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About Plymouth Community Homes

At a glance

Plymouth Community Homes:

- Is a not-for-profit organisation and would have charitable status.
- Has been specifically set up to take over ownership and management of Plymouth City Council's homes and management of leaseholder services.
- Has been set up with 12 voluntary, unpaid Board Members, including three tenants and one leaseholder, who would run the association.
- Would be registered with and regulated by the Housing Corporation.
- Would have a legally binding agreement with the Council to ensure all the promises contained in this document are met.



What type of organisation is Plymouth Community Homes?

Plymouth Community Homes would be a Social Landlord, registered with the Housing Corporation. The prime objective of Registered Social Landlords is the provision of affordable rented housing to people in housing need.

It is an Industrial and Provident Society. It is a **not-for-profit** organisation which means that all of its income would have to be put back into its housing, repaying loans and providing services to tenants. Because it would not be run for profit no dividends could be paid out.

The association would also be registered with charitable rules. One advantage of charitable status is that charities pay less tax which allows them to make best use of their income for the benefit of those persons they are assisting.

As a charitable organisation the association would be limited in who it could house and the activities that it would be allowed to carry out. As a starting point it would adopt the Council's current allocations policy, and consult with tenants when developing that policy over time.

It would not be able to:

- Carry out extensive commercial activities.
- Provide services to other outside organisations which are not charities.
- Provide commercial rented accommodation.

The association has been set up with the help of the Council specifically to take over the ownership and management of the Council's homes, if tenants vote in favour of transfer.



Plymouth Community Homes would:

- Be run by a Board made up of 12 members who would take the main decisions. There is a Shadow Board already in place and Shadow Board members have worked with the Council to put together this document. The Shadow Board is made up of three tenants, one leaseholder, four people nominated by the Council and four independent local people.
- Have a general membership comprising 55% tenants, 15% independents and 30% Council. The general membership have powers to make decisions that are fundamental to the constitution and structure of the association, but do not take part in the day-to-day running of the association.
- Be committed to building communities and creating neighbourhoods in which people want to live.
- Be based in Plymouth, which would be its main focus of operation.

Who is on the Board of Plymouth Community Homes and what do they do?

If transfer takes place the Board of Management would have overall responsibility for running the association including setting policies and directing activities.

The Board is currently operating in 'shadow' form. All Shadow Board Members have the same voting rights on the Board as each other and have a duty to act in the best interests of the association whether in shadow or full operation. Details of the current Board Members are given over the next four pages.

How were the Board Members chosen?

The three tenants and one leaseholder were elected following a process which involved

inviting tenants and leaseholders to consider standing and taking part in an election.

The four Council Board Members were selected by elected Councillors on a basis that reflects the current political composition of the Council.

The four independent people were chosen by both the tenant and Council Board Members following advertisements in the local press and through an interview process. They are not connected with the Council and were chosen for their skills and experience. They have valuable experience and expertise (not just in housing) to ensure the Board fulfils the Housing Corporation's strict guidance on how the organisation is run.

Who are the Board Members?

Tenants:



Peter Ebsworth

Peter has been a tenant representative for almost three years, giving him knowledge and understanding of how the housing sector and various housing services work.

He is enthusiastic about using his position as a Board Member to help deliver decent homes to tenants across Plymouth.

Peter said: "I wanted to be a Board Member because I believe transfer will make a big difference to tenants. I want to achieve the best possible results and standards for them."

Peter, a father-of-three, who lives in Whiteleigh, has achieved the Chartered Institute of Housing Level Two qualification and has attended a number of courses to learn more about housing.



Nigel Warn

Nigel has been a Council tenant for almost 30 years and lives in Mount Gould. He is employed by DML in Plymouth and has been a

union representative with GMB for seven years, giving him a valuable insight into workplace laws.

Nigel is also a certified Health and Safety representative, and has extensive working knowledge of risk assessments and workplace planning procedure.

Over the years, Nigel has sat on numerous committees including Health and Safety, Sports and Social and has received basic counselling training.

Nigel said: "I wanted to join the Shadow Board because I wanted to help tenants get the standards for the future. I am particularly interested in helping people with disabilities in terms of adaptations to their homes, as I have a disability myself."

Nigel, who is married with two grown-up children, is currently in charge of a small team of workers as a learning representative.



Elaine Pellow

Elaine was born and raised in Plymouth and has lived in the City for the past 46 years.

