

ALMOs in **ACTION**

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



Children enjoy face painting at the Kensington & Chelsea TMO Fun Day

Hello

and welcome to the fifth issue of **ALMOs In Action**, featuring the latest news and views from the world of council housing management.



Dennis Rees,
Chair, the National Federation of ALMOs

It has been an eventful few months, to say the least. Two bouts of severe flooding – the worst on record in many areas – caused misery for tens of thousands of tenants and ordinary householders. We all watched amazed as the extent of the flooding was revealed on the nightly news – street after street awash, whole towns cut off. While the government counts the cost of the damage, which already runs into the billions, we can at least be grateful for the dedication shown by the hundreds of ALMO staff who worked tirelessly throughout the crisis to help stricken tenants in their regions.

Meanwhile, the NFA has continued to build its national profile and command the attentions of the media. In my capacity as Chair of the NFA, I have appeared in recent months in the Guardian and on Five News questioning David Cameron on the Conservatives' social housing policy. While housing is truly high on the news agenda, we want to ensure the views of ALMOs and their tenants continue to be heard.

Perhaps the most significant development this summer has been housing's move to the top of the political agenda. Gordon Brown used some of his very first speeches as Prime Minister to announce his intention to put "affordable housing within the reach of not just the few, but the many." As many as three million new homes could be built if the legislation proceeds, including some 60,000 new "affordable" homes. While we wait to see just how many of these new homes will be council housing stock, Mr Brown's recognition of the importance of new build after decades of increasingly severe under-supply can only be excellent news. The figures speak for themselves – while 1.5 million people line up on the waiting lists, just 300 council homes were built in 2006.

News round-up

CODEMAN 4 HARINGEY

Two Star ALMO Homes for Haringey has invested in the latest mobile computer technology to assist in the delivery of its Decent Homes programme.

New Codeman 4 software will be used to accurately assess the condition of housing stock across Haringey. The data from this housing survey will then be used to create forecasts, budgets and reports to more efficiently plan and implement Decent Homes improvement works across the ALMO.



Surveyors and Decent Homes contractors in Haringey can access the survey results on the move via Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) which will enable improvement works to be carried out more quickly and efficiently than was possible before.

The results of the housing survey and the progress of any Decent Homes improvements will then be made available to Homes for Haringey tenants and leaseholders via the ALMOs website www.homeforharingey.org

THE HOUSEMARK BLUEPRINT

HouseMark has published an in-depth guide to future ALMO development. *ALMOs Tomorrow* sets out different strategic options for the sector.

Based on extensive research into the activity of leading ALMOs, and reflecting the expertise of its authors, the guide sets out five strategic options for ALMOs:-

- Functioning solely as a manager of the sponsor council's stock.
- Becoming a broader housing business, managing homes for housing associations and other councils.
- Providing wider neighbourhood services, such as training for young people, care in the community and neighbourhood safety.
- Joining large scale regeneration and renewal partnerships with councils, housing associations and developers.
- Becoming a resident-led stock transfer landlord.

Report joint author David Hall said: "ALMOs have delivered massive improvements in services and housing conditions. As many reach the end of their Decent Homes programme, they are working with their residents and sponsor councils to do even more."

HouseMark Chief Executive Ross Fraser said: "It is quite clear that many ALMOs are well on their way to being exactly the kind of multi-skilled landlord John Hills says we need for the 21st century."

MARK OF SUCCESS FOR STOCKPORT HOMES

Stockport Homes has received a prestigious national award in recognition of its excellent customer service.

The ALMO was awarded a Charter Mark following a detailed site assessment in May this year. Inspectors were so impressed with the performance of Stockport Homes that they awarded the ALMO a maximum score of 100 per cent during the Charter Mark assessment.

ALMO staff were specifically praised for their "passion, enthusiasm and delivery of excellent services to all customers".

Stockport Homes Chief Executive Helen McHale said: "Attaining the government Charter Mark is a real recognition of our commitment to customer service and is certainly an achievement of which we can be proud".

