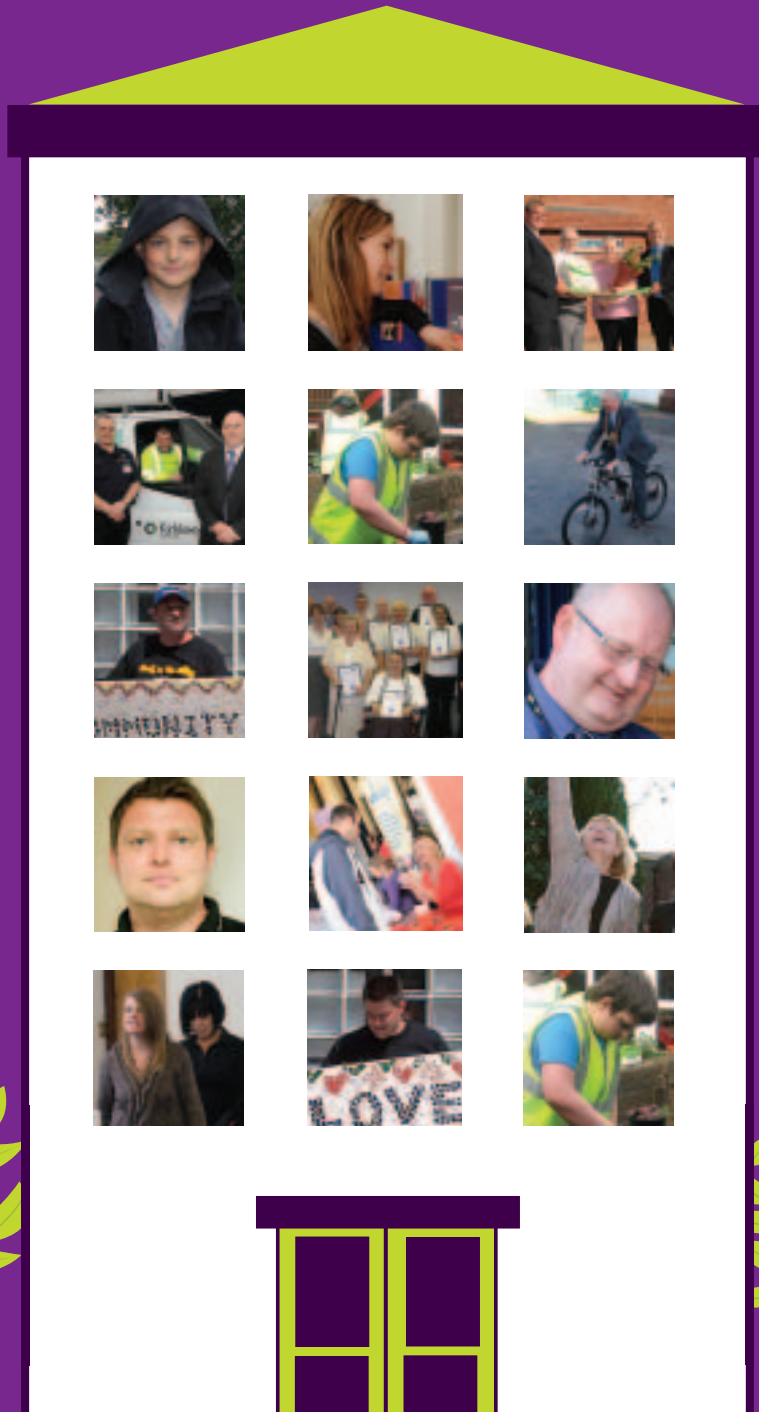


Windows of Opportunity

Sharing best practice, improving communities...

A selection of best practice projects from the NFA Awards 2011



Sponsored by  KIER

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

A word from our sponsor

Innovative award schemes show ALMOs and their tenants are ready to take on new ways of working.

When it comes to dealing with change, they say there are two kinds of people; those who respond with excitement to the prospect of fresh challenges and those who are fearful of having to do things differently. The same is true of organisations.

There is little doubt that change can be unsettling, disruptive and uncertain. It is also true to say that there has always been change; it's the way the world progresses and develops. The difference today, however, is the sheer scale and pace of change in almost every aspect of both our social and working lives.

The ALMO movement today is not just facing change as it comes to the close of completing the Decent Homes programme, it is actively embracing it and seeking to develop new initiatives and working models to build on the undoubted success of its primary role to date. ALMOs manage almost 1 million council houses across England, almost half of all council housing stock, and since the first ones were established in 2002 they have played a pivotal role in giving tenants a greater say in how their homes are managed. They have not just delivered physical improvements to hundreds of thousands of homes, they have improved the lives of families and communities across the country.

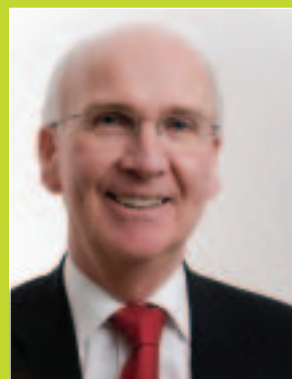
Now ALMOs are looking to the future to create structures that will enable them to continue providing the high quality services their residents have come to expect. Against a background of financial cutbacks and a changing political and regulatory scene, the National Federation of ALMOs has issued a report to Government that sets out a number of alternative models to sustain the future of ALMOs, including an innovative proposal that would, for the first time, see homes transferred to a community and council owned organisation.

When organisations are making major plans for their future, they need the reassurance of partners who not only share their vision and values, offer proven expertise and significant resources but also provide financial stability in still volatile economic times.

Within Kier Services we have simplified our structure into four key capabilities to retain market expertise and allow our customers to clearly see where they need to go to get our services. It is vital that we have the right structure in place, which is easily understood in order of meeting our needs. The four services within Kier Services are maintenance, facilities management, environmental and emerging markets.

Regardless of organisational change we all recognise that the further empowering of tenants is essential in developing the services we provide going forward. Kier is committed to ensuring that the tenant voice will continue to be heard and acted upon across all of our partnerships.

