



November 2003

Bulletin for Comhairle Tenants from Comhairle
nan Eilean Siar and Hebridean Housing Partnership

Homeward

Welcome

We wish you a warm welcome to this first issue of *Homeward*, which will be the regular newsletter on the proposed transfer of your home to Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP), a new, island-based, not-for-profit housing association.

Your views as Comhairle tenants are the most important factor in the transfer process and *Homeward* will help supply the information you will need to reach an informed opinion in the months ahead.

In this first issue we'll be telling you about transfer, the reasons behind it, the stage we're currently at and the process from here onwards. The next issue will be with you before Christmas. It will explain the transfer process to you in more detail and give you more information on the Partnership.

We're looking for you to get involved, so if you have any questions or comments on this bulletin or on the process in general, please get in touch. Contact details are provided at the end of this newsletter.

Why transfer?

The Comhairle is committed to providing you as tenants with well-maintained and well-managed houses at affordable rents. However, there are strict limits on the amount the Comhairle can borrow to carry out the repairs and improvements your homes need and to plan for the future. For this reason the Comhairle considered all the options to find the right way forward, including the transfer of the entire housing stock to Hebridean Housing Partnership.

Hebridean Housing Partnership is a new, locally-based and community-owned, housing association that is being set up by the Comhairle as a not-for-profit organisation.

Governed by different rules to those affecting the Comhairle, Hebridean Housing Partnership will be able to borrow the money, under strict guidelines, needed to bring your homes up to modern standards, while providing affordable rents and maintaining your Right to Buy.

Transfer will mean increased investment in housing, a guarantee on rent levels and, importantly, the removal of the Comhairle's Housing Capital Debt, which currently costs 75p in every pound spent on the islands' housing service. Transfer will allow the majority of rent money to be invested back into improving homes and the housing service.

Transfer will only happen if the majority of tenants voting in a secret postal ballot vote

'yes'. It will be for you, as tenants, to decide on whether or not you want the transfer to go ahead. Only then, following consent from the Scottish Executive, would your homes be transferred to Hebridean Housing Partnership.



The process so far

Both the Comhairle and Hebridean Housing Partnership have been working to set up a voluntary Management Board of tenants, councillors and community representatives and discussions are taking place with the Scottish Executive to reach an official valuation of the housing stock, the next important development.

Independent tenant adviser TPAS (Tenants Participation Advisory Service) has been appointed by tenants to give you clear, easy to understand information and independent advice regarding the Comhairle's Stock Transfer initiative. TPAS has experience of working with tenants in the Western Isles and is regarded as the leading tenants' participation organisation in the country.

TPAS is working with the Western Isles Residents Association Forum to make sure that every tenant has the opportunity to find out more about community ownership and to ensure that tenants' interests are represented. During the first phase of the process, TPAS held a series of information events across the islands and will be meeting with all the Residents/Tenants Associations and interested tenants in the near future. TPAS will also be producing a number of newsletters, which will explain more about community ownership.

What's next?

The Comhairle's annual tenants conference will be held in November this year, at which plans for transfer will be explained in more detail. As well as introducing the Hebridean Housing Partnership Board, proposed new housing standards, that will be delivered if transfer were to go ahead, will also be unveiled. The conference will be held from Thursday 20 to Friday 21 November 2003, at Lewis Castle College. Invitations are being sent to you separately.

How the Comhairle will ask for your views

Transfer will only take place following a ballot where the majority of voting tenants vote 'yes'. We will advise you of dates in future bulletins, but the stages of the process are as follows:

 **Stage One** will mark the start of formal consultation. You will get an information pack (known as the Stage One Notice) and video with full details about how the transfer will affect you, your home, the housing service and your rights as a tenant so that you can make an informed choice.

You will have the opportunity to send your views to the Comhairle and all the feedback will be considered before a decision is reached on whether or not to proceed to Stage Two.

 **Stage Two** you will receive the "Stage Two letter" which will describe any changes that have been made to the original proposals and will also outline your rights to make representations to Ministers at the Scottish Executive. At the same time or shortly afterwards, the Comhairle will let you

know if it intends to proceed with a ballot.

 A **Ballot of Tenants** will give you the opportunity to vote on whether or not you wish the transfer to happen. You will be sent a ballot paper to enable you to participate in a secret postal vote – neither the Comhairle nor Hebridean Housing Partnership will know which way you have voted. Every tenant of the Comhairle is entitled to vote therefore if you and your partner are joint tenants, you will each have separate ballot papers.

Get in touch

For further information or advice regarding the proposed housing transfer, you can call the following numbers:

Comhairle na Eilean Siar on 01851 709338

Hebridean Housing Partnership on 01851 706368

Independent Tenant Adviser, TPAS on 0800 269645

Alternatively visit the website:

www.w-isles.gov.uk/hebrideanhousingpartnership

If you wish a member of staff to call at your home to answer any queries you may have about the transfer, please contact the Comhairle on the above number.

If you have any comments or queries on this information bulletin please contact

Ken Newton or Dan Hughes, TNC, tel 01698 420420, fax 01698 424000 or email team@tnc.uk.com

Special communications needs

If you, a relative or neighbour needs assistance with understanding this bulletin because of visual impairment, learning difficulty or language reasons please tell the Comhairle and we will arrange for help.