

ALMOs in action

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

News from and for arm's length
management organisations

A message from the NFA Chair

As the ALMO sector approaches its ten-year anniversary we find ourselves in changing times. The Localism Act has now received Royal Assent, the implications of the Welfare Reform Bill and changes to housing benefit, the introduction of self financing and new regulation – all of these present both challenges and opportunities.

As managers of some of the most intractable council housing stock in deprived parts of the country, it is incumbent on us to face up to these issues and do the best we can to help our councils and their tenants in these difficult economic circumstances.

It is not at all surprising that the sector is demonstrating its usual resilience and ingenuity and that ALMOs are developing in different ways and doing different things according to local circumstances. While some ALMOs are going back in house or following a stock transfer route, the majority are having their contracts extended and are taking on additional functions on behalf of their councils.

“It is this ability to adapt to the needs of our communities that is a strength of the sector along with our other key aspirations of resident empowerment and delivering excellent services and value for money.”

While we should celebrate the sector's diversity and innovation we must also recognise that the NFA itself needs to adapt and change in order to ensure that it is able to represent its members and deliver a suite of services that will meet the sector's needs in years to come and provide value for money. As part of this evolution **the NFA Board has decided that this copy of ALMOs in Action, which looks at the different ways in which ALMOs are developing, will be the last.** In future we will make greater use of electronic communication with members through letters from the NFA chair, briefings and good practice notes.

By the end of this year we need to put the role of the NFA managing agent out to tender and we will be seeking expressions of interest from ALMOs to lead the procurement process. However, we also need to be sure of the services we wish the managing agent to provide. As a first step, the NFA carried out a membership survey in 2011 and full details of the results of the survey are included in the papers considered by the NFA Board in November which can be found on the NFA website under Meetings - www.almos.org.uk/meetings

Following on from this over the coming months the NFA Board intends to have further discussions with its members over the future role of the NFA prior to taking any proposed changes to the AGM in July. Key issues that we wish to look at will include:

- whether we should encourage other bodies that share the same values to become full members of the NFA
- whether we should change our name from the National Federation of ALMOs to something that reflects the changes and diversification of the sector
- defining the services that NFA members are entitled to
- encouraging ALMOs to host and resource additional regional or sub-regional activities themselves.

The NFA is a member led organisation so I hope that all our members will fully engage in these discussions so that we can ensure that the NFA has a clear strategic vision and policy objectives that will meet the sector's needs for the future.

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NFA round up

The NFA delivers a suite of services to its members which include:

- Policy and parliamentary work such as submissions to central government, briefings for MPs and Lords, parliamentary monitoring, lobbying on relevant legislation and organising the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for ALMOs – all of which help to build up support for the sector at a national level
- Servicing a range of regional and national meetings to enable every member to have a say in what the NFA does
- Communications to internal and external audiences on ALMO issues including electronic briefings and updates, the annual review and the NFA Awards
- The NFA website which includes access to the work of the NFA, a database of ALMOs and latest news from ALMOs
- NFA events, such as the annual conference and periodic conferences and seminars
- Advice and support to individual ALMOs.

Over the last few months we have organised introductory seminars for new Board members and a seminar on the review of ALMO management agreements; we have produced a series of practical briefings on the implementation of self financing and have made a submission to the Select Committee Inquiry into the financing of new housing supply. The latest meeting of the APPG in November considered ways in which ALMOs could bring in new forms of finance to invest in the existing stock and in new build and we have continued to discuss the NFA community ownership options with a number of interested bodies.

We aim to hold a policy conference on 21 February on some of the key developments that ALMOs will need to address over the forthcoming year while our annual conference and AGM will again be held at Manchester on 11 and 12 July. **Book these dates in your diary now!**

Policy update

Localism Act

The aim of the Localism Act, which completed its progress through parliament in November, is to devolve greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities more control over housing and planning decisions. It will also introduce greater flexibility in the way people access social housing, the types of tenancies that are provided and the way the homelessness duty is discharged. The Act abolishes the Tenant Services Authority and provides for a transfer of functions to the Homes and Communities Agency. It also amends the way in which a social housing tenant can make a complaint about their landlord.

