



# Overall Report for Sheerwater Secure Tenancy Consultation

On Behalf of Woking Borough Council



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## CONSULTATION INTRODUCTION

Woking Borough Council (WBC) invited The Halo Works to work together on consultation with their secure tenants as part of the Sheerwater Regeneration Project. Under Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985, the Council has a legal obligation to inform and consult with its secure tenants on any changes, which substantially affect their housing arrangements.

The changes to the tenancy included outlining a proposal that the new rented properties would be delivered by Thameswey, and that it would be Thameswey not the Council, who would be offering a different type of tenancy to the existing Secure Tenants taking up residency in one of the new homes within the Sheerwater Regeneration Area.

The consultation focused on a number of proposed changes to the tenancy agreement and was conducted in a number of stages. The consultation process included the following steps:

- . Questionnaire design
- . Recruitment for and facilitation of one “sense-check” focus group
- . Incorporate changes to the proposed questionnaire as required
- . Data preparation, printing and fulfilment of an initial and reminder survey mailing
- . Data input, analysis and tabulations and supply raw data file
- . Written reporting of the consultation results

Once the final version of the questionnaire was approved, it was sent to the 360 secure tenants on the database supplied by the Council along with a covering letter and freepost reply envelope. A unique identifier number was added to each questionnaire to prevent any duplicate or anonymous responses being included. Three weeks later, a reminder consultation mailing was sent to the 313 secure tenants who hadn’t responded to the initial survey mailing. This generated a strong response and overall, **125** secure tenants responded to the consultation representing an excellent overall response rate of **35%**.

This report details the main findings from both the survey and focus group stages of the project as well as a listing of the verbatim comments supplied by residents in response to the two open-ended questions included in the questionnaire. The strength of the response rate can give the Council confidence in taking decisions on the basis of these results. The questionnaire and listing of comments are both included as Appendix One and Appendix Two to the report. The findings from the qualitative ‘sense check’ focus group are also included as Appendix Three.

In most cases and unless otherwise stated, results have been given as a percentage of the total overall number of valid responses (all answering), which varies from question to question. Some percentage values have been rounded up/down to ensure the totals add up to 100%. We are unable to provide any further detail other than the headline results as there were no demographic type questions included in the questionnaire to segment the overall results.

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS FROM THE CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

- The consultation questionnaire achieved a very respectable 35% overall response rate.
- Seven out of ten tenants said they understood how their tenancy was going to change.
- From the list of options provided, 72% supported a fixed tenancy period of ten years.
- 45% of tenants agreed that if the proposed new rent levels were similar to the ones already in place at Kingsmoor Park, they would be fair and reasonable for a new property in Woking. A further 31% disagree whilst almost a quarter 24% responded 'don't know'.
- On the proposal to increase rental levels by CPI + 1%, 37% agreed this level of increase would be fair and reasonable for a new property in Woking, whilst 36% disagreed. A further responded 27% 'don't know'.
- Tenants were also invited to give their views on the new Earn your Deposit Scheme (EDS), which would be offered to former secure Council tenants who take a new tenancy within the Sheerwater Regeneration area. 29% believed this scheme could be a good idea for them and their household, whilst 29% also disagreed. A further 42% responded 'don't know'.
- Similarly, 37% thought the scheme would be a good idea for other tenants within the Sheerwater Regeneration area whilst only 13% disagreed. 50% responded 'don't know'.

The next section of the report provides detailed results from the consultation questionnaire. The full questionnaire is included as Appendix One to this report.

## PROPOSED TENANCY TYPE

The questionnaire included some background information to the proposed changes including highlighting that the main difference between a Secure Tenancy and an Assured Shorthold Tenancy is that instead of a lifetime tenancy, the tenancy granted will be for a fixed term, and that the Right to Buy will be replaced by a scheme to assist the tenant in buying a future home.

The table below highlights whether tenants understood how their tenancy is going to change.

	Number of responses	% of total
<b>Yes</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>70%</b>
<b>No</b>	21	17%
<b>Don't know</b>	15	13%

Overall, 70% of those answering said they understood how their tenancy would change whilst 30% responded either 'no' or 'don't know'.

## PROPOSED TENANCY LENGTH

In this question, the background information described that currently, new tenants in Woking are already being offered Flexible Tenancies for a fixed period of seven years and that from next year the government will require all new council tenancies to be granted for a fixed term of between 2 to 10 years. With this in mind, the Council is considering the length of the Assured Shorthold Tenancies to be offered to the tenants within the Sheerwater Regeneration area.

The table highlights whether tenants thought the fixed term should be five, seven or ten years.