I believe we have the skills, the experience and commitment to be part of the new future you are seeking to build and we are proud to work with ALMOs across the country to support your vision.



Peter Brynes
Managing Director
Maintenance



The National Federation of ALMOs Awards 2011

The annual **National Federation of ALMOs (NFA) Awards** were set up to celebrate best practice in the social housing sector, as well as to recognise ALMO staff, tenants and projects for going above and beyond the call of duty **to improve communities and lives across England.**

The 2011 NFA Awards: **Winners and Finalists**

BEST COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

Sponsored by British Gas

Winner

Derby Homes: Arboretum Community Initiative

Finalists

Ashfield Homes: Spade Aid
Homes for Islington: Soul in the City festival

MOST INNOVATIVE PROJECT

Winner

Blackpool Coastal Housing: The BCH Academy

Finalists

Newark and Sherwood Homes: Retrofit for the Future
West North West Homes, Leeds: On Your Bike project

BOARD MEMBER OF THE YEAR

Winner

Clair Wright, Berneslai Homes

Finalists

Marion Brunskill, East Durham Homes
Joyce Welsh, South Tyneside Homes

MOST EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP

Winner

Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing: Getting In, Saving Lives project

Finalists

Stockport Homes: Making a Difference Together in Offerton project
CityWest Homes: Westminster Works project

MOST OUTSTANDING YOUNG PERSON

Joint winners

Derekston James, Homes for Haringey
Torrion-Lee Dewar, Hounslow Homes

Finalists

Stephen Stanners, Homes for Northumberland
Zoe Kelly, South Essex Homes
Jess Cullen, Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing

BEST USE OF COMMUNICATION

Sponsored by Acceleris Marketing Communications

Winner

Derby Homes: 'It's Not Good Enough' DVD

Finalists

Nottingham City Homes: The Recipe for Making BREAD project
Northwards Housing: 'We ♥ Complaints: Our handy book to getting it right first time'

ALMO TEAM MEMBER OF THE YEAR

Winner

Mary Keane, Homes for Haringey

Finalists

Ian McGee, Hounslow Homes
Liz Wilcox, Derby Homes

MOST OUTSTANDING RESIDENT

Sponsored by Kier

Winner

Sue Walsh, CityWest Homes

Finalists

Elsie Smith, Berneslai Homes
Tony Osborne, Hackney Homes



Going that **extra mile**

The annual NFA Awards are now in their fifth year and over that time have attracted almost 1,000 entries, with the calibre of submissions always of an impressive standard. Allow me to start by thanking all the ALMOs who entered, and congratulating the winners and finalists for making it through to the shortlist. My gratitude also goes to Kier for sponsoring this guide for the second year running.

Entries never fail to demonstrate how truly 'national' the ALMO ethos is, and that we are all 'singing from the same song sheet' in terms of our priorities to the residents of the one million council properties we are responsible for across England. From Barnet to Blackpool, Southend to Salford, the ALMO movement continues to develop innovative new services

and go that extra distance to make their communities better places to live. This is all set against a challenging backdrop: a new government, changes to funding and welfare reform, as well as the forthcoming abolition of both the Tenant Services Authority and the Audit Commission.

There is an exciting diversity among this year's award-winning projects, from property retrofits to help the environment and lower tenants' fuel bills, to a week-long festival to bring communities together. Each and every project has resident involvement at its core, ensuring that not only are we providing the best service, it is the service residents want.

Despite the economic climate continuing to

challenge us all, the examples of excellent practice within these pages fill me with positivity and pride for the ALMO movement.



Alison Inman

Chair of Colchester Borough Homes and outgoing chair of the NFA

Winner: Most Innovative Project

BCH Academy:

Qualifying tenants to effectively scrutinise the housing services they receive



Tutors and tenants at the BCH Academy award ceremony

• THE NEED

The BCH Academy was developed to prepare tenants for the implementation of new resident-led scrutiny processes. BCH wanted to equip tenant representatives with in-depth knowledge concerning a wide variety of housing-related topics so that they could most effectively and confidently challenge the ALMO's performance and procedures.

• THE SOLUTION

The BCH Academy course comprises eight housing-related modules of between two and three hours each. The module titles include 'Social Factors Affecting Housing', 'Housing Finance', 'Housing Tenancies & Housing Law', 'Anti-social Behaviour', and 'Service User Engagement'.

Each of the Academy tutors is a senior manager within BCH, with a wealth of experience and knowledge. All tutors have a 'Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector' (PTLLS) qualification, which ensures each module is tailored to meet a range of learning styles, as well as experience of teaching similar modules on the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Level 3 Housing.

After completing the Academy pilot and graduating at the ALMO's community involvement awards in January 2009, the first participants took part in an evaluation session to discuss improvements and refinements to the course content. These included the development of a BCH Academy Pack, featuring a 'Housing Jargon Buster', which is now given to all new tenants enrolling on the course.

• THE RESULTS

The first Academy graduates gave positive feedback on their experience, with Maurice Christian, vice chair of the Ingthorpe Residents' Association, saying: "We enjoyed all aspects of the course - it had been designed at an appropriate level for tenants and in a way that we could understand. It was easy to relate its content to BCH services."

Following the successful pilot, BCH approached the CIH and received badging recognition, allowing graduates to receive a certificate from BCH and the CIH.

The Academy was officially launched in April 2009 and since that time, over 30 tenants have graduated and received their certificates at special ceremonies from dignitaries such as Blackpool's mayor and the head of education at the CIH.

The Academy has met and exceeded its original objectives with over 90 per cent of graduates rating it as 'excellent' or 'very good' and all attendees saying that it has increased their knowledge, confidence and understanding of BCH.

Following the completion of the pilot, three of the graduates wanted to further enhance their skills and have recently completed a CIH Level 2 in Housing, alongside a number of housing staff. The BCH Academy has also provided excellent value-for-money; costing only £20 per tenant to complete the eight-week course.

