

ALMOs in action

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

News from and for arm's length
management organisations

A question of ownership

The ALMO model has proved to be **very effective at raising the standards** of council housing management and **increasing tenant engagement** in decision-making and the running of their homes.

But housing is now facing a period of huge change. As public spending is cut back, self-financing is being implemented and changes have been made to the Decent Homes funding criteria, many local authorities with ALMOs are thinking about the best options for the future.

In response to this, the latest report from the NFA 'Building on the potential of ALMOs to invest in local communities' investigates ways in which local authorities can access additional private finance outside the public sector borrowing envelope while also providing opportunities for greater tenant empowerment and retaining the strong element of partnership with the local authority.

This report sets out three possible types of ALMO for the future:

- **Model 1 - A long-term management contract.** This is based on the ALMO model having a much longer contract and on the local authority having one-third rather than sole ownership of council properties.
- **Model 2 - A long-term management contract including transfer of some vacant properties or land.** This would be similar to Model 1 but with some limited transfer.
- **Model 3 - Transfer to a Community- and Council-owned Organisation (CoCo).** This would be a fundamental change to the ALMO's constitution and would transfer ownership to the community but on a

different basis from a traditional stock transfer.

The report examines the viability and business case for each model which will also provide a much greater role for tenants in the running of their estates whilst being attractive to private lenders.

All three models aim to retain the strong partnerships developed between ALMOs and their local authorities as well as the focus on tenant empowerment and involvement.

Developing new types of ALMO could give local authorities and their tenants the chance to ensure a sustainable future for their housing. The three options explored in the report offer both opportunities to bring in

much-needed extra funding and a way of building on ALMOs' strong track record of involving tenants in the way their homes are managed. Councils, ALMOs and tenants will want to work closely together to look at which option is best for them. The government and its housing agencies should also ensure that it supports communities to consider these options which could provide the best future for their homes.

Copies of the full report or a summary leaflet can be obtained on request from almos@hqnetwork.co.uk and PDF versions can be found on the NFA website www.almos.org.uk (under **News & publications/NFA publications**).

Fire safety first

The Local Government Group has published **comprehensive fire safety guidance** for purpose-built blocks of flats to help keep residents safe.

Now available for free download via the NFA website, the government-funded document has been compiled following extensive consultation with the NFA, councils, landlords, management agents, fire authorities and other organisations across the country.

Fire safety in flats is a significant issue for the housing sector. This in-depth report provides a guide to how to best manage fire risk and educates users on the relationship between flats and fires. For example, it highlights that while people living in flats experience more fires than people living in houses, a fire in a flat is no more dangerous than a fire in a house. It also points out that the most significant influences on fire risk are social and lifestyle factors and advanced age, not the type of dwelling in which people live.

The report is applicable to ALMOs, social and private landlords, risk assessors, fire

officers and other housing professionals. It aims to address a number of complex issues relating to fire safety, including:

- Legal responsibilities
- Fire safety management, including fire spread, means of escape and 'stay put' versus full evacuation
- Housekeeping - zero tolerance/managed use
- Benchmark standards - original design and current standards
- Scope of fire risk assessments - four types
- Guidance on selecting a competent fire risk assessor
- Advice on appropriate fire precautions
- Engaging with residents.

In response to the new guidance, the NFA said: "The NFA very much welcomes this guidance and believes it provides a comprehensive account of technical fire-related standards that can be applied to a range of flats, including high, medium, low-rise,

sheltered, maisonette and cluster flats. We believe this guidance will be highly valuable to responsible persons, fire risk assessors and fire enforcement officers and should provide a clear framework in which all professionals dealing with fire safety can work together to provide a risk-appropriate service to residents living in purpose-built blocks of flats."

Ahead of the release of the new LG Group guidance in July, the NFA held a workshop on fire safety for members at its annual conference in July. Areas for discussion included how to manage risk for leaseholders; the importance of good fire safety education; how to work most effectively with local fire services; and the responsibility held by tenants in reducing the risk of fire.

The LG Group document can now be downloaded for free via the NFA website www.almos.org.uk (under **Guidance & briefings/Health and safety**).

