

Housing Transfer 2008

TORFAEN COUNTY BOROUGH
BWRDEISTREF SIRIOL TORFAEN

April 2008

an update for tenants and leaseholders



Time to deliver

- A message from Alison Ward, Chief Executive TCBC

The reason councillors and ultimately tenants voted in favour of stock transfer is because it will enable over 8,000 homes to have around £500 million spent on them in the next 20-30 years. As a council, we could never afford to bring all our properties up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, a standard we want for all homes in Torfaen.

I would like to assure all tenants that following transfer, councillors will still act as your representatives raising with Bron Afon concerns on your behalf. The Council will play a key role in monitoring the performance of Bron Afon, and ensure it keeps all the commitments made to you in the offer document -

- A commitment on rents - which guarantees rents remain the same whether you stayed with the Council or transferred to Bron Afon. With Bron Afon, however, the return on the rent you pay will be much better as it contributes to a multi-million pound programme of investment in your homes.
- A commitment to investment - £187 million of repairs and improvements by 2012. £500 million over 30 years will be spent on necessary improvements like double-glazing, new doors, kitchens, bathrooms, and new central heating systems.
- A commitment on rights - your rights will not be affected by a transfer. The right to buy your home will remain unchanged and you would retain a preserved right to buy. Your right to pass on, transfer or exchange your home stays the same plus you will now have a second right of succession.
- For sheltered housing tenants in Torfaen, Bron Afon are committed to providing a greater choice of support to enable tenants with low needs to pay less and those with higher needs to get more support.

Transfer will also create wider community benefits. Over the next few years, Bron Afon expect more than 100 new jobs and many new apprenticeships on top of the present workforce.

The majority of the housing and maintenance staff you know will transfer to Bron Afon on 31st March, so the same familiar faces will be providing your housing services. Bron Afon will also be a firm but fair landlord and will be tough on anti-social behaviour with the continued support of the Council.

The Council will form a strong working relationship with Bron Afon as a key partner in ensuring first class homes for tenants. Reaching the Welsh Housing Quality Standard will have a genuine long-term impact on residents' quality of life.

I would like to wish all Bron Afon's tenants my sincere best wishes for the future.

Alison Ward
Chief Executive, Torfaen County Borough Council



Welcome to Bron Afon Community Housing. In this last newsletter to council tenants published by the Council, we aim to tell you everything you need to know about what to do when your home transfers from the Council to Bron Afon.



Duncan Forbes

The Council has a long and proud history of providing housing within the Borough which will come to an end when your homes transfer to Bron Afon. Despite a lack of money for investment in improving your homes, they have nevertheless been able to keep homes wind and water tight, to carry out selected regeneration

projects and to provide high quality housing services. I would like to pay credit to Councillors and Council staff for the benefits they have secured for many thousands of tenants over their years of providing housing.

We are now moving into a new era, where Bron Afon becomes your landlord. Bron Afon belongs to you. Bron Afon was shaped and developed by tenants and for tenants; it is owned by Torfaen tenants and residents who join up as members. In this newsletter you will see the various different ways in which you can get involved and plan for the future and I would encourage you to get involved.

Please read the newsletter and check up on how to pay your rent and report repairs. If you have queries we haven't answered, ring our helpdesk on freephone 0800 111 4242. I am looking forward to working with you and will be in touch with you again soon.

Duncan Forbes
Chief Executive, Bron Afon Community Housing

Transfer day is almost here. The target date is 31st March. Staff and tenants have been working very hard to make sure that all the preparations are in place for Bron Afon to deliver excellent services and improvements to all our tenants and residents.

Bron Afon will deliver the commitments made in our Offer Document. In brief, here's a reminder of what we have committed to do:

- Improve your home to modern standards set out in the Welsh Housing Quality Standard and aim to do this by 2012.
- Keep rents the same as they would have been under the Council.
- Protect all your existing rights, including security of tenure and right to buy.
- Improve timescales for non-urgent repairs from 90 to 30 working days.
- Work with local communities, the Police and the Council to tackle anti social behaviour.
- Improve, develop and promote housing services in Torfaen communities.
- Develop the sheltered housing service.
- Involve tenants and residents in shaping the future of Bron Afon by listening to you about changes you would like to see in your communities.

Following transfer, we will also:

- Start a thorough clean-up of the land we take over in the County Borough.
- Visit every tenant and ask them to sign a new tenancy agreement with better rights.
- Produce a Bron Afon tenants' handbook.
- Produce a regular Bron Afon tenants' newsletter.

