

ALMOs in ACTION

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



Members of the APPG with tenants of CityWest Homes (*inset*) and the spectacular view from the Glastonbury House Sky Lounge (see page 7).

News round-up

Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing



Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing and Kirklees Council have won a prestigious environmental award.

In the largest domestic solar power project in the UK, the two organisations have installed solar panels in over 500 buildings, including council houses, care homes and two local schools.

Dr David Bellamy presented the two organisations with a Silver award for environmental best practice in the Local Authority section of the annual Green Apple Environment Awards.

Stamps of Approval

Kensington and Chelsea TMO has been awarded "three stars with excellent prospects for improvement" by the Audit Commission, the 12th ALMO to receive such a rating. There are currently 32 two star ALMOs.

Ashfield Homes, Carrick Housing, CityWest Homes and Derby Homes all retained their three-star ratings on re-inspection by the Commission.

Brent Housing Partnership

Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) held its first ever 'Open House' party in November. Residents had the opportunity to meet staff and neighbours while enjoying music, food, dancing, relaxation and beauty therapy.

Housing Awards

Sheffield Homes and Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) have both been honoured in the 10th UK Housing Awards run by the Chartered Institute of Housing.

Sheffield Homes won the 'Excellence in Delivering Safer Neighbourhoods' category, for the work undertaken by its Neighbourhood Action Team. YHN's Furniture Service was named winner of the UK Housing Awards prize for 'Excellence in Support and Care Solutions'.

High Peak Community Housing



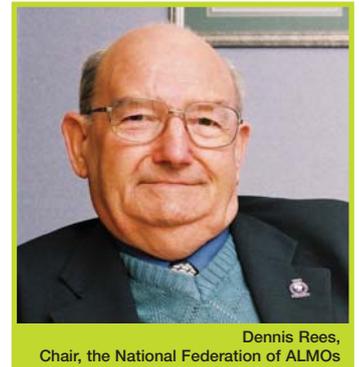
CareLink, High Peak Community Housing's Warden Service, has been awarded the highest possible accreditation by the 300-strong Telecare Services Association, one of only 11 members to receive such a rating.

CareLink provides a monitoring and emergency response service for over 2,000 vulnerable residents living in the High Peak region.

"We are delighted to have achieved this award and I am very proud of the team," said Head of Operations Mark Ford.

Hello

and welcome to the second issue of **ALMOs In Action**, featuring the **biggest stories** from the world of council housing management.



Dennis Rees,
Chair, the National Federation of ALMOs

This issue features our brand new logo, carefully designed to represent our role as a united voice for every ALMO in the country. As this newsletter shows, ALMOs are continuing to break new ground, and we think our new logo is an excellent representation of such innovation.

Enjoy issue two!

National Federation of ALMOs
 championing better homes and communities

7000 decent homes

Sheffield tenant **Linda Crosby** welcomes **Housing Minister Yvette Cooper** into her home



Yvette Cooper (right) with Linda Crosby (centre), and Labour MP Angela Smith

Late last year, Linda became the 7000th recipient of the Decent Homes programme in Sheffield. Her home in the city's Deepcar region received new kitchen and bathroom fittings from Sheffield Homes, along with a visit from Housing Minister Yvette Cooper.

Linda welcomed the Minister and proudly displayed the refurbishments to the home she shares with her two children and three year old grandson.

She said: "The difference it has made is unbelievable. I now have my dream kitchen; laid out how I wanted it with lots of storage and still room to fit in a table. The bathroom is brilliant too. I have a new suite and a shower, which we didn't have before. It's made me want to decorate the rest of the house! The workmen who did all of this were great. Overall we have a lot more space and are a lot more comfortable. It's just perfect."

Yvette Cooper added: "It's wonderful to see how our £40bn Decent Homes programme is changing people's lives. We've now put 500,000 new kitchens, 350,000 new bathrooms and 630,000 new boilers into homes. We have

re-wired 500,000 homes to ensure that they meet fire and safety requirements, and we are working to improve energy efficiency. This means up and down the country people like Linda are living in warmer homes with up-to-date kitchens and bathrooms."

