

ALMOs in ACTION

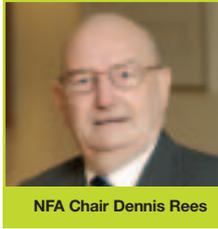
▲ ▲ ▲ National Federation of ALMOs
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▲ ▲ ▲ championing better homes and communities



The 'Door to Door' projection plays in Le Mans Crescent, Bolton

Hello

As a new year dawns we find ourselves looking back on what has been a tumultuous twelve months. When 2008 began we were still in the midst of an economic boom and only the most far-sighted of economists could have predicted the recession.



NFA Chair Dennis Rees

At a recent meeting with Iain Wright MP, the minister with specific responsibility for ALMOs, NFA Vice Chair Juliet Rawlings and myself were able to discuss a range of issues including, amongst other things, the role ALMOs might play in assisting the government's plans for economic recovery and new build. We also stressed the need for continued funding of the Decent Homes programme, especially for later round ALMOs, and for a resolution to the problems with the housing revenue account subsidy system.

As the role of ALMOs continues to expand and develop, 2009 is bound to be a significant – and interesting – year. A happy and successful New Year to all!

Parliamentary Privilege

Peter Marsh, Chief Executive of the recently established Tenant Services Authority (TSA), will be speaking at a special housing seminar hosted by the All Party Parliamentary Group for ALMOs (APPG) on March 24 2009.

The afternoon event, to be held in the Members' Dining Room of the House of Commons, will be open to members of the APPG, other interested MPs and Peers, ALMO tenant representatives and other tenant organisations.

Peter Marsh will discuss the role of the TSA and the process involved in establishing its Code of Practice and standards for social housing providers. Attendees will be able to discuss their expectations of the TSA and provide feedback on standards.

Construction company Keepmoat has kindly provided sponsorship for the event.

This is the second parliamentary event to be staged by the NFA – the first, held in the same venue in February 2008, was highly successful, attracting 200 guests, including MPs, Peers, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Iain Wright and opposition housing spokesmen.

Meanwhile, the December meeting of the APPG heard ALMO tenants and managers speak about problems with the housing revenue account subsidy system. Members agreed to write to the Housing Minister urging her to ensure that the current CLG/Treasury Review of Council Housing Finance delivers:

- An adequately-funded system for council housing that ensures all tenants' rents are spent on council housing services.
- The implementation of "self-financing" as an option available to two and three star authorities and ALMOs.
- A more stable and less complex subsidy system in the short to medium term.

A number of new MPs joined the APPG as a result of this meeting. Membership now stands at 74, representative of 42 ALMOs, and includes MPs without an ALMO in their constituency. The breakdown by political party is 52 Labour, nine Conservative, 12 Liberal Democrat and one Independent.

News round-up



Game for a laugh

The lively tenants of Northwards Housing sheltered scheme Apprentice Court, in Greater Manchester, decided to defy expectations by spending a grant from Valuing Older People and Help The Aged on a Nintendo Wii games console.

The energetic pensioners were keen to try the popular Wii Fit title which combines various motion-controlled activities, including yoga, aerobics and balance games. Northwards Housing Head of Retirement Pat Scappaticci said: "These residents are proving you're never too old to play. It's great how they've decided to embrace this new technology instead of being frightened by it."

The face of Gateshead

Tenants of The Gateshead Housing Company now have a new way to engage with the ALMO: a page on popular social networking website Facebook. The company's page features up-to-date information on free courses, local events and prize draws.

The 100th person to sign up as a 'fan' of the housing company and receive email updates will win an MP3 player. Chief Executive Bill Fullen said: "Our page on Facebook will work alongside our website, providing customers with another way to access information about us and our work 24 hours a day."

Green bulbs

St Leger Homes of Doncaster has begun supplying all new tenants with six free energy-efficient light bulbs when they move into their new homes.

