

Lewisham Homes recently celebrated its **first birthday** and since it was established at the beginning of 2007, the **South-east London ALMO** has made **significant progress** towards achieving a two-star rating in 2009, unlocking money to deliver a Decent Homes programme.

Lewisham Homes was established following an unflattering Audit Commission report into housing services across the borough. In a 2006 report, the organisation said the various estates were poorly maintained and it was critical of the repairs and maintenance service then in existence.

In just twelve months, Lewisham Homes has reduced the average time taken to complete non-urgent repairs by almost three days. For the year ending April 2007 the average was 9.52 days – this has now dropped to 6.73 days, a time in the top quartile for performance. The ALMO has also reduced the average time to re-let properties from 45.2 days for 2006-7 to 31.43 in December. Lewisham has also introduced a new single telephone number for reporting repairs in order to streamline its service, and has also established a range of methods for consulting residents, including a resident sounding

board, working parties, area panels and a dedicated Community Involvement Team.

It has launched a website, a residents magazine, and a dedicated team of staff responsible for tackling anti-social behaviour.

In September 2007, every Lewisham Homes staff member was asked to survey three residents face-to-face. Altogether staff spoke to 330 residents on 27 estates about caretaking, repairs and antisocial behaviour. The results were used as the basis for a company-wide analysis of the future of the organisation.

More than 400 residents attended the Lewisham Homes Open Day in November and since then 50 special notice boards have been installed across estates to promote communication with residents.

Lewisham Homes Chief Executive Andrew Potter has worked for Housing Associations,



Board member Chief May Agbakoba, left, with a resident

Tenant Management Organisations and ALMOs for almost 20 years. He says: "Lewisham is one of London's most challenging areas. We are changing the way the organisation looks, feels and thinks. It is a big job and it's about being realistic."

Chief May Agbakoba, a Lewisham resident for 33 years and now an ALMO board member, adds: "With Lewisham Homes we have a new start and a new way of doing things. This is showing us that things are changing and improving. Things are going to get better for us."

THE 2008 NFA PARLIAMENTARY RECEPTION SEE PAGE 3

ALMOs in ACTION

STOP PRESS!!!
RECORD ENTRIES FOR 2008 NFA AWARDS
SEE PAGE 2

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

Anything but an arms length relationship

In any **regeneration project** the relationship between an **ALMO** and its chosen contractor is a major factor in the **success** of the scheme and the **long-term prospects** of that community.



David Blunt, CEO

Through our delivery companies **Bramall Construction, Frank Haslam Milan and Haslam Homes**, we are a leader in the delivery of housing partnerships, affordable homes and social housing solutions across the North and Midlands.

We owe our success and continuing growth to our expertise, our culture, our people and our capacity to deliver a diverse range of quality products and services. We believe in total commitment to partners and stakeholders and delivery of the highest standards.

Roger Ward is our Director of Regeneration. He says: "Each partnership we form with an ALMO is different and we have not only gained invaluable experience from all of them, but delivered real results for the communities where we work."

We often work with the ALMO to ensure it can successfully meet the service level agreements it has in place with the Local Authority.

"From the start of the contract Keepmoat was very committed," says Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing's (KNH) Partnering Manager, Diane Hooley. "The partnership was an innovative way of working for us and all the staff from Keepmoat were willing to share their knowledge and best practice."

Working over three years, we delivered a £40 million programme of investment on behalf of KNH, all within budget and to a high standard.

We have also worked with Sheffield Homes. Their Director of Investment Janet Sharpe says: "We appointed Keepmoat as one of our partners in 2004 and since then they have been instrumental in helping us deliver our Decent Homes programme."

As a result of all our work Sheffield Homes has become a three-star ALMO organisation, twice inspected," she continues. "During these two

inspections Keepmoat helped us to prepare and worked hard to help us demonstrate value for money."