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NFA Awards 2011 - At a glance

The **fifth annual NFA Awards** returned to the Midland Hotel in Manchester in July to celebrate the hard work and achievements of ALMOs across the country.

Representatives from 19 short-listed ALMOs gathered alongside tenants, senior industry figures and MPs for the award ceremony, held during the NFA's annual two-day conference.

Winners across eight categories were recognised along with the finalists (see below) for their innovation and dedication in serving their local community.

Youth engagement and encouraging cultural diversity were two of the main themes, with winners such as Homes for Haringey resident Derekston James and Houslow Homes tenant Torron-Lee Dewar in the Most Outstanding Young Person category and Blackpool Coastal Housing's 'BCH Academy' in the Most Innovative Project category standing out among some very strong entries.

And the award goes to...

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

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 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 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

MOST OUTSTANDING YOUNG PERSON

Joint winners
Derekston James, Homes for Haringey
Torron-Lee Dewar, Hounslow Homes

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

BOARD MEMBER OF THE YEAR

Winner
Clair Wright, Berneslai Homes

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

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'

The new face of ALMOs

The NFA is delighted to announce **Sue Roberts MBE** as its new chair.



Sue Roberts MBE: New chair of the NFA

In her new role, Sue, who is already a key figure in the ALMO movement as a former vice chair of the NFA and current chair of Wolverhampton Homes, will become one of the social housing sector's most influential spokespeople.

The selection of two new vice chairs will take place later this year. The NFA has

also announced the members of its new Board, effective until 2013. Joining the Board are South Essex Homes, Hackney Homes and Six Town Housing, represented respectively by ALMO chairs Phil Lyons, Rupert Tyson MBE, and Hugh Broadbent.

Sue will be responsible for championing the ALMO movement and its positive influence on the homes, lives and communities of council tenants across the country. This includes continuing to grow the NFA's authority with national and local Government, policy makers and the national media.

Her appointment comes at a time of great change for ALMOs and the sector, with the introduction of the Localism and Welfare Reform Bills, proposals for ALMO self-financing and community ownership of council properties and the implementation of radical spending cuts announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review.

A Wolverhampton Council tenant for 35 years and a tenant activist in the city for twelve years, Sue became a Wolverhampton Homes board member in 2005 and was elected chair in 2008. In 2009, Sue was elected co-vice chair of the NFA, enabling her to represent the interests of ALMOs at a national level. Sue was also awarded an MBE in this year's New Year Honours List for her services to social housing (reported in the last issue of ALMOs in Action).

Commenting on her new appointment, Sue said: "I am very proud to have been chosen as the NFA's new chair and to have the opportunity to represent ALMOs and the indispensable services they provide, not only in providing Decent Homes and raising accommodation standards, but enriching the lives of millions of residents and their local communities.

"One of my main priorities will be to promote the opportunities and benefits of

tenant participation. Having been a council tenant for most of my life, I have seen first-hand the real benefits of taking part in your local neighbourhood.

"With deep spending cuts now being felt across the country, I will work hard with the Board to ensure that ALMOs remain relevant and responsive to the needs of their tenants."

Sue takes the reins from Alison Inman, who has spearheaded the ALMO cause since her election as chair in 2009. During her time as chair, Alison was instrumental in a range of major achievements for the NFA, including the successful lobbying for the re-instatement of Decent Homes funding for Round Six ALMOs; the reformation of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for ALMOs; two successful NFA Awards ceremonies; and important submissions to Government proposing such measures as self-financing and large-scale community ownership of council housing.

Introducing the new board...



Barbara Dennis
The Gateshead Housing Company



Rupert Tyson MBE
Hackney Homes



Theresa Coyle MBE
Homes for Islington



Ginette Hughes
Newark and Sherwood Homes



Bill Constance
Poole Housing Partnership



Janet Dean
Sheffield Homes



Hugh Broadbent
Six Town Housing



Phil Lyons
South Essex Homes

Making the most of self-financing

Self-financing for council housing will be implemented from April 2012, something for which the NFA has long argued.

Councils, ALMOs and tenants now need to start thinking seriously about how they will make the most of these changes and ensure that they can continue to provide excellent services for residents as well as managing the business and the assets in the best way for their local communities, now and in the future.

