

# ‘Decent Homes, Thriving Communities, Brighter Futures’



**A study into the wider social and community benefits delivered by arms length management organisations (ALMOs)**

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## Introduction

The Decent Homes programme, dubbed a "massive national refurbishment of unprecedented scale" by Housing Minister John Healey, was launched in 2000 to upgrade the nation's ailing council stock.

This has seen more than 250,000 council properties managed by ALMOs brought up to the Decent Homes Standard at a cost of over £4.6 billion. As a result of the Programme, 86 per cent of England's social housing now meets the Decent Homes Standard.

The practical result of this has been an enormous improvement in the day-to-day lives of the millions of people who now live in refurbished homes. Council tenants in homes managed by ALMOs, have benefited directly from the Programme which has seen thousands of new kitchens, windows, doors and heating systems installed in council properties.

However, this report aims to provide practical examples of the many wider benefits of the Decent Homes programme in areas such as employment, health and community cohesion.

Since the first ALMOs were created in 2002, the ALMO model has proved remarkably successful at delivering both the Decent Homes Programme and wider housing services. Currently 37 ALMOs have achieved the Audit Commission's two-star rating while a further 21 have been awarded the maximum three-star rating; a track record unsurpassed by the housing association or traditional local authority sectors. This is an achievement based on far more than just the delivery of Decent Homes and recognises the important role ALMOs are playing in delivering wider services and regenerating our communities.

Tenant empowerment and resident involvement are two of the key ALMO success stories beyond Decent Homes and ALMO managed tenants now have a much greater say in how their estates are managed and services delivered.

However, many ALMOs have completed their Decent Homes programmes and the roles of ALMOs are changing beyond a delivery mechanism for Decent Homes, into a more rounded provider of housing management services.

There is a need for the Government, of whatever political makeup, to provide a clear statement as to the future role of ALMOs, now that the initial 2010 Decent Homes deadline has arrived.

This report contains only a sample of the large number of innovative social projects being carried out by ALMOs across the country. I believe it is compelling evidence for allowing ALMOs to continue their record of proven success in a changing political landscape.



**Alison Inman, NFA Chair**

## Background

The Government assigns funding to two-star ALMOs to upgrade their properties to the Decent Homes Standard. In order to be 'decent', a home should be warm, weatherproof and have reasonably modern facilities.

The following key issues lay behind the introduction of the Decent Homes Standard:

- Too many residents live in poor-quality housing or find that their landlord (private or public), does not provide a proper service
- Many live on estates which have been left to deteriorate for too long, contributing to ill health, crime and poverty
- Many families and individuals, including elderly and vulnerable people, live in housing that is not energy-efficient and in which it is difficult to keep warm
- Most public sector tenants have been denied choice and offered housing on a take-it-or-leave-it basis

The impact of these problems is as clear as the benefits of decent housing. There are strong associations between poor housing and poverty, deprivation, crime, educational under-achievement and ill health. People are discriminated against in looking for work or using services because of where they live. Whole neighbourhoods suffer from neglect.

To achieve the Decent Homes standard a property should:

- Meet the current statutory minimum standard for housing
- Be in a reasonable state of repair
- Have reasonably modern facilities and services
- Provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

Decent Homes are important for the health and wellbeing of those living in them and boost the local community by reinstating residents' pride in an estate, improving the community and reducing crime.

Programmes also benefit the local economy, as work tends to be carried out by local firms – or the local representatives of larger companies – who use local suppliers and other service providers.

The benefits of Decent Homes crystallise around five key areas:

1. Health
2. Employment
3. Community Cohesion /Antisocial Behaviour/ Resident Involvement
4. Financial Inclusion
5. The Environment

14<sup>i</sup> ALMOs across England have completed their Decent Homes programmes and over 250,000 properties have been brought up to the Standard since 2002.

