



NCH Chair steps down after ten years at the helm

Nottingham City Homes has just taken on a new Chair of the Board, Malcolm Sharp. He will be working with the company as they look ahead to the challenges all ALMOs and housing organisations are facing in the coming years. But he has a tough act to follow.

Janet Storar MBE stood down from the NCH Board this year, after ten years working with the organisation, most of which she spent as Chair of the Board.

A tenant of forty years herself, Janet was able to give not only a strategic view, but the direct opinion of a tenant who has seen what has come before, determined to make improvements for the future of housing in Nottingham.

She led the organisation through the highly successful Decent Homes programme, a reorganisation of the repairs and maintenance service and the start of one of the country's biggest council house building programmes outside of London.

There's nobody better to tell her story, than Janet herself. She tells us below about her time as a tenant, how she got involved with the organisation, and her proudest moments.

Janet Storar - the lady!

I married my husband Ted in 1976. He'd been on the waiting list in Nottingham for a council house for ages but was of course not a priority as a single man. It got to about the middle of June the year we were married and I said "we should go down to the council and let them know you've got a wife"!

I remember they wanted to interview us, so they came to see us in Ted's flat, which was above a shop and the bath was in the kitchen!

Our first home together in Sherwood, is still my home now. We've had many happy years there together, and I'm still very happy there on my own now, as I lost Ted a couple of years ago now. In fact our house is just about to get a new bathroom under Nottingham City Homes' Maintaining Decency programme as we didn't qualify for Decent Homes because the bathroom was in too good a condition - we didn't have children you see!

The house of course in forty years has changed beyond recognition. Some of the work we did and the rest has been done as part of various improvement programmes over the years. And when I look around me now, I know the greatest impact has been the Decent Homes project - you now know when you walk through an estate which are the owner occupied homes as they don't have the new windows and doors, and in some cases the external wall insulation.

Getting involved

Before I became really really involved I was just the person on the road who helped people out. I could write well and had a typewriter, so people on the street used to ask me to write to housing services to help them air their concerns. I wrote it for them and they sent it off, we had quite a good system!

Someone said to me a little bit further down the line, "will you join the local tenants and residents association?" - at that time it was called SETRA (Sherwood Estate TRA). I was then asked to be secretary and I was there for a while as there was a lot that needed sorting in the area in those days, lots of problems that we had to tackle. However as things started to improve and got a lot better around us, it seemed that people didn't really want to be involved anymore cause they felt it wasn't needed.

I was very lucky at the age of 53 to be offered the opportunity to take early retirement. Some five years later in 2005, my wonderful husband saw an advert in the paper and he put it under my nose. He said I was getting bored and I should apply - I think he wanted to get me out the house! The advert was asking for Board Members for a newly formed ALMO - I'd never heard of an ALMO, but I thought I could give it a go.

When they were doing the interviews, NCH hadn't yet been properly formed, so I was interviewed in the Council House by a panel of 12 - I've done many interviews and difficult meetings in my career, but I have to say I found this the most intimidating of my life.

Luckily I got through the interview and was asked to join the operational board.

The only person I can remember from that panel, was a woman who I was soon to call a colleague and friend, Jean England, a local tenant and resident, who had been involved with the council for many years. We sadly lost Jean last year, but she'd been by my side and all the other tenants since that first interview and had such a huge impact on tenants' lives over the years.

I was on the operational board for a short time, until they asked me to apply for the Strategic Board, as well as being part of Area Committee 5. I thought, "I quite like this" as there were real opportunities to make a difference. It was an open book, there were some real issues, the repairs and maintenance of the city's homes needed a huge focus and of course forming the ALMO allowed us to access the Decent Homes funding, which is and always will be to me, NCH's crowning glory.

When I started on the Board there was a much smaller tenant majority, far more councillors and independents, but now I'm proud to say the Board is now weighted far more on the tenants' side.

I'm so glad that after ten years I can look back and see the huge difference which has been made across the board at NCH. It's a completely different organisation to the one I started working with ten years ago, and there are far too many people to mention for that success, it's always been a team effort.

Greatest moment

There are so many great moments - when I was elected Chair, passing my Chartered Institute of Housing exams and named a housing practitioner and a member of the CIH, not to mention of course, getting my MBE in 2013.

But for me, when it comes to my time as an involved tenant, there's no question. The 2010 Nott Decent campaign has to be the biggest and proudest moment for me. It saw tenants standing on the steps of Downing Street, appealing for Nottingham to be granted enough funding to complete the extensive and highly efficient Secure Warm Modern (Decent Homes) programme. For that campaign to succeed, secure the funding we needed, and to have watched it all come to fruition - exceeding the standards set by the Government - is such a proud thing for me. And it wasn't just the tenants, it was supported by so many wonderful staff members at NCH, so many councillors,

MPs and local residents, who collectively put together a fantastic campaign, which truly made a difference and showed the power of tenant involvement.

Hopes for the future of NCH

I would like to see more people using the Tenant Academy. My time at NCH wasn't just spent as a Board member or an involved tenant, it also gave me the opportunity to further myself and gain qualifications. This is an opportunity available to all tenants and I would love to see more of my fellow tenants and leaseholders taking up such valuable opportunities. This would also hopefully enable more tenants and residents to prepare for being a member of The Board - it's a huge undertaking, involves reading and understanding a large number of complicated documents, and it's not for everyone. But I feel through the tenant academy, we can really seek out those people who are potential Chairs of the Board.

Janet's next steps

I will of course still remain involved with NCH as a tenant, but I also have other commitments. If he were here, Ted would be telling me to keep busy cause I'm going to get bored again! So I will.

I will be remaining on the EEM Ltd Board as a Coopted Board Member, take up my new role as secretary for the East Midlands Tenant Participation Forum (EMTPF) and, going back to my roots, I am attempting to again form a Tenants and Residents Association in Sherwood, something that has been absent for many years. With the help of NCH and some local residents, I'm hoping to be able to get this going again. I must keep busy, I'm 70 next year!

Janet's message:

"The time is right for me to move on, and right for someone else to take the reigns. My school's motto was to 'continue always ever onwards and upwards' and in the current climate, with lots of challenges still ahead, that I believe has to be my message to the Board, the NCH management team, and all the wonderful employees that make a difference every day."

Ends