Graduates gave a presentation on the Academy at the National Housing Conference in 2010 and Great Places, a housing

association, has used it as a template for developing its own programme. By becoming a finalist in the NFA Awards, the Academy has once again been highlighted as an example of best practice.

• THE JUDGES SAID:

“Greater tenant scrutiny is a really positive thing. If this project works, it will be very successful and a model which should be rolled out to all ALMOs.”

Alison Inman, outgoing chair of the NFA

• KEY LEARNINGS

This project proves that simply having a tenant scrutiny programme in place is often not enough to make a real difference; it's about providing those tenants with the information and understanding they require to fulfil their role most effectively.

Service scrutiny programmes can be a crucial part of tenant involvement and in the case of BCH, empowerment. Not only did the Academy engage participants directly with their ALMO and housing services, they received recognition for their achievements and some wanted to continue their own personal development by obtaining further housing qualifications. In addition to tenants receiving training, ALMO staff also underwent valuable development to prepare themselves for the Academy.

The BCH Academy is already being used as a template for other organisations interested in improving their tenant scrutiny schemes and we hope to see this increase in the future.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS PROJECT:

Mike Glennon, customer involvement and projects manager | T: 01253 477911 | mike.glennon@bch.co.uk

Finalist: Most Innovative Project

Retrofit for the Future:

Newark and Sherwood Homes drives innovation in low-tech zero carbon solutions

• THE NEED

In 2010, Newark and Sherwood Homes (NSH) set out to help tackle energy efficiency and fuel poverty issues by retrofitting some of its existing housing stock with tried-and-tested renewable energy technologies.

By successfully partnering up with the Hockerton Housing Project (HHP), one of the first organisations in the UK to create earth-sheltered, self-sufficient ecological housing, NSH was well placed to see its plans come to fruition.

• THE SOLUTION

NSH and HHP secured funding for the project via a successful bid to the Technology Strategy Board's Retrofit for the Future competition, an initiative which enables building and renovation companies to improve social housing stock.

The East Midlands ALMO decided to focus on concrete solid-walled properties classed as 'hard to treat'. These can be expensive for landlords to resolve and provide poor insulation for occupants; an estimated 40 per cent of heat loss typically occurs through the wall of a property. There are thought to be over 300,000 such dwellings nationwide, with over 400 of these in the area managed by Newark and Sherwood Homes.

NSH worked alongside HHP to refurbish two homes in Newark with low-maintenance, low-cost technologies expected to reduce CO2 by at least 80 per cent. At the heart of this project were three main themes – insulation, passive solar heating and community renewables.

Tenant occupiers were encouraged to visit the properties regularly during the retrofit to monitor progress. They were also advised on the design principles and changes they could make in their own lifestyles to maximise the performance of the dwellings.

Each property received:

- *Retrofitted, fully-insulated cavity walls*
- *Underfloor and loft insulation*
- *An upgrade of double-glazing to triple-glazing*

- *Addition of a 'sunspace' to aid solar gain*
- *Passive solar heating, topped up with electric heaters*
- *Shares in a local community-owned wind turbine*
- *Installation of MVHR Heat Recovery and Ventilation System.*

The properties' energy use will be monitored for two years by the Energy Savings Trust to evaluate energy efficiency and the impact of occupier behaviour and lifestyle on the properties' performance.

A blog was set up to keep the community informed during and after the retrofit, and this has created significant national interest. Open days were also held and a DVD commissioned to document the project.

• THE RESULTS

Energy consumption fell by 80 per cent at each property, with an 83 per cent reduction in carbon emissions (zero carbon when wind turbine investment is offset). Energy payments also fell from £44 to £21 per month, despite severe weather conditions over the winter.

The properties now have an increased SAP rating and no longer fulfil the criteria for 'fuel poverty'. Longevity has also been increased by at least 60 years.

This project has been deemed nationally replicable and could be easily up-scaled for larger or multiple properties. Results from the two-year monitoring period, which concludes summer 2012, will inform how to roll out the project further and attract investors.

• THE JUDGES SAID:

“This project is innovative and demonstrates great ambition.”

Michelle Reid, chief executive of TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service)

• KEY LEARNINGS

This is a classic example of a seemingly small project delivering big results which can be replicated on a much wider scale – with an estimated 300,000 similar hard-to-treat, under-performing properties across the country, the potential environmental difference that can be made is boundless.

It has also had an educational impact with Loughborough University being granted permission to install further monitoring equipment at the properties, using the data for research into retrofit solutions.

It's also important when conducting such complex projects to be as transparent and communicative as possible, from inception and delivery, to their results. NSH has successfully kept customers and stakeholders informed via a combination of communication methods, including the effective use of a blog. The latter demonstrates the rapid progression of online and social media as an invaluable means of tenant communication.

To read the retrofit blog, visit:
<http://hpnshretrofit.wordpress.com/>

Residents of retrofitted property reap the rewards

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS PROJECT:

Michael Carman, contracts manager | T: 01636 655561 | mick.carman@nshomes.co.uk

Finalist: Most Innovative Project

On Your Bike:

West North West Homes, Leeds improves estates on two wheels

• THE NEED

Faced with limited road access to estates in the Lower Armley area of Leeds, West North West Homes, Leeds (WNWHL) ran a scheme to identify how travelling on a bicycle rather than by car could help housing officers deliver estate management services more effectively.

• THE SOLUTION

Through its regular work with external agencies such as the police, WNWHL learned of a successful scheme by Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in the area. By patrolling on a bicycle instead of by car, PCSOs were able to improve their presence on estates and respond to issues more effectively.

WNWHL ran a low-cost trial based on the PCSO scheme for two estate management officers to conduct their duties on a bicycle. This initial pilot highlighted even more benefits than previously thought. In addition to achieving increased face-to-face contact with tenants, the officers could travel around the whole of their estate in a fraction of the time and were able to cover every part of the estate, including areas they would not see from their cars.