She has always had a keen interest in working with people. "I wanted to be on

the Shadow Board as I would like to see the best service possible delivered when it comes to carrying out improvements to tenants' homes," she said.

"I believe I have the determination, dedication and time to serve tenants both fairly and thoroughly and would ensure that Plymouth Community Homes delivered on its promises to tenants and leaseholders."

Elaine lives in Morice Town and is a former training officer of modern apprenticeships. She also recently received a community volunteering award for her services to the community.



Leaseholder:



Christine Watts

Christine has been a leaseholder since the 1980s. Her experience of housing management spans more than 20 years and includes playing a key role in

developing, and maintaining a resident managed organisation at Pembroke Estate in Devonport, where she lives.

Christine has strong people skills and has worked on a range of community-based issues both City-wide and at national level over the years.

In 1995, Christine was awarded an MBE for her services to the community and hopes to bring her understanding of people and their communities to the Board.

Christine said: "I understand from experience how changes in management can often bring about new opportunities. I believe transfer would unlock many such opportunities for tenants and leaseholders in the City."

Council appointees:



Ken Foster

Councillor Foster represents the Plymstock Radford Ward. He was appointed Deputy Lord Mayor last year and has been a councillor for 11 years.

He is a member of the Plymouth Local Access Forum and the Plymstock Area Committee.

He has also been appointed to the Brock Trust, Plymouth Local Access Forum, the South West Local Government Association and the South West Regional Assembly.

Eddie Rennie



Councillor Rennie has been a councillor for 11 years and represents the Sutton and Mount Gould Ward. He has been a Council tenant for over 20 years.

He is a member of the Licensing Committee (both Miscellaneous and Hackney Carriage) and the Drake, Efford & Lipson and Sutton & Mount Gould Area Committee.

Additionally, he has been appointed to the Ballard Trust, the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority, the East End Development Trust and the East End Partnership.



Jack Thompson

Councillor Thompson was elected in May 2008 to represent Budshead Ward.

Cllr Thompson worked in Africa for 25 years for international aid agencies in

the development finance sector. This included managing and advising banks and helping businesses to get bank loans.

He is a member of the Council's Audit Committee and the Resources and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

He is married with four children. Now retired, he teaches Bridge with his wife who is from Plymouth.



Susan McDonald

Councillor McDonald represents the Labour Party in the St Peter & Waterfront Ward.

She has been a Councillor for two years and prior to joining

the Shadow Board worked as a director of the Millfields Trust and the Plymouth District and Community Health Council Board.

She said: "I have had direct experience of social housing as I have been a Council tenant in the past and hope to bring this valuable experience to the Shadow Board."

Having been a board director, she gained valuable economic and community experience and as a councillor regularly deals with transport and waste management issues.

She is a member of the Devonport, Stoke and St Peter & the Waterfront Area Committee, the Licensing Committee (Hackney Carriage), the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education and the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

A mother-of three and grandmother-of-two, Cllr McDonald, works part-time as a registered nurse at Nazareth House Convent in Plymouth.

Independents:



Zilpah Leahy

Zilpah is a housing manager and brings to the Shadow Board over 25 years' experience of working for local authority housing services and a Registered

Social Landlord.

She specialises in housing management and has a wealth of experience in general housing management, sheltered housing and repairs services.

Other aspects of her current role with a housing association include managing and addressing personnel issues, staff planning and dealing with performance, disciplinary and related issues.

She assisted with the transfer of 3,000 houses in the South Hams to housing association Tor Homes and for around two years, managed around 1,400 properties in the Plymouth area while Tor were part of the William Sutton Group.

Zilpah wanted to become a Shadow Board Member in order to use her knowledge of housing transfer and experience as a housing manager.

She said: "I intend to make a meaningful and practical contribution to the Shadow Board by using my experience of the transfer process and involvement in several major tenant consultation initiatives."



Linda Macbeth

Linda is currently a Senior Management Consultant in the Public Private Partnering Sector and a South West Committee member of the Chartered Institute of Housing.

A Housing Policy and Management graduate and postgraduate business student, Linda has gained several years of business and management experience in both the public and private sectors.

Linda previously worked for housing associations in the South West. However, more recently, she has acted as a management consultant on the development of major long term community regeneration programmes throughout the UK.