Charter Mark is a government scheme established to reward organisations with an excellent customer focus in the public sector.

WISH YOUR RENT WAS HERE

The Gateshead Housing Company has come up with an innovative way to tackle late rent payments over the summer. To remind tenants that there is 'no such thing as a rent holiday', ALMO staff will be sending out 'wish you were here' style postcards to tenants that have rent outstanding.

Although light-hearted, the campaign does carry a serious message, reminding tenants that the summer holidays can place an extra strain on finances and that the ALMO can offer support, assistance and advice to tenants who are struggling to make rent payments.



The Chief Executive Bill Fullen says: "The majority of our tenants pay their rent on time but unfortunately, despite our best efforts, a small minority simply refuse to pay. We make every effort to offer help and advice to tenants who are having genuine difficulties making their rent payments on time. However the rent our tenants pay goes directly towards essential services, such as emergency repairs to homes and it is unfair for the actions of small minority to effect wider community services."

Rising Waters

After inundating **thousands of householders** across the North of England and the Midlands, **summer's torrential rains** moved south.

And when the rivers Severn and Chelt in Gloucestershire duly burst their banks and sent torrents of muddy water washing through Gloucester, Cheltenham, Tewkesbury and other towns across the region, media coverage was extensive and spectacular.

Staff from local ALMOs Gloucester City Homes (GCH) and Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH) worked tirelessly to alleviate the watery misery inflicted on thousands of their tenants by the worst floods on record.

Gloucester, sitting right on the banks of the Severn, was particularly badly hit. And things got even worse when the nearby Mythe Water Pumping Station itself flooded, leaving many homes in the city without water for days. The lights then went off as the local electricity supply station closed down.

While only around 75 tenants were affected by flooded homes, every tenant had lost water supplies to their homes. Forced to close their office due to the loss of power and water supplies, Gloucester City Homes' staff fought to maintain essential services and support customers throughout the crisis. They managed to keep their main Customer Services Line operational throughout the crisis and reopened their office to the public after only two days.

Staff worked around the clock to ensure that customers had access to the practical help, advice and information they needed.

The team helped:-

- To provide sandbags to homes threatened by flooding
- To support Gloucester City Council's Homelessness Team in securing temporary accommodation for displaced residents
- By visiting all GCH tenants homes that had

been flooded and helping with the drying process, essential repairs and gas and electric safety checks

- Deliver bottles of bleach to those homes that had been flooded after the water had subsided.

The team also diverted GCH teams from their normal duties in order to visit all sheltered housing tenants and others known to be elderly or vulnerable, to provide advice, information and practical help with drinking water supplies.

Gloucester City Homes Chief Executive Ashley Green said: "This was an extremely difficult situation - not only for our customers but also for our staff who were exceptional in the efforts they made to maintain a service to customers and provide them with help and support throughout the emergency."

In Cheltenham approximately 350 homes flooded, with 33 Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH) residents flooded out of their homes and £260,000 worth of damage. Combined with the total loss of water supply for ten days, and a lack of drinking water for two weeks, this was the biggest civil emergency operation in the town since the Second World War. CBH provided an 8am-8pm service, 7 days a week, throughout the two and a half weeks of the crisis, with a 24 hour helpline.

Staff at CBH delivered a quarter of a million litres of water to the elderly and vulnerable. Twelve CBH vans delivered water every day to 500 tenants living in sheltered accommodation and 200 other vulnerable individuals. Staff also dealt with almost 500 phone calls about water distribution and flood damage.

All offices were able to stay open, thanks to the provision of portaloos and bottled water, a

change to two daily shifts and mobile working. All available CBH staff participated in such key activities as assisting the Borough Council at the five main water distribution sites and delivering thousands of leaflets to tenants on ways to manage during the water shortage.

CBH staff also assisted vulnerable tenants with sanitation issues, as the water crisis meant a total loss of water supply to taps, toilets and bathing facilities.

