

your future your choice

**Proposal from Manchester City Council to
establish Northwards Housing –**
an Arms Length Management Organisation
(Almo) to manage & improve council housing
in North Manchester.

August 2005

www.manchester.gov.uk/housing/northwards



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Summary

Following months of detailed consultation with tenants, residents, leaseholders and local councillors, Manchester City Council is proposing to establish an Arms Length Management Organisation (Almo) to manage and improve approximately 13,000 council Homes in North Manchester.

This new Almo would be called Northwards Housing and decisions about how it is run would be made by a board of directors independent of the City Council. The board would be made up of:

- four tenant members
- four council nominated members
- four independent members

There would also be three local area panels to ensure that the views of local people are fully taken into account. These area panels would report to the board.

If established, Northwards Housing would be able to secure an extra £130 million from central government to improve homes in North Manchester so that they meet the government's 'Decent Homes Standard' by 2010.

Although Northwards Housing would manage your homes and neighbourhoods, you would stay a council tenant, with Manchester City Council as your landlord. The Council would continue to decide the level of your rent as well as other housing policies. Northwards Housing would manage and improve the homes and provide an excellent housing service.

These proposals, shaped through detailed consultation with tenants, residents and other interested people, could change further as a result of comments you send us in coming weeks. The proposals need the backing of council tenants in North Manchester to go

ahead. Tenants will be asked to vote formally on the proposals in September 2005 in a ballot organised by Electoral Reform Services who are independent of the Council and Northwards Housing.

This booklet gives you the key information you will need to help to decide how to vote in the ballot – **please take time to read it before you vote.**

If there is anything you don't understand or would like explaining please get in touch. (See Section 6 – Who do I contact for further information?)



1

Introduction

In 2000, the government introduced the 'decent homes standard', which all council and housing association homes must meet by 2010. A 'decent home' is one which:

- meets the legal standards
- is in a reasonable state of repair
- has reasonably modern facilities and services
- is comfortably warm

To meet this standard in North Manchester, many homes will need improvements such as new kitchens or new bathrooms. Northwards housing would be able to offer even more: for example new windows. In addition, tenants have told us about other improvements that need to be made such as a better environment and improved housing services (see Section 3).

Manchester City Council recognises the need for extra money to improve homes to the decent homes standard but cannot raise the money needed alone. By setting up Northwards Housing to manage the homes in North Manchester, we would receive an extra £130 million of Almo funding from central government provided that:

- The vote is in favour of Northwards Housing; and
- Northwards Housing proves to government inspectors (from the Audit Commission) that it provides a good quality housing service when it is inspected in June 2006 – it would need to gain at least a 'two-star' rating before the extra money would be made available.

Northwards Housing would provide improved housing services (see Section 3) and would be managed by a board (see Section 4) who would make decisions about how and where the extra investment would be spent.

Use Your Vote

In September you will be asked to vote on the proposals being made in this booklet. All directly affected council tenants are eligible to vote and joint tenants will have a vote each – that's everyone who has their name on the tenancy agreement and on rent statements.

Votes must be returned by 4pm on Wednesday 5th October 2005 (see Section 6 for further information).



2

What is an
**Arms Length
Management
Organisation
(Almo)?**

An Almo is an organisation set up by a council to manage, maintain and improve all or part of its council housing. Northwards Housing is an Almo being set up by Manchester City Council to do this in North Manchester. [Parts of Miles Platting and Collyhurst are not included in this Almo because there are proposals there for another kind of new organisation – a housing Private Finance Initiative (PFI)].



Parts of Collyhurst
and Miles Platting
aren't included in the Almo

Areas covered
by the three
Area Panels.
See page 18.

Northwards Housing would be a 'Company Limited by Guarantee' (under the 1985 Companies Act) and has independence from the City Council to make its own decisions. Two of the main aims of an Almo are to bring the housing up to the decent homes standard and provide a housing management service that puts tenants at the heart of decision-making.