Allen Hickling, Managing Director of Keepmoat delivery company Frank Haslam Milan adds: "From the outset we discussed ways to help the local community by developing schemes that could directly feed off the investment and boost the area. Along with Sheffield Homes and Southey and Owlerton Area Regeneration partnership, we created a joint venture social enterprise - SOAR Build - to support the construction industry by creating local employment and training programmes. SOAR Build has been a huge success and has become a vital part of the Decent Homes project."

As some ALMOs move towards the end of their Decent Homes initiatives, many are preparing for the next phase in their development, one that often includes an ambition to be part of the National Affordable Housing Programme and to actively create new housing stock.



Northwards Housing residents Jack and Dorothy enjoying the UK's first older person's play area

Hello

and welcome to the seventh issue of **ALMOs In Action**, the only newsletter dedicated to arm's length council housing management.

The 2008 NFA parliamentary reception was highly successful, with 106 ALMO representatives and 64 MPs and peers thronging the Members Dining Room of the Houses of Parliament. Keynote speaker **Iain Wright MP** said it was the highest attendance he had seen at an event in the Dining Room and a testament to the enthusiasm and vibrancy of the ALMO sector.

"Giving tenants opportunities to have a greater role in running their homes and neighbourhoods is a priority for government," he announced. "ALMOs work and this has been demonstrated time and time again."

ALMOs work – in both senses of the word. They work in some of the most difficult and intractable areas of the country, with high levels of social deprivation and housing stock that has suffered from a lack of investment for decades. Yet they are delivering large scale decent homes programmes on time and on budget. They are also producing the majority of local authority housing efficiencies.

ALMOs work.



Dennis Rees, Chair

Respect!

Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH) has launched a film-based project designed to tackle antisocial behaviour before it starts.

Two films have been produced to encourage children and young people aged from 8 to 18 years to think about the consequences of their actions and develop a sense of respect and responsibility.

The films have been developed in partnership with Kirklees Council and an independent production company.

They depict typical scenarios that children and young people may encounter, including neighbourhood gangs and leaving home.

The films feature young local actors and have an accessible 'street' style. The production company worked alongside teachers and youngsters throughout the scripting, filming and editing, to make sure key messages are conveyed appropriately and effectively for the target age groups.

The films also include teaching materials to stimulate debate and discussion as part of the PSHE (Physical, Social, Health and Emotional Wellbeing) curriculum. All Kirklees schools will receive their own copy.

Local primary headmaster Brett Dye said: "This is an ideal resource to develop the social and emotional aspects of young people's learning – I like the way children are encouraged to see how they might make other people feel."

KNH Chair Cora Carter MBE added: "We are sure that students will enjoy these DVDs and see that they have to 'give respect to get respect!'"

News round-up

RECORD ENTRIES FOR 2008 NFA AWARDS

The 2008 NFA Awards have attracted a record number of entries beating the impressive total achieved in the inaugural event last year. By the time of the February 29 deadline, more than 200 entries across the seven categories had been received. The judging process to decide the winners who will be presented with their awards in a ceremony at the AGM in York in May is now underway. Given the high quality of the entries it is sure to be a challenging task!

The 2008 Awards are being judged by Roy Irwin, Chief Inspector of Housing, Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate; Michael Gelling, Chair, TAROE (Tenants and Residents Organisation of England); Janet Dean, Strategic housing adviser, Improvement and Development Agency (IdEA) and Steve Hale of sponsor Lovell Partnerships. The shortlist will be announced within the next few weeks.

YOUR HOMES NEWCASTLE MAKES COMMUNICATION EASIER

Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) has introduced a system designed to improve communication with deaf, hearing-and speech-impaired residents.

The ALMO has trained its staff in Typetalk – a telephone service that allows textphone users to dial a telephone used by hearing people and have a conversation with the help of an operator.

More than 40 YHN staff have been trained to use the service by Typetalk staff. The Typetalk training forms part of the ALMO's ongoing efforts to improve access to its services for disabled customers.