During the passage of the bill the NFA produced a number of summary briefings for MPs and Lords on those elements for which the NFA had key lobbying objectives. These were:

• Giving tenants a say in the future management of their housing

A key objective has been to give tenants a greater degree of protection where councils are considering bringing their ALMO back in house. During the course

of the Bill the NFA produced detailed briefings, including examples of some of the cases where councils have brought their ALMOs back in house without complying properly with the DCLG 2006 guidance and **ALMOs - building on a record of achievement** highlighting some of the 20+ ALMOs whose contracts have been extended, and the reasons for this – including quotes from councils and tenants. As a result of NFA lobbying the government has strengthened the guidance to councils, incorporating all the NFA points.

• Capital receipts

A key issue was to try and ensure all housing capital receipts be returned to councils at the end of the spending review. However, the most recent ministerial statements on revitalising Right to Buy (RTB) potentially undermine this.

• HRA ring fence

The decision not to publish updated HRA ring fence guidelines originally caused some concern. The NFA objective was to ensure a clear ministerial statement was made that the HRA ring fence continued to apply. This objective has now been met through a combination of written assurances and statements in parliament.

• Community Right to Challenge

The NFA sought clarification of the Community Right to Challenge, to ensure that tenants and residents' groups and ALMO officers should be able to challenge their councils to directly take over the delivery of council services, along the same lines as other community groups and local authority officers. The NFA responded to a separate consultation on the Right to Challenge and the government's response is awaited.

Government Housing Strategy

On 21 November the coalition government published **Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England**. This sets out its strategy to tackle the housing shortage, boost the

economy, create jobs and give people the opportunity to get on the housing ladder. The government also wishes to consider ways of addressing RTB and tenancy fraud and abuse, including widening grounds for evicting those convicted of anti-social behaviour or criminality and provisions to enable landlords to ask higher rents from high earners.

This strategy codifies in one place the key elements of the government's strategy across the whole of the social and private housing sectors and includes target dates and key milestones for action. Further information about many of the proposals highlighted in the paper will be expanded in more detail through a range of consultation papers and other documentation over the coming months.

Big changes on the horizon - are you ready?

The Localism Bill has become the **Localism Act 2011** and it's all systems go for self financing to start from the 1st April 2012. The draft financial settlement has been issued and will be finalised by government by the end of January 2012.

Councils, ALMOs and tenants will need to work closely together to ensure success as there will be no going back to government in future for more money if things have been badly managed. Key issues will be rent levels, managing the debt, maintaining decency and regeneration or new build projects.

All stakeholders will need to be more business-like, taking decisions to ensure that the service delivers what the community needs now and in the future. Tenants should be at the heart of discussions around the priorities for the business as well as scrutinising what has happened. To help ALMOs get to grips with self financing the NFA has produced a series of briefings covering issues such as business planning and risk management. These can be found on the NFA website under Guidance & briefings –

www.almos.org.uk/guidance

However, before we even start self financing, the government has proposed changes to the Right to Buy policy to encourage more sales. The NFA is concerned that this could jeopardise the business plan over the longer term and wants to see councils keeping all of the receipt to re-provide new affordable homes locally. Another significant risk to the business plan is welfare reform. The NFA is worried about the impact on arrears of the loss of housing benefit paid directly to landlords. We tried and failed to get an amendment to the Welfare Reform Bill to allow tenants to choose to have their benefit paid directly to their landlord if they so wished.

The government has instead commissioned a set of demonstration projects to test the issues. These will run from June 2012 before a phased move to Universal Credit from October 2013. The NFA is also waiting on details of the proposed changes to family sized housing benefit payments for working age tenants from April 2013. We believe that this change could cause hardship for many tenants in the sector as well as increasing arrears and making housing management more complex and expensive. The NFA will continue to work with government to ensure that the concerns of ALMOs are heard throughout this process.

Launch of the **NFA Awards 2012**

Entries are now open for the sixth annual National Federation of ALMOs Awards. Energy supplier British Gas and social housing repair and maintenance company Kier are again sponsoring the awards.

The awards will take place on 11 July 2012 at the Midland Hotel in Manchester as part of the NFA's annual conference.

With more than 1,000 entries to date, this awards event remains the industry leader for celebrating achievement in ALMO social housing delivery.

The weekly magazine for housing professionals Inside Housing will again be acting as media partner.

NFA chair, Sue Roberts, said: "I have been involved in the awards each year through my work with Wolverhampton Homes; however this year I am excited to see them from a judging perspective. I am looking forward to reviewing new and innovative concepts as well as highly committed and inspiring individuals working together to build strong communities."