The On Your Bike scheme was officially launched in October 2010 and the officers were soon picking up on numerous issues, many of which may have previously gone unnoticed until a customer reported them, including:

- Poor estate maintenance
- Rubbish and litter (including fly-tipping) and dog fouling
- Abandoned cars
- Graffiti
- ASB & neighbour nuisance.

By working closely with WNWHL estate caretakers, officers are able to proactively resolve problems without them ever being reported.

• THE RESULTS

The On Your Bike scheme has successfully boosted tenants' satisfaction with their ALMO through valuable face-to-face contact with staff. Because their duties were previously conducted by car, the officers would not always be noticed by residents. Now, with high-visibility jackets clearly identifying who



On two wheels for estate improvements

officers are, tenants' perception of them has been improved.

As well as improving the overall appearance of the estate through reported repair requests, On Your Bike has delivered value for money benefits, including a reduction in mileage claims. In removing the need for housing officers to use a car, the scheme has also helped reduce CO2 emissions.

An evaluation of the first three months saw an increase of over 100 per cent in the number of orders raised for both graffiti and fly-tipping. According to the ALMO, this increase would not have been achieved had the officers not been patrolling estates by bicycle.

• THE JUDGES SAID:

“This regular, on-the-ground contact with estates helped housing officers to immediately spot problems and areas of concern.”

Michael Gelling, chair of TAROE (Tenants and Residents Organisations of England)

• KEY LEARNINGS

This scheme highlights why sharing knowledge with partner organisations can be so important. WNWHL adapted a successful PCSO scheme for its own purposes, leading to cost reductions, improved customer satisfaction and a more efficient estate management service.

Increased tenant perception of housing officers was also one of the most significant benefits. The improved presence of staff not only led to more effective service delivery, it provided tenants with valuable reassurance and assistance.

While the major advantages of this scheme are primarily to residents, estate management and general ALMO operations, there were also health, lifestyle and financial benefits for the individual staff members involved.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS PROJECT:

Akbar Khan, area performance manager for Inner North West Leeds | T: 0113 224 3747 | akbar.khan@wnwhl.org.uk

Winner: Best Community Initiative

Arboretum Community Project:

Derby Homes boosts services to the deaf and hearing impaired



• THE NEED

When Niki Johnson, who is deaf and uses sign language, was made redundant in February 2010, her experiences as a jobseeker brought home to her the barriers faced by hearing-impaired candidates. She had worked with Derby Homes when employed with Dering, an organisation that helps deaf people in the city and, as a result, asked the ALMO for help in tackling the problem.

• THE SOLUTION

Niki met community initiatives officer, Carl Willis, to work out how the issue could be addressed. They decided that a café would be the perfect informal, friendly setting for both deaf and hearing people to gain confidence, work experience and qualifications.

He suggested using the vacant outlet in Derby's Arboretum Park as a venue. Lying at the heart of a diverse, deprived area of the city, the Arboretum was the country's first public park.

The Arboretum Café opened in July and is run by 15 part-time volunteers, both deaf and hearing. Some arrive with no work experience at all, while others are almost 'job ready'. The common factor is that they need to build their self-confidence.

Derby Homes has helped secure funding, including £180,000 from the Access to Work scheme, and the support of Derby City Council, Community Action, Derbyshire Consortium and JET Training.

• THE RESULTS

The Arboretum Community Project (ACP) has had a great impact on lives and careers, becoming a focus for both jobseekers and the local community. Vice chair, Angie Poole, who is a British Sign Language Talking Hands Interpreter, points to an example that typifies successful uptake: "A deaf lady who joined us in the first summer was extremely nervous and determined only to work in the kitchen but, with a little persuasion, she was soon helping in the café. The experience really boosted her self-esteem and she's since secured a job in a local supermarket."

Volunteers run the Derby Homes Arboretum Café



Apart from giving participants practical and communications skills, work discipline and enhanced self-worth, ACP delivers many other benefits. These include sign language lessons for local schools; the 'Translate' service, providing advice with forms and other correspondence people need help with; a signed counselling and advisory facility promoting independence and wellbeing in the deaf community; and a re-tubing and mould replacement service for hearing-aid users. The offer has been extended to include the development of CODA (children of deaf adults) and there are plans to become a registered centre for Signature accredited sign language courses at low cost.

The Arboretum Café hosts events such as the Asian Festival, held in July 2010, which highlighted issues among the deaf and disabled in the Asian community; the People's Kitchen, where volunteers prepared vegetarian food to serve at low cost; multi-cultural events, including Turkish and Bosnian evenings; a Christmas party for deaf children; and mother and toddler sign language sessions. It also issues community information on topics as diverse as gang awareness and the digital switchover.



Now, ACP is seeking Lottery funding to finance ambitious plans to purchase and renovate two nearby properties for conversion into a residential home for deaf people. Their gardens would be used by a local school for pupils to grow fruit and vegetables.

• THE JUDGES SAID:

“This project hits all the buttons. There are a huge number of deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals in the UK who often struggle to integrate.”

Michael Gelling, chair of TAROE (Tenants and Residents Organisations of England)

• KEY LEARNINGS

ACP has given us a better understanding of the deaf and hard of hearing community and what its needs are.

We have improved our networks and contacts for signposting and translations.

We have learnt that, even in the most challenging areas, it is possible to create new, exciting, sustainable projects that enrich the lives of our customers and residents.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS PROJECT:

Maria Murphy, director of housing and customer service | T: 01332 711000 | maria.murphy@derbyhomes.org

Finalist: Best Community Initiative

Soul in the City festival:

Homes for Islington boosts community cohesion with involvement in annual event



Boosting community spirits



• THE NEED

The Soul in the City festival brings residents, community groups and other key organisations and agencies together in a fun atmosphere that would boost resident engagement, as well as offering services and activities which would improve the community as a whole.

Now in its fifth year, the Soul in the City festival has gone from strength to strength and is now a major part of Islington's social calendar.

• THE SOLUTION

The Soul in the City festival is organised in partnership with Homes for Islington, Islington Council, local contractors such as Balfour Beatty and Kier, residents' associations, and other groups and organisations. The event is held at local churches and other venues, including the Andover Community Centre, a pivotal location for the event.