YHN Chief Executive John Lee said: "Typetalk is a vital service that allows people with hearing difficulties to communicate with us easily and quickly. In the past, the only way these people could talk to us was to get a friend or relative to call us on their behalf.

HOMESEAKER LAUNCHED

Barnsley ALMO Berneslai Homes has launched a new service designed to improve the way council homes are let across the city. The Homeseaker service is designed to make the lettings system easier to understand and more efficient. At present there are around 6,700 applications for only 1,200 empty council properties a year.

Barneslai Chief Executive Helen Correy says: "We had to address this issue and improve the lettings service in Barnsley. We can't re-house everyone on the housing register so it's vital that people have good quality advice and information about their re-housing options. We also need to be open about our vacancies and how we've let them."

Under the new scheme there will be just one re-housing list with five priority categories of housing need. Every Friday all new vacancies will be advertised and applicants then have until noon on the following Tuesday to apply to be considered for up to three vacancies each week. Figures from the first week showed that 46 per cent of people expressed their interest using the new phone system and 24 per cent via the website.

CELEBRATION DAY

Wolverhampton Homes and the local Federation of Tenants Associations recently staged a special celebration to welcome new communities to the city.

New tenants and leaseholders from Nigeria, the Caribbean, Africa, Somalia, India, Pakistan and Romania were all invited to the event. The guests wore traditional dress and enjoyed a variety of music and food from around the world.

Ann Guest MBE, chair of the Wolverhampton Federation of Tenants Associations, said: "The event was extremely successful and everyone came together to chat and have a really good time. The aim of the evening was to ensure new communities feel welcome in Wolverhampton and invite them to take an active part in tenant activities and come together in the areas where they live. We all learnt a lot about each other and I enjoyed taking part in the dancing and meeting everyone."



Abdul Aziz, from the Kalillo drumming band, talks rhythm with Ann Guest MBE

London calling

Junior Housing Minister **Iain Wright MP** praised the work of **ALMOs** during a speech to almost **200 MPs**, civil servants and ALMO representatives in February.

Speaking at a parliamentary reception organised by the NFA, Mr Wright, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, described ALMOs as "vibrant, enthusiastic" and "key" to the future of social housing.

Also present were Conservative housing spokesman Grant Shapps MP and Liberal Democrat spokesman Lembit Opik MP, who both pledged their support for the ALMO movement.

The parliamentary reception was staged in the historic Members Dining Room of the Houses of Parliament, overlooking the Thames. The event, held to highlight the achievements of the NFA and its members, was attended by ALMO representatives from across the country and over 64 MPs and Peers.

The reception provided ALMO tenants and Chief Executives with the opportunity to meet their local MP and to discuss the issues relevant to their local area. In total 106 ALMO representatives from 55 ALMOs attended the event.

Speaking at the reception, Mr Wright said: "I am familiar with the work of ALMOs and their marvellous sense of ambition, tenant involvement and empowerment. Giving tenants opportunities to have a greater role in running their homes and neighbourhoods is a priority for government. ALMOs work and this has been demonstrated time and time again."

He continued: "I see the ALMO movement as playing an absolutely key role in future housing provision, a role in which it will deliver more than just the Decent Homes programme and begin to provide new modern homes for the 21st century. There is a tremendous opportunity for the ALMO movement and I look forward to working with you in the coming years to make sure that ALMOs continue to remain at the heart of their communities."

The parliamentary reception was sponsored by housing regeneration specialists Keepmoat and was hosted by Clive Betts MP, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for ALMOs.

Following the reception seven new members joined the APPG, with several others expressing an interest in membership.

NFA Chair Dennis Rees said:

"ALMOs have come a long way in a very short space of time. Less than six years since the first ones were established, 67 ALMOs and three aspirant ALMOs are now managing and improving more than one million council - homes between them – that's over half of all council housing. The key to this success is the involvement of tenants in real decision-making about the management of their homes. Tenants have shown that they can make difficult decisions and sound judgements and they know what is needed on their estates."