Sheffield Homes Chief Executive Peter Morton added: "The Decent Homes programme is transforming homes across the city and we are delighted that the Minister has visited to see its impact herself. We have worked closely with our customers to get this programme right by involving them at every stage, from selecting the contractors, right through to choosing quality fittings and inspecting the finished results."

During her visit to Sheffield, the Minister also launched a £14 million programme to recruit 500 adults and train them in a construction trade. Construction JOBMatch South Yorkshire aims to tackle the serious shortages of skilled labour in the South Yorkshire construction sector by employing and training people who have not traditionally been considered for careers in construction. ALMOs Sheffield Homes, Rotherham 2010 and St Leger Homes of Doncaster, as well as Sanctuary Housing, are the project partners and provide placements for trainees on their Decent Homes programmes.

The 500 recruits, 250 in Sheffield and 125 each in Rotherham and Doncaster, will spend two years in full employment with a construction company, working towards an NVQ qualification in a trade such as plumbing, plastering, joinery or roofing.

ALMOs go straight to the top



The summit meeting in progress

ALMO representatives, including NFA Chair Dennis Rees and NFA board member Juliet Rawlings, attended an early morning summit meeting with Prime Minister Tony Blair and Secretary of State Ruth Kelly in early January.

Several key issues were discussed during the hour-long meeting, including the central role of tenants; the importance of sufficient funding for the Decent Homes programme; and the need for clarity and financial flexibility if ALMOs are to deliver on the government's sustainable communities agenda.

The Prime Minister and Secretary of State both spoke in very positive terms and reiterated the government's commitment to a long term future for the ALMO option. Ruth Kelly praised ALMOs for doing a "a superb job", while Tony Blair declared that ALMOs had proved themselves and "provide a potential model for future development."

On the same day, it was announced that ALMOs and TMOs are to be given new powers to tackle anti-social behaviour. Regulations laid before Parliament will give them the right to apply for Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs).

ASBOs - court orders prohibiting people from specific anti-social acts or banning them from certain areas - are used to clamp down on a wide range of social problems, including noise nuisance, harassment and vandalism, and carry a maximum penalty of five years in prison if breached.

NFA Chair Dennis Rees said: "Today's announcement is something we have lobbied for and is a major landmark in the development of ALMOs. Many ALMOs across the UK have already introduced groundbreaking programmes that work with both the victims and perpetrators of anti-social behaviour. Today's decision is the logical next step in this process, giving residents the power to take effective action at grassroots level."

He added: "The fact that we were invited to meet Tony Blair and Ruth Kelly, and the hugely positive comments they made, is a direct result of the excellent work being done by ALMOs across the country."

The government also announced an additional £485 million for the Decent Homes programme to refurbish council housing. The additional funding will pay for the modernisation over the next year of around 55,000 homes in 19 ALMOs. It brings the total amount allocated to ALMOs for improving council homes since 2002 to £3.7bn.

Ruth Kelly said the new funding was a clear reflection of the success of the ALMO option. "ALMOs are integrating with their communities and are keying directly into wider government initiatives, such as the creation of mixed communities and the creation of cleaner, greener, and safer neighbourhoods."

Saving: Kirklees - Style!

Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH) launched a trend-setting discount card for residents

The KNH Excel Discount Card enables council tenants and leaseholders to save money on goods and services provided by local businesses across Kirklees.

The scheme is the first of its kind in the country to have been completely developed in-house by staff and tenants' representatives, working with over 150 shops and businesses. The end result is a "local card for local people."

KNH Excel Manager Helen O'Sullivan said:

"When we first asked our customers if they wanted a discount card, they said they did – but they wanted to be able to use it at their local shops, rather than in high street chains. Developing it has taken a lot of time and hard work but it was really important that we came up with something our customers wanted that also helped support local businesses. They're an essential part of our communities and our neighbourhoods suffer if they don't do well."

To qualify for the card, tenants must have

been a tenant or leaseholder for at least three months, not owe KNH any money, and not have broken their tenancy conditions.

