

BABERGH TENANTS' FORUM

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Babergh tenants, sharing in the management of Babergh homes

INFORMATION



Insurance

Are you covered? What would happen if your furniture, clothing and personal belongings were ruined or lost through fire, flood or theft? How would you replace them—out of your own pocket, or by claiming on a home contents insurance policy? The council insure the buildings we live in, but not the contents. That's up to you.

For advice phone the council's insurance section—01473 825812.

Gas servicing

Blue Flame gas engineers annually service all the gas appliances in Babergh's housing to ensure that all the equipment is safe. Most tenants are happy to have this work done. They help ensure that Babergh has a high servicing rate, and that gas systems are working safely. However, a small number of tenants don't provide access when asked. Please let the gas man in, so you can be safe! Phone 01473 826628 with queries.



Need help in the garden?

Babergh's set up a new grass-cutting and hedge-trimming scheme for elderly and disabled tenants. It's not BBC TV's 'Ground Force', but could help keep the wilderness at bay.

To find out more and get an application form (which must be returned by 11th March) either come into the council offices or phone 01473 825746 or 825754.

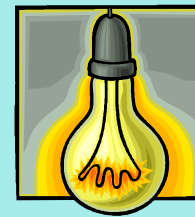


Sheltered Housing Review

Babergh has a total of 15 sheltered housing schemes for older people. Some of these were built many years ago and the demand for a number of them has fallen greatly in recent times. Because of this the council has decided to review its sheltered housing service and is thinking about upgrading some of the schemes, redeveloping others and perhaps using a couple of the hard to let ones for applicants who don't need a sheltered service.

These ideas and others are currently being actively explored and on the 28th April Babergh councillors will be considering a report from the Housing Panel—a group made up of elected councillors, officers, and a tenants' representative—about ideas for the long term future of Babergh's sheltered housing schemes.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the review and, in particular, any tenant interested in getting involved with the review, should contact Kim Best, Babergh's Tenant Advisor, on 01473 825766.



New rules on electrical work in the home—see page 2



Help for elderly and disabled tenants—see page 4

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Babergh Tenants' Newsletter



Issue 9

Spring 2005

Tenants want Babergh to continue as their landlord

Babergh's Stock Options Appraisal Steering Group has completed its work and has recommended that Babergh continues to own and manage its housing stock.

Babergh tenants made it very clear that this is what you want.

The steering group, which consisted of tenants, leaseholders, councillors, officers, and the project's consultants, undertook a full and detailed appraisal of our options for the management and ownership of the Babergh's housing stock, as we were required to do.

We initially considered four options, which were soon whittled down to two; stock retention (which means Babergh continues to be your landlord) or stock transfer (which means selling all the council housing to a housing association).

We established what we need to invest in housing over the next thirty years, and then worked out that we could do as much as a housing association could for about the next seven to ten years. After that, we can't be certain of being able to continue the necessary level of investment to deliver all our agreed programmes.

We established that if we transferred the stock to a housing

association, the delivery of all agreed housing investment programmes would be certain over the medium to long term. Transfer would also mean that the council could invest more in affordable housing and measures to tackle anti-social behaviour, which are important to tenants.

We explained the options and their consequences to all of you through a newsletter, a roadshow, and a consultation day. We made it clear that only stock transfer could ensure deliverance of our long term objectives, and that if you chose stock retention we can't be sure about future levels of investment.

It was clear from the feedback we had that you understood what the options meant and how you'd be affected, however you overwhelmingly chose stock retention.

1679 tenants (that's 49% of you) responded to our Tenants' Test of Opinion, and 1640 of you said you want Babergh District Council to continue as your landlord – that's 98% of those who responded, and 45% of all tenants. Only 39 tenants said they wanted Babergh to transfer the stock; that's 2% of the

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Tenants want Babergh to continue as their landlord

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respondents, or 1% of all tenants. It's interesting that our Independent Tenants' Advisors, who assisted the Tenants' Forum and the Steering Group throughout, said that they hadn't come across such a high response rate in any of the other local authorities they'd worked with.