	Number of responses	% of total
Five years	8	7%
Seven years	11	9%
Ten years	<b>86</b>	<b>72%</b>
Don't know	14	12%

Overall, 72% of those answering thought that of the options provided, the fixed term period should be ten years with the second highest response of seven years supported by 9%. In the focus group, the majority of respondents said that if lifetime tenancies were no longer available, they would prefer the longest time period option available.

## PROPOSED RENT LEVELS

The questionnaire set out that the rent levels would be similar to those set at Kingsmoor Park and a table showing the current weekly rents at this site was included as a comparison. The survey asked whether tenants considered these rent levels fair and reasonable for a new property in Woking.

	Number of responses	% of total
Yes	<b>55</b>	<b>45%</b>
No	39	31%
Don't know	30	24%

Whilst 45% agreed that the increase being proposed was fair and reasonable, a further 31% disagreed whilst almost a quarter (24%) responded 'don't know'. From the comments, it is apparent that not everyone was familiar with the Kingsmoor Park site and the type of housing there, so this may have made any rental comparisons more difficult.

In the focus group, when tenants started discussing the benefits of living in a modern building, such as better insulation and heating efficiency, improved sound proofing and a modern internal specification, they found it easier to understand why these rent levels may be higher.

## PROPOSED RENT INCREASES

The next question focused on the proposal that the annual increase in rental level would be increased by Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1% as it is in Kingsmoor Park. The level of support for this is shown in the following table.

	Number of responses	% of total
<b>Yes</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>No</b>	43	36%
<b>Don't know</b>	32	27%

The views on the proposed rate of rent increases were mixed with no strong majority view. Almost as many tenants disagreed that the rate being proposed was fair and reasonable for a new property in Woking than agreed (36% v 37%). In addition, a further 27% responded 'don't know'.

## PROPOSED EARN YOUR DEPOSIT SCHEME (EDS)

One of the main elements of this consultation was the proposal to introduce a new scheme called 'Earn your Deposit Scheme' (EDS), to replace the 'Right to Buy' scheme, which Thamesway would no longer be able to offer. The background information provided explained that with this scheme, the tenant would be given an amount of money, towards their deposit to help them buy a home. This home could be in Woking or elsewhere.

In addition, the survey explained that the amount payable to the tenant would be based on:

- the length of their tenancy
- the type of accommodation they occupy
- the increase in the value of the property during their tenancy, to a capped upper limit.

The consultation asked whether or not tenants thought this is a good idea either for their own household or alternatively for other tenants living in the same area. The results were:

	For you and your household	For other tenants within the regeneration area
<b>Yes</b>	29%	<b>37%</b>
<b>No</b>	29%	13%
<b>Don't know</b>	<b>42%</b>	50%

Overall, 29% of tenants agreed that EDS would be a good idea for them or their household, whilst the same number disagreed. A further 42% responded 'don't know'. There was far greater support for the scheme when tenants were asked whether this could be a good idea for other tenants living within the Sheerwater Regeneration area. Of those who expressed an opinion, almost three times as many tenants agreed than disagreed (37% v 13%).

In the focus group, many of the people who attended felt that due to their age or because of plans they already had in place, whilst they liked the idea, they didn't feel the scheme would be right for them. When the suggestion was made that there might be other tenants living in Sheerwater, who might be better suited to the scheme, a number of tenants thought there would be although it may depend on what aspirations people had for the future. The general feeling was that this scheme might be better suited to younger people, perhaps the next generation of tenants who were looking at different ways of getting onto the 'housing ladder'.

### **PROPOSED MANAGEMENT OF THE NEW RENTED PROPERTIES**

This was the first of two open ended questions. The questionnaire outlined that the properties in the Sheerwater Regeneration area would be owned by Thameswey Housing Limited.

A total of forty three tenants provided a comment. The full listing of comments is supplied in Appendix Two to this report. These comments focused on a wide variety of issues, many of which were unrelated to the management of the new rented properties. Others were from tenants wanting to know how the change in housing management might affect them on a more practical level. There were only a few comments from tenants objecting to the plans. Some of the other themes included:

- Reassurances that service levels would be maintained/improved by any new provider
- Whether there was a potential conflict of interest by Thameswey being owned by WBC
- A desire for more detailed information from WBC around dates and the types of housing
- Specific concerns from tenants with disabilities or from those living in sheltered housing

### **OTHER COMMENTS**

In the final question, a total of forty two people provided a comment. The full listing of comments is supplied in Appendix Two. Again, these comments were varied and in some cases very detailed. Some of the main themes included:

- Concerns around the loss of secure tenancies
- Concerns around the new rental levels being proposed
- Loss of trust caused by what have WBC said in the past and what they have then done
- A high level of uncertainty about what will happen and when
- More information specifically around the proposed rental levels and the EDS scheme

## APPENDIX ONE: QUESTIONNAIRE

### Proposed tenancy type

The new rented properties within the Sheerwater Regeneration area will be delivered by Thamesway, and for this reason it will be Thamesway granting the new tenancies for the new properties, not the Council. Existing secure Council Tenants rehoused within the regeneration area will therefore be granted an 'Assured Shorthold Tenancy' by Thamesway in place of their existing 'Secure Tenancy'. The Assured Shorthold Tenancy will be similar to the Flexible Tenancies that have been granted to any new Woking Borough Council tenants over the last few years, although the Council is considering a longer minimum period for the new tenancies in the Sheerwater Regeneration area.

The main difference between a Secure Tenancy and an Assured Shorthold Tenancy is that instead of a lifetime tenancy, the tenancy granted will be for a fixed term, and that the Right to Buy will be replaced by a scheme to assist the tenant in buying a future home.

#### Q1. Do you understand how your tenancy is going to change?

Yes	No	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>

### Proposed tenancy length

Currently, new tenants in Woking are already being offered Flexible Tenancies for a fixed period of seven years. From next year the government will require all new council tenancies to be granted for a fixed term of between 2 to 10 years. With this in mind, the Council is considering the length of the Assured Shorthold Tenancies to be offered to the tenants within the Sheerwater Regeneration area. The tenancy will be reviewed at the end of the fixed term. If the tenant's circumstances have not changed significantly over the course of that period, the tenant has complied with the terms of the tenancy agreement, and is still eligible for social housing; the tenancy will be renewed for another fixed term.

#### Q2. Do you think this fixed term should be five, seven or ten years?

Five Years	Seven Years	Ten Years	Don't Know
<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>



## Proposed rent levels

It is proposed that the rent levels would be similar to those set at Kingsmoor Park, a recent new build scheme facilitated by the Council; their rents can be seen in the table below:

NB. The figures below exclude service charges where they apply.

	<b>Kingsmoor Park (Weekly Rents)</b>
	<b>April 2017/18</b>
1 bed flat	<b>£113.18</b>
2 bed flat	<b>£129.37</b>
2 bed house	<b>£138.47</b>
3 bed house	<b>£159.48</b>
4 bed house	<b>£167.86</b>

**Q3. Do you consider these rent levels fair and reasonable for a new property in Woking?**

Yes	No	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>

## Proposed rent increases

The annual increase in rental level would be increased by Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1% as it is in Kingsmoor Park.

**Q4. Do you consider these rent increases fair and reasonable for a new property in Woking?**

Yes	No	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>

## Proposed Earn your Deposit Scheme (EDS)

Thameswey is unable to offer the Right to Buy, and a new scheme is being considered which is called ‘Earn your Deposit Scheme’ (EDS) for former secure Council tenants who take a new tenancy within the Sheerwater Regeneration area. With this scheme, the tenant would be given an amount of money, towards their deposit to help them buy a home. This home could be in Woking or elsewhere.

The amount payable to the tenant would be based on:

- the length of their tenancy
- the type of accommodation they occupy
- the increase in the value of the property during their tenancy, to a capped upper limit.

The scheme would only be offered to tenants who have always complied with the terms of their tenancy agreement. As the scheme applies to anyone wishing to buy a home in the private sector, there would be no reduction to the existing local affordable housing available.

### Q5. Do you think this is a good idea?

	Yes	No	Don't know
For you and your household	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>
For other tenants within the Sheerwater Regeneration area	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>

## Proposed management of the new rented properties

Properties in the Sheerwater Regeneration area will be owned by Thameswey Housing Limited.

### Q6. Do you have any views about the future management of the properties?

## Other comments

**Q7. Please use the space below to add any other comments you wish to make. Add supplementary sheets if necessary, numbering the pages clearly.**



**Please complete the information below:**

Tenant Name: .....

Your full address: .....

.....Email :.....

Contact Telephone Number: .....

Signature: ..... Date: .....

**Please return your completed questionnaire in the pre-paid envelope provided before 19 January 2018. NO STAMP IS REQUIRED**

**Thank you for your help.**

**Please note:** This is not an opportunity to comment on the merits of, or the detail of the regeneration project. Only responses from those secure tenants invited as recipients for this consultation will be accepted.