In addition to helping the environment, the bulbs help tenants save money. If the bulbs are fitted to the 1600 homes that are re-let each year, the combined savings in electricity for tenants will add up to £96,000 - or up to £10 per light and around £60 per home.

Business Manager Andy Rowe said: "It is great news for our new tenants. Not only are they moving into a new home but they have the reassurance that they are saving money and being environmentally-friendly."

Wings over London

Homes for Islington has found an all-natural solution to the flocks of pigeons which cause mess and inconvenience residents on its estates: Junior the harrier hawk.

Junior is specially trained to fly towards flocks of pigeons and scare them off without harming the feathery pests. Previous attempts at controlling pigeons, such as bird netting, had only very limited success but pigeon numbers dropped within weeks of Junior's first twice-weekly visits.

Sharon Kelly, Chair of Finsbury Tenants and Residents Association, said: "Unlike netting and spiking, which requires on-going cleaning, repairs and inevitable replacement, this is a clean, effective and sustainable alternative."



NFA update

2008 has been an active year for the NFA and the ALMO movement. The last two ALMOs went live in the summer, bringing the total up to **69 ALMOs, managing over one million council homes** in 66 local authorities.

Many ALMOs had to face inspection or re-inspection during the year and there were some notable successes. By December 18 ALMOs had achieved a three-star rating and 32 a two-star rating. Congratulations are due to all these successful ALMOs.

While not every ALMO is successful at achieving two stars the first time round, the mutual assistance offered by other ALMOs through the NFA Support Framework has undoubtedly been a major factor in the inspection success story. The NFA thanks all those ALMO officers and Board members that have so willingly given time and advice to help their colleagues. In the meantime, the introduction of short notice inspections for authorities and ALMOs that have completed their Decent Homes programme is expected to be piloted in 2009.

While the later round ALMOs are still concentrating on achieving that magic two-star rating and carrying out their Decent Homes work, those ALMOs in the early rounds that have already met, or have nearly met, the standard have been discussing future possibilities with their local authorities. Due to the impact of the new local government performance framework and the credit crunch, these discussions are very timely. With 22 ALMOs now pre-qualified to access social housing grant, the potential for councils to build new homes through their ALMOs has been decisively unlocked.

However, the long-term sustainability and financing of the existing housing stock remain major issues for the sector. The NFA has been active representing ALMOs in the joint Communities and Local Government and Treasury Review of Council Housing Finance. This is due to report in the spring and will have major implications for the financial viability of the sector.

In tandem with this, the NFA Board aims to produce a document at the annual conference in April on how the ALMO model could develop in the future without losing the key features that make ALMOs so successful, such as tenant empowerment and being embedded in one local authority community.

The Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 received Royal Assent before the summer recess with a last-minute change by the government to include cross-domain regulation without the need for further primary regulation. The NFA had been very active during the year in lobbying on the Bill and achieved all its key objectives. Following this legislation, the Homes and Communities Agency and the Tenant Services Authority both went live in December and will take over responsibility for managing the Decent Homes, regeneration and new build programmes, as well as for setting service standards. These developments herald a new agenda for all providers and managers of social housing and we can expect a greater focus on tenant expectations, the quality of services and governance. While the economic downturn will present many challenges for everyone, there are also real opportunities for ALMOs, who are not as dependent on private sector finance as their housing association counterparts.

In the meantime, negotiations on the next spending review round will soon commence and a Housing Reform Green Paper is anticipated as part of the government's wider welfare reform and community empowerment agendas. The NFA has already made it clear to ministers that continued funding of the Decent Homes programme post-2010 is essential if the promises made to tenants are to be honoured. We have also made it clear that we strongly oppose any attempt to end security of tenure. While in favour of giving residents a range of tenure options that meet their needs, the NFA believes that proposals to review tenancies after a period of time - other than when tenants fail to meet their obligations in behaviour and payment of rent - would have a destabilising effect on communities and undermine the success the Decent Homes programme has had in giving residents back a sense of pride in their homes.