The deadline for entries to the NFA Awards is 27 April 2012. For more information or to enter, please visit: www.almos.org.uk/awards



The NFA Awards – the benchmark for ALMO social housing delivery

New faces at the NFA

Ginette Hughes and Hugh Broadbent have been appointed as vice-chairs of the NFA.

The announcement was made in November. The pair will support newly appointed chair Sue Roberts MBE, who was elected to the NFA board in late August 2011.

Ginette Hughes has been re-appointed as vice-chair after spending two years in the role since 2009. She is also chair of Newark and Sherwood Homes (NSH) and has been involved with that organisation since 2004. Her 'day job' is managing director of a firm of architects and civil and structural engineers. She has 16 years' experience as a magistrate, is a fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) and a member of the Institute of Directors.

Ginette understands the importance social housing plays in building communities



Ginette Hughes

"The next twelve months will be crucial for the future of the housing sector, ALMOs and NSH. At this time of flux my focus remains to ensure that tenants have a real voice and that the services they receive are the best possible. In order to achieve these goals I believe that a positive dialogue and the engagement of all parties is essential.

"At a local level, I will be championing constructive and open engagement, and working with our tenants and the council during the review of NSH. Nationally, I will seek to

secure a strong future for housing and tenants. There are many changes on the horizon and it is essential that key decision makers such as MPs and councillors are well informed. This will then enable them to make the decisions that have the most positive long-term impact for tenants, communities, local districts and the public purse."

and creating life chances. Having lived her formative years in social housing in Garthamlock, Glasgow and Waltham Abbey, Essex, she knows from personal experience the impact that housing services and their success or failure can have on tenants and communities.

Meanwhile, Hugh Broadbent has been appointed as vice-chair after first joining in August as representative of Six Town Housing. He has championed the ALMO movement in the north west of the country for many years, having been independent chair of Six Town Housing since late 2010, and previously, chief executive of First Choice Homes Oldham from its inception in 2002.



Hugh Broadbent

"I am really pleased to be appointed at this crucial time for ALMOs. Many have completed Decent Homes and their futures are being considered in their localities. Housing organisations are changing their form and structure and the NFA needs to consider how it can engage with these new housing groups to represent them and most importantly their tenants.

"ALMOs' unique selling point is putting tenants at the heart of housing providers. I believe the NFA should seek to reinforce that highly successful approach in the future. There will certainly be lots of pressures on ALMOs in 2012, not least financial. Nevertheless I think ALMOs and the NFA are geared up to rise to these challenges."

Greater transparency needed

Doubts were cast in November over the future of two of the largest ALMOs – Sheffield Homes and Homes for Islington - as their parent councils announced they were considering plans to bring management services back in-house.

In the wake of these high-profile cases and as more details are revealed, the NFA continues to urge all councils reviewing their housing management to ensure they offer a fully transparent review process, providing comprehensive information on the impact of changes and ensuring tenants are involved from the start.

Meanwhile, the Communities and Local Government Minister Andrew Stunell has also written to all chief executives of councils with an ALMO, and all ALMO chief executives, setting out the government's position on the process councils should follow when considering disestablishing or winding up their ALMO.

In his letter, the minister said: "Councils should undertake at least as comprehensive a consultation process at the creation and closure of an ALMO.

"Councils should consult tenants and their ALMOs at an early stage before taking important decisions around the viability of these organisations. It is important that councils demonstrate that they had fully consulted their tenants as part of an ongoing, meaningful and transparent process of engagement, using a range of consultative methods."

Sue Roberts, chair of the NFA, said: "Whilst we welcome any review of tenant services, the fact is that in a number of cases, residents are not being consulted at the outset and are instead being asked their views on the option preferred by the council. Many reviews have taken place without any credible financial or risk analysis, or indeed a broader review of the options open to tenants.

"Some reviews have been fuelled by a desire to take control of council housing to access HRA housing budgets, yet arguments on savings by bringing ALMOs in-house are often unsubstantiated. In the absence of any effective regulator to safeguard tenant interests it is very much down to residents to stand up and to make sure their voices are heard before it's too late."