The card is part of KNH Excel, an incentive scheme that rewards and recognises good tenants and encourages others who might have rent arrears to clear their accounts. Other Excel benefits include regular competitions and prize draws, community grants of up to £500 and good neighbour awards.

Mums making

Juliet Rawlings

Kensington and Chelsea TMO Chair Juliet Rawlings is a true Londoner, having lived and worked in Chelsea all her life. Born around the corner from her current home on the King's Road, she is a fixture of the **local Cremorne estate**.



Juliet has been actively involved in this unique ALMO, which is also the only boroughwide tenant management organisation, for more than 13 years. She first became involved in 1992 when the residents' committee wouldn't let her attend meetings with her son Philip, now

aged 14, in a pushchair. She joined the committee and got the rule changed. In the years since, Juliet has served on numerous committees and attended many training courses with help from the TMO, even gaining a National Certificate of Tenant Participation from Oxford Brookes University.

She became chair of the TMO in July 2003, after joining the board two years earlier, and has since been voted back in three times. During her time as Chair, Juliet has seen the ten-year old TMO receive three-star accreditation from the Audit Commission and gain a national profile. She travels widely to speak about ways in which TMOs and ALMOs provide real tenant democracy. As a member of the NFA board, she helps formulate national policy decisions, and in the last few months,

she has represented ALMOs and the NFA in meetings with senior government ministers, including Secretary of State Ruth Kelly and Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Juliet juggles her many ALMO commitments with an equally demanding role as a full-time carer for her autistic son Philip.

"Many people still know me from when I ran a greengrocer's on my estate," she says. "They often come up to me to discuss their problems when I am out and about shopping. It's great that people see me as so approachable and I enjoy being able to really make a difference now that I am Chair of the TMO, especially for older and more vulnerable people who often don't know who to approach when they've got a problem."

Jackie Sear

At 20 Jackie Sear from Hanwell in Ealing was a **homeless single mother**, fleeing from domestic violence. But Jackie **refused to be defeated** by such hardships, and with the support of her family and friends set about rebuilding her life. She began a career as a **youth worker**, earned a law degree and in 2001 founded a charity to **help disadvantaged people in her community**.

Her successful charity, *Empowering Action and Social Esteem (EASE)*, aims to provide young people with a range of community support services. It runs a buddy scheme to provide a range of social support services – everything from household repairs right through to assistance with domestic violence and anti-social behaviour.

In 2005 EASE opened a community resource centre called BASE. This provides clients with such facilities as internet access, skills training and job search assistance, as well as offering

after-school clubs. BASE also runs after schools clubs, youth clubs and homework support services for children aged 8 to 19.

EASE also works with local social services on peer education projects and has organised an adult education programme at the BASE community centre. The charity now has seven part-time staff and over 20 volunteers.

"After struggling with my own problems, I wanted to provide a helping hand to others who might be going through similar experiences,"

explains Jackie. *"I've been lucky enough to have access to the education and support I needed, so I set up EASE to catch those people who might otherwise fall through the gaps."*

"In the future I'd like to ensure that we continue to offer a successful and sustainable service. I'd also like to increase our support work for victims of domestic violence and the elderly."

Jackie has the following advice for anyone thinking of setting up their own charities or community schemes: *"Persevere, even if everyone thinks you're mad!"*



a difference

Pam Payne

Being a **single mum** with a large family is a **demanding job** at the best of times, but Pam Payne still finds time to spare for the **community around her**.

Pam, 44, lives in a council home on the Lancaster West Estate in Ladbrooke Grove, west London, in an area managed by Kensington and Chelsea TMO. She shares her council house with no less than eight children and two grandchildren, but still has the energy to do voluntary work at the local school and help to run before and after-school play schemes for local youngsters.

Pam also volunteers at the local youth club and has organised community events for over two and a half years. Last summer Pam introduced a series of family fun days on her estate which proved a great success with both children and parents.

"I first started getting involved with the community because there was nothing for kids on the estate to do," remembers Pam. "I thought - why not give something back? It's very hard work but it's great when you see the kids' smiling faces and get positive feedback from their parents."