Representatives from the three main political parties voiced their support for ALMOs:

"Once in a while something like ALMOs comes along that just sells itself. Although all three of us are here from different parties, there are some things we all agree on and ALMOs are one of these things."

NFA Chair Dennis Rees with Keepmoat CEO David Blunt, centre, and Iain Wright MP

"Giving tenants opportunities to have a greater role in running their homes and neighbourhoods is a priority for government. ALMOs work and this has been demonstrated time and time again." Iain Wright MP - Junior housing minister

"The Conservative party are very keen to give ALMOs our full support. I think the work of ALMOs must continue and I wish the movement well in the future."

Grant Shapps MP - Conservative housing spokesman



Guests mingle



NFA Chair Dennis Rees with Keepmoat CEO David Blunt, centre, and Iain Wright MP



Under-Secretary of State Iain Wright MP



Action on employment

Sheffield Homes Helps Unemployed

Sheffield Homes has become one of the first South Yorkshire organisations to enter into a new employment agreement with JobCentre Plus. The two organisations have signed a 'Local Employee Partnership' designed to help the long term unemployed into careers in housing.

The ALMO has agreed a number of steps to help local people back into work, including bespoke pre-employment training courses tailored to a variety of jobs within Sheffield Homes. These lead to a guaranteed interview. Sheffield Homes Chief Executive Peter Morton

said: "At Sheffield Homes we try to benefit the communities we serve, striving to make them better places to live and work. It's really important for us to offer jobs with long term prospects to local people, particularly those who may find it difficult to enter the job market. We have had some excellent members of staff join recently via this route, and I look forward to many more".

"The agreement will go a long way towards helping our disadvantaged customers to enjoy the benefits of work by offering guaranteed opportunities and training".



Peter Morton and Caroline Flint MP

Caroline Flint MP, the then Minister of State for Employment and Welfare Reform, visited Sheffield to discuss Local Employee Partnerships and sign Sheffield Homes' new agreement, alongside Sheffield Homes Chief Executive Peter Morton.

Pathways in to work



Ashley Crumbley with Joe, a year 10 pupil and one of the first to benefit from the scheme.

Wigan and Leigh Housing has drawn up ambitious plans to offer jobs and training to young people living in some of the borough's most disadvantaged areas.

Chair Geoff Roberts said the ALMO wants to

make a direct contribution to tackling deprivation on local council estates.

"We have a social responsibility to contribute to improving the quality of life for our residents. The company has a good track record in training and assisting people into employment, but new research into deprivation has led us to fundamentally challenge our approach."

New figures show that 30 of the 32 most deprived areas in the borough are on council estates.

Wigan and Leigh is now working in partnership with Connexions, Job Centre Plus, the local college and two local schools, on a scheme called "Pathways into Training and Employment".

The scheme was drawn up by Wigan and Leigh

Housing Chief Executive Ashley Crumbley. It will provide a mixture of vocational qualifications, training and work experience for up to eight Year 10 and 11 pupils at the two schools. In addition, the ALMO will take on more than 20 apprentices from across the borough and support people from deprived backgrounds to go on to university.

Wigan and Leigh Housing will also host an annual "Apprentice of the Year" ceremony, with the winner being offered a bursary for further education.

Altogether up to 30 people from council estates will get help at any one time, and the ALMO says it plans to invest £186,000 annually over the next three years.

"The new training and employment framework provides a springboard from which young people from our deprived communities can gain skills and employment," says Ashley Crumbley.

Apprentice excellence

Two Homes for Haringey Apprentices were among 40 students who received a 'Conel' (College of North East London) Excellence Award at a recent ceremony.