The NFA believes that ALMOs have a continued relevancy beyond the Decent Homes programme, benefiting from high levels of tenant empowerment and dedicated housing expertise that would not necessarily be maintained under council control. Housing Minister Grant Shapps has also pledged that the new guidance will 'adequately protect tenants':



The Department for Communities and Local Government will listen to views across the housing sector to ensure that social housing is well managed and resourced and remains relevant in a changing world.

Going forward, we will continue to drive down costs and seek out value for money, so that access and provision remain open to all those in greatest need.

As you know, I'm a fan of the work that ALMOs have been doing [in this area].

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Minister for Housing and Local Government, in a letter to Sue Roberts MBE, chair of the NFA, on 26 October 2011

Here to stay

It's a time of major change for the ALMO movement. Austerity measures and the final lap of the Decent Homes programme have prompted many councils across the country to **review how their housing services should be delivered moving forward.**

While some councils have decided to take services back in-house, many are extending their housing management contracts, a move seen by the NFA as an endorsement of the ALMO model by their local authorities and a clear signal that ALMOs have a bright future beyond the Decent Homes programme. While Shropshire Council is currently considering establishing an ALMO in order to manage its homes more effectively under self financing, of the 59 ALMOs nationally more than 20 have so far had their management agreements extended following a review and others are expected to follow. Here are some of these success stories:

Ascham Homes



Set up in 2003. Manages 12,400 properties on behalf of the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

Waltham Forest Council has agreed to progress a new contract to commence in April 2012. Under the plans, Ascham Homes will become a new 'modernised' ALMO which will work more collaboratively with the council. Ascham Homes will take on responsibility for sheltered housing, hostels and the housing options service in order to provide a streamlined and focused service to residents.

Achievements at a glance: Ascham Homes has made significant strides towards Decent Homes compliance, delivered a financially sound organisation and undertaken a radical programme to transform the way its staff work with residents.

In my view... "We have increasing confidence in Ascham Homes, with which we have established a very productive working relationship that we want to build on. Ascham Homes offers the stability to achieve the council's strategic vision." -Councillor Saima Mahmud, Cabinet Member for Housing and Development

CityWest Homes

Set up in 2002. Manages 21,700 properties on behalf of Westminster City Council. Westminster City Council has agreed in principle to renew the ALMO's contract subject to consultation with residents.

Achievements at a glance: In the last year, CityWest Homes has made savings of nearly £2 million and delivered capital works worth £30 million, leading to significant improvements to a large number of homes. The ALMO has also played a key role in helping

residents get back into work or training through its Westminster Works programme.

In my view... "CityWest Homes has made significant improvements in the last few years by raising the standard of services and operating more efficiently for our tenants and leaseholders."

-Councillor Jonathan Glanz, Cabinet Member for Housing and Corporate Property



Berneslai Homes



Set up in 2002. Manages 19,500 properties on behalf of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council.

Berneslai Homes has signed a 10-year agreement with the council. The initial stage is until 2016 and if key performance is achieved this will be extended to 2021.

Achievements at a glance: Berneslai Homes was awarded a three-star excellent rating in its last Audit Commission inspection in 2009. It has a strong track record in service

delivery and partnership working. A recent satisfaction survey saw 90 per cent of customers saying they were happy with the service they received.

In my view... "Berneslai Homes is a high performance organisation and is one of the best performing ALMOs in the country, as well as one of the best in terms of value for money."

- Councillor Steve Houghton, council leader

Set up in 2002. Manages over 23,000 properties on behalf of Kirklees Council.

In November, Kirklees Council unanimously voted to extend its contract with Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH) for a further five years.

Achievements at a glance: KNH completed £150 million of Decent Homes work in 2008. Since then it has focused on its mission of 'quality homes and services in successful

communities', and achieved its highest ever levels of customer satisfaction.

In my view... "We look forward to working closely with the council and our other partners to continue providing excellent service to our customers." - KNH tenant chair Cora Carter MBE



Ashfield Homes



Set up in 2002. Manages 7,000 properties on behalf of Ashfield District Council.

Ashfield District Council has confirmed that Ashfield Homes (AHL) will continue to manage its housing stock until at least 2016. As part of the agreement, AHL is required to achieve a minimum of £2.1 million savings and options for income generation over a period of five years.

Achievements at a glance: In 2005, AHL became the first ALMO to complete its Decent Homes programme. With a reputation for delivering excellent housing services, AHL has also been awarded a three-star rating twice by the Audit Commission.