Linda is currently advising and developing a business plan for a new RSL organisation, based in the Midlands, which consists of eight housing organisations who will work together to ensure efficiencies and savings are achieved.

Linda said: "I hope to bring my public and private sector business consulting skills and experience to the Board to assist in the provision of the best possible service for customers."



Louise Barnden

Louise is a housing consultant with vast experience of management during her 25 years of experience in the housing sector.

She has understanding of both housing development and the culture change required when staff transfer from a local authority to a housing association.

Louise recently worked with tenants and staff to conduct audits and develop good practice for North Warwickshire District Council, a Midlands-based local authority in preparation for its Audit Commission inspection.



She has knowledge of housing law, through Chartered Institute of Housing qualifications, and was involved in the registration and development of Devon-based Riviera Housing Trust's constitution and registration with the Housing Corporation.

In the past, Louise has carried out work for a number of boards and has run training and away days on a variety of topics including governance, business planning and risk management.

Louise said: "As a Board Member of Plymouth Community Homes my primary focus will be on providing high quality homes for tenants and leaseholders."



William Lean

A chartered surveyor, William is a partner in charge of the Plymouth Office of a firm of property and asset consultants and valuers.

He has been involved in the property market in Plymouth and across the South West for the past 26 years, including buying and selling land and buildings for residential development and for valuing schemes for loan security funding and grant assistance purposes.

He has strong skills in property finance through his valuation and development experience gained over many years.

William owned his own property consulting business with seven staff for a number of years before merging with his current firm, which has 200 staff. William is currently responsible for a team of surveyors operating across Devon and Cornwall.

"I want to bring my financial and property experience to the Board to help play a part in improving tenants' homes and communities across the City," said William, who has lived in the City for 20 years and brought up his children locally.

Do Board Members get paid?

No. Although the Housing Corporation allows a reasonable payment, none is currently proposed for Plymouth Community Homes. Board Members have been recruited to serve on a voluntary basis. However, Board Members can claim reasonable out-of-pocket expenses, such as reasonable travel expenses actually incurred in carrying out the association's business, and upon production of receipts.

If transfer goes ahead, how would Board Members be chosen in the future?

The current Shadow Board Members would serve until at least the first Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the association after the transfer takes place (likely to be in 2009). At that, and each subsequent AGM, the tenant, leaseholder and independent Board Members would retire on a rotational basis. This would provide continuity and a process for gradual renewal of the Board. Retiring Board Members would be eligible for re-selection at each AGM up to a maximum of nine years.

Council Board Members would be chosen by the Council and hold office for a period determined by the Council but no longer than three years without re-nomination and would also be eligible for re-selection up to a maximum of nine years.

Tenant and leaseholder Board Members would be elected through tenant and leaseholder-wide elections, details of which would be widely advertised.

Independent Board Members would be chosen for their skills and recommended for election at the AGM of the association. All the members of the association would be eligible to vote in elections for independent Board Members.



What are the core values and objectives of Plymouth Community Homes?

Plymouth Community Homes would aim to offer the best possible standards and service to its tenants and would apply the following values to all that it does: The association is committed to being:

- Innovative
- Ethical
- Responsive
- Inclusive

The association has adopted the following objectives which are to:

- Provide better places to live
- Put residents first
- Be a good place to work
- Provide excellent leadership

Who would provide the service and what would happen to the existing staff?

The association would employ paid staff to run the housing service on a day-to-day basis. If the transfer goes ahead, employees who deal with the management and maintenance of your homes, such as housing officers, together with related support service employees, would transfer to the association. Their conditions of employment at the time of transfer would be protected under the Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE) regulations.

So you would continue to deal with people you know. This would ensure continuity of service for tenants and means the association would have a skilled and experienced workforce to rely on.

The additional work which would be undertaken by the association could create employment opportunities for people locally.

Housing staff who deal with homelessness, housing advice, private sector housing and strategic housing work would stay with the Council.

Who regulates and inspects Plymouth Community Homes?

The Housing Corporation is the Government appointed body that regulates all Registered Social Landlords including the association.



The association must achieve registration with the Housing Corporation as a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) before a transfer can take place.



The Housing Corporation:

- Has established a regulatory code with which all Registered Social Landlords must comply. The code sets the Housing Corporation's expectations which all Registered Social Landlords must follow. These expectations are set to ensure that tenants' rights are protected, services are of a high quality and financial management is sound.
- Monitors the performance of Registered Social Landlords to ensure these expectations are met. If Plymouth Community Homes did not meet these expectations, the Housing Corporation has extensive powers to step in and make sure things are put right.