Here are five reasons why Bron Afon Community Housing is a unique community based housing organisation:

- 1 Bron Afon will be owned by tenants and residents in Torfaen.
- 2 Bron Afon will have a housing service that is shaped around the communities in Torfaen.
- 3 Bron Afon will support each community to set up a local community forum and develop their own action plans for changing their community.
- 4 One of the main aims of Bron Afon is to promote and support Torfaen's communities. It will develop a strategy for delivering this aim and report to its members' meeting each year on how this is being implemented.
- 5 Local communities can ask to take over management or ownership of their homes.

What stays the same?

What's new?

Page 2

Your questions answered

Page 3

How can I..?

See the back page for how you can contact us, pay your rent, report a repair, get involved in Bron Afon

For general enquiries, contact Bron Afon's Helpdesk on freephone 0800 111 4242

For repairs, contact Bron Afon's Repairs Helpdesk on 0800 111 4343

If you'd like this newsletter in large print, Braille or on tape, please contact us on 0800 111 4242

investing in people, ho

Bron Afon: what stays the same? What's new?

	What stays the same	What's new
Your rent and other charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ You will pay the same rents as you would have done with the Council ✓ You can continue to pay with the same methods as you did with the Council (see back page for details). ✓ You will continue to have 2 rent free weeks. ✓ Your right to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit will stay the same. As long as your personal circumstances remain the same, then you will not have to make a new claim. ✓ You can still pay water charges with your rent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ More frequent window cleaning for sheltered housing. ✓ Cleaning internal communal areas for all flats that have them. ✓ No new charges for these new services or existing services.
Your rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All your existing tenancy rights will be protected. ✓ Your security of tenure will stay the same. ✓ Your right to buy will stay the same. ✓ Your right to live in your home without the threat of being evicted without good cause. ✓ Leaseholders' rights will stay the same. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ You will have a new second right to succession, provided you qualify. ✓ We cannot change your new tenancy agreement without your consent.
Repairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ You will still be able to report emergency repairs 24 hours a day. ✓ Timescales for emergency, urgent and priority repairs will stay the same. ✓ Staff on Bron Afon's Helpdesk will be the same as with the Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ You can contact the new Bron Afon Repairs Helpdesk on freephone 0800 111 4343 from the date of transfer. ✓ The target for non-urgent repairs will be reduced from 90 to 30 days. ✓ Bron Afon will improve the repairs service by taking on greater responsibilities including fencing. ✓ Bron Afon will introduce new higher standards for repairs and for homes that are let. ✓ Tenants will have a greater say in how repairs are done.
Sheltered housing and support for older people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The same staff will provide the service. ✓ Charges will not increase any more than they would have done with the Council ✓ You will still be entitled to help with sheltered housing charges as you are with the Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Bron Afon will further develop and improve the sheltered housing service with you. ✓ Tenants with fewer support needs will pay less for the service. ✓ Sheltered Housing Officers will have more time to devote to tenants with higher levels of need.
Involving tenants and communities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Bron Afon will offer you more ways to get involved. ✓ If you join Bron Afon as a member, you will be able to play a central role in monitoring Bron Afon's performance and influencing its future. ✓ Community forums will develop their own action plans for improvements ✓ The Membership Committee will review and help develop Bron Afon's policies ✓ The Quality and Design Forum will play a key role in ensuring high standards in improvement and repair work.
Local jobs		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Around 100 new local jobs and more apprenticeships are expected to be created. ✓ There will be a change in opening times for Area Offices. We will now be open from 8.30am to 12.30pm on Wednesdays and closed for the rest of the afternoon.

Ask Bron Afon

General queries

Q: When will transfer take place?

A: We are aiming for 31st March 2008.

Q: Will Bron Afon keep its commitments?

A: The Council has a legally binding contract with Bron Afon to make sure it delivers its commitments. Tenants and the Welsh Assembly Government will make sure that Bron Afon delivers all the commitments made in the Offer Document sent to tenants last year.

Q: Is it just the Council under another name?

A: No. Bron Afon is a not for profit Industrial and Provident Society with charitable rules and a Registered Social Landlord supervised by the Welsh Assembly Government and inspected by the Wales Audit Office. It is owned by Torfaen tenants and residents as members of the organisation.

Q: What is an Industrial Provident Society?

A: Bron Afon has been set up as a not for profit Industrial and Provident Society with charitable rules. This basically means that any surpluses we make will be ploughed back into homes, communities and services to Torfaen tenants and residents: they can't be spent on anything else. No-one on our Board gets paid.