During the course of 2008 the NFA ran a successful series of meetings and events, with regional seminars in February and the highly popular annual conference in May. These were followed by a free consultation brainstorm in October and a well-attended conference in November. Despite the London venue clashing with the Queen's speech, the governance seminars for Board members in December were extremely well received, with the hot breakfasts being particularly welcome on chilly mornings.

The next major event in the NFA calendar will be the annual conference and AGM on 1 and 2 April 2009. Held at our usual popular venue the Royal York Hotel, the conference is taking place earlier than usual in order to avoid clashes with the local government and European elections.

Honours for NFA board members

NFA Chair Dennis Rees was awarded an OBE in the New Year's Honours List.

The honour, for services to social housing, was awarded in recognition of his lifelong dedication to improving council tenants' quality of life, which has seen him dubbed 'the most powerful council tenant in the land' by leading housing commentators.

A former florist, Dennis Rees has championed tenant empowerment within the social housing sector for over 14 years.

He said: "I am extremely proud that I have been able to play a part in helping to get a better deal for council residents over the years and I would like to thank the dedicated and hardworking teams that have made this possible. I am also extremely pleased that the work of the NFA and Derby Homes in regenerating our communities has been recognised in this way."

Meanwhile, NFA Vice Chair Juliet Rawlings was presented with an MBE by Her Majesty The Queen in November.

She attended Buckingham Palace on 26 November to formally receive her award, accompanied by her family.

She said: "It was the most frightening experience, whilst being both enjoyable and fun! It was a real honour to be in the presence of The Queen and I was particularly proud to have my partner and children looking on."



Juliet Rawlings with her MBE

The art of Bolton

In November Bolton played host to *Door To Door*, one of the **biggest ever outdoor film projections in the UK**. The five-day event brought together residents, celebrities and politicians to pay homage to the town, its diversity and the regeneration of its estates.



(Left to right)
Bolton at Home Chair Noel Spencer, Mayor Anthony Connell and Olympic Gold medalist Jason Kenny

Le Mans Crescent was illuminated by a 100-metre tall patchwork of footage featuring around 200 social housing residents, a work of art celebrating the town's steadfast community spirit.

The creation was commissioned by Bolton at Home to mark the 10th anniversary of its Housing Percent for Art service, which works to boost regeneration and cohesion in the area through artistic ventures. Local brothers Matt and Rob Vale, who have extensive experience in lighting and film projects, spent months making individual films of Bolton residents and piecing them together to create a natural flow, producing an interactive jigsaw of footage enjoyed by thousands of visitors and residents.

An audience, including featured residents, gathered at 7.00pm on launch night to view the 30-minute projection for the first time. It began with several people opening their doors and appearing on their front step. Slowly this built up to hundreds and the audience then watched as each person passed a large orange ball to a neighbour and the ball travelled from person to person across the entire projection. This imaginative depiction of community and togetherness also honoured the diverse and multicultural makeup of Bolton.

Bolton celebrities and sports personalities endorsed the project, including TV and radio presenter Vernon Kay; comedian Dave Spikey; BBC Radio 2 DJ Mark Radcliffe; and Double Olympic and World Cup gold medal-winning cyclist Jason Kenny. The latter appeared in the footage and stood alongside Bolton at Home Chair Noel Spencer and Mayor of Bolton Councillor Anthony Connell at the launch. Dave Spikey and Mark Radcliffe also featured in their own clips.

Extensive media coverage was given to the premiere of *Door To Door*, with the Guardian,

the BBC, the Manchester Evening News and lifestyle magazines such as City Life all turning out to report on the occasion.

Rob Vale said: "The project aims to reflect and highlight the importance of local communities. The film celebrates the activity of Bolton at Home and Housing Percent for Art over the last 10 years, linking people and different communities together, and it will create an enormous and colourful spectacle."

Bolton at Home works with residents to help improve communities and encourage closer ties between artists and residents. Founded in 1998, the Housing Percent for Art scheme has successfully supported more than 200 arts-based projects, working to regenerate and unite neighbourhoods across Bolton.