"If the kids feel it's their estate as well then they won't ruin it and will feel pride in taking care of it," she adds. "I think having kids really helps. I just listen to what they have to say and get them involved through planting trees, cooking or leafleting for an event - anything to keep them out of trouble."



Earlier this year Pam completed a National Certificate in Tenant Participation and Neighbourhood Renewal, thanks to a course funded by the Kensington and Chelsea TMO. She has since become a mentor to other students on the course.

Positive Futures on the Football Pitch

Youngsters from the **Andover Estate** near Finsbury Park in North London have been **enjoying weekly football lessons from Arsenal coaches** on a brand new pitch, thanks to a project sponsored by **Homes For Islington**.

The coaching is part of **Positive Futures** – a national social inclusion programme which uses sport and leisure activities to engage with disadvantaged and socially-marginalised young adults. It is a joint project between the Home Office and Sport England.

HFI began working with Arsenal Football Club in 2004 on two estates, offering football activities to young people 10-to-19 years of age. The Club now offers coaching on six estates across the area. Teams compete against each other in the Arsenal Positive Futures League.

The new pitch was built on the site of an old playground following the popularity of a pitch refurbishment in the Harvist Estate the previous Spring.

Built in the shadow of the new Arsenal Emirates stadium, the Harvist facility is a state-of-the-art, FIFA-approved, astro-turf pitch. A disused flat was also converted into a classroom with IT facilities for use as a homework club, and also offers classes in numeracy, reading and IT skills. Sports Minister Richard Caborn MP attended the official opening in March.

Both pitches have proved tremendously popular with local residents. While the youngsters enjoy the weekly coaching sessions and opportunities to visit the Arsenal grounds, mums on the Andover estate are planning a charity five-a-side match against the Arsenal coaches!



Local youngsters practice their ball skills

NFA UPDATE

There are now 63 ALMOs managing more than 930,000 homes across the country

A joint **NFA / National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations (NFTMO)** conference, administered by the **Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS)** and part-funded by the Housing Corporation, was fully subscribed in Walsall on 2 November. Following the conference the **NFA** aims to work jointly with the NFTMO to develop better relationships at local level between **TMOs, ALMOs and councils.**

A New Year "NFA Stocktake" for ALMO Board members took place on 18 January 2007.

The next ALMO Communications Group meeting will be held on 7 February in Wolverhampton. For further information, contact Catherine Elphee on 0114 2735585

Regional seminars for NFA members will be held on 27 February in Leeds and 28 February in London.

For further information, contact Maya Rehill on 01723 350022.

The 2007 NFA annual conference and AGM will be held at York on Wednesday 9th and Thursday 10th May 2007.

NFA Board

The NFA Board met on 24 October and decided on a number of issues that will be the subject of formal consultation with the membership and discussion at regional chief officer meetings. These include proposed changes to the constitution and structure of meetings; the implementation of a single renewal date in January and a subscription based on the numbers of council properties in management.

NFA and the government

The NFA has written to Housing Minister Yvette Cooper to express concern about the proposed requirement that some ALMOs reprofile their decent homes programme beyond 2010. While we understand that there are constraints on public expenditure, and acknowledge that the ALMO option has proven more popular than originally expected, it is vital to ensure that all commitments made to residents should be honoured. We want to ensure that the government plays fair to tenants and does not undermine the success that ALMOs have achieved to date.

We have also asked the government to underwrite any additional costs and to make a clear commitment to providing all tenants in ALMO-managed houses with a Decent Home. We have also asked the Minister to consider a more flexible approach to local government spending and to the early implementation of financial freedoms for high-performing ALMOs.

Space for Training



Learning to put up a shelf!

Since opening in April 2006, the Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) Training Centre has played host to a stream of successful events, including a skills workshop for young people, wallpapering and plastering demonstrations and practical DIY instruction for tenants.

The skills workshop was aimed at new tenants under the age of 25, and included basic DIY, budgeting skills and cookery. Project partner Inspace also run an apprentice scheme, and currently have four local young people taking part. Two Inspace employees have also been trained as instructors.