Soul in the City is a free, not-for-profit event, offering entertainment, food and family activities at no cost to residents over six days, culminating in a community street party. The main objectives of the festival are to:

- Improve communities through partnership working with local organisations
- Enhance good will among residents and bring neighbours together
- Promote the Andover Estate and surrounding area as "a great place to live"
- Get young and elderly people involved and active through a varied range of summer activities

- Offer an event which is open to people of all ages, backgrounds and ethnicities
- Help the vulnerable. For example, a total of 37 gardening projects were carried out during the six-day event in 2010, helping people with disabilities have their gardens done free-of-charge, and getting them involved in other activities.

• THE RESULTS

The festival has grown year-on-year and now attracts thousands of local people. The attendance at this year's event was larger than ever before. The success of the flagship event spread to five different locations throughout the borough of Islington, so in total a few thousand people attended. Within Tollington, 500 people, including children, were served food each day and 1,000 people at the final street party.

Due to the successes of the event on the Andover Estate, other organisations in Islington have decided to run similar events.

The event has led to successful relations with a number of different partners, who send volunteers for the festival and generate interest, including Safer Neighbourhoods, Arsenal Positive Futures, local residents' associations, the Eden Network and urban youth charity XLP. Soul in the City has strengthened the organisers' relationship with the Hornsey Road Platform space, which runs youth workshops in the area. A new faith-based group course was also organised this year, consisting of around 20 local people, which is designed to build unity, fellowship and group discussion.

• THE JUDGES SAID:

“I am very impressed with the results demonstrated by Homes for Islington on event attendance.”

Michelle Reid, chief executive of TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service)

• KEY LEARNINGS

The Soul in the City festival is all about enhancing community spirit, being a good neighbour and enriching lives and communities. This kind of event also changes the tainted image that the Andover Estate has of crime and fear and spreads word that it is a safe environment, with community spirit, a sense of joy and peace and unity.

This project shows the potential every ALMO-run family fun day has – it can get residents together, bring essential service providers face-to-face with their customers and offer a free, fun event to lift people's spirits and broaden their horizons.

In a society where there are often residents who are hard-to-reach, isolated or limited on social options, the benefits of holding such an event for people of all ages, ethnicities and circumstances can far outweigh the costs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS PROJECT:

Mary Switzer, principal communications advisor | T: 020 7527 4342 | mary.switzer@homesforislington.org.uk

Finalist: Best Community Initiative

Spade Aid:

Digging deep for vulnerable tenants

• THE NEED

When garden maintenance for vulnerable tenants was highlighted at residents' meetings as a much-needed area of improvement, Ashfield Homes Ltd (AHL) partnered with a local secondary school to resolve the issue.

• THE SOLUTION

AHL made contact with Ashfield School to discuss a partnership where AHL would work with young people on a community volunteer garden scheme for vulnerable tenants of Ashfield District Council.

Named Spade Aid, the project aimed to provide a garden maintenance service for tenants unable to tend their own gardens, as well as to teach pupils valuable life skills, team-work and a general understanding of their wider community.

The pupils were consulted on the name for the project, Spade Aid, and helped design their work wear, making them easily identifiable while out and about on estates. They also got involved in obtaining £1,000 of funding for the project from the local You Decide community fund. All of these activities had the backing of the senior management team at AHL and senior staff at Ashfield School.

• THE RESULTS

To date, more than 60 young people have taken part in the Spade Aid programme and have completed:

- Ten vulnerable tenants' gardens
- Two sheltered scheme communal gardens
- Two community facility gardens
- Five 'litter-picks'
- Three 'mend and paint' projects, which included fencing and garage areas within estates across the district.

The project has now completed its pilot year (2010/11) and has been featured in the local media. The young people also took a positive role in the ALMO's recent anti-social behaviour (ASB) conference, which was used as a good practice example of engaging with young people to prevent ASB.

AHL has been developing a DVD with Ashfield School to showcase this work, which has been used to promote the scheme to tenant

groups, as well as at the ASB conference. Ashfield pupils will be involved in the planning and editing of a more corporate DVD to promote the scheme and encourage new schools to get involved across Ashfield in 2011.

• THE JUDGES SAID:

“I am really impressed with Spade Aid. Ashfield Homes has identified a need and engaged with schoolchildren to make a real difference, with great inter-generational benefits.”

Stuart MacDonald, editor of Inside Housing magazine

• KEY LEARNINGS

Spade Aid is a good example of a project resolving multiple issues. It successfully tackles the primary issue by improving garden maintenance for individuals who may otherwise be unable to do it themselves. In addition, we improved engagement with young people, brought different generations together and complemented Ashfield School's own programmes for young people which aim to teach new life skills, reduce anti-social behaviour and generate a real sense of achievement and community pride.

Helping the vulnerable keep gardens maintained



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS PROJECT:

Kevin Hornsby, tenancy services manager | T: 01623 608922 | k.hornsby@ashfieldhomes.co.uk

Winner: Most Effective Partnership

Getting in, saving lives:

Rogue methods deliver laudable results

• THE NEED

Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH) learned that West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service (WYFRS) had been experiencing problems accessing properties where new composite doors and locks had been fitted, especially those installed for crime prevention measures in homes managed by the ALMO.

This meant it was taking too long to gain entry into houses to save lives and put out fires. Additionally, twelve officers a year were being injured in their attempts to get through the tougher doors and locks, and the doors were costing KNH thousands of pounds to replace.

To solve these problems, the ALMO joined forces with Kirklees Building Services (KBS), ABS Secure and WYFRS to devise an innovative method of getting into properties quickly and easily in case of an emergency, while also recognising the need for home security.

• THE SOLUTION

ABS Secure, KNH & KBS shared their expertise on current burglary techniques with WYFRS and together the group came up with two very quick and simple methods of gaining entry to doors fitted with any type of standard or security cylinder using simple tools.