Cheltenham Borough Homes Chief Executive Paul Davies said: "Our staff are the clearest demonstration of why we were rated 'excellent' by the Audit Commission. Everyone did the right thing for our residents, going well beyond the call of duty to protect the vulnerable."

Chair Mike Tyrrell added: "Without doubt CBH helped prevent what could have been a tragedy if elderly and disabled residents had been left without water for more than a week."



Cheltenham under water

Audit Award Acclaim



Six three-star ALMOs received plaudits from the Audit Commission in its annual **Housing Excellence Awards**.

Carrick Housing, Cheltenham Borough Homes, Golden Gates Housing, Kensington and Chelsea TMO, Stockport Homes and CityWest Homes were all singled out for praise and presented with awards by the Rt Hon Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Ruth Kelly, at the Chartered Institute of Housing's annual conference in Harrogate.

Audit Commission Chairman Michael

O'Higgins, said: "This is the fifth year of the Housing Excellence Awards, which aim to encourage and celebrate excellence and promote improvement across the housing sector. All these organisations have demonstrated a high-quality, customer-focused service. They are not only performing strongly but are also delivering continuous improvement by being innovative and developing services for the future. They show the value of housing inspections driving improvement."

Secretary of State Ruth Kelly added: "I am delighted to present these awards and I'm particularly pleased that the winning organisations are being recognised for their strong customer focus. We want to put residents first and I congratulate the winners for doing just this."

Representatives of the winning organisations attended a lunch hosted by the Audit Commission's Housing Inspectorate prior to the awards ceremony.

Action on ASB

Tyneside Intervention

Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) has been selected to run **a new Government-backed project** to combat **anti-social behaviour** in the Newcastle region.

The ALMO fought off strong competition from household names in the voluntary sector to be awarded control of Family Intervention Projects (FIPs), developed by the Home Office as part of the Government's Respect Agenda.

YHN will run FIPs in Newcastle and four members of staff - who have specialist social work and youth skills - will begin working with

a total of nine families from across the city.

Funded by central Government, the FIP employs specialist staff who use targeted methods to reduce or resolve the anti-social behaviour - late night noise, abuse and harassment - that some families can cause. Each family is assigned a key worker who will offer intensive support, often with the help of other organisations. One option might

be to move a family out of an estate and work with them as they make a fresh start in another area. Parenting skills can also be improved through special classes.

The support from the FIP lasts for up to a year and is no 'soft option'. If families refuse to take part a range of other measures can be implemented including eviction, parenting orders and anti-social behaviour orders.

Care and Remote Control Cars

Groups of young people in Newton Heath, north Manchester have been learning the harder-hitting facts of life whilst having fun with remote controlled cars. And according to local residents and shopkeepers, this unusual combination is having a positive impact on the community.

'Operation Care' was devised by two of Northwards Housing's Neighbourhood Wardens. One of the wardens, Lee Roberts, remembers: "There were huge groups of young people hanging around and there had been big problems with ASB. We knew something had to be done for them."

Lee and colleague Alan Greensmith used funding from the government's Respect Agenda to set up a unique 10-week, Friday-night programme for local youngsters, in which they would learn about the real effects of ASB. Lee also invited representatives from drugs agencies, youth intervention schemes and the police to talk tough to the lads. Station Commander Jon Crawley, from Ancoats' Fire Station, was happy to host 'Operation Care' in their community room - on the condition that he could talk to the young men too. He said: "It's been marvellous to be involved in this programme. We've never seen anything like it before and we're thrilled to be part of it."

Participant Chris Parker said: "Watching the video about calling the fire station out for no reason was really sad. It made me not want to do it again."

The youngsters were rewarded for regular attendance with remote-controlled car races. Alan Greensmith explains: "We got the lads to keep coming back week after week by making and racing remote control cars at the end of each session - and if they got through the whole programme with full attendance and clean records, we took them go-karting at a professional track." "If the lads committed any ASB during the programme, they'd lose 'points', but could earn them back by taking part in street cleaning days." Lee says: "On one session, they filled 22 bags of litter! And they came back the week after."