Key features of Northwards Housing would be:

- Manchester City Council still owns the housing
- The City Council remains your legal landlord
- You remain a tenant of the Council and there is no change to your rights and responsibilities
- Voluntary board of directors including local people making decisions in North Manchester tenants' interests.

The relationship between Manchester City Council and Northwards Housing is defined in a management agreement that sets out the obligations of each party. Within this there are arrangements for reporting and monitoring performance to ensure high standards are maintained.



3 Why have an **Almo**?

Extra Funding

In addition to existing funding, establishing an Almo would attract an extra £130 million from central government IF tenants vote in favour AND it gets at least a 'two star' rating when it is inspected in June 2006. This extra funding would not be available to the City Council alone.

Decent Homes

Northwards Housing would use this extra £130 million to make sure the area's 13,000 or so council homes meet the decent homes standard.

Improved Environment

Throughout the consultation tenants have asked that their estates enjoy an improved environment under Northwards Housing. So some of this extra investment would be used to upgrade things like lighting and security, the boundaries around homes, the open spaces and greens on local estates and tower block foyers.

Excellent Services

Northwards Housing must ensure that housing services remain at a high standard and would work to improve them where possible.

Familiar Staff

The people who currently provide the housing service under the City Council would deliver the housing service under Northwards Housing.

Improved Tenant Involvement

Tenants would be at the heart of Northwards Housing and its services. There would be regular consultation with tenants and a new agreement – called a tenant compact – setting out a range of ways tenants can be involved. This would be developed specifically for North Manchester. For example, tenants have been involved in preparing the proposals in this booklet. Also, there would be tenants on the board of Northwards Housing and the three Area Panels. (See Section 4 for details).

How would the extra money be spent?

Northwards Housing would use the extra Almo funding to bring council homes in North Manchester up to the 'decent homes' standard by 2010. Following detailed door-to-door consultation between May and July 2005, tenants told us what improvements they would like to see under Northwards Housing.

From a sample of over 5,200 tenants:

- 52% wanted new kitchens
- 51% wanted double-glazed windows
- 35% wanted new bathrooms
- 20% wanted environmental improvements

This has helped shape the proposals in this booklet.

Improvement Promises:

Based on what tenants have told us, Northwards Housing makes four key promises to tenants:

- Your choice – a new kitchen OR a new bathroom if yours is over 5 years old now, followed by redecoration of the whole room.
- uPVC double glazing for **all** your single-glazed windows.*
- We would spend over £21 million on the wider environment. **
- All homes would meet the 'decent homes' standard by the end of 2010.

**Except listed buildings eg Victoria Square. We will use wooden frames in conservation areas.*

*** Using additional money from Housing Market Renewal funds*

Northwards Housing would consult further on all improvement work with local Area Panels (see Section 4 – Local Decision Making) and with individual tenants and tenant associations.

As well as the four key promises, Northwards Housing would also make sure that:

- Every home would benefit from some improvement work.
- All electric rewiring would include fitting mains-powered smoke alarms to make homes safer.
- Tower blocks without CCTV security cameras would get them, and all blocks would be linked to a control room.
- Long-term partnerships with contractors and suppliers would reduce costs and improve the quality of service year on year.
- Contractors doing the work for Northwards Housing must meet the high standards they would be set. Tenants would be involved in agreeing these standards.

Improvement work would be due to start in Summer 2006. We aim to have some work done on every home by Spring 2008. All the work needed to meet the 'decent homes' standard and the three other key promises would be done by the end of 2010.

Northwards Housing would consult tenants on how the improvement work would be done, focusing on things like:

- timescales
- standards
- choices of fixtures and fittings
- high quality materials

- good management of on-site contractors to reduce later problems
- consistency of improvements from the first home to the last
- giving tenants and tenants' groups choices about the design of new kitchens and bathrooms

How would services be improved?