In my view... "This decision presents a way forward which will ensure the high quality service provision to tenants is not disrupted, which is our top priority. The conditions within the recommendation will ensure that AHL becomes a leaner, smarter organisation, removing any existing duplication and sharing services which already exist." - Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Culture and Housing, Councillor Steve Carroll

Set up in 2002. Manages 13,000 properties on behalf of Brent Council.

The council has agreed Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) should continue to manage its housing stock and will consult residents on a new 'optimised ALMO' model of housing management. A final decision on the future of BHP is expected in early 2012.

Achievements at a glance: This year BHP scored at the top of a league of London social housing providers for customer satisfaction with local housing services.

In my view... "BHP has a long track record of working with tenants and residents to deliver high quality housing management services. We are determined to build on this to drive further service improvements for local people." - Councillor Janice Long, lead member for housing



Added value

Since its inception, the ALMO movement has toiled to deliver more than just council housing management, but **improved communities, better quality of life for residents** and **high standards of service** when it matters most.

As councils face some of the worst funding cuts in decades, their ALMOs are being challenged to devise new and different ways of working to ensure front-line services to tenants are protected. What's more, they are being asked to deliver that all-important 'added value' by taking on additional

functions for their councils, for example.

Easier said than done, but ALMOs never fail to rise to the occasion. Here are just a few examples of how partnership agreements between ALMOs and their councils are going above and beyond standard housing services:

• Unlocking empty homes for social rent - St Leger Homes of Doncaster

The government has described the 700,000 empty homes across the country as a 'national scandal' and has made tackling the problem a top priority in its recently unveiled Housing Strategy.

This is why local initiatives such as Doncaster Council's new Empty Homes Grant Scheme, which is designed to bring empty properties back into use, are so important. Under the scheme, grants will be given to modernise private homes which have been empty for six months or more, with their management handled by St Leger Homes of Doncaster.

Once the improvements are completed the house is advertised for letting by St Leger

Homes, which acts as managing agent for five years in exchange for a weekly fee. Improvement works of up to £12,000 are funded under the scheme.

The first tenants of a property brought back into use through this scheme have been given the key to the door after landlord Gareth Everton applied for a grant of around £5,000. This was used to pay for electrical rewiring, water drainage and some minor repair jobs so that the home could be put on the rental market.

Councillor Ray Mullis, Doncaster Council's Cabinet Member for Housing, said: *"I am delighted with this first success of our grants scheme. This is an excellent example of the authority working in partnership with St Leger Homes for the benefit of local people."*

• Not just part of the furniture – Your Homes Newcastle

With tenants suffering under financial strain, the Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) Furniture Service is designed to throw them a life-line.

The service provides affordable, essential furniture such as beds and cookers which tenants pay for out of their housing benefit. YHN offers a frequent delivery service to ensure that the furniture arrives before a tenancy starts. It will also repair and replace damaged or broken furniture and collect it once it is no longer required. It makes 12,000 deliveries and collections per year.

According to YHN, the service has had a positive impact on the well-being of tenants and local communities because tenants feel happier in their homes. Customer satisfaction rates with the service stand at 97.4 per cent. The ALMO has also seen an increase in the length of tenancies and a reduction in void costs and re-let times.

In addition to the 5,500 YHN tenants currently using the service, the ALMO holds contracts with 15 external organisations such as Homes for Northumberland and South Tyneside Homes, supporting a further 5,500 tenants. South Tyneside Homes

now has 670 tenants using the service, up from 270 18 months ago. It has seen a massive reduction in the turnover of single person tenancies and communities have become more stable and integrated.

YHN has recently procured St Leger Homes of Doncaster as its delivery partner in that area. This works via a contract with YHN, but with day-to-day activity such as deliveries being undertaken by St Leger Homes. YHN hopes to replicate this model across the UK.

For more information about the service, please email andrew.waters@yhn.org.uk



Home comforts



• A service open to all - Poole Housing Partnership

Some of Poole's most vulnerable social housing tenants, as well as people in private and rented accommodation, are benefiting from 'Sustain', a life-changing new support service run by Poole Housing Partnership (PHP) in conjunction with the Borough of Poole.

PHP resident Sharon Epton, who was instrumental in helping PHP to win the support service bid

The service aims to help vulnerable people, aged between 18 and 64, to live independently by giving them practical support and advice to resolve housing, finance and other issues.

