

FAQs

Q1. Why can't we stay with the Council?

Answer: The future of social housing in the borough is uncertain due to changes in Government policies, potential under investment in homes and rising land values. We needed to:

- maximise investment in homes and estates in the future
- give residents local control over their homes
- keep rents and service charges at levels residents can afford
- build new homes to address the chronic shortage of affordable homes in the Borough, one of the most expensive places to buy in the country
- improve housing services

Q2. What is transfer?

Answer: It is the transfer the ownership and management of our 12,000 plus homes to a brand new, resident-led locally based not-for-profit 'Community Gateway' housing association. This transfer can only go ahead if residents support the proposal.

Q3. What type of organisation would own and manage the homes?

Answer: It would be a resident led 'Community Gateway' housing association, which would put people and decent housing first. The Council would help set up this new organisation and it would give you a direct say in your community and in decisions that affect your home – it would be resident-led. It would be non-profit making so all the money would be invested in homes, estates and services. It would be registered and regulated as a charitable, not-for profit housing association for the borough.

Q4. Who would run the organisation?

You, the residents, would run it. The organisation would be resident-led- a 'Community Gateway'. This means it is 'owned' by its resident members. Residents can become shareholding members and play a key role. For example, they have to approve changes to the rules. The other main feature of a 'Community Gateway' is that it puts a resident-led board in charge of decision making and makes them guardians of their own communities.

Q5. Would I have to move home if the transfer goes ahead?

Answer: No, you would not have to move home as a result of transfer. It is only the ownership of the council's homes in H&F that would be transferred from the council to the new organisation.

Q6. What would happen to the staff who currently run the housing and repairs service?

Answer: Housing and repairs staff would move to the new organisation on the same terms and conditions as they have now with the Council and would continue to deliver the service on day-to-day basis.

Q7. Would the council have the ability to take control back should this proposed body fail?

Answer: Following a housing transfer, the homes cannot be taken back by the Council under any circumstances. However, the Council would be able to influence the organisation through the legal agreement that would be required to be signed prior to transfer.

Q8. Would the Community Gateway housing organisation be able to terminate major contracts (e.g. Mitie and Pinnacle) if it wants to or is it bound by agreements made by the council?

Answer: It is normal in housing transfers for large contracts such as those currently in place with Mitie and Pinnacle to transfer to the new organisation. However ultimately this would be a decision for the new organisation.

Q9. What level of rent will they have to pay if a transfer goes ahead?

Answer: Like the Council, the new organisation would be committed to keeping rents affordable – and the new organisation would be subject to Government rent rules limiting increases. Housing Associations charge identical rents to the council at point of transfer and follow the same Government Rent Guidance. In other words, if LBHF transferred its housing, rents would stay roughly the same.

Q10. Will the service charges go up as Housing Associations service charges are higher?

Answer: All social landlords are issued with guidance to ensure that council and housing association tenants should receive the same service charges for the same level services, although the Housing Association would be required to charge VAT on service charges. A key objective of the transfer is to keep rents and service charges affordable.

Q11. Will we still be able to buy our home if we transfer to a Housing Association?

Answer: Yes you would. In the event of transfer, your key rights would be protected. Any council tenant, who currently has the legal Right to Buy now, would have that Right To Buy preserved.

Q12. What will be the recommended turn out percentage in the ballot, what percentage of that to be accepted, (60-40%)(70-30%)?

Answer: The Council plan to arrange an independent ballot of tenants. The Council expects the majority of tenants and leaseholders to record their views. This test of opinion, and leaseholders' role, will be clarified in the next few months.

In the past, the vast majority of transfer votes have involved more than 50% of tenants using their vote. In these ballots transfer went ahead if a majority of tenants who voted, voted in favour of the transfer.

Q13. If any merger takes place following this transfer, whether once or a multiple of times, will this erode any existing promises made by the initial landlord?

Answer: There are no plans for merger and, in any case, any plans for merger would need the support of the board and residents anyway. In the event of a merger yes this MAY erode existing promises made to tenants. This will largely depend upon the circumstances which led to the merger. Safeguards to reduce the risk of this happening will be incorporated into the terms of any transfer, such as by making any future mergers conditional upon resident member and Council consent.

Q14. If the housing transfers to the Community Gateway Housing Association, and it fails, will the government always intervene or is there a case for lenders taking over the housing and selling it?

Answer: No transfer housing association registered with the Government's Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) has ever "failed" and no tenant has lost his or her home because of a performance failure or financial failure of a registered housing provider. This is because the HCA closely monitors the performance of registered housing organisations and has a full range of powers to step in if necessary. Before any transfer can take place, a sound and effective business plans needs to be in place.

Q15. What happens if there is a no vote?

Answer: If tenants vote no, the Council would have to review how the homes are managed. It would be faced with some extremely difficult decisions about how to maintain homes and estates in the future under increasing pressure from government policies and rising land values. This would mean homes and estates may not be kept up to standard and there would be no money available for building new homes.

Q16. Where does the money come from to maintain homes if transfer goes ahead?

Answer: A new housing association would not be subject to Government borrowing restrictions like the Council is because it would no longer be part of Local Government. It would be free to borrow money at the right time to maintain housing standards for at least the next 30 years and beyond, and repay the loans from future rent payments.