A government organisation called the Audit Commission carries out formal inspections of not-for-profit landlords – like councils and housing associations – to check that they're delivering a good service to their tenants. They give each organisation a 'star rating' depending on how they perform – from no stars for a 'poor' performer to three stars for an 'excellent' service.

Northwards Housing would be inspected after six months. If it reaches at least a two-star standard, the extra £130 million funding will be released. Most of the staff working for Northwards Housing will be people who are managing the area's housing now. They have already helped achieve the Council's current three-star award from the Audit Commission. Northwards Housing would build on this success.

Northwards Housing would provide all the housing management services that tenants currently receive from the City Council. It would be committed to providing a modern, customer-focused service and would improve services further by putting its customers – North Manchester's council tenants – first.

Comparing who would do what under an Almo

NORTHWARDS HOUSING RESPONSIBILITIES	CITY COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES
Housing investment decisions, repairs ordering and employing contractors.	Overall housing strategy.
Rent collection, dealing with arrears and debt counselling.	Overall policy on rents. Housing benefit and rent rebate administration.
Rehousing and exchanges, managing empty homes and finding new tenants.	Rehousing policy (in consultation with Northwards Housing).
Consulting and informing tenants about Northwards Housing services. Tenant participation including involving tenants in monitoring and reviewing service standards.	Setting Northwards Housing's minimum service standards and monitoring its performance.
Enforcement of tenancy agreements.	Council remains legal landlord.
	Right to Buy
Estate management, caretaking and sheltered housing. Managing the environment – such as untidy gardens, garages, land around homes and monitoring street cleaning.	Homelessness, Supporting People strategy and the Supported Housing Service.
Dealing with anti-social behaviour incidents.	Overall strategy and policy for tackling anti-social behaviour (in consultation with Northwards Housing).

We have spoken to many tenants, individually and in groups and at meetings during consultation about Northwards Housing. We have listened to what local people have said to the Independent Tenants' Advisers about their housing services.

Based on what people told us, Northwards Housing would improve and develop services to bring lasting benefit. It would:

- put North Manchester tenants first, through a local board of directors and a dedicated area-based housing service;
- locate senior managers and support staff in a head office in North Manchester.
- use three local housing offices.
- continue to use the Housing On Call service, including a new, dedicated telephone number and staff team for Northwards Housing tenants. You would keep the option of a home visit when you make an appointment with housing staff.
- give tenants access to a full range of online services through the Northwards Housing website.
- have staff spending more time out and about on estates tackling issues that matter most to tenants, dealing with things like anti-social behaviour and improving the environment.
- improve the caretaking service across the area.
- strive for efficiency and value-for-money services to give you even better service standards.
- make sure that repair contractors and suppliers offer local employment and training opportunities, and have environmentally-friendly policies.
- introduce a written agreement (or compact) specifically for north Manchester tenants on how to involve them more in housing services.

- develop creative ways to involve tenants in managing their neighbourhood – especially under-represented groups.
- set performance targets for repair contractors and suppliers; and negotiate agreements on standards of services like mobile cleaning, grounds maintenance, gardening work and security.
- publish plain-language information for tenants about how the improvements are going, what standard of service to expect, and how Northwards Housing is performing. There would also be tenants' newsletters produced jointly by Northwards Housing and local people.
- improve the way we let new homes and make sure they are fit for new tenants to move into.

Building on successful services

Northwards Housing will follow tried and trusted City Council policies on things like rehousing, anti-social behaviour and charging tenants for repairs caused deliberately, and will put them into practice in a way that works for North Manchester tenants. It would also:

- keep existing local rehousing policies – for example reserving some properties for certain age groups to meet different needs.
- collect rent following City Council policies – supporting tenants with debt problems for example.
- work closely with local Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs), and continue to support and fund tenant and resident groups.
- use an official complaints procedure to investigate, take action and learn lessons if things go wrong.
- provide a supportive environment for staff, with opportunities for learning and developing skills.
- build on the City Council's excellent track record of tackling crime and anti-social

behaviour. Northwards Housing would prioritise and continually improve this work, and would use the expertise of the Council's neighbour nuisance and mediation services. It would work closely with the police and other agencies to tackle neighbourhood problems.