Tenant Dawn Booth enjoyed being filmed. "It was great fun and I loved getting involved along with all the other tenants. I'd gladly do it again and I'm really looking forward to seeing my friends and neighbours displayed on the big screen!"

Bolton at Home Chair Noel Spencer added: "One of the main benefits of Housing Percent for Art has been the lasting legacy of arts projects on neighbourhoods and the people that live within them, utilising the arts to generate community cohesion and a sense of pride in Bolton. Regenerating the estates of Bolton is not just about physical repairs but also about involving residents in their communities and encouraging a pride in the local area."

In the same week the Housing Percent for Art service hosted the *What's art got to do with it?* conference, to address the role public art can play in regeneration and the future of social housing. Among the guest speakers was Wayne Hemingway, architect and former fashion designer.

Champion at involving residents

Derby Homes has been declared a Resident Involvement Champion by a government-backed initiative, giving the ALMO authority to help other housing organisations improve the way they involve tenants and residents.

The company has also received a cheque for £10,000 which will be used to establish a regional network for sharing good practice and innovation across Derby and the East Midlands.

Building on the success of an earlier scheme in 2007, the Resident Involvement Champions project aims to promote the involvement of residents in all aspects of housing and to provide housing organisations with support. The network also works at a national level to support prestigious Beacon Councils, helping them to identify like-minded partner organisations with which they can share ideas.

Funding for the Resident Involvement Champions initiative comes from the department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA).

Derby Homes Tenant Involvement Manager Mark Crown said: "This is a tremendous opportunity for Derby Homes to lead other organisations in the region, and also to learn from them. It will enable us to work with Derby City Council, the Community Safety Partnership and other partners to improve and refine how we involve our residents."

"Tenant involvement in running housing services is very important," added Chair Dennis Rees. "We have been recognised as giving this a priority and I hope we can help other housing organisations to follow our example."

Meanwhile, Derby Homes has marked the end of the remarkable 70-year tenancy by presenting Doris McEvoy with a bouquet of flowers and the framed original of her tenancy agreement. Mrs McEvoy and her late husband James, a railway worker, relocated from Liverpool to Derby in 1938. After 70 years in the same home, Mrs McEvoy has now decided to move into Merrill House Residential Care Home.

Director of Housing and Customer Services Maria Murphy said: "Mrs McEvoy is an exemplary tenant. She brought up her son John and daughter Ann in Flint Street, so I'm sure the house held a lot of happy memories for her. We wish her all the best in her new home."



Maria Murphy and Wendy Simms of Derby Homes with Doris McEvoy, her son John and daughter-in-law Marilyn

Foundation stone

In November **Homes for Islington** and **Islington Council** laid the foundation stone for a new generation of council housing in London.

Ten new family-sized homes will be built in Boleyn Road, N16, on the former site of an Area Housing Office.

The last council housing to be built in Islington was completed 25 years ago in Finsbury. In recent years most affordable housing has been built by housing associations and through financial contributions negotiated as part of planning permissions.

Homes for Islington is to supervise the construction work by Mansell and will manage the new homes after their expected completion in summer 2009. The new buildings have been designed to a high environmental specification, with eco-friendly and energy-saving features.

Islington Council Leader James Kempton unveiled the foundation stone. He said: "Today's ceremony is good news for overcrowded families in Islington.

The construction of our first new council housing for a generation heralds a new era in social home building."

(From left)
Cllr Terry Stacy, Executive Member for Housing & Community Safety, with Cllr James Kempton, Leader of Islington Council



Homes for Islington Chair Adam Borrie added: "This is an exciting new step for social housing in Islington. This new housing will be the first in a new generation of council homes and it will set new environmental standards."

Meanwhile, the Housing Corporation has signed its first ever funding agreement with an ALMO: Stockport Homes has received £1.02 million from the Corporation to fund 17 new homes. Work has already started, with completion expected in November 2009.