ALMOs and councils will require very different skills for managing a self-financed business plan compared to managing a subsidy system. There will need to be a significant cultural change within each organisation in order to make the most of the opportunities that self-financing will bring. ALMOs are well placed to provide the focused approach to business planning and asset management that the new self-financed regime will demand.

Councils, ALMOs and tenants need to ensure that the business plan and asset management strategy for the housing stock reflects what all stakeholders want as well as ensuring that they are achievable in the new financial framework. Consideration should be given to service levels, the needs of the existing stock in terms of repairs and maintenance, whether the stock is fit for purpose, how best to maximise income, whether there are any assets that can be made better use of and the identification and management of risks.

There will still be a ring-fenced landlord account from April 2012. This will need to be managed efficiently and transparently so that tenants and leaseholders can understand what their rent and service charges have been spent on and how decisions were made in terms of allocating resources between different aspects of the service to residents.

The increases being built into the self-financing model should allow most councils that have met the Decent Homes standard to maintain decency across their stock, especially if they are able to make the most of their assets and manage their self-financed business plan in an efficient manner.

For those ALMOs who have yet to complete their Decent Homes programme Decent Homes funding will be provided in the form of a grant from April 2012. In London, the grant will be paid by the Greater London Authority; elsewhere in England it will be paid by the Homes and Communities Agency.

Over the coming months the NFA will produce a series of briefings highlighting the key issues that ALMOs and councils need to consider when preparing for self-financing.



The Localism Bill

As the Localism Bill has progressed through parliament, the NFA has **produced a number of briefings on those elements of the Bill** for which the NFA has key lobbying objectives.

Giving tenants a say in the future management of their housing...

A key objective has been to ensure that tenants are given the same degree of statutory protection in the management of their homes as those where councils are considering stock transfer. The current DCLG guidance to authorities bringing their ALMOs back in-house is being ignored by some councils and tenants are being disenfranchised.

The Housing Minister has promised to re-issue stronger guidance, and comments:

"It is imperative that tenants have adequate protection and their views about the provision of housing management services for their homes are fully considered. I expect those councils considering disestablishing their ALMOs to ensure that they make all the options for the ALMO clearly available to their tenants. The consultation process should be fair and transparent and evidence-based."

A considerable number of councils are expected to review their ALMOs over the next twelve months. The NFA has developed a toolkit for ALMOs undergoing reviews and has published its report on community ownership in order to extend the range of options available to councils, tenants and ALMOs.

HRA ring fence

The NFA objective has been to obtain a clear ministerial statement that the HRA ring fence continues to apply under self-financing.

Andrew Stunnell, Under Secretary of State dealing with the Bill, confirmed that:

"The proposed abolition of the subsidy system does not end the requirement for local authorities to maintain a statutory, ring-fenced housing revenue account."

Capital receipts

A key issue is clarification that all housing capital receipts will eventually be returned to councils since this will, in the longer term, significantly affect resources available to invest in the housing stock under self-financing. While there are some indications that this remains the long-term aim no definitive public statement has yet been made on the issue.

Community Right to Challenge

The NFA is seeking clarification of the Community Right to Challenge which will allow voluntary and community bodies and local authority staff to bid to run council services. Currently it is not specifically stated that the Right to Challenge is applicable to tenants or residents' groups; plus we wish to ensure ALMO officers are able to challenge their councils, along the same lines as local authority officers can. The government's response to a recent consultation paper is awaited.

A Wolverhampton Homes tenant review panel increases resident participation opportunities



100 years of ALMOs

Twenty ALMOs across England have had their management agreements extended or newly agreed by their councils for a **total of more than 100 years**, safeguarding the long-term future of tens of thousands of council tenants.

The news has been welcomed by the NFA as an endorsement of the ALMO model by their local authorities and as a clear signal that ALMOs have a bright future beyond the Decent Homes programme.

ALMOs were first formed under the previous Labour government with the dual goal of accessing government funding to pay for physical improvements to council homes and raising housing management standards.