## The Impact of Decent Homes on Health

The Decent Homes Programme has had a significant impact on the physical and mental health of ALMO tenants. The benefits of warm, weatherproof and secure housing to the health of tenants are well documented and the subject of numerous research projects. By improving the condition of social housing, the NHS has been able to save millions of pounds as a result of fitter, healthier tenants who are less prone to illness and disease.

By creating more inclusive, safer and desirable communities, the Decent Homes programme has also seen a significant improvement in the mental health of tenants.

The Decent Homes Programme has been at the heart of the ALMO movement since the first organisations were created in 2002 and a decent property is the basic foundation from which all other social improvements can develop.

However ALMOs have also improved the health of their tenants through other schemes and initiatives often working with the local health services to assist vulnerable tenants. ALMOs also play a major role in the provision of sheltered accommodation and provide other valuable services to elderly tenants across the country.

### Case Study 1



#### Sheffield Homes

A major Health Impact Assessment, conducted by leading academics at Sheffield Hallam and Warwick Universities in 2006, concluded that the Sheffield Homes Decent Homes Programme will save the NHS millions of pounds and dramatically improve the security of tenants.

The study was carried out over a ten-month period in Sheffield, where Sheffield Homes managed a near £700m Decent Homes Programme – the largest in the UK - on behalf of Sheffield City Council. It showed the benefits of linking housing and health policies at a local level.

Taking the Council's then 50,000-plus housing stock as its baseline figure, it found that upgrades of homes and estates across the city, affecting some 95,000 people, would result in:

- 300 fewer accidents in the home per year, saving nearly £1m in-hospital care alone
- More than £1m saved per year in long-term NHS care
- A reduction in winter cold-related deaths among the elderly and other illnesses
- Potential savings for the NHS running into millions of pounds
- Mental health improvements as a result of the reduction in burglaries
- Reduced fuel poverty, improving physical and mental health

The results not only showed how new kitchens, bathrooms, re-wiring, new heating systems and other adaptations reduce hazards and accidents, but also how new windows, doors and security measures make people feel more secure – bringing immeasurable mental health benefits to tenants. The ALMO also dealt with health issues relating to cold, damp or poor living conditions and mental and physical harm resulting from aggravated burglaries.

## Case Study 2



### The Gateshead Housing Company

Five percent of The Gateshead Housing Company's Decent Homes funding has been allocated to estate sustainability schemes. One scheme, designed for the Springwell estate in the south of the borough, will incorporate an outdoor gym and sports area which is part funded through the DCSF co-location fund and linked to the adidas sponsorship of the 2012 Olympic Games.

This adiZone facility incorporates a gym, freestyle area, kick wall, basketball and tennis wall, designed to get families and young people into physical activity. It aims to improve outcomes for individuals by providing a free and accessible facility in the heart of the estate with the added benefit of Youth Sports Trust and Council activation plans to encourage links with community groups, schools, clubs and organised sport.

## Case Study 3



### Bolton at Home

A series of 'slipper swap shop' events were rolled out across Bolton at Home's estates to emphasise the importance of stable footwear in preventing falls. Held across eight sheltered housing facilities, the safety drive included performances from members of the Octagon Theatre's 'activ8' group to highlight the importance of stable footwear in preventing falls.

Backed by Bolton at Home's Older People's Forum - a consultation panel used by Bolton at Home's Elderly Services team – the campaign is part of a widespread programme to enhance the safety and wellbeing of council housing tenants in the town.

Hilda Freeman, a pensioner from Drummond St, Halliwell, said: *"The slipper exchange has been thoroughly enjoyable. Watching the play was good fun, but it also carried a serious message about how important good slippers can be, especially for older residents."*

Chair of Bolton at Home, Noel Spencer added: *"Bolton at Home is dedicated to the continued personal safety of its customers, particularly vulnerable individuals and older people. The Slipper Exchange has proved to be a fantastic, fun idea which has been embraced by many of our elderly residents and is one we are confident will deliver real benefits by reducing accidents in the home."*

## Case Study 4



## Rochdale Boroughwide Housing

The Rochdale ALMO has teamed up with Homestart, Rochdale Borough Council and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents to support a scheme aimed at reducing accidents in the home among the under-fives.