Since the service began in April 2011, Sustain has supported 156 people, prevented 24 people from losing their homes and enabled 16 people to find more suitable accommodation.

PHP won a competitive tender following a council decision to employ a single provider to deliver a borough-wide support service, instead of a number of providers operating independently.

• Making adult social care a top priority - Barnet Homes

Barnet Homes is set to become the first ALMO to be incorporated into a Local Authority Trading Company (LATC).

This involves the creation of a new sister company for Barnet Homes, called Your Choice Barnet, which will take responsibility for some of the adult social care services traditionally provided by the council. Both will be overseen by a parent company The Barnet Group, due to launch in February 2012.

Business support for Your Choice Barnet, such as IT, finance and HR, will come from existing Barnet Homes staff, and the organisations will share a chief executive to generate further efficiencies.

Barnet Homes says the move will allow it to more closely integrate its housing

services with social care and to be more cost effective by spreading costs. Front-line services to tenants and leaseholders will not be affected as the funds for Your Choice Barnet will come in the form of a management fee from the council.

Tracey Lees, chief executive of Barnet Homes, said: *"This is an exciting venture that's entirely new for ALMOs, and it's evidence of the strength and adaptability of the ALMO model."*



The **new face** of ALMOs

Arm's length management organisations have brought **real and lasting benefits** to the communities they serve. As the sector faces a **time of huge change**, many councils are looking to the future of their ALMOs and deciding how best to continue this **excellent track record** amid major cuts in public spending.

But it is important for councils reviewing their housing management agreements to remember that in addition to extending ALMO contracts or taking services back in-house, there are a number of other options available, including new management models which offer greater tenant involvement and closer partnership working.

Some ALMOs and their council partners are considering or embarking on major transformations into new housing bodies this year. The NFA is hopeful for the future of these new organisations and how they will benefit thousands of social housing tenants and their families in the years to come.

> Case study 1 - The CoCo

In June 2011, the NFA published its report 'Building on the potential of ALMOs to invest in local communities', which proposed three major new types of ALMO for the future. All of them offer opportunities to bring in new investment, while retaining the community focus and tenant involvement which have made ALMOs such a success.

These options include transfer to a Community and Council-owned Organisation (CoCo), which is currently being explored by Gloucester City Homes, Dale and Valley Homes, and East Durham Homes. For the latter two ALMOs, CoCo is only one model of a suite of transfer options being modelled for Durham County Council by its advisers for the future of its housing stock.

Under this model, the ALMO would become the owner of the council's homes. The ALMO itself would be jointly owned by the community and the council. The council would retain the housing debt, agreed under the reform of the council housing funding system, and the CoCo would make payments from its income to cover that debt. This would mean that the new CoCo would still have strong financial ties with the council.

Because the homes would no longer be owned by the council, this option would allow the ALMO to borrow more, outside the rules which restrict public sector borrowing. But - unlike a traditional stock transfer to a housing association - the council and the ALMO would have strong ongoing financial ties and ownership.

From the desk of the chief executive...



Durham County Council is currently undertaking an options appraisal of its three social housing providers. A report was presented to the council's cabinet meeting on 14 December 2011 and one option, which has been consulted on and is being considered, is CoCo. The report recommended that further work will be undertaken on retention and all transfer options available to the council as the government's position on transfer continues to develop. - **Paul Tanney, chief executive, East Durham Homes**

The CoCo option means that Gloucester City Homes (GCH) would be jointly owned by the city council, tenants and independents. This would enable the company to maintain existing high levels of service and resident engagement. GCH would also be able to secure private finance to maintain the significant improvements made in tenants' homes in recent years, to regenerate existing homes and potentially build new homes to meet future housing needs. - **Ashley Green, chief executive, GCH**



> Case study 2 - The 'super ALMO'

Following the arrival of the first ever 'super ALMO', East Kent Housing in April this year, there are plans to form a similar body in Cornwall.

In April 2012, Carrick Housing is set to become a new and larger body called Cornwall Housing, which will take over management of homes from existing ALMO Carrick Housing, as well as responsibility for further council properties across the east of Cornwall - a total of around 10,700 homes.