Carmine Grimshaw, the owner of 'Fresh and Frozen' in Newton Heath, said: "Operation Care has been running outside my shop and it's had a very, very positive impact on the community."

Lee adds: "I've worked with young people all my life and out of all of the schemes of its kind, this is the best. No youth project can do what Operation Care is doing."

Northwards Housing Chair, Ade Alao says: "I'm thrilled that our Wardens are taking it

upon themselves to run this innovative project. The work they do is amazing and we're all really proud of what's being achieved in the area to tackle anti-social behaviour."



ASB DVD

Youngsters from Blyth Community College have brought the issues surrounding anti-social behaviour to life in a new DVD.

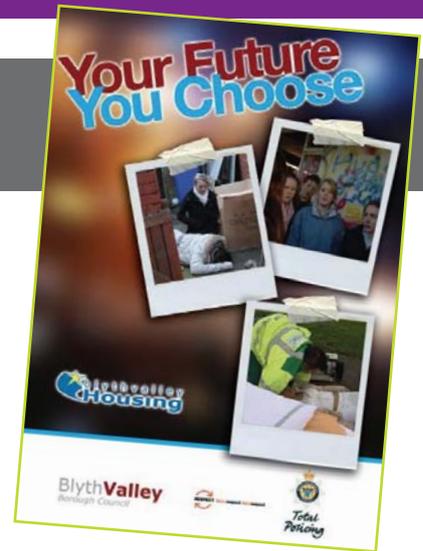
Blyth Valley Housing's Anti-Social Behaviour Unit commissioned pupils in the Year 10 drama group to produce an interactive DVD entitled 'Your Future, You Choose', designed to teach young people the consequences of anti-social behaviour.

The hard-hitting DVD deals with underage drinking, bullying, fighting and criminal damage. Each section highlights the dangerous and potentially fatal consequences of these anti-social activities. Students were

given the basic plot but wrote the script themselves and also appeared as actors. The DVD is part of the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit's long-term strategy to reduce anti-social behaviour through education.

Colin Blackett, Assistant Manager of Blyth Valley Housing's Anti-Social Behaviour Unit, said: "I am delighted we have been able to produce a DVD that is really high quality. This has been a real team effort and we are very proud of the finished article."

Year 10 pupil Liam Beattie said that the experience had been "really good" and that he had learnt a lot about what goes into



making a film. All the pupils who took part in the project will receive accreditation towards their overall GCSE qualification.

Kids in the Community

Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH) staff went back to school for four weeks this summer as part of a new project designed to encourage an interest in the community amongst local children.

The RBH Community Kids project aims to help young people develop a sense of identity with the communities around them and a greater understanding of the impact their behaviour has on other people. It has been developed in partnership with five schools that have a large intake from local council estates. A class of year four and five pupils at Boarshaw Community Primary School were the first to take part and the programme will be



rolled out to the other schools from September.

RBH staff will deliver the lessons while the students learn about their own community and go out and about photographing things they like and dislike locally. An afternoon tea for tenants and residents provides an opportunity for the pupils to discuss the impact of adults' and childrens' behaviour on their community. Finally, pupils can design their own estate.

RBH Chair Gill Walch said: "This is an opportunity to create positive links with young people living on our estates. We want to encourage better behaviour and show the children that they can make a difference and make their communities better places to live for everyone. Our staff are very excited about getting involved".

The project is part of RBH's Communities First programme, which recognises, rewards and promotes individuals and groups who make a positive contribution to their local communities. RBH Acting Managing Director Gareth Swarbrick explains: "This is a very important project for RBH and shows how we can work creatively with schools to make a real difference".