The partners then developed a training package that teaches firefighters to recognise and quickly unlock the doors using equipment

provided by ABS Secure. With these tools and training, firefighters can get through doors, in less than 60 seconds, where before it would have taken considerably longer. WYFRS has reported the measures have saved valuable time in emergencies as well as protecting their crews from injury. Depending on heavy door-breaking equipment also raised equality issues for fire services. A great advantage of the new technique is that it does not require strength and can be used by anyone who has been trained, including paramedics and police.

• THE RESULTS

The new approach has the potential to save KNH and other housing organisations thousands of pounds a year. During a recent incident in Huddersfield, crews entered a property within two minutes, where fortunately they found only a smouldering towel.

Previously, this would have cost KNH around £1000 to replace the door. This time, the cost was a £5 replacement lock.

The joint research and testing has also enabled ABS Secure to refine its already high security product to make it one of the strongest, most secure locks on the market. The greatest benefit, however, is the potential to save lives. The speed with which crews can now get into homes can make the difference between life and death. In addition, being able to keep the door intact greatly reduces the risk of back draught or flashover situations, which can cause a fire to flare up dangerously,

threatening both householders and fire crews. The new approach has worked so well that it has been rolled out across Yorkshire and is now being implemented nationwide. This is resulting in joint working and information sharing between services, sectors and regions that have historically operated quite independently.

• THE JUDGES SAID:

“This project will save a huge amount of money and more importantly should save lives.”

Michelle Reid, chief executive of TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service)

• KEY LEARNINGS

Through the Getting In, Saving Lives project came collaborative, imaginative, yet simple, solutions to serious problems. Fire and rescue officers were suddenly able to do their job better, the risk of injury and death was reduced and thousands of pounds were saved.

Interestingly, KNH and other partners were able to adapt burglary techniques, something you would not normally consider in a positive light, into something constructive, which has the potential to deliver impressive results nationwide. We are very proud of what this project achieved.

Embracing innovation makes a real difference



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS PROJECT:

Penny Allison, communications manager | T: 01484 416440 | penny.allison@knh.org.uk

Finalist: Most Effective Partnership

Making a difference together in Offerton:

Stockport Homes leads partnership to make area safer, cleaner and greener



• THE NEED

Stockport Homes in partnership with residents, including children and young people, services, community groups and businesses, has identified a range of issues in Offerton. These include safe, cleaner, greener issues, unemployment, low educational attainment, customer satisfaction and distrust of services working in the neighbourhood. In response the community and services are working together to make a difference in Offerton.

• THE SOLUTION

This is a proactive, multi-layered project involving numerous partners and initiatives but with a single objective: to make Offerton a safer, cleaner and greener place to live and work.

The 'Offerton Together' forum was established in partnership with a neighbourhood management board which is delivering a shared action plan.

With a range of community projects, events, activities, courses and resident groups, all with that shared objective, the partnership set out to tackle problems in Offerton head-on.

The project has been funded through a variety of sources, including: Stockport Homes, Stockport MBC, the Department of Communities and Local Government, the Home Office, Big Lottery, Greater Manchester Police, Manchester and District Housing, Groundwork Trust and residents.

• THE RESULTS

Over the space of a year, the project has led to:

- A reduction in anti-social behaviour by 45 per cent
- A range of events and activities to positively engage the community, including: Offerton in Bloom, a sports day, festive celebrations, street theatre events, twelve community clean-up days and domestic violence workshops
- Twenty-seven community groups receiving a total £64,100 of local funding, including a portion from Stockport Homes' community fund
- £56,000 of external funding being secured
- Named a 'Newlove Neighbourhood' in

partnership with Baroness Newlove

- The support and development of a community group, Friends of Offerton
- The development of a neighbourhood agreement, overseen by the community, to review the key priorities for the Offerton area and define roles and responsibilities of residents and partners
- Twelve-week back-to-work course delivered in partnership with Groundwork (Successful Transitions Course)
- Nine new homes built on former sheltered housing scheme for social rent
- National recognition for its positive approach to participatory budgeting, commended by Home Office as part of the Nesta National pilot
- A new learner lounge being established at the local library
- Positive changes in behaviour and attitudes between residents and service providers
- An increase in children's physical activity levels.

• THE JUDGES SAID:

“The reduction in ASB demonstrated by Stockport Homes is hugely significant and benefits everyone.”

Michael Gelling, chair of TAROE (Tenants and Residents Organisations of England)

• KEY LEARNINGS

This project has had a positive impact on the Offerton area, addressed cleaner, greener and safer issues and has helped develop and build sustainable relationships between individuals living in the community, voluntary groups and partner organisations.

A joint approach to develop and deliver a range of projects and activities has enabled substantive steps in building confidence and trust with the community and services working in the neighbourhood. The project aims to increase pride and satisfaction in Offerton and is well on its way to achieving this aim.



Bringing Offerton together

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS PROJECT:

Jo Cole, Sustainability Manager | T: 0161 474 2918 | joanne.cole@stockporthomes.org

Finalist: Most Effective Partnership

Westminster Works:

CityWest Homes helps residents back into employment



• THE NEED

Given the UK's current economic climate, unemployment and worklessness have become a real issue for many people. CityWest Homes has worked to tackle these issues over the past year by establishing the dedicated Westminster Works employment advice team, in partnership with other key organisations.

• THE SOLUTION

Challenging a pre-existing view that ALMOs and RSLs should focus more on housing than employability, the Westminster Works team has looked to provide both practical and innovative solutions to get residents back into work.

By linking up with other organisations with similar objectives, Westminster Works takes a collaborative approach to employment support. In addition to providing general advice, it helps residents secure work placements, work experience, and permanent roles.

The Westminster Works team has forged lasting partnerships with local businesses, colleges and training providers such as Westminster adult education service, Kingsway College and City of Westminster College. The work placement scheme has been particularly successful, with many organisations' recognising the benefits that local people with local knowledge can bring to a role. Identifying what applicants are interested in is the first step; once the

applicant has been matched to an appropriate role, the employment advisor will guide them through the process. If they are successful, they will receive practical work experience within their chosen field.