Natasha McDonald, a second year plumbing apprentice, and Tarkan Kurter, a plumber who completed his apprenticeship in July, received trophies to mark their outstanding commitment and achievements. They each received the Skills for Plumbing Excellence Award, sponsored by the Worshipful Company of Plumbers.

Natasha joined Homes for Haringey in September 2006 as an apprentice plumber and is now half way through her second year

of studies, working towards the NVQ Level 2.

Tarkan joined Homes for Haringey in September 2004 as an apprentice and successfully completed the NVQ Level 3 within three years. He is now employed full time while studying for the National Certificate in Construction.

Homes for Haringey is committed to addressing the manual skills shortage in the UK building industry and last year had over 100 applications for the eight places on its coveted apprentice scheme. All apprentices are local people.

This year eight apprentices in the electrical, carpentry, plumbing and plastering trades will



Natasha and Tarkan

complete their three- and four-year training. Most will complete the scheme in July 2008, with the remaining two in July 2009.

Never too old to play!

A project financed by Manchester ALMO Northwards Housing attracted national and international media attention after its opening in January. The UK's first older person's play area, in Dam Head Park, was the subject of stories in no less than seven national newspapers – the Daily Mail, Metro, the Sun, the Times, the Daily Mirror, the Guardian and the Daily Express. The play area was also featured on the BBC One O'Clock News, Granada Reports, the ITV Evening News and US TV station ABC News.

"We are delighted to support the Dam Head Residents Association in this venture," says Chief Executive Robin Lawler, "and the fact that the project has been of such interest to the media has been terrific. We are sure the Older Peoples Play Area will bring huge benefits to the community."

The Dam Head play area was constructed close to the under fives play area, so grannies and granddads can have some fun of their own. There are six pieces of equipment – all simple to use and designed to gently exercise different parts of the body.

DAMRA Chair Joan Fitzgerald and her friend Pam Angelucci are already regular visitors. "It's great fun," said Joan. "Pam and I had such

a giggle using the equipment – I'd recommend anyone to come and have a go – after all you're never too old to play!"

The Dam Head Residents Association (DAMRA) and the Friends of Dam Head Park were inspired by a similar playground in Germany.

Age Concern's Director General Gordon Lishman has welcomed the project. He said: "A well-designed fitness park could be a great way to encourage older people to exercise and socialise. Exercising a few times a week can make a big difference to someone's health and doesn't have to be strenuous. Equally, socialising with others can help to alleviate feelings of loneliness and depression. Many older people aren't exercising enough and we are really keen for local authorities to offer a range of accessible and affordable facilities that promote physical activity in later life."



76-year old Joan Fitzgerald has some fun

TGHC weeds out untidy tenant

The Gateshead Housing Company (TGHC) has evicted a tenant who refused to tidy the rubbish-strewn garden of his three-bedroom semi in Blaydon, in defiance of a court order. The eviction was sought as part of TGHC's ongoing drive to crack down on troublesome tenants and antisocial behaviour.

District judges granted the order after hearing a number of complaints from other residents about the overgrown lawns and rubbish strewn around the front, side and back gardens of the property.

The courts had originally granted a six-month suspension of the eviction if the tenant kept his garden tidy, removed all rubbish and made repairs to a window on the property.

But when the company's Neighbourhood Relations Team visited the property on a number of occasions there had been no improvement.

TGHC Chief Executive Bill Fullen said: "The Gateshead Housing Company wants to give local people the homes they deserve, and we are doing so through our £1m-a-week

programme of major improvements. But we also have to help people feel safe in their homes and have pride in their neighbourhoods, whatever their age, race or background. Tenants and leaseholders have told us that dealing with anti-social behaviour on estates is their number one priority – and that includes cracking down on tenants who do not look after their gardens. This tenant simply refused to tidy his garden and the company, through the courts, took this action to evict him."

He added: "We intend to carry on making sure that the small minority of tenants who cause nuisance and annoyance to local people are dealt with severely, and show that there is no place for anti-social behaviour of any type in Gateshead."