## APPENDIX TWO: VERBATIM COMMENTS FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

### Q6 Do you have any views about the future management of the properties?

- I think the tenants who are being forced out of their secure tenancy should be given the right to buy still I have paid a steady rent for 24 years, effectively paid enough to get a very reasonable discount I was in the process of looking into buying my house and it was suspended. I feel very cheated by the council. I work for a HA So I am familiar with how they work and their general upkeep of their general needs tenants. As a secure tenant we need just that SECURITY!
- NVH seem to have done a good job so I am prepared to accept that THL will be capable of the same
- I feel that the increase in rent by 1% and considering it will be run by a housing association so that increase does not include service charge is a lot of money as some people are struggling to pay rent now, and I am talking about people that are working for those that are on benefits will be ok because they will be in receipt of housing benefit!
- I am a pensioner living in sheltered housing in Woodlands House, the properties are not very old, and I don't see the point in demolishing them. You have people, living here who has got health problems including myself, people don't want to be moved out of these properties
- Given my age and circumstances I would be too old to be considered for most of the options available
- Thameswey is owned by Woking Council. I believe this is just a means of having the power of making secure tenants homeless has and when it suits. The promises in the charter have been broken so many times now and this is just another step to put pressure on working tenants. It feels unsafe and unfair. If Thameswey was owned by a third party with no connections it would be fairer.
- This was a pre-planned scheme to increase rents over guidelines. Council tenants received a letter from Woking Borough Council stating that existing council tenants would remain council tenants on completion of "regeneration". Under Thameswey, my rent will increase by at least 25% for a smaller built property and less garden and facilities.
- Will there be a warden? Is my hot water/heating included?
- Ensure the condition of flats and common areas is good and always well maintained. Tenants who cause problems / don't adhere to their tenancy conditions, to be appropriately dealt with.
- We need to have a commitment to a secure, clean, warm, suitable place to live. I'm happy to leave Sheerwater to another property in Woking. Others want to move back. People are anxious about not knowing when, where, how the regen is happening.
- I do think it is wrong that tenants no longer have secure tenancy if they are existing tenants
- Council housing should be owned and managed by the council.
- If my accommodation is for the elderly would all heating, hot water and any emergency equipment be included in the rent. If not how much would you expect it to amount to.
- There needs to be more responsive requests to resident's repairs. A better 'out of hours' service that actually LISTENS to the problem of resident. Better accountability of likes of Serco and the cleaning team, as they're both useless!

Final

- As long as it is good
- Nothing about proposed management or identifying the owner is a private landlord
- To be honest I don't know enough about what is happening or being affected to me
- I have concerns as I have only heard bad things about Thameswey as landlords. I am happy with my secure tenancy and don't feel that I should lose it at any point just because of the regeneration.
- As long as it's run correctly and not bully, I have no issues.
- A fair rent and long fixed term tenancy for people that have been a long term tenant and loyalty consideration. Rent reductions where applicable.
- Has to be better than New Vision Homes.
- I am living here from Aug 14 2014. Management is doing well his + her duties. But some time is problems for service of boiler. I have reposted since 2017 still no service. I am suffering from cold no hot water and no heating. Please solve this problem as soon as possible. Thank you very much
  
- I have never had any dealings of this kind with Thameswey! So I do not know. I consider this home to be my family home and have made my own adaptations to it for our comfort. If I was to move I would want to keep my secure tenancy and right to buy.
- Yes I think the properties should remain council properties with council rents & secure tenancies.
  
- In the FQs of the WBC/NVH Sheerwater News 01, dated August 2013, it was categorically pledged that "... people who are currently council tenants will remain council tenants if they need to be re-housed". I expect WBC to honour this pledge and WBC, not Thameswey Housing Limited, will own social housing properties in the Sheerwater Regeneration area.
- Properties should be maintained not neglected. Why can Thameswey not offer right to buy??
- My personal view is when Woking Council managed properties to standard was much higher than it has been since New Visions Homes took over. I think any future management companies should still be accountable to W.B.C and at least try to keep a high standard of care etc.
- We have secure tenancy + to ask us to except short term fixed term tenancy goes against the grain some what
- Thameswey is owned by WCCA conflict of interests. Well built houses that are only 30 years old
  
- We will not be given what we were told i.e. a like for like a 2 bedroom house for a 2 bedroom house
- Do not feel secured with the new tenancy arrangement
- The rent should be fair
- The rent should be fair always
- I am worried about security of tenure as I am disabled and receiving benefits. My disability means some special help may be required as my health worsens. I will not be able to afford higher rents.