Meanwhile, **Hackney Homes** is celebrating

the first anniversary of an innovative, multi-agency approach to managing one of its larger estates. Last year, an office was established to provide a single hub for a wide range of services from Hackney Homes and partner Mouchel Parkman, London Borough of Hackney's anti-social behaviour project, Homerton Police and SHP, an agency providing support to Hackney tenants.

After almost a year in operation, the effective working partnership was celebrated this week with the official launch of the Homerton Neighbourhood Office in Hackney.

Hackney Homes' Chief Executive, Steve Tucker said the past year had seen a huge leap forward in tackling anti-social behaviour, both through enforcement and diversionary activities, particularly for young people in the area. "Working so closely alongside the police has meant that anti-social behaviour can now be addressed and resolved quickly. We are also working with our partners on a range of diversionary youth activities. For example the Kickz programme, run on Gascoyne Estate, offers young people the chance to learn football and other sports skills from coaches and experts from local football clubs."

Buddies in Slough

People 1st Slough has launched a pioneering buddy scheme to engage with young people in the area.

The scheme is designed to highlight the importance of citizenship and participation in the local community at a young age. Issues covered include ways to reduce nuisance

behaviour, the correct disposal of waste and the role of the ALMO's Estate Service Officers.

Estate Services Team Manager Mario Muir says: "The buddy scheme is an excellent opportunity for us to spread awareness of the work we carry out and to listen to the views of young people. We have made

presentations to over 2000 youngsters at four schools so far, and we aim to have a buddy attached to every local school."

To date the scheme has been a notable success and has received a very positive response from youngsters across the ALMO.

Therapy in the Garden

Christine Gash's garden is a **vivid testament** to the Kirklees tenant's triumph over a series of **major personal problems**.

In recent years, the 61-year grandmother has had to cope with a stroke and a heart attack, as well as the loss of her business, her home and her husband. But her horticultural efforts since moving into a new Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH) home have helped Christine to recover and regain her strength.

"I use gardening as physio," she says. "It takes me a long time to do things, but I keep going because I know the results will be worth the effort."

Christine has transformed her garden from an overgrown tangle into a brightly coloured profusion of flowers – and her efforts have been rewarded. She took first prize in the South Kirklees best garden category in the first KNH annual gardening competition. On the morning the judges arrived to present the prize, she had just been burgled.

She moved into her bungalow four years ago as part of the recuperation after her heart attack. Due to her recent health problems, Christine has short-term memory problems so

cannot remember the names of any plants but still managed to create an award-winning garden.

Christine was delighted by her prize. "The bungalow garden was really overgrown but it has restored my life," she explains. "I was never a keen gardener but it is now my little world. I get most of my plants from the waste sections of garden centres. I get a real sense of achievement out of nurturing plants that no one else wanted – and I love getting a bargain."

Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing Communications Manager Penny Allison says: "Christine is not only one of the most optimistic and enthusiastic people I've ever met, but she's a great gardener too."

KNH Director of Neighbourhoods Paul Buckley said: "Many of our tenants work very hard in their gardens and their efforts deserve to be recognised. Their gardens bring pleasure to their neighbours and help to make sure their estates are attractive places to live."



Christine with competition judge Graham Porter and granddaughter Bethany

Bulletin Board

ALMO Round Up

Salix Homes in Salford became the 66th live ALMO in July. St Leger Homes of Doncaster and Homes for Haringey successfully achieved two stars on inspection, while Gloucester City Homes accomplished the impressive feat of moving from a zero to two star rating in less than 18 months.

In July the Housing Corporation announced three major new developments for the ALMO movement. For the first time, ALMOs have been awarded Housing Management Accreditation status and are also included in the projects shortlisted in the Northern Housing Challenge for housing-led regeneration projects. Additionally, eight ALMOs have passed the pre-qualification process that will enable them to bid for social housing grant to build new homes. A further round next year is expected to attract even more ALMOs.

Meanwhile ALMOs continue to drive forward the efficiency agenda with ten London ALMOs, through the London Area Procurement Network (LAPN) signing Framework Agreements with more than 25 contractors that will save their residents millions of pounds on housing maintenance contracts over the next five years.