NFA Update

Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing in the East Midlands became the **67th live ALMO** in December 2007. A number of ALMOs have also achieved a **two star rating** in recent months. By February 2008, there were **14 three-star** and **35 two-star ALMOs in existence**. And as newer ALMOs start their **decent homes work**, an increasing number of early ALMOs are finishing their programmes.

In the meantime, the busy autumn period moved seamlessly into an even more hectic winter and spring for the NFA. The publication of the Housing and Regeneration Bill, additional funds for ALMOs and the announcement of a review of the housing revenue account subsidy system will all have major implications for the ALMO movement in the longer term.

A surprise reshuffle led to a change in Housing Minister, with Caroline Flint replacing Yvette Cooper, who has moved to the Treasury, where her knowledge of the self financing proposals promoted by the NFA, CIH and HouseMark may be useful in the next spending review.

The Housing and Regeneration Bill was published on 16 November. The NFA welcomes the Bill but would like to see stronger provision to ensure a level playing field for all social housing tenants when it comes to regulation and the ability to exercise management choice.

The main part of the Bill relates to the setting up of the Housing and Communities Agency and the new social housing regulator OFTENANT (the Office for Tenants and Social Landlords) to replace the Housing Corporation. The key issues for ALMOs are:

- The Bill specifically excludes councils and ALMOs from the remit of the social housing regulator but the government plans to include further legislation to extend it to them at a later stage.
- However, the NFA believes that tenants across the social sectors should have the same standards applied and the right to choose a new housing manager, should their own provider fail to deliver an adequate service. We also want to ensure that the legislation will allow ALMOs to be considered should the regulator decide to transfer the management of a failing RSL (registered social landlord) to another body. We would also like to see tenants given information about the performance of providers at a local level so that they can compare the service they receive.
- The Bill includes a clause to enable councils and ALMOs to move out of the subsidy regime; either for new build or for the whole stock, paving the way for self financing to be implemented. This will offer ALMOs long-term financial stability and security.

In December the government announced £2.4bn for ALMO Decent Homes funding in 2008-11. This was a significant achievement in the light of the increased profile of new build and it is the first time that a specific ALMO allocation separate from other Decent Homes funds has been set. This success is undoubtedly due to the success demonstrated by ALMOs in Decent Homes delivery, service improvement, tenant empowerment and efficiency gains. This increased allocation will now allow round 6 ALMOs to move forward. The government aims to agree the remaining bids over the next few months.

While this Decent Homes funding was good news, the revenue position and the long term sustainability of housing stock remains an issue. The NFA has strongly argued that, unless defects in the subsidy system are addressed, both service improvements and the improved condition of housing stock will deteriorate in the longer term. The results of the self financing case studies are due to be published soon and it is anticipated that they will demonstrate the validity of our proposals. It is very welcome news that the government has now accepted that these defects need to be addressed - a wholesale review was announced just before Christmas. This will also consider rent policy, recommend subsidy determinations for the next two years and make a decision on the implementation of self-financing, probably by 2010.

Two NFA regional seminars in February discussed the outcome of the self-financing case studies and the implications of the subsidy review. They also considered alternative extensions to current ALMO structures, such as TMO and Community Gateway models. In December governance seminars specifically for Board members took place in Manchester and London. And the first of a series of free officer level workshops for those ALMOs not yet at two stars took place at the end of 2007, as part of the NFA Support Framework.

The 2008 NFA Annual Conference and AGM will take place, once again, in York on 13th and 14th May 2008. This is always a major event for the sector and last year it was attended by almost 300 delegates from nearly every ALMO. It will also be the forum at which the winners of the NFA Annual Awards, sponsored by Lovell Partnerships, will be announced.

Money Matters

Residents of **Sandwell Homes** in the West Midlands can now **seek help and advice on dealing with debt** thanks to Money Matters.

