

Dear Customer

**Consultation on (1) governance arrangements; and (2) rent non-collection weeks**

We are contacting you as a tenant or leaseholder of believe housing as we'd like to consult with you and receive feedback on two separate proposals.

The first proposal, about our governance arrangements, applies to all of our tenants, leaseholders and shared owners.

The second proposal, about rent non-collection weeks, applies to tenants whose tenancy agreement requires rent to be paid weekly. It applies to most of our tenants and to our shared owners of homes. It will not affect you if you are a leaseholder or if you hold a tenancy of a rent to buy property and this is because you are not required to pay rent to us on a weekly basis.

The deadline to provide your views on both proposals is Sunday 14 August 2022.

**1. Governance arrangements**

We want to consult with you on what you think is the best way of involving tenants and leaseholders in the governance and scrutiny of our housing management service.

We are also proposing to make some changes to our governance structure and want you to let us know what you think about them.

Our Values Group is a key part of our governance structure. Established in 2019, the Values Group contributes to ensuring that the voice of customers influences and contributes to our decision making. As well as getting together for scheduled meetings, the Values Group is also consulted on specific projects and policies and it carries out scrutiny of different areas of our housing management service. The Values Group helps us achieve our core values 'to do the right thing for our people, our customers and our business'.

Under our present arrangements, the Values Group can have up to 12 members, with reserved places for up to 7 of the organisation's tenants/leaseholders. The remaining membership can be comprised of up to 1 councillor, 1 staff member and 1 independent member. The remaining 2 places are reserved in the event any specific issue facing the Values Group arises which requires expertise in such areas.

**What changes are we proposing?**

We are proposing to revise the Values Group membership. The proposals would see increased representation from tenants/leaseholders and independents whilst also recognising that it is now more than 7 years since Durham County Council transferred more than 18,000 homes to us as part of its 'large scale voluntary transfer'.

The table below sets out the current membership alongside the proposed membership.

Membership (up to 12)	Current	Proposed
Tenant/Leaseholder	Up to 7	Up to 8
Independent	1	2
Councillor	1	0
Employee	1	1
Reserved for specific projects	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>

### Why are we proposing these changes?

The Government published its Social Housing White Paper: A New Charter for Social Housing Residents in November 2020. Whilst not law yet, we are keen to adopt some of the principles around transparency and creating a stronger voice for residents at an early stage.

As part of our commitment to involving our customers in how we deliver our services and the importance we place on the Values Group's contribution to our board's decision-making, we are looking to strengthen arrangements by increasing the membership of tenants and leaseholders from 7 to 8.

We also know from experience that the Values Group benefits from the different perspective and skill set that an independent member can offer so we think that by increasing the number of independent representatives by one, that the Group will continue to deliver significant outcomes.

### When will this all happen?

After the consultation period closes on Sunday, 14 August 2022 we will consider all of your feedback and ask our Board to make a decision on whether to approve, amend or not proceed with the proposals at its meeting in August. We will let you know the outcome of this proposal on our website in September.

### What do you think about our proposals?

We would like to hear what you think about our proposals to change the membership of the Values Group but also if you have any views on how we might otherwise involve our tenants and leaseholders in the governance and scrutiny of our housing management service.

### You can contact us with your views or queries by:

- Calling us on: 0191 814 2862
- Emailing us at [governance@believehousing.co.uk](mailto:governance@believehousing.co.uk)
- Writing to us at Governance Team, Coast House, Spectrum 4, Spectrum Business Park, Seaham, SR7 7TT

**The deadline to provide your views is Sunday 14 August 2022**

## 2. Rent non-collection weeks

Before April each year, when we inform you of your new weekly rent, we tell you whether there will be any rent non-collection weeks (also known as rent free weeks) during the year and when those weeks will be. Depending on where your home is located, there will be either three or four non-collection weeks in the financial year (April to March).

### What changes are we proposing?

We are proposing that this financial year (April 2022 - March 2023) will be the last year we have rent non-collection weeks which would mean from April 2023 there would be no more rent non-collection weeks.

### What would this proposal mean for you?

From Monday 3 April 2023 you would pay rent every week.

The proposal would not mean you pay more. This is because we always divide the total rent payable over the year by the number of weeks in the year that you are required to make rent payments.

For example, if, currently, your weekly rent charge is £106.12 that means the total amount of rent paid over the year is £5,200 (based on 49 rent collection weeks).

Under this proposal the weekly rent will become £100 per week (which is £5,200 for the year divided by 52 weeks).

### Why are we proposing these changes?

Feedback from our tenants the last few years has highlighted that the rent non-collection weeks are causing some confusion and make it much more difficult for tenants to understand their rent accounts.

If the proposal is introduced, we think this will:

- remove any confusion about when the non-collection weeks are
- allow for easier set up of direct debits and other payments
- allow you and us to interpret rent accounts easier and answer any questions
- reduce the weekly rent charge and make it a consistent charge throughout the year
- make it easier to confirm housing costs and manage the weekly rent due out of monthly Universal Credit payments

all of which should make it easier for you to budget as well as result in a better experience when you have questions about your rent account.

### When will this all happen?



After the consultation period closes on Sunday, 14 August 2022 we will consider all of your feedback and ask our Board to make a decision on whether the proposal should proceed, be changed, or not go ahead at all and we will let you know the outcome on our website in September.

We will also confirm the decision in February when we write to inform you of any changes to your rent and other charges.

### **What do you think about our proposals?**

We would now like to hear what you think about our proposals to remove rent non-collection weeks.

You can contact us with your views or queries by:

- Calling us on: 0191 8142839
- Emailing us at: [NCWenquiry@Believehousing.co.uk](mailto:NCWenquiry@Believehousing.co.uk)
- Writing to us at Income Team, Coast House, Spectrum 4, Spectrum Business Park, Seaham, SR7 7TT

**The deadline to provide your views is Sunday 14 August 2022**