NFA Events

The NFA has a full schedule of events planned for the autumn. A **consultation brainstorm** on 5 September discussed the NFA response to the Housing Green paper and a series of **free workshops**, specifically for those ALMOs not yet at two stars, are planned as part of the NFA Support Framework. The first officer level sessions are taking place on procurement and inspection in October and November.

A major **conference on New Build** will be held in London on 3 October and **governance seminars** for Board members will take place in Manchester on 6 December and in London on 11 December.

A **parliamentary reception** for MPs is planned at the House of Commons on 28 November, while the 2008 **NFA Annual Conference** will take place, once again, in York on 13 and 14 May.

For further details of events see the NFA website at www.almos.org.uk

Choosing Health

Health was the theme of this year's **Kensington & Chelsea TMO Fun Day**, which attracted **over 200 residents** to Holland Park in West London in spite of rainy weather.

Residents met up with friends and neighbours to enjoy a summer barbeque, whilst children played on bouncy castles, had their faces painted and took part in fun circus workshops. The Football in the Community team from Chelsea Football Club was also there to promote sports and fitness by putting energetic youngsters through their paces.

Kensington & Chelsea Council and Kensington & Chelsea Primary Care Trust (PCT) used the day to launch a major public health and wellbeing initiative: Choosing Good Health – Together.

This borough-wide initiative was developed in conjunction with a variety of agencies, including the Metropolitan Police, the London Fire Brigade and the voluntary sector. It is designed to implement the priorities identified

in the Government's public health white paper 'Choosing Health', namely alcohol and drugs, mental health and well-being, nutrition, physical activity, sexual health and smoking.

Kensington & Chelsea PCT Director of Public Health Melanie Smith explained to residents that the TMO, the Council and the PCT had worked with around 80 stakeholders to consider the best way for them all to contribute to the health and well-being of communities in the borough over the next five years.

TMO Chair Juliet Rawlings said: "It was great to see so many residents enjoying the day. The TMO has a vital role to play in building healthy communities, and through events like this we will continue to work with residents and stakeholders to promote living well."



The circus comes to town!

6 Big Questions: Kathy Ellison

Kathy Ellison, 59, is Chair of the Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) Board. She started her long service with BHP **over 16 years ago** - all because of a rat.

Kathy remembers: "I came back from work one day to find a dead rat in my back garden. I believed the rat was a result of some abandoned garages across the road where people were dumping rubbish. I knew I needed the support of other residents to solve the problem – so I knocked on 185 doors in the area and from that, the Groves Residents' Association was born. From there I got involved with the area housing board."

When BHP was established, Kathy was invited to join the shadow board and eventually offered the post of Chair. She lives in Kingsbury, north London, with her retired husband Roy and recently celebrated her ruby anniversary. Kathy is also Chair of the Groves Residents Association and the Kingsbury Police Liaison Panel, and a member of the Kingsbury and Kenton Forum.



1 Define your role

To make sure that BHP continues to develop as a company whilst keeping a good partnership with the council.

2 Three things you like about yourself

I'm caring, always positive and happy.

3 Three things you dislike about yourself

I try to do too much, I can't say no and I'm always late – but never for a board meeting.

4 Best thing anyone has ever said about you (or you would like them to say about you)?

My dad once said to me "When I die I want to come back as your dog".

5 Is your position worth the hassle?

In a word - yes.

6 What do you hope to have achieved by the time you leave it?

I would really like BHP to build its own eco friendly homes one day.

Housing Futures

The recent publication of a **major housing Green Paper** is a **clear recognition** of the **success** of the **ALMO option** to date. It constitutes a **major success** for the ALMO movement and the NFA, touching upon all those issues for which the NFA has lobbied.