The scheme loans home safety equipment to residents free of charge, and RBH is fitting the equipment free of charge and to the correct standard. The equipment includes items such as safety gates at the top and bottom of stairs, fireguards, window restrictors, cupboard locks, anti-slip bath mats and protectors for table corners. To date 430 households have taken up the service.

Statistics shows that thousands of young children are injured in the home every year and simple precautions like those being implemented by this scheme can prevent them.

Mark Fisher, Head of Repairs for RBH said: *“We are always happy to look at anything that helps ensure our customers remain safe in their properties and we are delighted to support this scheme which protects our younger residents. This local scheme is supported by information and accident prevention advice to ensure that our residents are fully up to speed on the issues.”*

## Case Study 5



### Hackney Homes

London ALMO Hackney Homes has introduced a new scheme in 2009 to help residents grow their own fruit and vegetables. Hundreds of residents have started their own personal gardens and over twenty estates have started community gardens. The outcome of the community gardens are not just bright, attractive green spaces, they also help to bring different cultures and generations together, improve neighbourhood spirit and make cheap and healthy herbs, vegetables and fruit.

Charlotte Dove, Secretary of the Wilton Estate Tenants and Residents Association said: *“It’s amazing how something as simple as planting trees can bring people together and put a smile on faces. The support that we have had from Hackney Homes staff has been tremendous. They have given advice on growing food, how to ensure that the trees bear fruit and general maintenance”.*



On a number of other estates in Hackney, residents are turning simple green spaces on their estates into beautiful herb gardens. Turkish and African residents have introduced new herbs to residents on the estate and shared recipes on how to use the herbs in everyday cooking.

Food growing brings together residents from different backgrounds and gives them the opportunity to grow food which is cheap and healthy.

# The Impact of Decent Homes Funding on Employment

Access to work and employment opportunities are factors that greatly affect the overall wellbeing of a community.

Unemployment is responsible for a number of social problems and is intricately linked to issues such as financial exclusion, antisocial behaviour and the physical and mental health of tenants.

Recent figures from the Department of Communities and Local Government suggest that only 24 per cent of social housing rent-payers are in full time work. As a result it is clear that as a sector of the population, they are extremely vulnerable to the health-sapping effects of poverty.

Many contractors that carry out Decent Homes refurbishments also run apprenticeship and training schemes in construction trades which provide valuable practical training.

However in addition, many ALMOs are going beyond these initiatives creating partnerships with local education providers to give tenants new skills and to help them find meaningful employment.

## Case Study 1



### Nottingham City Homes

As a result of achieving the two-star rating, Nottingham City Homes is embarking on a large city-wide programme of home refurbishments called *Secure, Warm, Modern*. This will see £200 million being spent between 2009 and 2013, of which £165m will be provided by the Government through the Decent Homes Programme.

*Secure, Warm Modern* will create much needed jobs in the city, including over 200 apprenticeships with building contractors. This is part of a new scheme called 'One in a Million' which requires contractors to take on one apprentice for every £1m spent with them. So far Nottingham City Homes has taken on 53 apprentices in trades such as plumbing, joinery, plastering and business administration. The apprenticeships for the 'One in a Million' scheme are a direct result of the Decent Homes funding from the Government.

## Case Study 2



### East North East Homes Leeds

East North East Homes Leeds (ENEHL) partnered with contractor Connaught Partnerships Ltd to provide a DIY Skills Workshop for residents to teach them how to make minor improvements to their homes. The ten workshop participants received expert tutoring in basic joinery, decorating, plastering, tiling and how to handle



power tools whilst working in a new kitchen kindly provided by Rixonway Kitchens.

One of ENEHL tenants will now be offered the opportunity to further develop their skills after an agreement was reached with Leeds College of Building to offer a place on a relevant course for the most promising participant.