The quality of design and build has been a significant area of focus, involving feedback from customers and a review of renewable energy technologies. The homes will meet the Housing Corporation Housing Quality standards, Lifetime Homes and Secured by Design standards.

Stockport Homes Chief Executive Helen McHale said: "There is a shortage of affordable housing in Stockport, with over 9,000 people currently on Stockport's Housing Register. This shortage in affordable housing is exacerbated by high house prices in the borough and the very small number of new affordable homes becoming available. Receiving this money will not only help people locally, but is a massive vote of confidence from the Housing Corporation."

Working together

Everyone working in regeneration must now be aware of the challenges posed by the current economic climate.

Stories of funding cuts, redundancies and struggling companies add to the uncertainty, which has hit the housing and construction sectors particularly hard. Keepmoat and its partners are not immune from these pressures, but our work with ALMOs also highlights the outstanding performance of the sector, even at this challenging time.

Through our delivery companies Bramall Construction and Frank Haslam Milan (FHM), we have achieved some outstanding successes in the last year – successes we are proud of. In our work with a number of ALMOs, we have brought thousands of homes up to standard. Amongst these impressive statistics are some notable achievements which underline the huge and widespread commitment to delivering results.

In South Yorkshire, Bramall's training partnership with Berneslai Homes, Barnsley Council and Chevin Housing Association has delivered outstanding Extra Care facilities for older tenants. The wider community has also benefited from training opportunities which have helped around 50 local people learn new skills. This achievement was rightly recognised at the regional National Training Awards – a first for the company.

In the West Midlands, FHM is one of three construction companies working in partnership with Wolverhampton Homes to deliver a four year, £280 million social housing refurbishment programme. As part of the project, FHM has teamed up with partners and pledged to employ more than 30 per cent of people locally.

In Sheffield, Keepmoat has brought more than 15,000 Council houses up to standard in partnership with Sheffield Homes. Our work in Sheffield with a range of partners also supports SOAR Build, a community enterprise which has helped people in the north of the city learn new skills and find work in the construction industry.

In the North East, FHM works with four ALMOs. This work has regularly seen FHM leading community activities, with support for local tenants, sporting events and donations to community groups. Our commitment to training local people in the North East was underlined this year when Apprentice Carpenter and Joiner Chris Freeman was highly commended at the Construction Partnership Student of the Year awards.

Keepmoat has championed a partnership approach to delivery in the sector and sponsored the NFA parliamentary reception in Westminster. This brought more than 200



Keepmoat CEO David Blunt (left) with NFA Chair Dennis Rees

stakeholders together to look at how the industry can meet future challenges. The event gave the partners the chance to discuss key issues with ministers and leading MPs.

Keepmoat CEO David Blunt said: "In this time of economic uncertainty, one thing that we know through our work in the last year is that strong partnerships still deliver results. This is one of the reasons why we believe strongly in bringing the industry together to meet the challenges ahead as one. We are proud of our record over the last year, and are ready for the next 12 months. ALMOs are as vibrant, innovative and committed to the task ahead as they ever have been. We need to match that energy and innovation, and together we can keep delivering results for local communities across the country. Our partners deserve nothing less."

Keepmoat is sponsoring next year's parliamentary reception at Westminster. We look forward to seeing many of you there!

A moment in the spotlight

Homes for Islington's *Every Child Matters* project was honoured at the 2008 annual UK Housing Awards, winning the new 'contributing to wider community agendas' category.



HFI Chair Adam Borrie receives the UK Housing award from a representative of the Financial Services Authority

The category is open to housing organisations that play a significant role in community and government agendas not directly related to housing, including health, education, and financial inclusion.

The *Every Child Matters* project provides positive, healthy activities for children and young people living on Islington council estates managed by Homes for Islington (HFI), offering them opportunities to enjoy themselves, feel a sense of achievement outside school, and develop their knowledge, confidence and skills.