Final

- Would this mean we have a private landlord responsible for maintenance, repairs rent etc.? Would I receive the same rent/allowance I currently receive (based on income) also for council tax etc. What/How would Woking Council be in. Not enough details have been given therefore I cannot give a fully informed answer.
- Will there be a communal boiler? + Home support?
- We think it would be good if Thameswey response to maintenance issues as we've had a few setbacks with New Vision Homes but we do have faith they will be more responsive
- The EDS would not apply to me as age would preclude me
- The EDS scheme would not apply due to my age
- Yes Thameswey Housing Ltd is owned by WBC. Therefore a conflict of interest is accrued. Gerrymandering comes to mind in destroying well built homes that are only 30 years old. Which has been forced on us as a fate accompli since the 1990s we were sent forms to ask if we agreed to New Vision Homes taking on the task as landlord
- Not at this moment in time
- Even though I know THL is owned by the council, it would concern me that they are still more worried about providing a profit rather than providing a service

### Q7 Please add any other comments you wish to make?

- I think this whole process has been messy! Our rents should NOT go up straight away for those families who are trying hard to fight the economy and cost of living rise; this should be done in a steady balanced affordable way. If you think of a TUPE situation the TUPE'd member of staff would have their salary honoured for a set amount of time. We have no choice in this matter our rents at least should be honoured
- My current 1 bed flat basic rent is £86.09 so the Kingsmoor rents are a significant increase. I am currently in receipt of Income Related ESA which gives me 100% Housing Benefit, including service charges. It is extremely unclear to me how having THL rather than the council as my landlord (and changes to the benefit system) will affect this but I view the prospect of having to pay a contribution towards rent/service charges with alarm. Also, what is the justification for increasing rents by more than inflation?
- Upon reading the proposals of the regeneration, I would like to add that changing tenants from a secure tenancy to assured tenancy is unfair. As we are the ones that are being freed out of our homes, and then being put into housing association with a 1% rent increase not including service charge! For those tenants (myself included) who work for basic wage and are struggling as it is to pay rent where or how do you expect us to find the extra money??
- I am a 67 year old man relying on state pension and housing benefits to survive. How will all these changes affect me personally my family have lived on the estate since 1953 and given my age and health problems I would be reluctant to leave the area as my sister, nephew and brother live within walking distance
- The Council should have made an effort to contact people and put it in writing that as long as there is a housing need we will always have a house/flat whatever. This just feels like that I no longer have protection and can be made homeless at the councils choosing. My trust is shattered in Woking BC. As yet no one has rung has promised. Lies, lies and more lies!
- As stated previously, I feel that the single bed flat is rather high in rent, although the rest are reasonable. Regarding the EDS scheme it is unfair to ask my opinion about other tenants affected by it.
- I would like to stay in Sheerwater.
- Is hot water + heating included in sheltered & TV Licence for under 75. Currently receiving benefits which include large reduction of rent via the council. Are Thameswey doing the same as tenant is 87 years old & can no way afford £113. Please clarify these points.
- My friend to call, asking about when and how I will be informed for moving house and they said that they will contact me. When?
- It was not totally clear that the new tenancies are still pretty much permanent, for us that are in need of our properties, which would make a big difference to considering swapping to the new Tenancy Agreements.



Final

- Because of my age. I am 63 I am not sure if I need the right to buy.
- Not sure if I would still get housing support at these prices of rents, but would expect to
- Timing is poor just before Christmas a time when many advice services will be closed. No clarification Thamesway is a private landlord or that assured shorthold tenancy is a type offered in the private sector. Vulnerable and elderly would not understand tenancy change. Tenancy length can this be brought to an end during the term and what happens at the end. Rent levels no details of service charges. Private landlords not subject to rent increase restrictions that apply to social landlords. Deposit scheme poor information or no information is very poor on which to form a view
  
- I opted to leave Sheerwater and not return, I still haven't heard anything about a possible move. Will I be offered a secure tenancy under these circumstances?
- I am in sheltered housing
- I am in sheltered housing, due to my health.
- It would have been more helpful (in order to properly answer the question, regarding EDS), has there been an example or approximate indication as to what sort of monies are going to be involved bearing in mind we were initially told that 'right to buy' would be put on hold and then continued.
- Properties should be sound proof so neighbours don't annoy each other with loud music/TV, domestic arguments.
- I was promised a secure tenancy and a council property now it has changed to a shorthold tenancy and a housing association property. This is very unfair when I have been a tenant for over 25 yrs. I also done my time in a flat and worked my way up the list for my house and at my age I cannot go back into a flat as my husband is ill with a heart condition and we cannot do stairs. I should not be getting stressed out this as I was settled. I do not get any benefits and pay all my rent and council tax. So this should not be happening and it has made me ill. This was not the promise the council made also rent are so much dearer.
  