Angelena Fixter, Chair of ENEHL said: *“Giving our tenants the chance to learn new skills to brighten up their homes is a great new initiative. ENEHL is thrilled to be working with its partners in bringing DIY skills training to our customers. We are also delighted to be offering one of our tenants the opportunity to access a course at Leeds College of Building which could offer the opportunity of an entirely new career.”*

### Case Study 3



#### Wigan and Leigh Housing

Wigan and Leigh Housing (WALH) and its contractors are currently providing some 85 apprenticeships through its Decent Homes programmes. WALH/Contractor partnership has also supported the Western Skills Centre, providing construction experience to some 200 school children a week.

### Case Study 4



#### Sandwell Homes

In 2005 Sandwell Homes began its Decent Homes programme and were tasked with bringing 30,000 local authority homes up to a decent standard. The programme presents a real opportunity to deliver lasting regeneration to an area. It is not only important for the health and well-being of those living in local authority homes, but also for local construction companies, suppliers and the local workforce.

The programme has been a great success and in fact it has delivered a whole lot more, bringing new training and employment opportunities, as well as new hope to local communities across the borough.

The key facts:

- 1,000 employment opportunities have been created - 98 per cent with the Sandwell Decent Homes Partnership (SDHP).
- 20,000 properties have been delivered to above Decent Homes standards to date
- Opportunities have been created for 150 apprentices with 90 per cent of them achieving or working towards an NVQ level two qualification
- The SDHP delivers jobs fairs, events and Netbus (which showcases construction to schools/colleges/communities), reaching an estimated 7,500 people in 2008 alone
- Training programmes have been rolled out to help and train disengaged youths, youth offenders and those affected by gang-related culture, which provides a career path, creates self-esteem and pride within their community

- Over 96 per cent of the ALMO's non hazardous construction waste is recycled; a significant amount on a £425 million refurbishment programme

*“The Construction Awareness event has been a fantastic chance for school children to get a real insight into the wide variety of careers that are available to them in the construction industry and to gain a clear understanding of how they can access them. The event has been a great help as it comes at a time when they are making difficult decisions about their education and future career paths. It has really given the children something to consider and we hope it has helped to broaden their horizons.”*

- Peter Boot, teacher at Tividale Comprehensive.

*“The Sandwell Homes Partnership has given me a beautiful place to live... All local people have benefited from the improvements through job opportunities, a better standard of living or through the wider regeneration that the estate is likely to encourage. I can't thank the delivery team enough.”*

- Victor Dangerfield, St Clements tenant

## The Impact of Decent Homes Funding on Community Cohesion/Antisocial Behaviour/Resident Involvement

There is an established link between the quality of social housing stock and levels of resident satisfaction, crime and antisocial behaviour.

Poor quality housing can create numerous social problems and have a negative effect on an area's reputation, creating undesirable and unsustainable communities. Poor housing can also exacerbate levels of social exclusion, homelessness and other social difficulties.

One of the key strengths of the ALMO model is the focus on resident involvement in how estates are managed. By giving tenants a direct role in the running of their communities, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and a pride in their local area. Coupled with a programme of physical regeneration, this has led to a reduction in crime and antisocial behaviour and an increase in resident involvement on ALMO estates.

ALMOs also play a key role in encouraging community cohesion by bringing ethnic minorities and other excluded groups into the wider community through a number of innovative schemes and initiatives.

### Case Study 1



#### Berneslai Homes

Statistical evidence by Berneslai Homes indicates that areas where properties that have been refurbished under the Decent Homes Programme have reduced instances of reported crime (across four areas crime was reduced by 22.5%), particularly with regard to burglary and breaking and entering (across the same four areas burglary was reduced by 39%) This evidence also indicates a reduced turnover in tenancy in these areas.