Many ALMOs have now completed their programmes and are having their contracts reviewed. The NFA believes that ALMOs have a continuing role to play in the delivery of housing management beyond Decent Homes and that there is now ample evidence to support this view.

Sue Roberts, chair of the NFA, said: "We have always been confident that the vast majority of ALMOs will have their management agreements extended and the evidence so far supports this view, even with some organisations deciding to dissolve theirs." ALMOs have proved popular with tenants, provided many more opportunities for tenant involvement and have delivered a number of efficiency savings and improvements which have been fully recognised by their parent councils. We are very pleased to see these achievements being rewarded with contract extensions."



Among the 20 organisations to have their agreement extended is Nottingham City Homes which received a ten-year extension from Nottingham Council in March. The council decision took into account the ALMO's many achievements that included reducing rent arrears from £5 million to £1.8 million and delivering one of the UK's most efficient Decent Homes programmes.

Another is Solihull Community Housing (SCH), which has also been awarded a ten-year extension to its housing contract by Solihull Council. Established in 2004, SCH rose to a two-star organisation in 2005, which helped it gain access to £63 million of government funding to improve local homes. It became a three-star ALMO following an inspection in 2008.

Councillor Ken Meeson, leader of Solihull Council, said: "SCH's strong focus on responding to the needs of tenants, leaseholders and residents in Solihull is evident and we are confident that our housing service is in safe hands for a long time to come."

Ensuring fair change

Proposed cuts to housing, employment and welfare benefits announced by the government as part of the Welfare Reform Bill will put **intense pressure on the housing sector** and the 4.7 million tenants currently in receipt of housing benefit in this country.

Welfare reform is a key issue for the ALMO sector, 69 per cent of all social housing tenants receive housing benefit, half a million are on Jobseeker's Allowance and 700,000 are working in low-paying jobs.

The intention of the measures introduced as part of the Bill are to make work pay and to simplify the benefit system by introducing a Universal Credit to replace a number of existing benefits. However the scale and speed of the reforms threaten to cause severe hardships for both housing organisations and their tenants.

The key areas for concern to ALMOs are:

- The possible loss of housing benefit paid directly to social landlords.
- The increase in Non-Dependant Deductions from April 2011.
- The change to family sized housing benefit payments for working age tenants from April 2013.
- The overall cap on household benefits to around £500 per week from April 2013.
- The introduction of the Universal Credit to replace all of the individual benefits and tax credits for working age households by 2017.
- Technical concerns over the implementation of these reforms and the impact on information flows, IT systems and arrears.

The NFA has considerable concerns about the impact of multiple changes to the benefit system on the most vulnerable members of society. Additionally, if some tenants fall into arrears of rent this will affect the HRA business plan and the service offered to all residents.

As the Welfare Reform Bill progresses through parliament the NFA has been lobbying MPs and ministers, and working with other housing organisations, to ensure changes to the benefit system are fair. In particular we have argued that tenants should be allowed to choose whether the housing cost element of the new Universal Credit is paid to them or directly to their landlord and the government has responded positively to our request to discuss these issues.

In order to help inform this work we need further information from ALMOs on the likely impact on their business plans and their tenants, particularly information on the numbers of tenants affected by each different change, any evidence of the mismatch between the sizes of properties needed and actually available in each area, as well as any comments about technical and practical problems that can be foreseen.



Partners against crime

A **major crackdown on criminals in north Manchester** is now underway thanks to **Project Cove**, an initiative coordinated by **Northwards Housing**, the police and a number of other key community agencies.

Project Cove was launched in June and is designed to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in Harpurhey and Moston. Project partners include Northwards Housing, the police, the Department of Work and Pensions, Trading Standards and Manchester City Council's environmental health team.

The team investigates every aspect of a suspected criminal's life - including their business interests, benefits and associates. The information they gather then allows them to identify illegal activity and take appropriate action against the criminals involved. This can range from reviewing their tenancy to freezing their benefits.

In early June, for example, Northwards Housing officers received information about suspicious activity at a property and passed the details on to the police. As a result, officers secured a warrant to search the house, suspecting it was being used to deal drugs, and once inside, discovered a machete hidden under a bed. Given that having a weapon is a breach of the tenancy agreement, Northwards was able to start eviction proceedings.