- Not at all happy with response to my request regarding heating being cut off accidentally by the utility company. I have had cancer surgery and thought you could have helped. Cost of phone calls too high to you.
- I cannot understand why they want to do regeneration in the Kingfisher Court. As the house are only 21-22 years old. And also why do older people need to live in flats and disability. I disagree what there are doing to Sheerwater residents who have lived this area most of their life.
  
- My concern is that as an elderly resident in a 1x bed flat with a garden, which keeps me occupied and happy that I will be placed in a flat without the space outside for me to keep myself busy. I would like to see you offer residents like for like property within the scheme. It's fair that people shouldn't have the right to stay in council for ever as circumstances change it should be means tested. But I would like to keep my garden.
- You should secure tenant to be secure at Sheerwater regeneration area. No any change

Final

- This consultation has come too late as Sheerwater residents were not made aware of this when having to make this choice of moving or being able to come back to the estate. There has been little consideration for vulnerable residents. I myself have decided to move out of the area so this consultation seems a little too late. The prices quoted for the rent also seem off kilter. The 4 bedroom is more value for money than a one bedroom. Either way, one needs to increase or decrease.
- We do not understand why our tenancy agreements have to change! We were offered like 4 like when this process started! This was my lifetime home & we are happy here. We always intended to buy this home & now feel that we may not even get a real home as we are now hearing about assured shorthold or flexi tenancies? Why is it just us? So my other council tenants are buying their homes.
- My only query is that I am living in a studio flat so would the rent be classed as a 1 bedroom or would I get a 1 bedroom or would another studio be offered to me
- This is not what I would call a consultation. I have boxes to tick, so once these are collected the council will then declare the results and claim this is what the tenants want! When actually there is no room for our own opinions if they don't fit in the council boxes. Although the below disclaimer states this is not an opportunity to comment on details of the regen so this is a pointless exercise?
- I am on the list of the Home Support Service (my property has alarm cords) and I will have reached retirement age by the date of any required move. I have heard "rumours" of special arrangements for those in sheltered accommodation and on the home support service register but neither WBC nor NVH have ever contacted me to explain the position and the options available. Until I am aware of what is planned I cannot really make any decisions of my own.
- It is bad enough that you are taking our homes and now our security. It is lamentable that you influence these consultations by telling us how you want us to answer the questions and not giving us all of the information. Threatening us is even worse.
- The only other comment I wish to add is obviously a lot of people (us included) are unsure of the future plans etc. as there's been very little communications in recent months and conflicting advice should we want to move before regeneration is completed, there is no one point of access where we can get solid advice etc.
- To destroy well built houses is untenable, on this rather dodgy regeneration scheme. The only people that seem to benefit are only councillors who have directorships in building companies + bring in private home for only people who can afford it.
- I have a lot of facilities at my current accommodation. We don't have any problems car park and school everything is round the corner. Especially the supermarket and I am not sure that council would provide these facilities in future accommodation?
- At my current accommodation the supermarket is walk distance and we don't have any problems here the school is around the corner and I am not sure how the future property will be? and Personally I don't want to replace some where

Final

- I am worried about security and not being unable to balance benefit against increased rent, and the shorter terms of the agreements.
- You have compared with a new build Kingsmoor; I have no idea where it is! Please see my questions on previous page. I shall attend the meeting in Parkway on Thursday 18th Jan and hopefully gain further information.
- Would the EDS scheme apply to tenants wishing to move away from Sheerwater? Would the scheme apply to tenants moving away from the Borough completely?
- It is not clear whether Thamesway will be under the control of W/B/C or not. The rent increases would seem fair using R.P.I as guideline
- I do not understand whether Thamesway will be under the control of WBC
- Of which we said no. On the 4th occasion we were not notified, other than to agree to the restructuring of the shops in Dartmouth Ave. This was then used as a Trojan Horse to destroy our local community with a proud history since QEII's coronation in which we re-housed from bombed out London boroughs
- Although I think the regeneration project is a great, thought about idea I feel it does come with a lot of questions from current thoughts. I feel that although the rental prices for a new property are fair, I do not feel they are fair for current tenants who are paying lower rental costs. I also feel that the tenancy should be tailored to meet each family for their needs & measurements i.e. if disabled or someone in household is, the tenancy should be lifetime. I feel that it's unfair to the existing tenancies.
- 1/ I don't believe the rent increase should be linked to CPI plus 1% because wages aren't. Under current climate this could be putting a publicly owned property out of price reach of many. 2/ Not a big fan of right to buy, so trying gimmicks as per their 'proposed EDS' I don't think is good at all.
- The EDS does not seem suitable for me as a pensioner, I would never be able to have enough money to put into this plan. The annual rent increases are a bit worrying as many people including myself did not get annual increases in wages to be practical, plus other items like food also going up in price.