In January 2007 the Government announced that it planned to split the activities of the Housing Corporation. The regulation and registration functions are to transfer to a new independent social housing regulator, The Tenant Services Authority.

The finances of Plymouth Community Homes would also be monitored by external auditors who would be appointed if transfer takes place. This means that there would be safeguards in place to prevent the association getting into financial difficulties.

The Housing Corporation/Tenant Services Authority would monitor the financial performance of the association, particularly during its early years of operation, and is able to take action if a Registered Social Landlord gets into difficulties to ensure that tenants and leaseholders are protected.

In addition, the Audit Commission (through its Housing inspectorate) would have a role in checking the standard of service delivered by the association and other Registered Social Landlords.

Working closely with the Council

Before a transfer could take place Plymouth Community Homes would enter into a formal and legally binding contract with the

Council. This agreement would allow the Council to make sure that the promises made to tenants by the Council in this document are kept. If there were any suggestion of the association failing to honour the promises, the Council could enforce them.

Tenants would be protected by arrangements set up by the Council to monitor the association's performance. As part of those arrangements, the Council would need to be consulted about any proposed changes to the conditions of your Tenancy Agreement before your written consent was sought.

The association would aim to ensure that properties are let quickly and efficiently, and that the time properties remain empty is kept to a minimum. It would also assist the Council in fulfilling its legal duty to house homeless people.

What about Plymouth Community Homes' staff?

The 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 quality staff by making the working experience rewarding, challenging and enjoyable.

There would be a comprehensive training programme for staff and a commitment to the expansion of apprenticeship and local employment schemes.





Improving and repairing your home

At a glance

Plymouth Community Homes would:

- Have a budget of £168 million to invest in your homes over the first five years and in the region of £1 billion over 30 years.
- Plan to bring all homes up to the Plymouth Community Homes Standard, including (where appropriate) new kitchens and bathrooms (with over-bath showers), central heating, new external security doors and double glazed windows within five years.
- When fitting new kitchens and bathrooms, as part of the improvements programme, spend approximately £3 million over the first five years on adaptations, to ensure that they are fitted with consideration to tenants' disabilities, including for example, walk in showers. In addition, it would have a budget of £350,000 every year for the first five years to clear, as a priority, any backlog of adaptations with the Council at the time of transfer.
- Carry out a review of its responsive repairs service within its first year.
- Be committed to introducing a Handyman Service within two years of transfer – to assist tenants with carrying out minor jobs which are the tenant's responsibility. A charge would be made for this service.



The Plymouth Community Homes Standard

To meet the Plymouth Community Homes Standard, the package of works each home would receive would depend on its current condition.

The association has budgeted to carry out the full programme of works identified in the 2007 survey on the condition of the Council's homes in order to maintain them to the Plymouth Community Homes Standard.

This would include replacing major components such as central heating systems, windows, external doors, kitchens and bathrooms as they wear out, as well as upgrading or renewing roofs.

The following tables set out a comparison between the basic Decent Homes Standard and the Plymouth Community Homes Standard.



PLANNED MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENTS	
 Decent Homes Standard	 Plymouth Community Homes Standard
Windows	
<p>There would be a limited window upgrade programme to approximately 1,500 properties to replace single glazing with double glazed units. These would be high quality double glazed PVCu (plastic framed) windows which have high levels of energy efficiency, completed over 15 years. These would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure locking handles to ground floor and vulnerable windows. • Restrictor bars on windows. <p>Repairs to individual windows would be carried out as necessary in accordance with a revised repairs policy based on legal minimum requirements.</p>	<p>The new association would continue with the Council's existing programme and install new high quality double glazed PVCu (plastic framed) windows which have high levels of energy efficiency to approximately 3,800 properties. This would be completed within five years of transfer and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure locking handles to ground floor and vulnerable windows. • Restrictor bars on windows. • A maintenance programme undertaken on all windows and doors.



Decent Homes Standard



Plymouth Community Homes Standard

Kitchens

There would be a limited kitchen replacement programme of approximately **1,750 - 2,000** in five years, with basic fixtures and fittings.

Repair work to individual kitchen elements would be carried out as necessary in accordance with a revised repairs policy based on legal minimum requirements.

