

TRANSFER NEWS



THE JOINT NEWSLETTER FROM FAIRFIELD AND KINGDOM HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this, the second edition of *Stronger Together Transfer News*.

It seems like no time has passed since our first edition in March, but there has been lots going on and I'm delighted to share with you an update on the progress so far on the proposed Transfer of Engagements with Kingdom Housing Association.

Before that update, let me remind you of the background to the Transfer.

In December 2018, the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) used its statutory powers to protect the interests of Fairfield tenants and to address serious and widespread failures which were found across all Regulatory Standards. The SHR took this action after it identified serious risks related to our governance and management following an independent investigation that confirmed we had not been complying with Regulatory Standards.

To address the SHR concerns, Fairfield began working collaboratively with Kingdom Housing Association and this was a key element of our recovery strategy over the last year. In May 2020 we entered a shared services agreement with Kingdom and they have provided us with Chief Executive, governance, organisational, financial, payroll and strategic asset management services. Their support has been very well received and feedback is that their expertise has proved vital during exceptionally challenging times.

The fact remains, however, that as an independent housing association without the support from Kingdom we would continue to face challenges with regulatory and compliance requirements

on an ongoing basis. We would also continue to struggle to remain financially independent and have enough money to deliver the standard of service and level of improvements to homes whilst still keeping rents affordable.

In January 2021, we completed a strategic options appraisal to assess how the interests of Fairfield tenants could best be served in the future. After a detailed and thorough process, the assessment concluded that the best solution that would allow us to do much more for our tenants would be to formally become part of Kingdom. Our Board has therefore agreed we should pursue a Transfer of Engagements with Kingdom Housing Association.

A Transfer of Engagements is the legal process that allows one housing association to transfer all of their interests into another. If this Transfer of Engagements takes place all of Fairfield's operations transfer to Kingdom. Fairfield tenants would become Kingdom tenants and you would retain ALL of your existing tenancy rights. Similarly, Fairfield staff would become Kingdom employees on the same terms and conditions. Fairfield then effectively ceases to operate.

In reaching this decision, I would emphasise that all Board Members had the best interest of tenants in mind. We also wanted to ensure that staff interests were protected too. Information provided by Kingdom as part of the appraisal process means we are confident that this decision will lead to improved outcomes for tenants, while safeguarding the local, community focused, and personalised services that tenants and staff value.

In the first Stronger Together Transfer News we asked for your views on the 9 Transfer Priorities which were identified based on initial feedback from tenants during the Satisfaction survey in 2019 and subsequent survey in 2020. In this newsletter I'm delighted to be able to share with you the results of the feedback we received and highlight a new additional priority which has emerged as a result of tenant consultation.

The Transfer Team has been working hard with Kingdom as they develop a detailed Business Case spelling out what the transfer would mean for you in terms of firm promises from Kingdom, using the 9 Transfer Priorities and your feedback as starting points.

I've been delighted by the response so far, both to the survey and to the levels of participation and engagement in the first focus groups. There will be many more opportunities to participate and for you to have your say over the coming weeks, so please do get involved.

Remember, the final transfer offer is subject to an independent tenant ballot where every tenant gets a vote on whether or not they want the transfer to go ahead.

The final decision on the Transfer of Engagements to Kingdom Housing Association is up to you.

Bob McDougall
Fairfield Chairperson



Tenants were also asked what other priorities they had which were not specifically identified in the initial list of 9 Transfer Priorities.

The additional priorities can be grouped into the following themes:

- Tackle antisocial behaviour
- Ensure effective and regular communication with tenants throughout the consultation process and beyond
- Improve customer service
- Ensure tenants have a voice and listen to their concerns
- Tenants who are older still matter and have changing needs
- Provide options and services for vulnerable tenants
- Community and trust are important
- Maintain Fairfield's values

Some direct comments from tenants were as follows:

Rent staying affordable and maintenance and anti social behaviour being made priority.

Keeping the business viable and keeping the maintenance up are most important to me.

It doesn't seem to matter how often we call about repairs, nothing seems to be getting done, the snagging list we handed in as this was a new build, things have still not been carried out over 3 years later. The stairwells are filthy being half mopped with cold water, I'm sick of paying for a shoddy service, I've complained from very early on about this but I'm absolutely livid that 3 years later we are throwing our hard earned cash on this.

Green area and all fences plus gates in McLeod Court are in a very poor condition and have not been painting or had any maintenance for over twenty two years. The only work done has been grass and hedge cutting, plus what the tenants themselves have done.

Double glazing as we have now been waiting well over 1 year and just keep getting told different stories and our single glazed windows have now been sealed many times to leaking.

Getting repairs done quickly and efficiently. I've been waiting for over 5 years to get roof, guttering and a choked drain at the back fixed. Still no joy.

Money put into improvement, I have rotten fences in the garden and mould inside my flat, before putting money into building more houses I feel the existing ones need work.

100% new windows and doors mine were condemned a couple of years ago by your joiner contractor and nothing happened.

An Additional Priority

As a direct result of tenant feedback, a new additional tenth priority has been identified, **Expanding Housing Choice and Options**. Tenants wanted more services and housing options for older and vulnerable tenants within their community.