- use introductory tenancies so that new tenants must show they will keep to their tenancy agreement before they get a full 'secure' tenancy.

A local service

Northwards Housing would employ its own dedicated management team to run the housing service. It would do this from three local housing offices:

- White Moss Road, Blackley
- Monsall Street, Collyhurst *
- Cheetham Hill Road, Cheetham Hill

** Services currently delivered from Varley Street would transfer to nearby Monsall Street.*

The board of directors (see Section 4) would employ the staff and monitor their performance. The people working for Northwards Housing would be mostly the same ones providing the service now as City Council employees. They will transfer automatically to Northwards Housing, so you would deal with the people that you already know. New staff would join Northwards Housing to bring in more expertise.

Wider regeneration

Northwards Housing would make sure that tenants benefit from the wider regeneration of the North Manchester area. Although this is not specifically about housing, it looks at improving wider community needs for things like education, health, crime and safety, and employment.

Northwards Housing would make sure its investment fitted in with the wider regeneration of North Manchester, so that tenants get the most out of the area's economic, social and cultural improvements.



4

How would the Almo
(Northwards Housing)
be run?

A **voluntary, unpaid** board of directors would have responsibility for the management of Northwards Housing and they would make decisions independently from the City Council.

The board would be made up of four tenants, four council-nominated members and four independent people with experience in specialisms such as business, finance, construction, law or the community.

Tenant members were selected at an interview with a tenant sub-group following an advert that was publicised across North Manchester. The Council-nominated members include three councillors and one senior officer. Independent members responding to a widely circulated advert will be appointed on their suitability to complement the skills of the tenant and council nominated members who have already been appointed.

Meet your Northwards Housing Board



Joan FitzGerald

Tenant in Charlestown Ward for 32 years. Chair of the Dam Head Residents Association and over 60 years experience of working with voluntary organisations.



Michelle Blakeley

Tenant in Harpurhey Ward for 15 years. Secretary of the North City Residents Forum and Treasurer of the Kingsbridge Estate Tenants Association.



Donald McGetrick

Tenant in Moston Ward for 18 years. Member of the Manchester Community Forum and over 20 years experience of working with voluntary organisations.



Richard Lockwood

Tenant for 26 years – 8 of them in Higher Blackley. Treasurer of the Walker Road Tenants and Residents Association and a member of the North Manchester Community Network Steering Group.

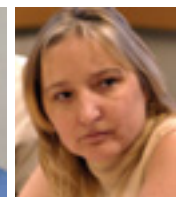
Council nominated members



Councillor Anna Trotman
Hr. Blackley



Councillor Eric Hobin
Charlestown



Councillor June Hitchen
Miles Platting & Newton Heath

The fourth Council-nominated member is currently being selected.

Independent members – are currently being selected

Before the vote this board will be in place to agree the details that must be ready if the vote is in favour of Northwards Housing. This board would have the authority to make decisions from December 2005.

The board would make the bigger decisions about Northwards Housing's policies and strategies and monitor the performance of front line services provided from local offices.

All tenants who are interested would have the opportunity to put themselves forward for board membership in due course.

What are the board's responsibilities?

The board has overall responsibility for how Northwards Housing is run, including:

- Agreeing, with the Council, a yearly plan for how the service would run.

- Deciding policies and ways that this plan and other objectives would be met.
- Defining Northwards Housing's vision and values.
- Making sure the budget and accounts are in order and approving them for publication.
- Deciding who is responsible for what and overseeing control systems to make sure things get done.
- Making sure plans and budgets are met, acting to correct any under-performance and making sure Northwards Housing continually improves.
- Making sure services are efficient, effective and provide value for money.