Activities include playing and coaching in a wide range of sports, music and arts projects on Islington estates and educational opportunities, such as homework clubs and computer training. Islington Council, Arsenal Positive Futures and Sports Activities for Everyone (SAFE) are all closely involved in the project.

HFI Chair Adam Borrie said: "HFI are committed to supporting communities and working with our partners to provide opportunities for young people. I'm delighted

that this work has been recognised and it highlights the benefits of local agencies working together."

HFI has also received an award for its work in training staff how to deal with violent or aggressive customers.

The training, which has improved staff morale and perception of safety, won a London Regional Award as part of the National Training Awards 2008.

The training, led by HFI's Learning & Development team, working with and accredited by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, aimed to equip staff with techniques for defusing or avoiding potential incidents, to ensure they knew how to report any episodes and what action should be taken afterwards.

HFI Director of Resources David Selo said: "This training has been enormously important in helping those staff who have to deal with the public on a day-to-day basis and is a response to a problem faced by many public bodies."

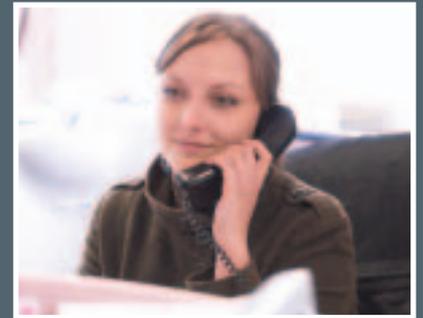
Meanwhile, Sheffield Homes and its Decent Homes partners scooped two awards at the inaugural Celebrating Construction in Sheffield Awards, held at Sheffield City Hall.

The Awards, organised and hosted by the Chartered Institute of Building, are open to organisations and individuals based in and around Sheffield with business related to construction.

Sheffield Homes and its Decent Homes programme partners - Kier Sheffield, Lovell, Keepmoat, Wates Living Space and Henry Boot Construction - were named winners of the Health and Safety and Innovation categories.

The Health and Safety award was presented in recognition of the Decent Homes programme, while the Innovation award was presented in recognition of Sheffield Homes' use of *Panagraph*. This is a sophisticated software programme used to project manage the delivery of the Decent Homes standard.

Look Northwards for action on domestic abuse



Northwards Housing's domestic abuse policy has been extended to offer advice and guidance to tenants concerned about forced marriage and so-called "honour" violence.

The North Manchester ALMO is working to raise awareness and offer support to victims in a safe and secure environment. Specially trained domestic abuse advisors are on hand to provide help for tenants who suspect they may be forced to marry, or are worried for a friend or relative.

A common misconception is that forced marriage is only a problem within Asian communities - Northwards Housing says it can affect children, teenagers and adults from all races and religions. A person can be forced into marriage through the use of physical threats or emotional blackmail.

Another form of domestic abuse, so-called "honour" violence, involves the use of violence to force the victim to do something against their will or punish them for behaving in a certain way.

Head of Neighbourhood Services Emma Foster said: "Forced marriage and 'honour' violence is becoming worryingly common in our society. This is a form of domestic abuse which Northwards Housing takes very seriously and that is why we have updated our domestic abuse policy to target the problem."

Northwards Housing also advised tenants to consider its Sanctuary Scheme over the Christmas period. This is for people at risk of becoming homeless because of violence from someone who has moved out. Fitting free security measures helps such people stay in their homes.

Northwards Housing Head of Neighbourhood Services Emma Foster said: "Incidents of domestic abuse often increase over the Christmas period as money worries and alcohol put extra pressure on relationships. We take a zero tolerance approach to domestic abuse and have designated champions to support vulnerable tenants."

A fresh coat of paint

East North East Homes Leeds (ENEHL) has partnered with charity Avalon on a scheme **training people with learning disabilities** to become painters and decorators for elderly or disabled residents.

The West Yorkshire ALMO devised the initiative, called Michelangelo's Mates, to provide paid employment and work-based training for people who would not normally have the opportunity.