Q: Is Bron Afon a housing association?

A: No. Bron Afon is a registered social landlord based on the 'community mutual' model. This means that it is a housing and regeneration organisation owned by its members. Membership is open to all tenants of Bron Afon and residents of Torfaen, with tenants always in the majority.

Q: I am on the Council housing waiting list for a house. How will this affect me when the properties transfer to Bron Afon?

A: When the property transfers to Bron Afon, you will still stay on the list.

Q: Why would I want to become a member of Bron Afon?

A: As a member of Bron Afon, you will be able to get involved and influence how decisions are made. Details of how you can become involved are on the back page.

Q: How will Bron Afon deal with anti social behaviour?

A: Bron Afon will work with local communities, the Council and the Police to improve responses to anti social behaviour.

Q: Will there be a tenant handbook?

A: Yes, a tenant handbook is being produced and will be published sometime in May. All tenants will receive a copy of the handbook when we visit everyone after transfer.

Q: What about support for older/disabled tenants?

A: Bron Afon will work with sheltered housing tenants and staff to ensure that best practice already happening in some of the sheltered complexes is extended to all in Torfaen. Sheltered housing tenants who need high levels of support will receive a higher level of service. We will work with tenants in the Sheltered Housing Forum to develop our services.

Q: What will happen with community halls?

A: Community halls will stay under Council management.

Q: Will a who's who of Bron Afon staff be published?

A: Yes. We are currently working on a website and factsheet which will include a list of key staff.

omes and communities



some frequently asked questions

Your Rents

Q: Will rents stay the same?

A: Bron Afon will not increase tenants' rents by any more than they would have increased if you had stayed with the Council.

Q: What will happen to rents on the day of transfer?

A: Rents will be the same as your Council rents on the day of transfer. You don't have to change or do anything differently.

Q: Where can I pay my rent?

A: You can use all the methods you used previously. Please see the back page for further details.

Q: Will I still get two weeks free rent?

A: Yes. Tenants with no arrears will continue to get two weeks free rent.

Q: What happens if my rent is in credit?

A: Your rent account will stay in credit.

Q: What will happen to rent arrears?

A: Any rent arrears owing to the Council at the time of transfer will still be payable but to Bron Afon.

Q: Will I still be able to pay my water rates in with my rent?

A: Yes.

Q: I pay by Direct Debt. Will this need to be changed?

A: No. Direct Debits will continue for rent and lifeline charges. You don't need to do anything.

Q: I am on Housing Benefit. Will I need to make another claim?

A: No. You will not need to make another claim.

Q: Will Housing Benefit be paid in advance?

A: Housing Benefit will be paid 4 weekly in arrears. However, this does not mean that tenants who are in receipt of Housing Benefit will be classed as being in rent arrears so please do not be concerned. If your financial circumstances change it is important that you notify both Bron Afon and the Council so that we can ensure you are receiving the correct amount of Housing Benefit.

Q: I pay my home contents insurance in with my rent. Will I be able to continue to do this?

A: Yes. Your home contents will remain covered under Bron Afon if you opt for this service and pay for it.

Repairs and improvements

Q: How do I report a repair?

A: Contact the new Bron Afon Repairs Helpdesk on freephone 0800 111 4343.

Q: How long will I have to wait to get a repair done?

A: Timescales for emergency, urgent and priority repairs will stay unchanged. The target for non-urgent repairs will be reduced from 90 to 30 days.

Q: When will the improvements be done in my home?

A: We will publish our plans in our next newsletter.

Q: When will I have a new kitchen, bathroom, central heating system?

A: We aim to complete work by 2012 in accordance with priorities set out in the Offer Document.

Q: Why are other areas being done before my area?

A: We have carried out a stock condition survey of the properties and prioritised the work according to the results.

Q: Will everyone receive the same standard of work?

A: Yes. All improvements will have to reach the modern standards set out in the Welsh Housing Quality Standard. We aim to do this by 2012.

Q: If I have already made my own improvements, will I be reimbursed?

A: Where a tenant has received written consent from us to undertake improvement works to their property, they may be eligible for payment of compensation should they vacate the property and leave the improvement(s) behind.

Q: Can I refuse to have the improvement carried out on my home?

A: Yes. Bron Afon will only carry out work to your home if you want it to be done, unless there are health and safety issues or repairs needed to make your home wind and water tight.

Q: How will you ensure the work is done to a decent standard?

A: We will check the quality of the work whilst its being carried out and when completed. You will be given advice and information to let you know what you can expect.

