tenantadvisorypanel/index.htm	Information on Tenant Advisory Panel set up to consider how the authority can access enough additional finance to enable all Council homes to be improved or repaired to reach the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2012
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council http://www.merthyr.gov.uk/Home/Local+Services/Housing+Services/	Housing pages of the local authority website
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council www.rctbetterhomes.co.uk	Dedicated website on WHQS Better Housing, Brighter Future, Your Choice Authority has decided to ballot tenants on transfer
Torfaen County Borough Council www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/living/index.php/mid=2045~sect=	Series of website pages dedicated to Housing Choices

Section 3: Useful Publications

The table below sets out relevant publications which are either aimed at tenants or are focused on the role of tenants in the process of options appraisal and achieving the relevant quality standard.

Published by	Publications and where to find them
Community Housing Task Force	<p>Good practice briefing notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appointing an Independent Tenant Advisory - Transfer: a short guide to the process, roles and technical terms - Choosing a new Landlord <p>Available online at http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1152245</p>
Department of Communities and Local Government (formerly ODPM)	<p>Communication and Consultation Strategies in Options Appraisal</p> <p>Compendium of Tenants Guides</p> <p>Decent Homes and Councillors: A Guide for Officers</p> <p>Decent Homes Tenants Guide</p> <p>Housing Stock Transfer Tenants Guide</p> <p>Options Appraisals Tenants Guide</p> <p>Available online at http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1152471 or http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1152416</p>

Scottish Executive	Code of Practice for Tenant Participation in Stock Transfers See Appendix 5 for link
TPAS England	Council Housing Transfers (Briefing) Secure and Assured Tenancies Stock Options Appraisal (Briefing) Tenant Control and ITA – case studies TP Compacts and achieving Decent Homes Tenant Participation in Housing Associations Available online at http://www.tpas.org.uk/sub_page.asp?id=1&cat=49 – search on document title

TPAS Cymru	Solutions 6 Welsh Housing Quality Standard Solutions 7 What is Stock Transfer Stock options/transfer plain and simple leaflets Stock options/stock transfer – summary Stock options appraisal Available online at http://www.tpascymru.org.uk/publications.htm
Welsh Assembly Government	Council Tenants and Leaseholders Stock Transfer Charter Available online at http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/housing/social/stocktransfer/?lang=en