Tenants who attended different events at the centre have rated the training 'excellent' and 'very helpful'. A second series of courses began in January, based on suggestions provided by previous participants. Future plans included joint youth projects with the YMCA and Essex Youth Service.

In November last year the training centre opened its doors to the wider community when a group of year 10 and 11 students from the Alderman Blaxhill School attended a series of all-day sessions on the basics of plumbing and carpentry. All the students have since expressed interest in taking up these trades when they leave school.

Respect still on the agenda

The Respect Standard for Housing Management continues to receive the seal of approval from ALMOs around the country. In recent months Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing, High Peak Community Housing, Homes for Haringey and Brent Housing Partnership have all signed up to the government-produced guidance for public sector landlords on tackling anti-social behaviour.

Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH) was one of the first to sign up to the standard after its official launch in August.

KNH Chief Executive Simon Rogers, said: "We're trying to nip problems in the bud before they get to the point where we have to take legal action against anti-social tenants.

We are also committed to keeping victims and witnesses better informed of developments and we will be making some changes to our policies and procedures in response to people's concerns, to make sure our communities are places where people enjoy living."

The Respect Standard for housing providers outlines those elements essential to tackling nuisance behaviour – for example, by providing residents with the support they need to report problems.

High Peak Community Housing (HPCH) in Derbyshire signed the Agenda in November. "Signing up to the Respect Agenda was an easy decision for us," said Head of Operations Mark Ford. "We have been working on many



Jackie Thomas, (left), of Homes for Haringey, and Mike Bagnall of Haringey Council with Ruth Kelly

fronts to prevent incidents of anti-social behaviour in our communities."

London ALMOs Homes For Haringey and Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) formalised their anti-social behaviour policies by signing the Agenda in December. Both were given special certificates to mark their pledges from Ruth Kelly, the Secretary of State for Housing and Communities, at a special reception to celebrate the achievements of organisations who have already signed.

A Parliamentary View

Members of the **All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)** for **ALMOs** visited **CityWest Homes** in Westminster late last year, spending two hours touring properties and talking to residents.



Members of the APPG visit Glastonbury Tower

The visit was organised to mark the imminent completion of CityWest's Decent Homes programme, over four years ahead of schedule. Over £200 million has been spent to bring more than 7000 council homes across the borough up to the government-defined Decent Homes Standard.

The refurbishment work included new kitchens, bathrooms, roofs, windows and central heating systems, as well as a range of innovative 'green' facilities, including sensor-controlled lights.

Ivy Searle, a council house tenant for the last 30 years and Secretary of Abbots Manor Residents Association, escorted the MPs around the newly-refurbished Glastonbury

House. In addition to modernised flats, Glastonbury House now includes a 'Sky Lounge' social facility offering spectacular views of the London skyline, including Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament and the London Eye.

Ivy said:-

"It's important to show MPs from other parts of the country what can be achieved in their own areas by involving tenants in improvement programmes. We have worked with CityWest Homes from day one to make sure their work reflected what we wanted as residents. We're extremely proud of the housing we've modernised, as well as facilities like the Sky Lounge that bring people from the community together."



Tenant Ivy Searle with Clive Betts, Labour MP for Sheffield Attercliffe, and Chair of the APPG, in the Glastonbury House Sky Lounge

6 Big Questions: Cora Carter MBE



Cora Carter is Chair of both the Kirklees Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations and the Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH) Board of Directors, having been a tenant director since KNH was established in 2002.

She is also secretary of the Tenants' and Residents' Organisation of England, a member of the NFA board and a founder member and chair of her own tenants' and residents' association in Cowesley, Huddersfield.

Cora, who has worked for over 20 years in the local and national tenants' movements, received an MBE in the Millennium New Year's Honours List for services to council tenants.

Cora meets regularly with Government Ministers, Senior Civil Servants, the Housing Corporation and the Chartered Institute of Housing to help shape housing policy and practice.

In her free time she enjoys reading, eating out and spending time with her grandchildren.