## APPENDIX THREE: KEY FINDINGS FROM THE FOCUS GROUP

### BACKGROUND

This section of the report details the findings from the **‘sense check’ focus group** we held in the Sheerwater Community Centre on 30<sup>th</sup> November with seven residents affected by the scheme.

This included ‘piloting’ the wording of the questionnaire, to check the understanding of and looking at the nuances of the tenancy changes and exploring the “mood” of tenants at this stage of consultation to the changes to their tenancy agreements.

We recruited local residents by telephone using a list provided by WBC. The list was segmented and included older people, some with mental health issues and those defined as “general needs”. The group was held in Parkview Community Centre in Sheerwater and facilitated by Alison Bond from The Halo Works.

### THE FINDINGS

Most of the people who came to the group had lived in their homes for a very long time, some up to thirty five years in the area. A couple had moved in during the last two years and felt less rooted, and for them, although the process they are going through is still disturbing, they were able to see it as part of life, rather than for those who had been there a long time, a major disruption and to some extent an end to their current way of life and lifestyle.

Not only were some of the group needing to move from their homes, some were being asked to significantly downsize; those whose families have left home, were being asked to move from a three bedroomed house to a one bed flat. We had to get past these conversations and upsets before we could move on to the purpose of the group, which was looking at and understanding the wording of the consultation questionnaire on the changes to their existing tenancy agreements.

We used show cards with the wording on to talk to respondents about their understanding of the various terms and ideas being set out in the questionnaire. These worked well, and it helped that the respondents who came were very open to have a discussion and were able to articulate about what they saw and what they needed to see for it be clear.

“I am so glad I came; I now know exactly what I am going to do and think I will be much better off as a result of my decision.”

## PROPOSED TENANCY TYPE

The first idea we looked at was about the change in tenancy type from secure tenancy to shorthold assured tenancy. This produced a tide of unhappiness and upset from the majority of the respondents. The removal of the word secure in the tenancy agreement immediately

“The Charter they gave us is all lies. They have already gone back on most of it. They are not to be trusted.”

equated to a loss of security. This was not the purpose of this exercise but again we needed to hear it before we could move on to wording. Also what happened during this conversation was how much mis-information there is with some of the nuances not being understood.

property and did not come back he could keep his existing tenancy. This galvanised at least a couple of the respondents to get cracking and find another property rather than wanting to come back.

One respondent, who was often the “voice of reason” in the group, explained that his understanding was that if he moved out of Sheerwater to another

“You don’t know what they are thinking, they tell you one thing, change it, you get used to that, and then they change their minds again. The thing is this is our homes.”

“I am going to have a nervous breakdown if this continues for too much longer.”

What we heard from the conversation around the wording is that it leaves people feeling nervous about their security. Something we hear whenever we do groups with those living in social housing is there is a certain level of fragility in their sense of security. Not all feel like this but many do, and as the social housing tends to be concentrated in relatively small areas it may be that this proximity to others with the same

concerns feeds the insecurity. They are excellent people, with lots of ideas and often enormous compassion for one another but they can get very worried rather quickly over things that more confident people would not even notice. Therefore the wording is crucial and the word which worried people was “shorthold”. Whether it is possible to tweak this to “Fixed Term” is a conversation which would be worth having, as the respondents need to feel secure, and if there way of including “secure” in the wording that would be helpful too.

The show card is below, and the other word which needs to be given plenty of emphasis is “renewed” which is in bold below. The group was understandably sensitive about losing their homes and need to feel sure that their home will not be taken away from them at the end of the term. All of the residents wanted to have a tenancy agreement for as long as possible so ten years was the only realistic option in their minds.

Final

The final issue on this wording was the idea of “where the tenants’ circumstances have not changed significantly”. People really worry about what this might mean to them and how it might affect their security. They asked whether it meant if they earned a little bit more would they then be expected to go into private rent, something which for many makes them rather fearful.

***SHOWCARD ONE***

The Assured Shorthold Tenancies that are being proposed for the tenants of Sheerwater will be similar to the Flexible Tenancies already being offered to new WBC Council tenants.