Local people making decisions

Almos must listen to tenants, and take their views into account. One way Northwards Housing would do this is through area panels with decision-making powers so that local needs can be fully taken into account. The area panels would feed information about their area to the Northwards Housing board and make recommendations where appropriate. The area panels would be given the support and resources to carry out this role.

There would be three area panels (See map on page 9).

Each area panel would be made up of seven tenants, two owner-occupiers, one leaseholder who has bought their council flat but still pays a service charge to the Council, and one councillor from each ward in the area.

The main role of area panels is to consult with local tenants and tenant groups and to receive information about budgets, performance and policy from Northwards Housing and comment on it for their area for consideration by the board.



5

What happens to my
rent and rights with
Northwards Housing?

There would be no changes to your existing rights and responsibilities as a council tenant.

Rents

Manchester City Council would remain your legal landlord and would continue to set rents. Like all councils and housing associations they would use the same rules that are used now to calculate rents and to keep them affordable (called the government's 'target rent' formula).

So, under Northwards Housing the rent you pay on your current property would be the same as it would be with the City Council.

You would pay your rent to Northwards Housing. Tenants who are up to date with payments would continue to get the two rent-free weeks a year.

Rights

Under Northwards Housing, you remain a tenant of Manchester City Council who would still own the council housing. You would keep your existing tenancy agreement and there would be no changes to your existing rights and responsibilities.

You would still, for example, keep the Right to Buy with a discount (if eligible).

The council tenants' rights that you keep under Northwards Housing

See your current tenancy agreement for details – it will not change.

The right to live in your home without the threat of being evicted without good cause (Security of Tenure)	✓
The right to buy	✓
The right to pass on your home when you die (succession)	✓
The right to make improvements and receive compensation for them	✓
The right to have repairs carried out within set timescales	✓
The right to be consulted about housing management	✓
The right to be given information about the management of your home	✓
The right to transfer or exchange your home	✓
The right to take in lodgers and (with permission) to sub-let part of the property	✓
The right to complain	✓



6

What next?

AND

7

Other information

you may want to look at

What next?

The ballot

In early September, you will receive a ballot paper in the post from Electoral Reform Services (ERS). This is your chance to vote on the proposals set out in this document.

It won't cost you anything to vote – you can choose to post your vote back to ERS in a Freepost envelope, or you can vote by calling a Freephone number. The ballot paper itself will give you full instructions on how to vote.

Look out for your ballot paper arriving on **Wednesday 7th September 2005**

Voting closes at 4pm on Wednesday 5th October 2005. Please ensure your vote is received by ERS in plenty of time.

Permission from the government

Before Northwards Housing can be established and the extra funding released, the government must give its official consent. If tenants agree to our proposals we will apply for consent telling the government the ballot result and setting out our plans under Northwards Housing.

Next Steps

Subject to a positive ballot, Northwards Housing would begin to manage council homes and estates in North Manchester during December 2005.

Who do I contact for further information?

Council staff and independent experts chosen by tenant reps are ready to answer any question or explain anything about this proposal. Please get in touch in the way that suits you best:

Contact Manchester City Council:

Phone 0161 953 2662

Let us know your thoughts ahead of the official vote using the "What's Your View?" form that came with this booklet by 31st August.

Comment and ask questions on the internet at www.manchester.gov.uk/housing/northwards
Free internet at your library.

Contact your Independent Tenants'

Adviser:

Free and independent advice from TPAS/Compact Solutions, the North Manchester Independent Tenants' Adviser on

Freephone 0800 731 1315

Email info@tpas.org.uk



Other information you may want to look at

In addition to this booklet, there are a number of other publications you may want to look at as background to the City Council's proposal to establish an Arms Length Management Organisation (Almo) in North Manchester.

Quality and Choice, a Decent Home for All

Government's housing strategy.
www.odpm.gov.uk

Sustainable communities: building for the future

Government's action programme for communities.
www.odpm.gov.uk/communities