Kitchens would be modernised and tenants given a choice of worktops, doors and tiles. Approximately **14,000** new high quality kitchens would be fitted in the first five years following transfer.

New kitchens would include:

- A choice of wall tiling and slip resistant flooring.
- A choice of colour finishes to unit doors.
- A choice of colour finishes to kitchen worktops.
- Lever taps as optional.
- Individual design service to maximise the available work surface.
- Units to be fitted with consideration given to tenants' disabilities.
- Extractor fan as standard where practicable.

Heating

Continue with a renewal programme leading to approximately **3,500** replacement systems in five years. This would focus on replacing obsolete boilers when they break down.

Carry out repair works to keep existing heating systems in working order in accordance with a revised repairs policy based on legal minimum requirements.

All homes which currently fail the Decent Homes Standard would be offered new full gas central heating systems with approximately **5,000** systems being replaced in the first five years following transfer. All new systems would include:

- Radiators that are thermostatically controlled – with controls at a convenient height in sheltered properties and bungalows, and for tenants with disabilities on request.
- Energy efficient condensing boilers.

All properties with solid fuel or electric night storage heaters would be offered gas central heating if practicable.



Decent Homes Standard



Plymouth Community Homes Standard

Bathrooms

There would be a limited bathroom replacement programme of approximately **1,750 - 2,000** in five years at a basic specification – without over bath showers.

Repair work to individual bathroom elements would be carried out in accordance with a revised repairs policy based on legal minimum requirements.

Around **14,000** new, modern bathrooms would be fitted within five years allowing for:

- Overbath electric showers and shower rails where technically practical.
- Bathrooms to be fitted with consideration given to tenants' disabilities such as level access shower cubicles/wet rooms as appropriate and technically practical.
- Lever taps as optional.
- Extractor fan.
- Slip resistant vinyl flooring in a choice of colours.
- Tiles and decoration in a choice of colours.

External Doors

Homes would continue to have wooden doors repaired with a 'like for like' replacement either through the planned external repair and maintenance programme following an eight year cycle or in accordance with a revised repairs policy based on legal minimum requirements. Doors opening into communal areas would have industry standard fire check doors.

All properties that need them would be fitted with new PVCu (plastic) front and rear doors within five years of transfer. Front and rear doors would be of high quality and include five lever mortice locks and a choice of colours. This means that approximately **15,000** properties would receive new external doors. As with the Council, doors opening into communal areas would have industry standard fire check doors.

Thermal Insulation

All properties that are able to be cavity wall insulated have been completed. Upgrades to the loft insulation to a thickness of 250mm would be completed in conjunction with the approximate **3,500** central heating upgrades in five years, where necessary.

All properties that are unable to be cavity wall insulated will be considered for an external insulation system for example, external cladding. Upgrades to the loft insulation to a thickness of 250mm would be completed in conjunction with the approximate **5,000** replacement central heating upgrades within five years, where necessary.



Decent Homes Standard



Plymouth Community Homes Standard

Electrical Systems

A minimum programme of work would be undertaken to meet the Decent Homes Standard which states: 'Electrical systems should be no more than 30 years old and be repaired or replaced if in poor condition'. The programme of installing hard wired smoke detectors would cease.

Would complete the electrical refurbishment of remaining properties (around **7,500** homes) within the first five years following transfer and domestic wiring would not exceed 30 years old. In addition, the association would finish the existing programme of providing two hard wired smoke detectors by 2019.

Security

Would not be able to carry out any security improvements.
Existing door entry systems would only be upgraded when they become obsolete or broken, when assessed as financially viable.

Tenants would be offered (where appropriate):

- Programme of installing or upgrading door entry systems (subject to service charging and the agreement of the occupants of the block) in flats and sheltered schemes.
- Easier access to additional keys to blocks.
- Digital CCTV (subject to service charging and agreement of the occupants of the block).
- Gates on alleyways and other security measures where appropriate and where health and safety permits.
- Additional security on outhouses – PVCu (plastic) doors with mortice locks – programme to start on transfer.

Disabled Adaptations

A prioritised programme of disabled adaptations would continue to be provided within available resources- currently **£500,000** per annum although continued funding at this level could not be guaranteed. As any separate bathroom and kitchen replacement programme would be severely limited, any adaptations required to these rooms would be funded from this money.

