Grampian & Langstane Customers' Advisor

NEWSLETTER

April 2009

TENANT PARTICIPATION ADVISORY SERVICE

Information on the group structure proposals

Grampian and Langstane Housing Associations are creating a group structure. Both Associations will continue as separate organisations in the group but the new organisation formed will allow them to work more closely together. They believe this will enable them to build more housing and improve services to tenants and communities throughout the North East.

We (TPAS) have been asked to provide customers with **independent** information and advice on the plans to set up this new organisation, the first of its kind in Scotland.

Although this newsletter is mainly aimed at tenants, the Associations are also using it to let other customers (sharing owners and owners) know about the proposals.

Why change?

Social landlords in Scotland are under pressure to build more housing with less Government subsidy. Also, demand for affordable housing in the North East is now higher than ever before. This means Grampian and Langstane need to find ways to meet this demand, whilst also providing existing customers with a quality service.

The Scottish Government is making changes to national housing policy. The Government now wants housing associations to work closely together in order to meet demand and provide better value for money.

Grampian and Langstane believe that setting up a new group structure will help them to meet the housing needs of the North East by making the necessary changes to help ensure continued Government support. The new group structure may even work throughout Scotland.

The business case

LANGSTANE HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD

GRAMPIAN HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD

The business case for the new group structure highlights that both organisations have different strengths that they would like to retain.

Langstane for example has a proven track record in meeting housing needs of single people. Langstane is also a charitable organisation.

Grampian however, has concentrated on providing housing for families, with options for both rent and low cost home ownership.

The joint business case indicates that both organisations aim to keep focused on meeting these particular housing needs.

Who is TPAS Scotland?

The Tenant Participation Advisory Service is a voluntary, not for profit organisation and we have been providing independent support and advice to tenants in Scotland for over 25 years.

This newsletter sets out the key details that are currently known about the planned group structure.

We will soon be holding local information surgeries to ensure everyone gets the chance to discuss these plans.

More details inside…

How will the new group structure affect me?

How will it affect me?

Your landlord will become part of a larger group structure. However, there will be no change to tenancy agreements and it will not affect your statutory rights.

Tenants' Rights

Tenants will continue to hold Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreements with their landlord. This means that if you are a tenant, you will still be a Grampian or a Langstane tenant with no loss of rights.

Right to Buy

If you have a Right to Buy at present this will not change.

Sharing Owners

Sharing owners will also continue to be sharing owners with Grampian or, in the case of Langstane Housing Association, its subsidiary, Next Step Homes.

Rents

Rents will remain the same following the formation of the group structure. Currently Langstane and Grampian charge different rents. However, it is expected that the Associations will work towards charging the same rents in the future.

Repairs and Maintenance

Langstane currently has a slightly faster repairs response service while Grampian is looking to improve its timescales. In the group structure both Associations will be working together to improve customer services at reduced costs.

Planned maintenance will not be affected by the group structure. Once the group structure is set up, both organisations believe tenants will receive better value for money through the bulk buying of services.

Volunteers required

Places for tenants and residents are available on the governing body of the new organisation.

Contact either Association if you would like to put your name forward to become a board member. Positions on the board are voluntary but all out of pocket expenses will be covered.

Working together

Grampian and Langstane have already built 85 new houses by working together. Both organisations believe that by formalising this relationship they could achieve better results. For example, their business case proposes a 'centralised development team'. This means that Grampian and Langstane would not both have to employ their own housing development specialists. The Corporate Services and Finance functions will also be shared across both Associations.

Government rules also mean that a formal group structure between the two housing Associations would mean less paid out in taxes (VAT).

Savings without redundancy

All the proposals indicated in the business case point to cost savings that would be made without redundancies. There are no plans for job cuts as a consequence of this new joint venture so the service to customers will not be adversely affected.

When will the new organisation be set up?

Current timescales indicate that October 2009 will be when the new group structure is formally established. So there is still plenty time to let the Associations know your views on the plans.

The Associations will advise of exact timescales once these become available.

Finding out more...

In addition to independent information, you can also contact Grampian or Langstane directly if you prefer.

To discuss these proposals with **Grampian Housing Association,** contact Neil Clapperton on 01224 202920.

To discuss these proposals with **Langstane Housing Association,** contact Lynn Cargill on 01224 423101.

Have your say

TPAS wants to be sure that tenants, sharing owners and owners get the opportunity to influence these plans.

We want to know if you agree with the plans for a group structure. We also want to know about any concerns you may have regarding these plans.

Please take a few minutes to complete the enclosed questionnaire and return to TPAS Scotland, Freepost GW7454, Glasgow, G1 5BR (no stamp needed) **by Monday, 11 May 2009**.

All completed questionnaires will be entered into a free prize draw to win £50 worth of vouchers for the High Street store of your choice.

Information Surgeries

TPAS will take part in the following local information surgeries to allow you to find out more about these plans. Representatives from Grampian and Langstane Housing Associations will also be on hand to answer your questions.

Tuesday, 5 May 2009 at 7pm
Grampian Housing Association
Huntly House, 74 Huntly Street,
Aberdeen, AB10 1TD

Wednesday 6 May at 2pm
Mansion House Hotel
The Haugh, Elgin, IV30 1AW

To book your place please contact Sandra MacIntyre on 01224 202902 or email
sandra.macintyre@grampianhousing.co.uk

We look forward to seeing you at one of the information surgeries soon.

COMPETITION!
Name the new organisation

What do you think the new organisation should be called?

Write your suggestion down on the freepost reply slip. When making your suggestions, bear in mind that the new organisation may eventually build houses anywhere in Scotland so the name should not link the organisation to a particular area.

There will be a £100 prize of vouchers for the person who suggests a suitable name for the new organisation (competition also open to staff).

Freephone 0800 269 645

Proposed new group structure: a summary

In summary, the proposed new group structure aims to build on the experience of both Associations to:

- Further increase the provision of affordable housing for families, single people and people who are homeless;
- Provide a wider range of housing options for current and future customers including social and market rent and low cost home ownership;
- Continue to promote social inclusion and create sustainable communities;
- Improve access to housing;
- Extend involvement in community regeneration and environmental improvement projects;
- Continue to provide customer focused services that are efficient and effective;
- Create more opportunities for financing new housing and;
- Create a stronger collective voice in the North East for negotiating with Government and contractors.

If these plans go ahead, this would be the first social housing organisation of its kind in Scotland.

Home visits

If you are unable to attend an information surgery through illness or **disability, call 0800 269 645 to book a home visit.**

Contact:

Jamie Ballantine if you have any questions regarding this newsletter.

***Freephone: 0800 269 645**

Email: enquiries@tpasscotland.org.uk

* calls are free from a BT landline

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