

# PRESS RELEASE

22<sup>nd</sup> January 2004

## Who wants to be a Millionaire?

Many people dream about sitting in the spotlight answering questions on their way to a £1million. Tenants of New Charter experienced some of the drama when their landlord opted to “Ask the Audience” about its future plans!

One of New Charter’s four key pledges at transfer was to give tenants a greater say in the business. Like many landlords, we consult customers about the issues that affect a tenant’s own home – improvement works, relet standards, and grounds maintenance for example. But we also want to engage tenants on some of the fundamental plans and strategies that shape our services for the future.

New Charter first involved tenants in planning last year’s Business Plan, but we were looking for ways to improve. In particular, we wanted to make sure everyone’s views were recorded – often difficult in what are usually group discussions. That’s when we hit on the idea of using electronic voting.



The technology is familiar to all those who watch “Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?” Individual electronic keypads transmit the voters’ views and these are instantly displayed on a big screen. Every tenant could see that his or her vote counted. As well as making sure every opinion is logged, the technology allows recording of strength of feeling. And there’s no need for participants to hold up their hands while someone counts!

We took the same approach with Board Members and senior managers. The results showed to all groups who took part just how much they all agreed. There were, of course, some exceptions – tenants weren’t as enthusiastic about our plans to refinance our business – but we provided feedback and explanation for couple of issues where there wasn’t a consensus.

“We promised tenants a greater say in the ownership and management of their homes,” said Tony Powell, New Charter’s Director of Tenancy Services. “In independent surveys, customers tell us we are good at keeping them informed, and take account of their views. But it’s a much bigger challenge to engage tenants on the ‘drier’ issues such as next year’s Business Plan. We have a turnover of £49m, so it was easy to make the quiz connection! The results show what tenants see as important is also what senior managers and Board members see as important. That gives us a great platform to build on”.

Engaging customers in this way is part of New Charter’s response to the **iN business for neighbourhoods** campaign. Our commitment to customers is to involve them at all levels within the business.

## **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

1. New Charter formed in 1999 as the new landlords to own and manage nearly 16,400 properties transferred from Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council in Greater Manchester. With a turnover of £49million a year and a workforce of almost 800, New Charter is one of the twenty largest Registered Social Landlords (RSL's), and is regulated by The Housing Corporation, a Government watchdog.
2. We asked tenants to vote on 78 issues, including targets for rent collection and empty homes, action on equality and anti-social behaviour, investment plans and business expansion.
3. We borrowed the equipment we used from our internal auditors, Deloitte & Touche. We ran the event on 11<sup>th</sup> December for tenants.
4. We will deliver our Business Plan for 2004/05 to funders in February 2004. While it is commercially confidential, we publish a summary annually on our website, [www.newcharter.co.uk](http://www.newcharter.co.uk)

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