The Money Matters booklet, produced by Sandwell Homes in partnership with Sandwell Council's Welfare Rights Unit, the Six Towns Credit Union and Sandwell Citizens Advice Bureau, was written to provide residents with valuable, consistent guidance on dealing with financial difficulties.

Project Officer Kelly Morris said: "Money Matters contains information on how to maximise your income, where and how to find free independent impartial advice on your finances and how to access affordable credit. There is also a self-help section aimed at individuals who may otherwise be reluctant to ask for help until their financial situation becomes unmanageable and spirals out of control."

Meanwhile, Northwards Housing now works closely with the Manchester Credit Union to help tenants obtain credit and encourage them to save.

Manchester Credit Union (MCU) is a local, ethical, financial co-operative, owned and controlled by members. It is open to anyone living or working within the city of Manchester. Alison Foster, Head of Finance at Northwards Housing, said: "Doorstop lenders are becoming a huge problem in the north Manchester area.

We all need some extra cash from time to time, but for some families access to affordable credit can be very difficult and many of them turn to doorstop lenders for help."



Project Officer Kelly Morris with the new Money Matters booklet

New colours add life to Huddersfield tower blocks

A **creative refurbishment** of two **1960s tower blocks** has given the residents of Berry Brow, outside Huddersfield, more reasons to be cheerful during 2008.



Before... and after



The towers, which stand in an otherwise attractive rural setting, had become run down and unsightly. So Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH) refurbished the blocks, repainting the outside and replacing dingy, yellowed balcony panels with fresh, bright colours.

KNH worked hard to involve tenants and nearby residents in decisions from the outset of the project, and was particularly keen to ensure the new colour schemes were appropriate to the semi-rural setting.

The ALMO commissioned arts and regeneration agency Loca to carry out a carefully planned

creative consultation process. A team of artists and designers ran a series of activities in April to encourage residents to consider how they would like the blocks to look. Residents of all ages and backgrounds were involved.

KNH Neighbourhood Manager Jacky Thomas added: "The towers are a very visible part of the local landscape, so it was very important that the designers took this into account, while also drawing on the ideas of people who live in and around the flats. They've done a fantastic job and the whole scheme has been completed from start to finish in nine months, bang on schedule."

New initiative to tackle domestic violence

Victims of violence or domestic abuse in Doncaster can now continue to live in their own homes without fear of attack, thanks to a new initiative by the Safer Doncaster Partnership.

The Doncaster Sanctuary Scheme was devised to help local people at risk of violence, intimidation or harassment. The Safer

Doncaster Partnership is a statutory body made up of representatives from St Leger Homes, Doncaster Borough Council, the Police, the local health authority and other agencies who have come together to help reduce crime and disorder in the borough.

St Leger Chief Executive Martin Musgrave said: "Through our involvement in the Safer Doncaster

Partnership, we are working towards helping our tenants feel safer. This scheme enables us to offer support to tenants affected by domestic violence or other harassment."

Mayor Martin Winter, Chair of the Safer Doncaster Partnership, added: "Our aim is for all residents and tenants to feel safe in their homes and neighbourhoods."

Working Closely

Following a **successful pilot**, **Homes in Havering** has **changed the role** of its housing service officers so that staff spend **more time** based on estates around the borough.



Local resident Mrs Hulbert and Estate Officer Agnes Ogunsanwo

The move was introduced in response to requests from residents to see more staff on estates. The role of the housing officer was split, creating tenancy services officers and estate officers. Both groups of officers were given laptops with internet cards, providing rapid access to all the files they would normally use in an office.

A pilot project in October 2006 proved so popular with residents that the project was quickly rolled out across the borough. It has vastly increased the number of staff on estates, made them more visible and easier for residents to contact. Overall resident satisfaction has increased to 81 per cent.

Local resident Mrs Hulbert said: "We've never had such a good staff presence on our estate as we do now."