1 Define your role

I have several official roles, but they all have the same purpose: to improve the lives and homes of tenants.

2 Things you like about yourself

I care about people; I am punctual; and I am a Mum, Grandma and Great Grandma.

3 Things you dislike about yourself

I am untidy and can't say no.

4 Best thing anyone has ever said about you?

During a training session, our co-ordinator at KFTRA once said she would like to be me!

5 Is your position worth the hassle?

Yes - if at the end of it all one tenant has a better quality of life then it's all been worth the work!

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

A better quality of life for every tenant!

All Party Parliamentary Group

Established in July last year, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for ALMOs has over 40 member MPs interested in the further development of the Arms Length Management Organisation option.

Seven new MPs recently joined the APPG:

Peter Bottomley

Conservative MP for Worthing West

Emily Thornberry

Labour MP for Islington South and Finsbury

Angela Watkinson

Conservative MP for Upminster

Eric Illsley

Labour MP for Barnsley Central

Adrian Bailey

Labour MP for West Bromwich West

David Crausby

Labour MP for Bolton North East

Sir Malcolm Rifkind

Conservative MP for Kensington and Chelsea

Has your local MP joined the APPG? For a complete list of members, visit the NFA website: www.almos.org.uk

In the Spotlight: Your Homes Newcastle



The Decent Homes standard has enabled **tens of thousands of council house tenants** across the country to enjoy **smart and comfortable new homes**, and many more will benefit over the next few years. But all that work requires an ample supply of builders, plumbers, roofers and other skilled professionals.

A multi-initiative project run by the Employment Initiatives Team of Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) aims to ensure that the 12 construction partners involved in the delivery of its demanding Modern Homes programme have access to a sufficient pool of skilled labour. The team works to raise awareness of career opportunities in the construction industry, and benefit YHN tenants with training and employment opportunities.

The Building Futures initiative for the long-term unemployed has already secured jobs for eight graduates of this fortnight-long introduction to the construction trade. Fourteen people over 30 years of age have attended the course since its launch in the summer – all of whom were offered interviews on completion.

Lee Atchinson, a 27-year old Trainee, has started work with Wates Living Space. As a Tenant Liaison Officer, he joins an army of over 1200 people working on the £600m Modern Homes programme.

"I took part in the training because I was looking for a new career and the construction trade looked interesting," he explains. "I am really looking forward to starting my new job and being the first point of contact for council

tenants to make sure the work in their homes is up to scratch."

The team also works closely with local schools in a series of projects designed to encourage young people to consider the construction industry when they leave school. Benfield School in Walkergate is one example. Groups of 15- and 16- year olds recently began an ongoing work experience programme with YHN construction partner Frank Haslam Milan (FHM) North East.

The students spent a week on one of FHM's local building sites and have since made weekly follow-up visits to learn bricklaying, joinery, painting and decorating and other construction skills.

FHM Operations Manager Mark Connor said: *"It is important to put something back into the communities we work in and we feel that this scheme will provide the youngsters with a range of educational and skills development opportunities."*

Meanwhile, YHN has taken on the management of a groundbreaking service designed to support vulnerable young people and tackle youth homelessness.

Dozens of young people aged between 16 and 21 years of age have been helped by INLINE ("Independent Living North East") Newcastle. Established by the Children's Society in 1997, the service helps young people unable to live with their families to lead independent lives and can boast an impressive 96 per cent success rate.

At any one time, INLINE Newcastle supports young tenants living in around seventy specially-selected council homes. These young people are often very vulnerable because they have moved into their new council homes in difficult circumstances and without the life skills needed to live independently.

Over a two-year period, they receive a range of integrated support from staff through regular home visits and group sessions. Such help may include learning how to cook, how to budget, and how to apply for courses, grants and benefits.

"They are sort of tough, but they don't give up on you," says one INLINE tenant.

YHN Chief Executive John Lee says: *"Everyone, whatever their age or circumstance, should have access to the support they need to live independently in safe and healthy homes."*

Youngsters learn construction skills with Frank Haslam Milan



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