

## FAQs

Answers to questions you may have.

### Why now?

Unless we make changes now, your Housing Revenue Account – which pays for Housing services and investments using the rents and service charges collected – will not cover the budget needed in future. It's an opportunity for a better service that can fund fire safety investments, lower carbon energy and ongoing home improvements. It will save you money in your energy bills and save management costs, long term, to keep up future investment.

### What could change?

We wouldn't change the way tenants get their housing service or change your rights as a tenant, or how rents are worked out. But we'd stop Northwards being a separate organisation with its own board, executive directors and arrangements, and make it part of the Council, which already owns the homes as landlord.

Management of your home would go back to the Council, using existing staff. We would improve the service, asking your views on how, and we'd involve you more in how services are managed.

### Will savings really come back to tenants?

Yes. Funding is 'ringfenced' by law and can only be used for housing-related activity for tenants' benefit.

### Do joint tenants get a vote each?

No. It's one vote for each tenancy agreement.

### Will leaseholders get a vote?

Yes. They are users of the service.

### How would we get the Council-run service?

We will review the way in which you contact us to see whether you would get a better service if there was one contact centre for all of your Council enquiries.

### Will the offices at Dam Head, Cheetham and Monsall still be open?

Yes, we want to use them for even wider community benefit. We'd consult you on any changes.

### Will the same contractor do our repairs?

We're going through the tendering process of deciding who should do repairs in future, so it could be a new contractor. The way you order and progress repairs won't change although we will improve the issues you have told us that you are concerned about.

### How will this affect the service I get?

Things won't change day-to-day – it will be the same staff you deal with now, but they'll work for the Council instead of Northwards. In time we'll improve service and join up more with other Council services. We'll consult residents closely.

### Will this affect any work due on my home?

No. Planned work would go ahead. We'd keep homes at a decent standard and could invest more – for example offering new bathrooms and kitchens.

### Will we see fewer staff?

We anticipate more staff working in communities aligning with Council colleagues. You'll still have housing staff on hand to deliver services.

### How do I contact the Independent Tenant Advisor?

If you want to speak to someone who is independent of the Council and Northwards Housing please contact Paul Bragman.

Paul can be contacted on **0208 442 2379** – If he's not available you can leave a voice message and he will get back to you as soon as possible, or you can email [paul.bragman@campbelltickell.co.uk](mailto:paul.bragman@campbelltickell.co.uk)

## Background

Have your say on the future of your housing services.

As part of the Council's look at changing how our council housing can be run in future, we're sending you some background information about:

- Why we set Northwards up and what it's achieved
- How we're proposing to change things, and why
- Answers to questions you may have
- How to let us know what you think.

Our proposal is to make Northwards part of the Council, instead of a separate, 'arms-length' organisation (ALMO).

Your day-to-day services would still be delivered by the same staff – you'd contact them in the same way. But Northwards would be managed and governed within the Council, not separately as now.

We'd also have an improvement plan that you, the tenants, would set and monitor, for better landlord and neighbourhood services.

Please read this background information and let us know what you think. We'll use your views to help shape your future housing service.

### Why we set Northwards up

In 2000 the Government introduced a requirement that all social housing should meet 'decent' standards by 2010. To get the funding needed, we created – with residents' support – an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) to improve and run north Manchester's council homes.

### Northwards' achievements

Over 15 years Northwards has unlocked substantial Government funding to bring 97.6% of our homes up to 'decent homes' standard, with:

- ✓ 11,442 new kitchens.
- ✓ 2,655 new bathrooms – adapted for those with mobility problems where needed.



- ✓ 11,640 homes have new double-glazing.
- ✓ Insulation for 2,503 homes, plus cavity wall or loft or floor insulation where needed.
- ✓ 4,967 new roofs and 304 roof improvements.
- ✓ 2,240 full rewires and others upgraded.
- ✓ 10,937 new boilers.
- ✓ 153 air-source, and heat-source pump heating systems have been fitted.
- ✓ 2,330 solar panel systems at 15 high rise blocks, 3 maisonettes and 3 sheltered blocks.
- ✓ 8 communal solar thermal installations at sheltered blocks.

We only got this money from Government by creating the ALMO. Now the ongoing investment has to be funded by the Council from your rents. Despite the good work that they have done keeping the ALMO no longer gets us any external funding.

### Tenant involvement

We want tenants to shape and influence services more – it's a main part of our proposal. Bringing management of homes into the Council means you'll engage directly with the landlord – the Council, not just the managing agency as now. We would support and strengthen tenant groups and create a representative group to deal directly with local councillors about the service and their priorities.

