



PRESTON COMMUNITY GATEWAY

The PRESTON “COMMUNITY GATEWAY”

You've heard that Preston City Council are thinking of transferring your home?

You've heard of the “Community Gateway” and want to know what it will mean to you?

You want your say on what happens to your home?

If so please read on...

What is a “COMMUNITY GATEWAY”?

Preston City Council, working in partnership with tenant representatives, have decided to propose to Preston’s tenants that the council homes are transferred to a non-profit making “Community Gateway Association”.

The Community Gateway is a new way of running housing. It gives tenants and communities the maximum possible opportunity to influence how the housing organisation is run and to decide what happens in each local neighbourhood.

Community involvement happens on two levels in a Community Gateway:

- across the whole organisation – tenants would be able to become members of the Community Gateway and membership would mean that tenants could influence the Community Gateway’s policies. The Community Gateway would have a board which would run the organisation, and the tenant membership would elect a number of tenant members to the board.
- in local neighbourhoods - the Community Gateway would be divided up into “Local Community Areas” that people identify with. In each of these areas, tenants and communities would be offered opportunities about how they could make decisions about what happens in the area

This is all a new way of thinking. The Community Gateway is about people in communities being the experts on what will make their neighbourhoods work. Its about you making decisions about your homes, your neighbourhoods, your communities and your futures.

The Preston Community Advisor Team

The Preston Community Advisor Team is here to work with tenants and communities to work out how tenants can be involved with the Community Gateway (if tenants do vote in favour of it) and in their local neighbourhoods.

We are here to work with tenants and communities to:

- define “Local Community Areas” based as closely as possible on the sense of community identity that exists in each area. These areas will be the building blocks for the Community Gateway. In each of these Local Community Areas, tenants and communities will be offered opportunities to get involved in deciding how their communities are run
- carry out “community option studies” in areas across Preston. A “Community Options Study” is a means by which a local community can:
 - consider what issues are important in the area
 - work out what things it would like to see done to tackle those issues
 - identify how the community will be involved in tackling the issues
 - make links with the people and organisations that could help the community achieve their aims
 - develop an action plan, signed up to by all parties, that sets out the way forward

A Community Options Study is an intense period of work with the community that usually lasts about 6 months. We are currently considering how “community options studies” could add to what is already going on in the various areas of Preston.

- develop a “Community Empowerment Strategy” that says how tenants can be involved with the Community Gateway and in their local neighbourhoods

The Preston Community Advisor Team is made up of people from four organisations – Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services, Partners in Change, Preston Community Network and Ashiana Housing Association.

We are strongly committed to the principle of giving opportunities to tenants and communities to be involved in making decisions about their homes and neighbourhoods. But we are not here to advise you to vote for or against the transfer. We are neither for it nor against it. That is for you to decide, although we will do our best to give you impartial advice about the issues, based on our many years experience of working with tenants and communities.

What does Preston City Council say?

We asked Preston City Council a number of key questions about the Community Gateway. This is what they told us.

Why are you proposing stock transfer?

“For many years, Preston City Council and tenant representatives have discussed the future of Council homes in Preston. Many of Preston’s homes need modernisation or improvements. Too many have kitchens and bathrooms which are out of date or haven’t got things like central heating.

The problem is that the way that Government funding works means we can only bring in a fraction of the money needed if we stay as we are. Councillors and council staff are frustrated that we are not able to provide Preston tenants with the service they want and deserve.

We’ve looked at all the options with tenant representatives. We think that the only way enough money can be brought in to modernise and improve the homes is to transfer them to a non-profit making housing association.”

And why the “Community Gateway”?

“Many council members and staff were sceptical about transferring our homes to a housing association without much tenant involvement. We wanted to make sure, if we were going to transfer, that the homes are transferred to an organisation where tenants are in the driving seat and can influence how it works. The Community Gateway is a way of making that happen.”



They’re your homes – you will decide

A transfer to a “Community Gateway” can only happen if tenants agree to it. A majority would have to vote “yes” in a ballot of all tenants for the transfer to happen.

Tenants will have all sorts of questions about what a transfer would mean to you. You may want to know what will happen to the rents; will there be changes to tenancy rights; when would improvements be done and no doubt, many other things.

There will be many opportunities to find out the answers to your questions so that you can make an informed choice when you come to vote on whether the transfer should happen.

The Government requires that an “Independent Tenant Advisor”, chosen by tenant representatives, is employed who can work with tenants, answering their questions and checking information provided by the Council.

There is also a requirement that an “offer document” is sent to tenants. This offer document will include information about future rent levels, about secure tenancy rights, such as the right to buy, and about when and what improvements will take place and a lot of other information.

What will happen to my rent under Community Gateway?

“It’s too soon to say what would happen to your rent, because we are only just starting to look at the money side of the proposals. However, we will make a clear statement and a guarantee to tenants on rent levels in the offer document that will be sent to you before you vote.

In any event, Government regulations affecting both council and housing association rent levels mean that over a ten year period all rents will be within a Government defined target range. Therefore, voting for or against the transfer will not make a difference to rent levels in the longer term.”

What’s in it for me and my family if I vote for the Community Gateway?

“If the transfer happens, more money will be available for:

- fitting new kitchens and bathrooms to many homes
- fitting double glazing
- improvements to the security and appearance of neighbourhoods
- regular painting and other repair programmes
- more staff to deal with nuisance and anti-social behaviour problems
- and tenants and residents would have a major say in what happens in their communities through the Community Gateway framework.”

What’s the timetable for all of this?

“The Council has agreed in principle to apply to Government at the end of 2003 to move forward on the Community Gateway proposals.

Work is being done now to work out how the transfer could be organised and financed. This will lead to the development of an “offer document” being sent to tenants and a ballot of tenants in Summer 2004.

If tenants vote in favour, it would take at least six months to set the Community Gateway up.”

How can tenants get more information from the Council about the Gateway proposals?

“Further information on the Gateway and its implications for your home will appear in Preston Estate News and in further special newsletters, which will be delivered to your door.

Details are also available on the council’s website at www.preston.gov.uk

You might also be able to get more information from your local tenants and residents association. Full details of tenants and residents groups are in Preston Estate News and also on the Council’s website.”