- . Existing WBC Secure and Flexible Tenants who are rehoused within the regeneration area will be offered Assured Shorthold Tenancies as opposed to Secure Council Tenancies
- . They will be granted for a fixed period.
- . Where the tenants’ circumstances have not changed significantly over the course of the fixed term, and they have complied with the terms of their tenancy agreement, their tenancy will be **renewed** for another fixed term.
- . Currently new WBC tenants are being offered Flexible Tenancies lasting 7 years; the government is considering changing this period; the tenancy period could be anywhere between 2 and 10 years.

## RENT LEVELS

When we talked about rent levels and showed the example of what they may be (shown below) the respondents all saw that they were higher than they currently pay. Those living in flats asked if the figures included the service charge, which they felt for the levels being suggested, should do so. All the rents are higher by £10 - £15 per week than they currently pay.

	<b>Kingsmoor Park</b>
	April 2017/8 Per week
1 bed flat	<b>£113.18</b>
2 bed flat	<b>£129.37</b>
2 bed house	<b>£138.47</b>
3 bed house	<b>£159.48</b>
4 bed house	<b>£167.86</b>

This conversation led on to a debate about build quality. One responded works on the homes in Kingsmoor Park and whilst he said they were very nicely fitted out and would be well insulated, he thought they were very small and extremely “flimsy”. Clearly the respondents were not happy at the thought of being asked to pay more for something which might be inferior and smaller even if it was a new build built to modern standards.

Throughout the conversation there was a thirst for information about what the properties would be like, the mix of housing, whether there would be any one bed roomed flats available and when the work was going to start. This was one of the very good reasons why it was worth having this group independently moderated. We could quite honestly say we didn’t know the answers to any of their questions, and it needs to be understood just how much interest there is in the project. If there was a chance to share any more information, as it happens it will be very well received.

“My son is a guard on SW Trains; he has three children and privately rents in Knaphill. It costs him £1500 per month. I don’t know how he affords it”

## EARNING YOUR DEPOSIT SCHEME

We used the description below to check the idea for this scheme, asking them to read the piece and then discuss their reaction. The quote in the box to the right of the page was one of the more vociferous respondents views, for the whole group looking at this idea started to soften the mood somewhat.

“This could persuade people to look up and beyond social housing, it is a good idea.”

### SHOWCARD THREE

The council is investigating a new scheme to replace “Right to Buy”. In these new homes, ‘Right to Buy’ would not be available; in its place a “**earning your deposit scheme**” policy is proposed which is a cash incentive scheme to help tenants buy a home that they couldn’t otherwise afford.

The amount payable to the tenant would be based on:

- The length of their tenancy
- The type of accommodation occupied
- The increase in the value of the property, to a capped upper limit.

The scheme would only be offered to tenants who have always complied with the terms of their tenancy agreement.

This idea is popular on many levels: they like the idea that social houses stay as social houses, that it helps with the deposit, which everyone said is the “impossible” thing to get together, especially for young people and it allows people aspiration and the feeling they are building something for the future.

It was very difficult for people to understand the details as there was a feeling that the council would still own part of the house bought with the deposit scheme. Whilst it was explained that this would not be the case, people still found the concept difficult. What they do see is this might be a way out of social housing for perhaps their own families and other younger people, even if it wouldn’t be something that appealed to them and everyone felt this was a good thing. The idea of aspiration to move onwards was appealing to everyone and ending the group on this conversation was very positive.

“I like this idea because it gives and incentive to more people and it keeps the housing stock for those who need it most.”



## FOCUS GROUP CONCLUSIONS

We met these people to talk about a very tough subject in a somewhat abstract way so the group was never going to be easy, however it was very good, and the respondents excellent. All had other questions and needed help with practical things which WBC should probably be handling better, like PIN numbers for the bidding system. We collected numbers from almost everyone and several said they would like a call from someone at WBC who could assist. These have been passed on to WBC and we hope they will get the calls and the help they need.

“We should be giving young people a leg up; this idea will do just that.”

The people are not unsupportive of the need to re-develop Sheerwater but they want to be supported too, with the honest, sympathetic help. Most need practical, rather than emotional help and this has not always been as good as it perhaps should be, given the circumstances.

When the residents were leaving a number said how pleased they were to have come to the session. One said; “This is the first re-development meeting I have been to which has not ended in a shouting match”. Another, despite, possibly having to make the greatest sacrifices to the re-development (moving from a much loved family home of thirty five years to a one bed flat with no garden) said he could see that there were things to look forward to and moving away was going to be “exciting”.

“I can see that the future will be better I just don’t have a PIN number or the other things I need to make it happen yet.”

Listening to the respondents it seemed that there is a need for the conversation to move for residents, away from “why is this happening” to “what do I need to do, and what help do I need”. Making it

practical will really help these people and whatever WBC and the team can do to assist in this will be great.