### What you've said

Every two years Northwards surveys tenants to test satisfaction. From 2012 to 2018 results showed overall satisfaction with services, repairs, and rent.

This summer over 3,000 residents filled in our survey. Up to 40% responding had some dissatisfaction with services. This is not what we would want to see, and improvements must be made.

## Why change?

We want to be able to provide great services and put more into making communities stronger, better places to live. We also want to continue building new homes to meet the city's needs.

Northwards Housing has done some great work over the years. But the ALMO no longer brings in extra money for improvements. Keeping it running takes resources away from front-line services.

Without changes, the funding which pays for Northwards' services and investment – our Housing Revenue Account – will not cover the budget needed in future.

**That's why we propose that the housing service provided by Northwards is transferred back to the Council, including the management and governance of your home.**

The key benefits are:

- Joined-up services with a range of local agencies.
- Stronger tenant voice.
- Investment in homes and communities, continued upgrades to kitchens and bathrooms.
- Better services – more joined-up for the most vulnerable, keeping people living at home longer, avoiding hospital. We'll spend savings on priorities like fire safety and energy efficiency, helping to meet our carbon-neutral target.

# What's on offer?

Here's how your new service would look if managed by the Council – based, in part, on what you told us you want in the recent independent survey.

## Getting in touch

Tenants were generally positive about getting through to the service and getting through to the right person. 69.5% rated this 'good' or 'very good.' But 30.4% said 'poor' or 'very poor'.

We'll create a one-stop service for all your housing, Council, and other related services.

We'll keep staff and offices that serve you now but join-up with other Council services.

We'll put more services online for those who choose them.

You'll see better customer service with:

- Better trained staff
- Listening services responding quicker, age-friendly, and tailored to needs such as disability and language
- Updated, improved systems including complaints handling.

## Repairs

40.4% found the repairs service 'very poor' or 'poor' – the lowest-rated part of the service. Some had no problems, but many saw poor and unfinished work, slow response times and multiple visits.

We're arranging for a new repairs contractor to provide:

- Better quality repairs and materials
- Work to agreed deadlines with appointments kept
- Explanations for any multiple visits
- Kitchen and bathroom improvements
- Sorting out serious disrepair
- Improved pest control.

## Communal areas

Tenants have a mixed reaction to how communal areas are maintained. 42.1% say 'poor' or 'very poor'. 57.9% say 'good' or 'very good'. They praise hard working staff such as caretakers for their great ability to deliver services. Negative comments focused on garden maintenance – infrequent grass cutting – general lack of up-keep, poor quality cleaning and rubbish collection.

We want to join up services to improve these and other standards that make us proud of our neighbourhoods as safe, attractive places by:

- Caring for communal areas
- Better maintenance
- More grass-cutting
- Making paths and pavements safer
- Keeping up gardening services.

## Antisocial behaviour (ASB)

57% were satisfied with the response to ASB reported. 43% were not. Many have never had to report an issue, some had severe problems.

We will bring local services together to be much better at tackling antisocial behaviour and improving safety and security, doing more about tenants suffering theft, vandalism, noise, drug-related problems and unfriendly neighbours. Our priorities include:

- Protecting residents and catching culprits with CCTV and alarm systems
- Sensitive support for the victims of ASB
- Tackling drug dealers and gangs
- Supporting young people
- Working closely with the Police.

## Listening to you

Only 58% of residents were positive about how Northwards listens to their views.

We'll form a direct link between our tenants and the Council as landlord – the owners of Manchester's council homes. Northwards, who just manage our homes, can't offer this. We will work with and strengthen tenant groups. The housing organisation

Shelter will also work with us on widening representation, especially for under-represented residents.

## Value for money

64% of tenants say the service is good or very good value for the rent they pay. But 36% are not satisfied.

We will work on tenants' priorities to meet future housing needs, making homes more accessible, affordable and suitable for local needs. We'll continue offering value for money and will:

- Improve the standard of homes
- Build new and affordable homes
- Improved disabled access
- Develop eco-housing and energy efficiency
- Tackle serious overcrowding and downsizing
- Keep rents and charges fair.

## Priorities

The survey asked tenants for their priorities for the housing service.

We'll make your priorities, expressed in the survey, into our priorities for the future, including:

- Repairs
- Antisocial behaviour
- Improving neighbourhoods
- 'Decent' standards of home improvement
- Service delivery.