In recognition of this additional priority Kingdom will make a commitment to the provision of new build properties in the Perth and Kinross area with a mix of housing types suitable for families, single people, older people and people requiring wheelchair accessible homes.



Your Independent Tenant Advisor

The Tenants Information Service (TIS) has been appointed as the Independent Tenant Advisor to ensure you have all the information and support you need during the transfer project. They will help you understand the implications of a Transfer of Engagements and will also carry out an independent assessment of the final transfer proposal to make sure all of the promises made are in line with what tenants want.

TIS is a national organisation that has provided independent advice to the majority of tenants in Scotland considering a Transfer of Engagement.

TIS also provide a free advice line during the tenant consultation process, so if you have any questions about the transfer or would like to get more involved, you can call their freephone number during office hours: 0800 488 0982

Really good progress has been made so far and a clear transfer offer is now emerging but there is still a lot of careful consideration and a number of further stages to be undertaken.

We expect the next key milestones to be:

- June 8th 2021: Second round of Focus Group meetings.
- June 2021 - Kingdom and Fairfield Boards consider and hopefully agree the Business Case to support the transfer and the detailed offer to Fairfield's tenants.
- July/August 2021: Fairfield conducts Stage 1 formal tenant consultation including visits to tenants and local roadshow meetings adhering to coronavirus restrictions at all times.
- August/September 2021: Fairfield tenant ballot on the Transfer of Engagements.
- December 2021: Transfer of Engagements to Kingdom if tenants vote YES in the ballot and shareholders approve the transfer at 2 Special General Meetings.
- New Local Area Committee in place to ensure a strong local voice and influence over services and delivery of transfer promises.

We will make sure you are kept fully informed throughout the transfer project so keep a look out for the exciting Kingdom offer coming to you soon as part of the Stage 1 tenant consultation.

Expect a promise of a **major multi-million pound investment programme** in homes and the local environment including an accelerated programme of planned maintenance work and upgrades to windows, doors, and kitchens, **firm promises on more affordable rents** offering greater value for money, a **commitment to improving services and providing new enhanced services** and all underpinned by **new arrangements to ensure a strong community voice** to shape local services and priorities.

Questions?

We want you to be involved throughout the Transfer of Engagement process and we understand that you may have questions.

Along with TIS, we will work hard to keep you up to date with what is happening. You will find information on our Facebook page and on our website: www.fairfieldhousing.co.uk/transfer

You can call TIS on their freephone number during office hours: 0800 488 0982 and you can email us direct at transfer@fha.scot

We encourage you to take part in our Focus Group meetings whether these are virtual meetings online or in-person sessions. If coronavirus restrictions allow us to hold in-person meetings, you can be guaranteed that we will follow all Government guidance to ensure your safety.

Our next Focus Group meetings will be held on Tuesday 8th June 2021 at 2-4pm and 6-8pm. If you'd like to be part of the Focus Groups email transfer@fha.scot or call 01738 630738

Focus Groups

In addition to offering independent advice throughout the consultation phase of the transfer project, TIS also arranged and facilitated the two tenant Focus Group sessions held on 22 April 2021.

Those in attendance enjoyed a joint presentation from Fairfield and Kingdom about the background to the transfer plans, were given an introduction to Kingdom Housing Association as an organisation, and were given a progress update on the project.

Across the two sessions tenants also participated in informative and engaging discussions about the 9 Transfer Priorities and asked lots of questions about the project and the future.

Although much was discussed at both Focus Group sessions, there were common themes:

- Tenants agreed the 9 Transfer Priorities reflected their expectations.
- Tenants agreed the time is right for a transfer to improve the housing stock and the wider environment provided there was a positive transfer offer from Kingdom on the things that matter to tenants.
- Tenants highlighted that they felt well informed and reassured following the meeting and would be happy to attend future meetings.
- Tenants noted that it's important that Kingdom delivers on its commitments should the Transfer of Engagements be approved by tenants.

A common question raised by tenants was what would happen to Fairfield if the transfer didn't proceed, and can Fairfield stay independent in the event of a 'No' vote?

If the transfer to Kingdom did not take place, Kingdom confirmed that they would **not continue** with the current shared services arrangements meaning Fairfield would be without Chief Executive, governance, financial and asset management support and would have to make new arrangements. Fairfield would also stop managing Kingdom's own houses in the Perth and Kinross area, meaning a loss of management fee income to Fairfield.

If tenants did not support the voluntary transfer to Kingdom, Fairfield would continue to face serious and urgent challenges as it does not comply with the Scottish Housing Regulator's (SHR) Regulatory Standards. Since December 2018, it has been in statutory engagement with the SHR and is still reliant on their appointees for support. In order to protect the interests of Fairfield's tenants, Fairfield would need to consider all its options and re-visit its strategic options appraisal before deciding a way forward. Any future plans would likely not secure the range of benefits being offered by Kingdom at this time. The SHR could also consider its future regulatory engagement with Fairfield in order to protect the interests of Fairfield tenants in these circumstances.

Fairfield's lenders are supportive of the transfer to Kingdom. If the transfer did not proceed and a permanent and timely solution to Fairfield's issues and non compliance with SHR standards was not secured, they could ultimately call in their loans.

0800 488 0982