• THE RESULTS

To date, more than 800 residents have enrolled onto the programme. 120 people have found permanent employment, 22 job fairs have been organised and 58 work placements have been arranged. 40 of those work placements have been given to unemployed residents at CityWest Homes, across the organisation. As a result, 15 of these residents have now been supported through the interview process and rewarded with permanent jobs at various organisations. So far, CityWest Homes has exceeded all targets for helping residents into work and for registering people through job fairs.

One resident who has benefited from the initiative is Julienne Tang, who has worked in the lessee services team at CityWest Homes since November 2010. She contacted Westminster Works having seen a poster advertising the programme and acquired a role within one month.

Julienne commented: "I loved every moment of the placement. There was a great atmosphere and the work was interesting. The team were always making sure I had enough work to learn from and offered me lots of help. As a result of the programme my career has been given a real energy boost. I am up for

the challenges my new role poses and keen to learn new skills."

• THE JUDGES SAID:

“It is not easy to find work in this affluent London borough and the work CityWest Homes is doing is helping to reverse the increasing gap between rich and poor here.”

Alison Inman, outgoing chair of the NFA

• KEY LEARNINGS

From the beginning, the team has wanted to fully understand the challenges involved. By developing a coordinated approach to employment and training issues, it has been able to provide residents with a faster, more efficient and thorough response to their employment needs. The knowledge that the team has gained can help people change their lives and gain employment and skills to further their career. The team has seen the difference its contribution has made to the lives of hundreds of residents – and this can only help enhance our community for the better.



CityWest Homes' 'Ways into Work' fair

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS PROJECT:

Tessa Eydmann-Peel, communications advisor | T: 0207 245 2542 | teydmannpeel@cwh.org.uk

Winner: Best Use of Communication

'It's Not Good Enough' DVD:

Derby Homes' groundbreaking dramatisation hits home



Derby Homes staff perform part of their role from the DVD

• THE NEED

Following the tragic case of Fiona Pilkington and her disabled daughter, who died in a suicide/infanticide incident after suffering years of anti-social behaviour, it was decided that an impactful training device was needed to increase awareness among ALMO staff and other agencies of the problems faced by tenants and leaseholders with learning difficulties.

• THE SOLUTION

A dramatisation of the case, 'It's Not Good Enough', was devised, written, performed and recorded by the neighbourhood safety team as a training tool. With sound effects sourced and edited by a member of the residential involvement team, the only input from outside Derby Homes was the filming. The DVD was 'premiered' to 460 Derby Homes staff at an employee briefing.

• THE RESULTS

The pioneering film reminds audiences that everyone has a responsibility to be aware of the issues and to act on, not ignore, problems encountered by vulnerable residents. For example, a housing repairs operative visiting a property can often notice signs of anti-social behaviour, or be given information by tenants, and this should be reported back to their team.

The audience completed a feedback form, with results showing that the eight-minute DVD was a powerful tool for delivering these messages. Approval ratings were very high, with nine out of ten feeling that the dramatisation was an effective way to raise awareness of these important issues. Seventy per cent rated the film as 'very good', while a further 20 per cent considered it 'good'. Anecdotal responses from many individuals showed that it made them think about the subject matter on both a professional and personal level.

A measure of the effectiveness of 'It's Not Good Enough' is that partners such as the Police, Community Safety Partnership and Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service have all requested copies for their own training and awareness. The neighbourhood safety team has also been invited to deliver further training sessions within these organisations and at several national conferences.

Significantly, the film has been marketed to other ALMOs and housing organisations, rolling out the messages nationwide and helping Derby Homes recoup production costs.

The 'It's Not Good Enough' DVD provides a memorable, ground-breaking training style and delivers highly emotive subject matter to

wide-ranging audiences. At times, its content is both shocking and thought-provoking, as the actions and language are as was reported by the media.

Derby Homes chair, Bob Osler, said: "This is an extremely powerful performance; when it was shown at our AGM in October, you could hear a pin drop. Rarely do you see a reaction like that and all board members left determined to improve our awareness of learning difficulties and how we can make a positive difference to the lives of those affected.

"'It's Not Good Enough' isn't comfortable viewing, but had it been it would have lost much of its impact and been a far less effective tool. It is our ambition that the film will continue to hit home with the right people across the UK for many years to come."

• THE JUDGES SAID:

"It doesn't matter if it is rented or owned, a home should be somewhere where people can go to feel safe, warm and secure. This is a significant project which affects a lot of people."

Michael Gelling, chair of TAROE (Tenants and Residents Organisations of England)

• KEY LEARNINGS

An overwhelming majority of staff gained awareness from the DVD. Individuals also reported that they thought about the issues on a personal and professional basis.

A key learning point is that this communication device works with a very broad audience; employees at all levels and in every area, board members, partner organisations and other agencies, volunteers and other ALMOs have all given hugely positive feedback.

We also have some very talented employees! Thank you to those who helped produce the DVD, a piece of work which was both professional and cost-effective.

Finalist: Best Use of Communication

'The Recipe for Making BREAD' project: Nottingham City Homes cooks up some 'bread-making' skills



A roadshow to teach tenants about money matters

• THE NEED

Nottingham City Homes is proud of its free support for tenants in financial difficulty. With 70 per cent of its homes in the poorest ten per cent of wards in the UK, this is vital for many vulnerable people. When the recession started to bite, the ALMO knew that even more had to be done – helping customers tackle rent arrears, rising debts, fuel poverty, unemployment and benefits take-up – while maintaining income levels and keeping tenancy turnover down

• THE SOLUTION

As there is often a stigma attached to asking for financial help, Nottingham City Homes set out to jointly break down these barriers and promote its services via the 'Recipe for Making BREAD' project.

BREAD is not only slang for money - it neatly represents the five strands of the ALMO's financial inclusion work: Accessing **Benefits**, paying **Rent**, reducing **Energy** bills, getting **Advice** and dealing with **Debt**.