- Total investment £210m to date (£141m from Decent Homes money and the balance from Council capital funds, mostly capital receipts)
- Currently 96% Decent, on track to complete in 2010 with a further 992 properties improved during the calendar year
- Positive place shaping impact, 88% satisfaction with neighbourhood as a place to live
- Overall tenant satisfaction 87%.

### Case Study 2



#### Aire Valley Homes

A scheme by Aire Valley Homes, which has funded 70 projects to help local people, engage youngsters and tackle nuisance conduct, has led to a reduction in antisocial behaviour, according to West Yorkshire Police.

Aire Valley Homes' Outer South Area Panel provided over £5,000 to fund West Yorkshire Police's Operation Divensure after a report by the police found that high visibility policing



could reduce crime by as much as 50 percent. This saw uniformed Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) patrol the Cottingley council estates during 'hot spot' times with the intention of preventing, or at least reducing, the levels of violence, drunkenness, antisocial behaviour and offences of damage.

Two officers, with support from another on a sponsored mountain bike, patrolled the area each Friday and Saturday night between 6pm and midnight, recording any instances of crime or disorder. Operation Divensure followed on from a similar operation in Drighlington, also funded by the Outer South Area Panel, which saw a 51 percent reduction in crime between April 2007 and April 2008.

### Case Study 3



#### Brent Housing Partnership

Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) and local groups and organisations created a partnership to tackle antisocial behaviour (ASB) and crime on the St Raphael's Estate.

Close to 200 ASB incidents were recorded on the estate between April and September 2006 including, robbery, loitering in shops, dangerous dogs, stolen mopeds and drug dealing.

BHP felt that a multi-agency approach was needed to target the problem. They proposed a range of co-ordinated actions including:

- Agreeing Acceptable Behaviour Contracts with youths who were causing problems in Lilburn Walk
- Membership of the Youth Consortium and regular meetings with youth leaders
- Working with the Neighbourhood Renewal Project Officers, the local Police, youth providers and voluntary groups taking a multi-agency approach to the problems
- Engaging B.A.R.K. - (Brent Action for Responsible K9s), a collaboration between BHP, the Police, the RSPCA, Brent Council and the Mayhew Animal Home to educate people about responsible dog ownership, but also remove dogs that were being used to intimidate people or were being mistreated
- Organising activities including TaeKwondo classes, trips and football training (including the development of a Futsal league)
- Regularly attending Neighbourhood Forums where young people and local residents could meet to discuss the issues that affected them in the area which proved helpful
- Increased patrols by Neighbourhood Wardens in the area, in particular responding to the hotspots identified in conjunction with the Police
- Promoting an ASB hotline as a means for residents to report antisocial behaviour. Calls were responded to by BHP's Neighbourhood Wardens



A subsequent survey of the St Raphael's Estate saw reported ASB reduce by 47%, a 49% reduction in phone calls from residents to the ASB hotline and a 52% reduction in calls resulting in call-outs. Additionally, reported environmental crimes dropped by 52% with 100% of those involved in schemes not re-offending. As a result the planned dispersal order was dropped.

## Case Study 4



### Sandwell Homes - Resident Inclusion

Phil Cartwright, Board Member, Sandwell Homes said:

*"I have lived in social housing for 25 years and have been involved with Sandwell Homes since its inception four years ago. I decided to get involved in the ALMO as I have a social conscience and I believe that by working together things will improve."*

*"I have a strong belief in social housing and I believe that the Decent Homes Programme is one of the finest things to happen in the sector. Decent Homes was exactly what Sandwell Homes needed. It takes the politics out of the process and has worked out exceptionally well, saving a lot of money along the way."*

*"This saved money has been re-routed into the environment through community projects. Cosmetic improvements to the area have led to more pride by residents and more visitors to the area, which ultimately improves the local economy. We have also managed to encourage contractors to put some of their profits back into the community."*

*"Without any doubt at all Sandwell Homes has made a real difference to tenants' lives. This is proved by the vastly improved satisfaction figures. Ultimately tenants are influencing decisions and they can be as involved as they like. People are a lot happier with this way of working."*

## Case Study 5



### CityWest Homes - 'Henna Ladies'

CityWest Homes in Westminster has launched 'Henna Ladies', a women only social group based in Queen's Park, to encourage Muslim women to integrate into the wider community.