These include:-

- A commitment to a continuation of the decent homes funding for existing and new ALMOs, including round 6.
- The introduction of freedoms and flexibilities for high performing ALMOs (also known as 'self-financing'), as well as improvements to the current subsidy system.
- Extending the eligibility criteria so ALMOs can access social housing grants to provide new and replacement homes.

The Housing Green Paper is a significant and substantial document which sets a clear government agenda for the future. It covers a wide ranging menu, although delivering new homes to meet demand is, as expected, a major element. This encompasses planning as well as housing and financial issues. A very welcome aspect is the commitment to council housing and to achieving the Decent Homes standard in all social housing.

The key points in the Green Paper include:-

- A 50 per cent increase in new social housing over the next three years.
- Councils will be able to build new social housing through ALMOs or other 'Special Purpose Vehicles' (SPVs).
- New ways for councils to retain rents and capital receipts on new build homes provided through ALMOs and SPVs.
- Eligibility for the social housing grant will be extended to two star, as well as three star ALMOs, and there will be greater flexibility in the use of council-owned land.

- The continuation of the Decent Homes programme, with at least £2 billion reserved for ALMOs.
- Strong indications that self-financing will be piloted and that work on reforming the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) will be undertaken.

The NFA welcomes the Green Paper. ALMOs have already proven that they can deliver decent homes and excellent housing services. They are well-positioned to help meet the Government's ambitious targets for new supply so the extension of the eligibility criteria for social housing grant to two star ALMOs is, to us, a logical extension.

We believe that the work ALMOs, and other partners, have carried out on self-financing has not only proved the potential of the model but has also now convinced the government that a radical overhaul of the subsidy system is essential. In the long run this will also benefit those local authorities and ALMOs for whom self-financing may not be the best option. However, for those that do wish to go down the self-financing route, we look forward to early implementation of the pilots.

As well as building new homes, however, it is essential to ensure that existing stock is maintained to acceptable standards. The inclusion of a clear endorsement of the ALMO programme in the Green Paper is a major success for the NFA – especially given the fact that the Comprehensive Spending

Review, which would normally pre-empt such commitments, has yet to be announced.

In a tight spending round, and with a high priority on new build, ALMOs have nevertheless managed to retain, as a minimum, current levels of investment. This success is largely down to ALMOs' impressive track record in delivering the Decent Homes programme on time and within budget, and in producing the majority of local authority housing efficiency savings. Now that a base level budget has been set, we are hopeful that clarity can be given to round 6 ALMOs and those potentially affected by reprofiling, so that clear committed allocations can be made. This will enable them to plan their programmes effectively.



Going Green in the Black Country

Black Country **ALMO Sandwell Homes** has urged its business suppliers to **go green** and achieve **internationally recognised environmental standards** to match its own **green** credentials.

Sandwell Homes, which manages 30,000 council properties in the West Midlands, hosted a "Let's Go Green Together" conference at its West Bromwich headquarters. More than 100 representatives from 50 regional and local suppliers attended the event.

The event was organised by the ALMO's purchasing team, which has already adopted its own environmental policy and management system in order to reduce the impact that delivering its services has on the environment.

Measures include:-

- A dedicated purchasing website and on-line tender calendar showing tenders coming up for renewal, with their approximate value.
- Emailing of purchase orders to reduce paper usage.
- Electronic reverse auctions – where purchasers bid downwards for the supplies on offer.

Sandwell Homes is encouraging suppliers to work towards British Standard 8555 and ISO 14001 – recognised quality standards designed to improve a company's environmental performance. It hopes that all its suppliers will achieve ISO 14001 or BS 8555 for smaller

suppliers by 2009. Chief executive Brian Oakley said: "I was greatly encouraged to see so many of our suppliers joining us for the conference. As a company delivering services to our tenants in 30,000 properties across Sandwell while employing 1,300 people, we need to be aware of the impact we have on the local environment and beyond. We want to achieve sustainable purchasing, which equals a sustainable environment, and that equals a sustainable Sandwell."

To mark the event, delegates were given a commemorative mouse mat made from recycled vending cups.

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