Existing and new communications tools were used to promote these 'slices' and engage customers, including:

- Financial inclusion roadshows. These brought 60 partner organisations under one roof, all with the single aim of getting customers through tough financial times.
- A year-round series of local 'tea and toast' surgery events with a dedicated team of financial inclusion officers. Sessions offer face-to-face advice and support to tenants

- Two 'Money Matters' newsletters to all 29,000 tenants. These gave basic advice on all the key elements of financial inclusion.
- A bus advertising campaign on vehicles travelling in and around housing estates where benefit take-up and rent payments were low, encouraging more people to ask for help.
- Information on how and where to get advice and support in every edition of the company's tenant and leaseholder newsletter, published eight times a year.
- Constantly updated rents and financial inclusion information on the Nottingham City Homes website. This was complemented by Facebook and Twitter alerts for 'followers'.

• THE RESULTS

One of the easiest ways to 'improve' performance would have been to evict tenants in arrears. A key campaign focus was to stress how the ALMO wanted to avoid that by offering help early. Uptake was brisk – with the free debt advice service helping nearly 1,000 people manage £1.5 million of debt, some 1,276 tenants claim £1,643,262 in housing benefit, and 60 older people in sheltered schemes claim a variety of benefits.

As a consequence, rent arrears have been reduced to a record low of £1.8 million (from £5 million in 2006), with collection rates the highest ever at more than 100 per cent (meaning former tenant arrears were also being collected).



The 'human' upshot is that Nottingham City Homes has managed to cut the number of evictions for non-payment in the last year by more than a third – in the teeth of the toughest recession in recent history. Tenant sustainability (the number of people who remain in their home beyond the first 12 months) has risen from 86.5 per cent to 92 per cent.

• THE JUDGES SAID:

“In an era of insecurity and mounting anxiety for the poorest in our society, Nottingham City Homes must be congratulated on a communications campaign that has led to such a substantial reduction in evictions.”

Stuart MacDonald, editor of Inside Housing magazine

• KEY LEARNINGS

The BREAD campaign showed us that most of our tenants want to pay their rent but can't, rather than 'can but won't'. We found that many people didn't realise they were entitled to the benefits available to them, or didn't feel confident to switch energy suppliers, or claim their council tax credit. The campaign became more about educating our tenants on how to manage their money, than stepping in to help in a crisis.



identified by customer profiling

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS PROJECT:

Martin Valentine, head of communications and marketing | T: 0115 915 7278 | martin.valentine@nottinghamcityhomes.org.uk

Finalist: Best Use of Communication

‘We ♥ Complaints: Our handy book to getting it right first time’: Northwards Housing writes the book on complaints

Learning to love complaints



• THE NEED

Tenant members of Northwards Housing's complaints panel felt that a handy pocket guide for employees would help raise awareness of the value of complaints and the importance of learning from them. The guide was devised to tackle inconsistencies in complaints handling and help to develop a uniform approach.

The challenge in creating a guide was finding a format that would both engage staff and be convenient to use.

• THE SOLUTION

Northwards Housing's complaints panel, which is made up of tenants and staff, various service managers, representatives from the ALMO's customer service centre and its responsive repairs contractor Manchester Working Ltd, was the driving force behind 'We ♥ Complaints'. The panel is responsible for reviewing the quality of complaints handling at Northwards Housing and ensuring the root causes of problems have been identified and that necessary action is taken to tackle any underlying issues.

Colin Smith, tenant and chair of the panel, came up with the innovative idea for a tea coaster-size book, with protective cover, for staff to keep on their desks at all times. The full name of the guide is 'We ♥ Complaints: Our handy book to getting it right first time'. It was published and issued to all employees in July 2010.

Providing them with an excellent basis for

dealing with complaints professionally and efficiently, a range of topics are addressed and various scenarios presented, including how to behave when confronted by somebody complaining aggressively.

Colin Smith was also invited to write the foreword, which was invaluable, as the thoughts and ideas of one of Northwards' customers gave the publication a relevance and 'real world' perspective. He very effectively outlined why ALMOs should never be afraid of complaints, but learn to view them as the most useful tools they have at their disposal to improve the services they offer tenants and learn important lessons.

• THE RESULTS

Northwards Housing's chief executive, Robin Lawler, said: "We have found the unique complaints pocket guide really useful. It provides a standard, consistent and effective way of dealing with all complaints. We really do love complaints, because they continuously help raise our performance thresholds, improving our offer to Northwards customers." Customer Service Excellence Accreditation assessors identified the handbook as an area of 'compliance plus'. This means that among other Northwards initiatives, the booklet was judged to exceed expectations in helping to provide excellent tenant services.

There were a number of improvements made as a result of the handbook. For example, it highlights the importance of speaking to the customer personally to discuss their concerns. The Complaints Panel felt that too many

managers were responding to complaints solely in writing, and as such the responses lacked the more personal touch that you can only get face-to-face or from a telephone call. This is something that, as a result, has since been changed in the ALMO's complaints policy and is always checked for when monitoring complaints.

Northwards Housing is now looking to extend its complaints panel's role to scrutinise other areas of its business, such as its services and overall business direction.

• THE JUDGES SAID:

“The ALMO is making sure it learns from its complaints, so it gets them right first time. This project is simple and communicated well to staff.”

Alison Inman, outgoing chair of the NFA

• KEY LEARNINGS

- Our philosophy is now to embrace complaints and convert them into improvements.
- Involving tenants gives us a great insight into the complaints process from their perspective.
- It's important to keep things fresh! Presenting information in a fun, innovative way engages staff in a manner that a 'dry' document never could.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS PROJECT:

Louise Huntington, marketing and communications manager | T: 0161 720 5873 | l.huntington@northwardshousing.co.uk

The National Federation of ALMOs
Rockingham House | St Maurice's Road | York YO31 7JA

T: 0845 4747008
E: almos@hqnetwork.co.uk Website: www.almos.org.uk

Produced by Acceleris Marketing Communications