CityWest Homes launched the group after identifying that the majority of schemes focusing on community interaction, were aimed at men. Henna Ladies encourages Muslim women, traditionally a hard-to-reach group, to mix and integrate into their local community and get to know 'their' London.

Henna Ladies is designed to offer local women activities, leisure trips, and a safe, relaxing place to socialise, interact with others and make friends - building bridges between different cultures.

Henna Ladies founder Rita Begum said: *"I've lived and been closely involved with the community of Queen's Park for over 25 years, so I have seen first-hand the need for a group like Henna Ladies. It is so important to make women from all backgrounds and ethnicities feel like they're part of their community, to give them a group which is especially for them."*

*"Henna Ladies will be a very special thing for many of its participants – some of whom will have rarely left the house before and may never have socially interacted with the wider community."*

## The Impact of ALMOs on Financial Inclusion

Financial exclusion, or lack of access basic financial services such as banking, affects a large number of social housing tenants. Between six and nine per cent of all households do not have any kind of bank or building society account<sup>ii</sup>, creating or exacerbating a number of social problems.

Many ALMO residents survive on very low incomes and as a result are unable to access traditional financial services such as bank accounts and loans. As a consequence many tenants have experienced further financial difficulties and have resorted to risky alternatives such as unregulated loans sharks. This often creates a spiral of debt, exacerbating the original financial problems.

ALMOs around the country have introduced a number of financial inclusion measures to offer advice, support and access to basic financial services to help residents break the cycle of debt and poverty. As a result ALMOs are breaking down the causes of financial exclusion and greatly improving the lives of their tenants.

### Case Study 1



#### Aire Valley Homes



Aire Valley Homes' Money Talk Guide was included in Leeds City Council's award for Beacon status, a prestigious national award scheme that recognises excellence in local government for promoting financial inclusion and tackling indebtedness. The initiative offers traditional safe credit options for tenants at a time when credit loans are being reined in by high street banks. This also tackles the growing issue of doorstep lenders many of which charge interest rates in excess of 1000%.

Money Talk has been warmly received by local debt advice services such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Leeds City Credit Union which has enabled 2,600 Aire Valley Homes tenants to open accounts, many of whom would have found it difficult to do so elsewhere. The scheme is proving popular and is routinely used by Income Management staff when visiting tenants on arrears issues to encourage them to seek independent advice.

### Case Study 2



#### The Gateshead Housing Company

The Gateshead Housing Company has over 22,000 customers, and of those, 50.3% are in some form of rent arrears. Statistics indicate that:

- Local authorities and housing associations are owed around £647m by current and former tenants.

- 84% of people who see adverts on buses/Metros each week don't like the idea of being in debt.
- 7.5m people who saw bus/Metro adverts last week say they cannot manage their money effectively -TGI 2006-2007

In 2005, the housing company ran a highly successful marketing strategy to warn customers of the threat to their home should they fall into arrears. The campaign, titled 'Rent arrears, don't let it end in tears', along with the hard work of rent arrears teams across the network, brought in over £60 million in rent, dramatically reducing arrears by £190,248. This achieved the company's target of 96.9% of rent being collected. Similar publicity ran in 2006.

In 2007 the task was still to remind tenants to pay their rent or continue with payment plans over the festive period, but this time using more emotive tactics.

The task was to catch the tenant's eye with strong images that had no correlation with 'paying rent' or 'housing' for that matter, but implicitly appeal to their subconscious.