When fitting new kitchens and bathrooms as part of the improvements programme, would spend approximately **£3 million** over the first five years on adaptations, to ensure that they are fitted with consideration to tenants' disabilities, including for example, walk in showers. In addition, would have a budget of **£350,000** every year for the first five years to clear, as a priority, any backlog of adaptations with the Council at the time of transfer.

C



Decent Homes Standard



Plymouth Community Homes Standard

Environmental Improvements

Would not be able to carry out any environmental improvements.

The current annual environmental improvement budget of **£220,000** which is used to improve estates would be moved toward meeting the Decent Homes Standard.

The association would commit a budget of **£10 million** in the first five years, planned and spent in conjunction with tenants and tenants' groups, for example:

- Fencing – to individual gardens and to communal areas.
- Lighting.
- Play areas.
- Modernised refuse storage.
- Improved recycling and composting facilities.
- Storage facilities in blocks of flats.
- Off street parking.
- Slip resistant flooring in communal areas of flats.

Improvements to Sheltered Schemes

Health and Safety requirements would be met but the Council would not be able to carry out other improvements.

The association would assess individual sheltered schemes in consultation with tenants, agree a programme of improvements and implement them within 10 years of transfer. This could include, for example, improving security and communal facilities, such as lounges and laundries.

Garages

Would carry out its minimum statutory repairing obligations, to keep safe and secure.

The association would have a programmed spend of **£600,000** over 30 years for other general external maintenance work which would include:

- A programme of garage door replacements.
- Lighting improvements where possible.

Ensuring the effective delivery of the Repairs and Maintenance Service

The association is committed to continuing to encourage tenant involvement in the monitoring of the Repairs and Maintenance Service by:

- Having a Continuous Improvement Group, made up of tenants, staff and Board members which monitors delivery of the maintenance service and recommends or decides changes for implementation.
- Working with PETRA who would provide an independent overview of the service.
- Encouraging tenants to feed back any issues in order to assist in further improving the service.
- Promoting local training and employment opportunities both within the association and with contractors, and through resident management organisations.
- Publishing details of work programmes giving time for tenants to make any necessary arrangements.
- Integrating energy saving works into planned improvements.



- Involving tenants in prioritising and programming estate improvements.
- Having caretakers undertake minor repairs to communal areas.
- Ensuring that all work is effectively supervised and monitored to ensure that it is of the required standard.
- Continuing the Tendering and Contracts Group (TAC) which would:
 - Contribute to discussions about the programming of works.
 - Participate in the preparation of contract specifications (including colour schemes and product design), tendering process and selection of contractors.
 - Advise on how best to communicate with tenants about works planned for their homes.
 - Participate in the monitoring of contractor performance.
 - Assist with the development of a code of conduct for all contractors.

C

Making estates pleasant, attractive and safe places to live

We know from tenants' feedback how important estate improvements are. At present the Council has very little money to spend on things like fences and better parking provision. Plymouth Community Homes would be able to plan to spend £10 million on environmental improvements in the first five years.

To ensure that money is spent wisely, the association would consult with tenants and tenants' groups to establish a list of priorities for each estate and the best way to deliver them, including the use of open spaces and communal areas.

Examples of the improvements that could be provided are listed in the table on page 28.



Would tenants be consulted about work to their homes?

Yes. The association would consult all tenants individually on improvement works to their homes including where there are special needs or cultural requirements.

Tenants would usually be able to choose what work to have done, unless there are health and safety issues involved or it is work to the outside of their home or which is required to repair their neighbours' home. If, for example, a tenant has installed their own kitchen or bathroom and they did not want to change it, they would not be pressured into having the work done unless health and safety reasons exist.

Would tenants pay extra for these improvement works?

No. There would be no extra charge for any of these programmed improvements over and above the planned annual rent and service charge increases. Please see section D on rents and other charges.

There would be charges for some additional specific services such as for new door entry and CCTV systems in flats where tenants have requested and consented to them.

Who would do the improvement works?

Plymouth Community Homes would have its own workforce. However, the improvement programme, as well as the catch up repairs

and planned maintenance, would be done by a combination of carefully selected contractors and the association's own workforce.

What are Plymouth Community Homes' plans for the Repairs Service?