This is the result of a council review of housing services in Cornwall, following recommendations by the Audit Commission. Carrick Housing, a three-star ALMO, is to merge with the council's own housing service operating in the east of the county. Because housing services will now be provided by one company, the expectation is that tenants will receive a better service.

Levels of tenant involvement have been high throughout the review process with regular newsletter updates, consultations and door-to-door road shows taking place in both Carrick and eastern areas.

Staff, board members, councillors and tenants will continue to work together to establish the new company and to ensure that the service provided is what tenants want. Tenant involvement and consultation will remain a high priority. A shadow board has also now been put in place.

If you would like to find out more about this review, please visit the council's website: www.cornwall.gov.uk

> Case study 3 - The Housing Mutual

Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH) has been granted approval to create England's largest social housing co-operative which will give tenants more say in how their housing services are delivered.

The plans will turn RBH into a mutual organisation owned and run by tenants and RBH employees. This would be, in effect, a co-operative housing company owned and run by local people, for local people and for local communities. It is the first time an ALMO has been involved in a housing co-operative of this kind.

Plans were approved and fully supported by the borough's two MPs, Simon Danczuk and Jim Dobbin and tenants voted overwhelmingly in favour of a stock transfer. Fittingly, the announcement was made by council leader Councillor Colin Lambert, on Wednesday 21 December 2011 at 8pm - the same date and time the Rochdale Pioneers opened their co-op store on Toad Lane in 1844, which is recognised as being the catalyst for the global Co-operative Movement.

The vote will result in a £169 million improvement programme for homes and estates in the first five years - much more than would have been possible if the houses had stayed with the council.

From experience...

Our vision - Nottingham City Homes

“It is important that as an ALMO we don’t just limit ourselves to housing management.

“Although this is our core service, our role extends much further than that. Our vision is to create homes and places where people want to live.

“As a major employer and commissioner in Nottingham, we are helping to tackle worklessness, providing jobs and training opportunities for people living on our estates. We are also working with local communities to improve the look and feel of estates, making sure they are safe, clean and green.

“The city council has agreed a new ten-year partnership agreement with Nottingham City Homes, with scope to develop to meet future and emerging needs. Our ambition is to build new council housing, and support the regeneration of our local communities.”

Nick Murphy, chief executive of Nottingham City Homes



Nick Murphy

How re-structuring helped us deliver more for tenants - Wolverhampton Homes



Lesley Roberts

In Wolverhampton Homes’ first four years of life it embarked on a radical re-structuring programme, designed to make the most efficient use of resources and ensure that it could deliver on its promises to tenants.

Lesley Roberts, chief executive, said: “It wasn’t easy, but we recognised that to offer our customers what we knew they deserved, we had to become far more efficient. We re-structured several teams and achieved cost savings of £2 million a year on salaries.

“Ultimately, this has helped us to put additional resources into front-line services that Wolverhampton tenants told us they desperately wanted such as fencing, new building, enhancing our void specification and bringing back empty homes into use.

“In addition, although our minor works scheme was cut from our capital budget, we managed to continue to offer it to tenants because of the savings we made.

“Tenants have told us time and again that this programme, which provides small, much-needed improvements to estates such as signs and notice boards, is really important to them, so I’m incredibly pleased we have been able to deliver it.”

A family affair - Stockport Homes

Stockport Homes has formed a multi-disciplinary team with a wide range of agencies to help vulnerable families in ‘high-priority’ areas.

The ACT Family approach is an innovative partnership designed to support families whose lives and future prospects are threatened by issues such as poor health or mental illness, offending behaviour, parenting difficulties, unemployment, and housing difficulties.

The team brings together committed, experienced staff from Stockport Homes, the Police and a range of community services such as housing, youth offending, welfare rights, parenting support, probation and health visiting.

Since the team was created in July 2011, positive changes have been made in the lives of 28 families. Some improvements have been seen almost immediately, with families’ weekly income increasing, reductions in offending behaviour, anti-social behaviour cases closed and some families supported into more appropriate accommodation.

Other long-term changes include child immunisations, increased school

attendance and access to mental health services. The team also has a hands-on approach to developing positive parenting practice, assisting with property conditions and supporting children in getting to school.

Other achievements to-date:

- **Issues being resolved quickly and efficiently**
- **An intensive approach to engagement**
- **Increased opportunities for joint working and learning**
- **Families being given one named worker rather than multiple workers**
- **A consistent approach to supporting families.**