This response sent a very strong message to the steering group. The result, along with the consultants' advice that Babergh could deliver all essential housing investment in the short term, led us to conclude that stock retention should be the Steering Group's final recommendation to the Council.

However, we want the position to be reviewed annually from next year to ensure that the forecasts we have made continue to be correct. If any key assumptions change we'll need to go back to you, the tenants, explain the implications of those changes and ask if you still want to stay with the

council. Depending on your response, and the situation we find ourselves in in a few years time, we may have to think again, but for the time being we recommend stock retention.

Our recommendation was given to Babergh's Strategy Committee on 9th February, and will be considered by the full council on 24th February. Assuming they accept our recommendation, Babergh's decision on the future of its housing, and an account of the process by which we arrived at that decision, will be conveyed to the Government Office for the East of England (GO-East) to be formally 'signed off'.

The steering group was very pleased that so many tenants responded to the Test of Opinion, making it much easier to do our job. Thank you to everyone who became involved in the stock options appraisal process.

"Thank you to everyone who became involved in the stock options appraisal process"



New rules on electrical work in the home came into force in January 2005

If you're thinking of improvements to your home...

New rules on electrical work in the home came into force from January 1st. The key question for tenants is, who'll be carrying out the work? If it's you, a friend or relative, then you must notify the local authority building control department, unless only minor work is involved. The alternative is to get a suitably qualified and accredited electrician who is registered with a 'competent person' scheme to carry out the work. You must also get permission from the council before starting any work.

A leaflet called 'New rules for electrical safety in the home' from the Office of the Deputy Prime

Minister (ODPM) explains the options and how to go about finding a 'competent person' in your area. It's available from the ODPM website (www.odpm.gov.uk), or printed copies are available from local authorities and competent person scheme operators during 2005.

An average of 10 people a year die and about 750 are seriously injured in accidents involving unsafe home electrical installations, and in 2003 2,336 house fires were caused by faulty electrical installations. Electrical safety is important to everyone.

Statistics taken from data supplied by the DTI, ODPM and the Home Office since 1990

A message from Richard Searle

Dear Tenants,

My name is Richard Searle and I'm a member of Babergh Tenants' Forum. I'd like to tell you how I got involved.

My curiosity about the forum and the part it played in the management of Babergh District Council housing services was aroused about a year or so ago when I was reading the tenants' newsletter. There was an article on the forum, about its aims and how tenants could play a part in it. They were asking for tenants to apply to join. I thought great! A chance to have my say about the things that could affect me and my home!

I filled in the application form, then I had doubts about what I was letting myself in for, and put the form back on the shelf. Several weeks later I thought to myself, don't be stupid, you can do this, so I telephoned the council to ask if they still needed people. They took my phone number and said someone would call me.

A couple of days later I got a call from Ted Ingilby, chairman of the forum. Yes, they did still need new members, he said. He invited me to

come to the council offices one evening and observe a forum meeting, so I went along and watched. To my surprise and delight these were ordinary normal people just like me. I attended a couple more meetings as an observer, before being elected to the forum last May.

Since then I've been very busy with my fellow forum members. We're consulted on a wide variety of things, from the stock options appraisal process to anti-social behaviour.

We still need more forum members—the more we have, the wider the range of opinions we have.

The Government has placed a requirement on all local authorities that they should have more tenant involvement in the management of their housing, so if you feel that you could give some of your time to help us on the forum we would love to hear from you and possibly co-opt you onto the forum.

I got involved, and it has proved to be one of the best decisions I have made in my life.

Yours sincerely,
Richard Searle



Richard Searle

"I got involved, and it has proved to be one of the best decisions I have made in my life"

Want to know more about getting involved?

If you'd like to know more about getting involved with the decisions that affect your life as a tenant and possibly becoming a member of Babergh Tenants' Forum, please get in touch. You can come and observe a forum meeting to see how we do things before you commit yourself. No one is thrown in at the deep end—everyone is given training.

Have a look at the Tenants' Forum website (www.babergh tenants.org.uk) or phone Tenants' Services (01473 825766) for more information.

Ted Ingilby, Chair, Babergh Tenants' Forum



Ted Ingilby