A commercial approach was therefore taken to design. Images of products commonly bought as presents over the festive period and social activities were contrasted with financial implications to make tenants think twice about how they were spending their money:

- 'Designer gear or eviction fear? You can't run from rent arrears' coupled with an image of a trainer
- 'Designer scent or pay the rent? Eviction can leave a nasty smell' coupled with an image of perfume bottle.
- 'New year bash or no rent cash? Make rent payments your resolutions - 'coupled with images of party-poppers and party hats.



Rent teams across the organisation were also responsible for liaising with tenants in arrears and preparing payment plans to mediate the levels of arrears.

The campaign resulted in £397,300 of rent being recovered, at a particularly difficult time of year, which equates to 97.45% being collected.

In the future, it is hoped that the company will lead on a cross-borough rent campaign with other ALMOs, so that customers in arrears are constantly aware of its severity and have access to information on how to seek help and advice.

### Case Study 3



#### Bolton at Home

Bolton at Home has rebranded its 'Quids in' credit union to Hoot! The credit union will provide a safe, secure and ethical way of saving for anyone living and working in Bolton, allowing those who might not be able to access traditional forms of credit, to receive low-interest loans without resorting to door step lenders who have been reported to charge interest rates of over 1,000 per cent.

As Hoot!, the credit union will be able to improve its services and continue to provide low-cost loans and secure savings schemes to its 3,000 members.

Hoot! will be run on a not-for-profit basis and will benefit Bolton's communities by investing profits back into local regeneration projects. Membership will be available to anyone living or working in Bolton - not just Bolton at Home tenants or those in financial need.

A new educational DVD has also been launched to accompany the initiative to warn customers of the dangers of loan sharks and the impact of debt on family life. The film is aimed at school children and their families and will be screened in schools and community centres throughout Bolton, encouraging people to sign up to Hoot!

#### **Case Study 4**



#### **West North West Homes Leeds**

West North West Homes Leeds has become the first social housing organisation nationally to launch an awareness campaign to ensure every eligible tenant benefits from changes introduced to the housing benefit system in November to free up more cash for struggling families. An estimated £200 million could go unclaimed in the first year.

The communication campaign involved issuing more than 4,000 informational postcards which have resulted in 125 tenant enquiries so far with an extra £628 now being claimed every week.

## The Impact of Decent Homes Funding on the Environment

As environmental concerns become an increasingly mainstream political issue, ALMOs are responding by introducing a number of 'green' initiatives to reduce the carbon footprint of their organisations.

The domestic housing sector is responsible for 40 per cent of carbon emissions<sup>iii</sup>, representing a real opportunity for ALMOs to reduce energy saving.

Decent Homes funding is used to ensure that each home refurbished reaches a minimum standard of sustainability. ALMOs have had an immediate environmental benefit through physical improvements such as the installation of more efficient heating, cavity wall insulation and energy efficient windows. However many ALMOs are going beyond these measures in an effort to change behaviour of tenants to bring about long-term change.

From recycling schemes to the provision of energy saving light bulbs and green information packs, ALMOs are taking the initiative in introducing 'green' measures and are making a real contribution to improving their local environment.

### Case Study 1



#### Berneslai Homes

As part of Decent Homes works, Berneslai Homes has installed a series of pilot energy efficiency initiatives including air and ground source heat pumps, biomass installations to communal heating systems, renewable technologies as well as a pilot "Eco House" refurbishment involving a comprehensive range of measures. Berneslai Homes is also committed to replacement of fossil fuels at its district heating plant with biomass woodchip. The scheme at Sheffield Road was the winner of the national Ashden Environment Sustainability Award.

### Case Study 2



#### Stockport Homes

Stockport Homes' £1.02m Brinnington project comprises 17 modern timber-frame family and professional homes, with two for disabled residents. It achieved Level 3 in the *Code for Sustainable Homes*, which measures the sustainability of new homes against nine categories of sustainable design, and is the first ALMO build to receive a Social Housing Grant from the Homes and Communities Agency for a series of new properties.



The prestigious project will meet the '*Lifetime Homes*' and '*Secure by Design*' standards as well as the Housing Corporation Association's '*Housing Quality*' standard.