Plymouth Community Homes would be committed to ensuring that the in-house workforce maintains a central role in providing the day-to-day repairs service and planned maintenance service after transfer, and would have a budget to continue to provide a **24 hour emergency service 365 days a year.**

If transfer goes ahead the association would also plan to:

- Complete a review of the responsive repair service within one year of transfer and agree with tenants a plan for bringing in any changes. The review would concentrate on:
 - The timescales for completing repairs.
 - The specification for repairs.
 - The appointment system (including evening and weekend appointments).
 - The arrangements for inspections and monitoring of repairs.



fact

There would be no extra charges for improvements to homes.

- Regular inspection of properties to identify preventative maintenance issues.
- The arrangements for taking repair requests from tenants and for informing tenants of progress, including the use of technology such as text messaging.
- Further develop a system of prioritising responsive repairs for vulnerable persons for example, ensuring that the specific needs of tenants with disabilities are addressed.
- Introduce a Handyperson Service within two years of transfer – to assist tenants with carrying out minor jobs which are the tenant's responsibility. A charge would be made for this service.

Planned maintenance

In addition to continuing with existing programmes, Plymouth Community Homes would undertake the following additional maintenance works to help ensure homes and estates are well maintained through a commitment to:

- Increasing the target frequency of decoration to internal communal areas in sheltered schemes and blocks of flats from every eight years to every six years after the first five years of transfer.
- Maintaining appropriate 'open spaces' on estates and ensuring that trees and shrubs are trimmed regularly – as part of a review of existing grounds maintenance arrangements to take place within two years of transfer.
- Continuing with the programme of external painting, but aiming to install PVCu doors, guttering and fascias to reduce future maintenance costs.

C

What would happen if tenants vote 'no' and homes stay with the Council

In the event of a 'no' vote, the Council would still be required to try and meet the Decent Homes Standard and would be expected to put all possible resources from its Housing Revenue Account into trying to achieve it. This would come at a significant cost to Housing Services as the Council expects it would only have the same resources as it does now.



Responsive repairs would be reduced so that the Council would undertake only those repairs for which it is legally responsible.

The existing decent homes programme would be reviewed, and be based on basic standard kitchens and bathrooms (for example no choice of units, tiling etc, and no over bath showers).

There would also be a reduction in the numbers of kitchens, bathrooms, windows installed – for details see tables on pages 24, 25 and 26. The works would be undertaken on an ad hoc basis, focusing on those properties that could most easily be brought up to meet the Decent Homes Standard.

Additional improvements would cease for example:

- Replacing external doors with PVCu security doors.
- Installation of hard wired smoke alarms.
- Environmental and security works.

These improvements are not required by the Decent Homes Standard.



D

The rent and other charges you would pay

At a glance

- Rents would be the same whether you transfer to Plymouth Community Homes or stay with the Council due to current Government policy.
- Rent increases would be calculated using the Government's formula each year designed to create a fairer rent system.
- Your entitlement to claim Housing Benefit would not be affected by transfer.
- There would be no hidden service charges and no hidden increases.
- New services could be provided, which tenants can opt into, which may be chargeable.

What would happen to rents?

At the time of transfer, each tenant would pay the **same** rent to Plymouth Community Homes as they were paying to the Council. As with the Council, the rent increases would be due in April of each year. The first rent increase by the association would be in April 2010 and it would be the same increase as it would have been with the Council. The association would continue to allow two rent free weeks a year.

The Government has a policy for rents. This is to ensure that:

- Rents for social housing should remain affordable and well below rents set by private landlords.
- The calculation of rents for social housing should be fairer and easier to understand.
- There should be a closer link between the rents tenants pay and the quality, size and location of their homes.
- There should be no significant difference between the rent set by councils and Registered Social Landlords, like Plymouth Community Homes, for the same or similar homes.

The Government has developed a formula for working out the rent levels (called a target rent) for each type of property which reflects its location, value, number of bedrooms and the local average earnings compared with the national average earnings.



The Government also says that rents should move steadily towards target levels but with annual increases limited to inflation (RPI) plus 0.5% plus £2 per week.

When it was introduced, the Government's rent restructuring policy required councils and Registered Social Landlords, like the association, to bring actual rents to the same level as target rents by 2012. The Government has since stated that this timescale can now be extended to 2016 for local authorities, although this may take longer where the annual limit applies. The Housing Corporation has stated that this extension could also be applied by Plymouth Community Homes in the event of transfer.