## Overall service Standards

63.3% in the survey said the housing services overall is 'good' or 'very good'. 37.7% said 'poor' or 'very poor'. Even those saying 'good' or 'very good' saw room for improvement and inconsistencies in the service. Most negative comments were about the quality of repairs and materials, slow and unfinished work, and slow responses to repair needs.

We'll make sure your housing service is the highest standard, tested against similar landlords to bring you top performance from staff that residents have told us do a great job.

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10 Acorn Business Park  
Heaton Lane  
Stockport  
SK4 1AS

Tel: 0345 209 3770  
Email: [mcc-chm@uk-engage.org](mailto:mcc-chm@uk-engage.org)

3 December 2020

## Have your say. Proposal to change how Northwards homes are run in future.

The Council is looking at changing how its council housing – currently managed by Northwards – can be run in future.

Without changes, we cannot meet the cost of running the service from your Housing Revenue Account – where rents and service charges go to pay for services and investments.

### Independent review

This summer we organised an independent review of Northwards Housing based around two options:

1. Keeping the existing way of running things – Northwards, a separate 'arms-length' company (ALMO);  
or
2. Making the management of Northwards homes part of the Council, instead of a separate arms-length company.

Reviewing both options, we've considered:

- Which gives better service and performance and more tenant involvement.
- Efficiency: the best services and housing with value for money – which option gets the best return for your rent.
- Linking long-term plans: making sure tenants benefit from council-wide priorities like managing neighbourhoods well.

### Review findings

The review found benefits to both options but said managing homes as a Council service saves money that can be put back into services and home improvements and gives residents the best links to neighbourhood services.

### Next steps

We want you to tell us what you think of our proposal before we make a final decision. We'll include all views in a final report to the Council who will consider them before deciding.

The Council sees this as a great opportunity to improve how homes are managed and improve the service, joining up with other local services, cutting duplication, and improving efficiency.

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### Test of opinion

We've sent you some background information on why the ALMO was set up, what it's achieved and the housing challenges we now face.

I hope you'll have your say in this 'test of opinion' – details of how are overleaf and in the leaflet enclosed, or you can do it online at <http://ballot.ukevote.uk/mcc-chm>

The test of opinion is being run by an independent body, called UK Engage, not by the Council or Northwards. You'll get your voting form and pre-paid return envelope from them. No Council or Northwards staff will play any role in this process. There will be one vote for each tenancy.

We have employed Campbell Tickell to act as an independent tenant advisor. They will be on hand to support tenants and leaseholders, providing independent information and advice on the implications of these proposals and to answer any questions.

*Suzanne Richards*

#### Councillor Suzanne Richards

Executive member for Housing and Regeneration

## TEST OF OPINION

### You can have your say online or by post

#### ONLINE

To vote via the internet visit the voting website:

<http://ballot.ukevote.uk/mcc-chm>

and follow the instructions from there.

You will be asked to enter your unique voting code, which is:

Make sure you vote by 5pm on  
**MONDAY, 4 JANUARY 2021.**



#### BY POST

Tear off the ballot paper opposite and follow the instructions on how to complete the form.

Put your completed paper ONLY into the white pre-paid return envelope and seal it.

Make sure you post it so it arrives by 5pm on **MONDAY, 4 JANUARY 2021.**



## TEST OF OPINION

### Have your say

Thank you for taking the time to be part of this test of opinion. How to give us your views:

#### Test of opinion events

The Council will host a series of online briefing and Question and Answer sessions. Dates and times are listed below. To register for one of the sessions please contact:

[housing.central.admin@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:housing.central.admin@manchester.gov.uk)

- 1pm Monday, 7th December 2020
- 4pm Monday 14th, December 2020
- 5pm Wednesday, 9th December 2020

#### Test of opinion questions

Please mark your answer to each question below with a cross 'X'

**Q1** Is the information we have provided useful?

Yes  No

**Q2** Was the information easy to read and understand?

Yes  No

**Q3** Have you received enough information about the proposal?

Yes  No

**Q4** Do you understand how the proposal would save money to support the Housing Revenue Account?

Yes  No

**Q5** Do you understand that the change does not affect your tenancy, rent or conditions?

Yes  No

**Q6** Do you support the proposal to bring the management of your council home into direct management by the council?

Yes  No

**Q7** Are you interested in taking a more active role in the management of housing services?

Yes

**Send me more information about ways to get involved**

No

NAME:

ADDRESS:

When you have made your choices fold this ballot paper & put it in the white pre-paid envelope provided.

It must arrive by 5pm on  
**MONDAY, 4 JANUARY 2021.**