Through the ENEHL scheme, a small team of people train as apprentices in painting and decorating, and then work as sub-contractors to the ALMO, helping tenants in need or redecorating empty properties in preparation for new tenants. All completed work is quality-checked by ENEHL and, in some cases, work by Michelangelo's Mates will replace grants given to tenants to decorate their homes themselves.

The qualifications and training methods are tailored to the needs of each participant, and are carefully designed to help trainees find employment once they are fully qualified. Chief Executive Steve Hunt said: "I'm delighted ENEHL is working in partnership with Avalon to support a social enterprise helping people into work - and one that is providing opportunities to develop new skills at the same time."

Avalon provides a range of services and training to support people with learning difficulties and mental health issues throughout Yorkshire, Teesside and Cumbria.



Michelangelo's Mates apprentice Keith Boyer (left) with Project Co-ordinator Paul Deane

Swap It!

Yorkshire ALMO **Berneslai Homes** and London counterpart **Homes for Haringey** have both partnered with **HomeSwapper**, the largest exchange service for council and housing association tenants wishing to swap homes, either locally or elsewhere in the UK.

The online service is quick and easy to use. After registration, users can browse through the thousands of homes available. They can also itemise specific requirements, such as the desired location or number of bedrooms, and will receive alerts highlighting suitable new homes that meet their requirements within a matter of hours.

Tenants without personal computers can access HomeSwapper via the free internet access provided at their local library. The service has more than 360,000 members, and over 70 per cent are matched with one or more potential swaps within 24 hours.

Berneslai Homes Lettings Manager Bob Cartwright says: "Berneslai Homes are pleased

to have joined HomeSwapper. Due to pressures on the housing register it is becoming increasingly difficult to find accommodation for people and HomeSwapper offers an alternative for council and housing association tenants wishing to swap their homes."

Jackie Thomas, Executive Director of Housing Management at Homes for Haringey, added: "We signed up to HomeSwapper because we recognise that it is a relatively cheap and simple way to ensure our tenants have the greatest number of options when it comes to mobility. With ever-increasing pressure on our housing stock, we are particularly keen to support those who wish to move into alternative accommodation. Achieving even a few exchanges would easily cover our costs when you consider the time it would otherwise take to fill empty homes."

Decent homes, fewer burglaries

The number of burglaries in Rotherham council housing has dropped over the last five years, thanks to initiatives run by **2010 Rotherham** and other organisations across the borough.

Burglary of homes has halved across the borough over the last five years and the latest figures from the South Yorkshire Police Community Information Unit show that council tenants are now less likely to be burgled than those in the private sector.

These impressive results have been attributed to:

- The installation of 'secure by design' high security doors and windows as part of the Decent Homes programme.
- The Safer Homes Scheme, which enables security work on the doors and windows of council properties. The scheme is administered by Victim Support Rotherham and 2010 Rotherham, together with Rotherham Borough Council's Neighbourhoods and Adult Services; South Yorkshire Police; South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue; Age Concern; and Rotherham Stay Put, who provide independent advice on repairs, improvements and adaptations.
- A rapid response by the ALMO's Responsive Repairs service and Safer Home Scheme.

2010 Rotherham Safer Estate Manager Andrew Leigh said: "This is a dramatic turn-around since 2003/4, when burglaries in Council homes were nearly 50 per cent higher than in the private sector. With more than a third of properties still to receive high security doors and windows through the Decent Homes programme, we expect this figure to reduce even further in the coming years."

The South Yorkshire Police Community Information Unit figures for March 2008 to August 2008 reveal that out of every one thousand council homes, 10.64 are burgled, compared to 11.46 private properties. Between 2003 and 2004, 26.6 per thousand council dwellings were burgled, compared to 17.7 per thousand private properties.

Dramatic goings on

Brookside actor Luis Emerick, who appeared in the iconic soap opera as Mick Johnson, was star of the show at a recent training event staged by Barnet Homes.



Luis Emerick and colleague Celia White in action

At the event, Luis and colleagues from the Mast film and theatre group used acting and drama to demonstrate how vulnerable tenants might feel and the difficulties they may face when contractors do work in their home.