After target rents have been reached, Plymouth Community Homes' business plan is based on limiting annual rent increases to no more than inflation plus 0.5%, which follows current Government policy. This is the same as it would be with the Council.

It would be the association's policy to keep all rents at affordable levels.

The Housing Corporation, a Government appointed body set up to regulate and supervise all Registered Social Landlords, has powers to ensure that it does.

What about Housing Benefit?

Transfer would not affect tenants' entitlement to claim Housing Benefit. Housing Benefit applications would still be made to the Council.

Advice on Housing Benefit would continue to be available at the Council's offices and at Plymouth Community Homes' offices.

The association would work with the Council's Housing Benefit team, to try to ensure the speedy payment of Housing Benefit. It would promote the option of Housing Benefit being paid directly to it, in the same way as it is now with the Council. Plymouth Community Homes would provide help to tenants to achieve this.

Some service charges are also covered under current rules by Housing Benefit, or by the Government's Supporting People Grant. This does not include, for example heating.



Supporting People

If you are in sheltered housing you may be receiving support services. Support services may include general counselling and support in relation to:

- Maintaining the security of your home.
- Maintaining the safety of your home.
- Maintaining your home in an appropriate condition.
- Contact with others to ensure your welfare.
- Other support services, excluding personal care, such as Sheltered Housing Officer support.

If you currently receive support services, and the transfer goes ahead, the services you receive would not be affected by the transfer.

If you pay something towards the cost of support services, this would not change until the service charge is next reviewed, the same as it would be with the Council.

If you do not currently receive these services and require them in the future you would still be able to access the service through the association. The Government requires that support services are reviewed on a regular basis and this is a requirement whether or not transfer goes ahead.

What would happen to service charges?

There would be no hidden service charges and no hidden increases.

Plymouth Community Homes would not introduce new service charges for existing tenants unless tenants ask for a new service in the future which carries a separate charge, CCTV for example, and would only make a charge if appropriate to do so and with the consent of individual tenants.

Service charges are subject to Government guidance which currently states that annual increases should be no more than inflation plus 0.5%. Plymouth Community Homes

would be subject to this guidance. The association would not make a surplus from the service charges that it applies, and would only cover the cost of the service that it provides.

Service charge increases would occur once a year (unless a new service is introduced) and would usually occur at the same time as increases in rent.

A review of the information that tenants receive about service charges would take place within two years of transfer, with a view to providing more detailed information about the charges.

What would happen to garages?

Where garages are let as part of the housing service, they would be owned and managed by the association. If you pay for a garage, you would continue to do so but your payments would be to Plymouth Community Homes.

What methods could tenants use to pay their rent?

Plymouth Community Homes plans to continue with current methods available for tenants to pay their rents and other charges including rechargeable repairs and home contents insurance. It would also regularly review these methods and look at new ways for tenants to pay their rent. Like the Council, it would provide quarterly rent statements.

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Rents would be the same as with the Council.



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What rents would new tenants pay?

New tenants are those who become tenants of Plymouth Community Homes after the transfer. New tenants would pay the target rent for their home from the start of their tenancy plus any applicable service charge. This would also be the case with the Council.

What is Plymouth Community Homes' policy on rent arrears?

Tenants' rents pay for the housing service, investment in homes and repayment of loans to help finance this investment. Plymouth Community Homes believes it is not fair to those tenants who do pay their rent on time, to allow a minority not to do so. The association would have a firm but fair policy on rent arrears. However, it also realises that some tenants do sometimes have financial difficulties through no fault of their own.

The association would contact tenants who are in arrears as soon as there is a problem. Arrangements would be made for tenants to

pay their arrears. Staff would be trained in arrears management, debt management, and benefits so they can give advice to tenants to help them avoid problems and support those households who are in difficulty. The association would also work very closely with the agencies who can provide tenants with advice.

Plymouth Community Homes' policies on rents and arrears would be clear so all tenants could understand what is expected of them. The association would only use similar grounds for eviction for rent arrears as those that are available to the Council. This is to make sure your rights to live in your home match as closely as possible those you have now with the Council.

As a last step, the association, like the Council, could take court action to end a tenancy. This would only normally be done, for example, when a tenant has not kept to an agreement to pay off the debt.

If the transfer goes ahead, tenants' arrears transfer to the association. Any tenant who owes rent to the Council would, therefore, then owe that rent to Plymouth Community Homes.