### Case Study 3



#### The Gateshead Housing Company

The Gateshead Housing Company (GHC), installs 250 metres of loft insulation as well as cavity wall insulation as standard. This is significantly higher than the Decent Homes Standard. This is delivered in partnership with Warmzone which contributes 70 percent of the cost equating to a saving of £2.75 million. This insulation work has been carried out to over 12,000 properties generating fuel bill savings of £3m a year and CO2 reductions of 14,000 tonnes a year. Warmzone has also carried out benefit checks which has generated an additional £3m a year in benefits income for GHC customers. In order to reduce fuel bills further, additional funding is needed for boiler replacement and insulation measuring on hard-to-heat homes such as properties with solid wall construction.

### Case Study 4



#### A1 Housing Bassetlaw

Alternative heating has been used on a number of A1 Housing Bassetlaw sites to replace outdated oil fired and electrical systems. The ALMO has fitted over 150 ground sourced heat pump systems to elderly peoples properties and over 50 air sourced heat pumps, which have reduced CO2 emissions, increased the warmth of properties and reduced the cost to the tenants, (some tenants have seen up to 60% in financial savings).

The costs of installing the systems has been subsidised by the energy providers to ensure that there is little difference between the costs of installing a gas system. The ALMO has monitored the effectiveness of the initiatives and has evidence to show how successful they have been. At Cuckney it installed ground source heat pumps and they have used less electricity (3,267 units and 8,826 units in two separate properties) with a combined CO2 saving on two properties of 6,796 units.

In Lincoln Street the ALMO fitted a Calorex Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) and the tenants made an annual saving of £300 and reduced CO2 emission by five tonnes a year. We have also obtained funding from E-On to monitor 19 ASHPs in Hablesthorpe.

### Case Study 5



#### Barnet Homes

Barnet Homes has reduced CO2 emissions from 2003/04 to 2007 by 1.2 tonnes per property. Its SAP figures have improved from a Decent Homes start of 62.1 to 70. This record was key to winning £7m funding for a flagship innovation scheme at Granville Road and the recent £2m for cavity wall insulation for 1,500 properties. At Granville Road it estimates that an

innovative cladding system will save each flat £250 per year and 2.5 tonnes of carbon emissions and insulated over roofing which will save some flats £165 per year and 1.3 tonnes of emissions. The Cavity Wall insulation programme will improve SAP ratings by between 20 to 30%.

## Case Study 6



### West North West Homes Leeds

Residents of a Leeds tower block have saved a combined £10,000 on their annual fuel bills and reduced carbon emissions by over 7,000 tonnes over the last year, thanks to an innovative 'Green Tower Block' scheme run by West North West Homes Leeds (WNWHL).

The scheme which began in February 2009 at Grayson's Crest in Kirkstall, involved a programme of large-scale refurbishments to improve the energy efficiency of the building and to save residents money on their fuel bills.

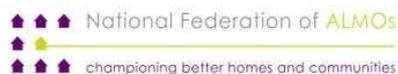
Since February 2009, residents have saved between £100 and £145 on their annual fuel bills and reduced their individual carbon footprint by between 94 and 103 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> each year.

Grayson Crest resident, David Ballard said:

*"The improvements have made a real difference, the recycling in particular has worked a lot better than I expected it to and I now recycle all my rubbish. As part of the works I also had my bathroom refurbished and had new kitchen units put in which are much better. The work has definitely had a positive impact on me and the whole block looks cleaner and tidier than before."*

Following the project's success, WNWHL is investigating whether the scheme could be repeated across the city's 47 other high-rise blocks.

**-Prepared by the National Federation of ALMOs - March 2010**



<sup>i</sup> Value correct as of May 2009

<sup>ii</sup> *In or Out*, Financial Services Authority, 2000

<sup>iii</sup> *The Decent Homes Target Implementation Plan*, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, June 2003