Called *Do You Care?*, the session was designed to help staff respect the diverse needs of tenants, who may have religious and cultural sensitivities, poor health or limited mobility.

Over 160 Barnet Homes staff attended the event, along with representatives of contractors Balfour Beatty, Connaught, Apollo London, VHL Heating and United House.

Through the scenarios dramatised by Luis and his fellow actors, staff were shown the point of view of different tenants and encouraged to discuss ways of adapting their work to be more sensitive to tenant needs.

Janet Cornthwaite from Connaught was impressed by the session. "It was a real eye-opener. Using drama was a great way to illustrate the different situations contractors might come across and also challenge how they behave."

Barnet Homes Chief Executive Tracey Lees adds: "We work with a number of contractors who go into our residents' homes without necessarily being aware of how they might impact on their lives. We set up this training session to help them to see how they can adapt the way they work to take into account the vulnerability of some tenants."

The event was videoed for later use as a training and development DVD.

Elsewhere, Bolton at Home took a similar approach to the dangers of debt, helping to stage a 'financial literacy' play for younger residents and community groups.

At Home With The Wiltons explored banking, borrowing and illegal money lending, and used interactive workshops to highlight responsible money skills.

Sixteen year-old student Zena Fairhurst said: "The play was fun to watch, but carried a serious message - that it can be easy to fall into debt. I'll take away practical advice on budgeting and not overspending from today."

The play, performed by Solent People's Theatre, was brought to Bolton by the Money Skills Service, Bolton Council, Corporate Debt Forum and Bolton at Home.



The Solent People's Theatre play out the importance of money management

JUDGES AND SPONSORS FOR THE 2009 NFA AWARDS

Following the success of last year's event, the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA) awards have again attracted high profile judges from various elements of the housing sector.

Returning to the panel are Michael Gelling, Chair of TAROE (Tenants and Residents Organisations of England); Roy Irwin, Chief Inspector of Housing at the Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate; and Janet Dean of Dean Knight Partnerships, consultant advisor to both the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and the Homes and Communities Agency.

New judge Jane Gething-Lewis, editor of **24housing** magazine, will judge the Best Use of Communication award, while the magazine will also sponsor the category. Since its launch, **24housing** has quickly risen to prominence, becoming one of the most agenda-setting publications in the sector.

24housing has also been appointed official media partner for the awards. The magazine will feature the latest news and updates before any other media outlet and will also provide the winners with exclusive coverage in its May 2009 edition.

Developed to recognise and celebrate the hard work and achievement of the UK's 69 ALMOs, the NFA Awards are now in their third year.

The deadline for awards entry is 30 January 2009, with the ceremony taking place in York on April 1 as part of the NFA's annual conference. Entry forms can be found at www.almos.org.uk/2009awards

Other award sponsors include:

Wates Living Space Most Outstanding Resident

Wates Living Space is one of the UK's leading affordable housing contractors. As part of the family-owned Wates Group, it delivers more than 20,000 new and refurbished homes for registered social landlords, local authorities and ALMOs per year.

Connaught Partnerships Best Community Initiative

Connaught is one of the UK's most experienced and community-focused providers of housing maintenance, compliance and estate services to local authorities and registered social landlords. They continuously invest in their people, processes and technology, whilst integrating services together in a unique way to provide its customers with the best service and quality available.

Studio 163 Most Innovative Project

Studio 163 is an award-winning film and animation production company based in Leeds. It provides media content for clients throughout the UK and overseas, including commercials, documentaries, animation and educational films, and also offers project management services.

Solace Enterprises Board Member of the Year

SOLACE Enterprises delivers a comprehensive range of tailored and integrated consulting and resourcing services to the public sector. It has been operating successfully for over 11 years and has amassed a wealth of public sector knowledge.

For further information, please contact the NFA at: **Rockingham House, St Maurice's Road, York YO31 7JA**

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