Q: What will happen if contractors sub contract the work?

A: Arrangements for the use of sub contractors have been made with the Quality and Design Forum, which consists of tenants and staff. Members of the Forum will be involved in monitoring the quality of work on site.

Q: If I am unhappy with the work, who do I contact and how?

A: We will have a 24 hour phone service set up specifically to resolve any problems that arise from the improvement works. We will provide all tenants with the telephone number.



Staff

Q: What will happen to the staff that are currently working for the Council?

A: Most of the staff currently providing the housing and repairs services will transfer to Bron Afon.

Q: Will the same staff be working on the Helpdesk?

A: Yes, although we will be increasing the numbers of staff to provide a more effective service.

Q: If it is the same people working for Bron Afon how can it improve?

A: It is our intention that standards will improve significantly and we will be working up the proposals for improved standards in consultation with tenants and staff. We will also be training staff to ensure continued improvements in service delivery.

Your Rights

Q: Will tenants' rights stay the same?

A: Yes. All your rights including security of tenure, right to buy and rights to succession will be protected under Bron Afon.

Q: Will I need to sign a new tenancy agreement?

A: Yes. Bron Afon will give all tenants a new tenancy agreement in place of your existing agreement with the Council.

Q: Why do I need to sign another tenancy agreement and what will happen if I don't?

A: You will get more rights if you sign the new tenancy agreement. We will explain the differences to you before you sign.

Q: Will I still be able to buy my home?

A: Yes. If you have the right to buy your home now you will keep that right under Bron Afon. This is called the preserved right to buy.

How can I pay my rent?

You can use all the methods you used with the Council. These are:

- **At any one of Bron Afon's Area Offices.**
These offices are located at:
 - 34, Bailey Crescent, Garndiffaith
 - 5, Fairwater Square, Fairwater
 - 7, Maendy Square, West Pontnewydd
 These offices are open Monday, Tuesday and Thursday 8.30am – 5.00pm, Wednesday 8.30am – 12.30pm (offices closed Wednesday afternoon) and Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm.
- **At any one of the Council's Customer Care Centres and One Stop Shops.**
These offices are located at:
 - 1-2 General Rees Square, Cwmbran
 - Civic Centre, Pontypool
 - Church Avenue, Trevethin
 - 7-12 Lion Court, Lion Street, Blaenavon
- **On line at www.bronafon.org.uk**
(this will link to the Council's online payment service, which will collect payments on our behalf)
- **By telephone during office hours on 01495 766002**
- **By Direct Debit**
(please call us on 0800 111 4242 if you need more information on this)
- **By post (cheques and postal orders only) to the Bron Afon address shown below**
Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to Bron Afon Community Housing

How can I contact Bron Afon by phone?

- **By ringing us on freephone 0800 111 4242**
8.30am - 5.00pm Monday – Thursday,
8.30am - 12.30pm Wednesday (offices closed Wednesday afternoon)
8.30am - 4.30pm Friday

How can I report a repair?

- By ringing our freephone repairs Helpdesk (24 hours for emergencies) on 0800 111 4343.

How can I write to Bron Afon?

- **Our address is:**
Ty Bron Afon
William Brown Close
Llantarnam Industrial Park
Cwmbran
Torfaen NP44 3AB
- **By e-mail to:**
enquiries@bronafon.org.uk

How can I speak to someone in person?

- **You may prefer a home visit.**
We are happy to arrange this for you. If you do require a home visit, please ring us on 0800 111 4242 or call into one of our Area Offices and we'll arrange this for you.

For more information ring us on 0800 111 4242 or visit us at www.bronafon.org.uk

Remember - we will come to you!

How to get involved in Bron Afon

There are many different ways in which you can get involved and influence how decisions are made by Bron Afon. We recognise that not everyone can serve on the Board or wishes to attend meetings but your views, opinions and ideas are still important to us. The diagram below shows how you can choose to get involved in playing role in shaping the future of Bron Afon. The stars represent how much time/effort is needed to be involved:

Sheltered Housing Forum	☆☆
Tenants' and Residents' Sounding Board	☆
Tenants' Forum	☆☆
Membership of Bron Afon	☆
Community Forum	☆☆
Area Forum	☆☆
Membership Committee	☆☆☆☆☆
Leaseholder's Forum	☆☆
Quality and Design Forum	☆☆☆☆
Task and Finish Groups <i>*not listed below. Open to Bron Afon members, staff and Board Members</i>	☆

If you are interested and would like further information, please contact us on 0800 111 4242.