Project Cove was inspired by a similar multi-agency initiative in Salford called 'Project Gulf', which has been highlighted by the Home Office as a national example of best practice in terms of multi-agency crime fighting.

Mike Stevens, director of neighbourhood services at Northwards Housing, said: "Northwards has strong links within the community. By strengthening our partnership with the police and other agencies through Project Cove, it's now easier to identify problem areas and helps us provide the community with more effective action and support."

Meanwhile, Northwards Housing has linked up with the Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust and The Wellbeing Project to deliver a six-week mental health education course to sheltered housing tenants.

The programme aims to help people stay healthy, active and independent for as long as possible. Subjects tackled include coping with stress and improving mood and vitality. More information on this story and Northwards Housing can be found at www.northwardshousing.co.uk



Enforcing Project Cove

Reaping the benefits

Six Town Housing has reduced the time taken to process tenants' housing benefit claims by 36 days thanks to a close working relationship with **its housing benefits partner.**

Housing benefit liaison officers work alongside rent advisors on the Six Town Housing rents team to provide a high standard front-line service to tenants, contribute to the effective collection of business revenue and help tenants understand and deal with the impact of welfare benefit reforms. In the last two financial years, tenants have had housing benefit payments totalling £153,244.31 paid to their rent accounts.

Thousands of tenants have benefited from the partnership, including at weekly drop-in surgeries. Here, tenants can access help, advice and information, as

well as report problems before they worsen. To date, 1,589 tenants have received support from the surgeries, with an average of 13 attending each session.

The partnership has also made progress in addressing the needs of vulnerable tenants, some of whom had previously fallen into rent arrears and struggled to keep up payments. Working actively with the local community, Six Town Housing has engaged with vulnerable tenants and offered solutions, including successful back-dated payments in appropriate cases, enabling individuals to sustain tenancies.

Six Town Housing reports that historically revenues and benefits have

had large amounts of work outstanding and delays of many weeks. Now the housing benefit liaison officers are processing claims on average 36 days quicker than before.

In the case of welfare benefit reforms, Six Town Housing is working with its housing benefit partners to minimise the impact on communities and prepare for any changes which will affect tenants. Information and updates are shared via notices in rent accounts and newsletters.

The partnership will also play a critical role in the continued support of more vulnerable tenants, particularly in the run-up to the implementation of Universal Credit.



Helping residents back to work

Efforts by **Lewisham Homes to tackle unemployment** have so far led to **22 residents finding full or part-time work**, with more entering college, further training or work experience programmes.

Lewisham Homes has developed a number of key partnerships with local training and employment services to help residents back into employment or training.

Initiatives include Get Lewisham Working, a partnership funded by Lewisham Council which aims to provide employability support to local residents through job clubs and drop-in sessions at dedicated centres. Another is High-5 training, which offers mentoring and development opportunities to 16 to 25-year-old residents and is delivered by training and development company Elevating Success in partnership with Lewisham Homes.

Twenty-five-year-old Lewisham Homes resident Renee Robinson has undertaken administration work experience at Elevating Success and Lewisham Homes after completing High-5 training. She says: "The programme has helped me to identify my skills and has given me the confidence to go out and look for work and know that I am doing it in the correct way."

Lewisham Homes also has a close relationship with employment specialists Working Links. Together they regularly deliver CV writing and interview skills training

and launched the 'All I want for Christmas is a Job' campaign, which saw all Lewisham Homes residents receiving a postcard with essential employment advice and contacts in December 2010.

Community involvement manager for Lewisham Homes, Sue Asquith, says: "The partnerships are about being proactive in our community and reaching out to those who need support to get back into employment."

These are fantastic opportunities for Lewisham residents to work with people dedicated to helping them identify skills and experience that could be valuable to potential employers."



Residents fulfil their Christmas wishes with help from local training and employment services

Good things come in threes

East North East Homes Leeds (ENEHL), West North West Homes Leeds (WNWHL), and Aire Valley Homes (AVH) hope to **save £1.6 million** by combining a number of key departments to form the **ALMO Business Centre Leeds (ABCL)**.

The main aim of the ABCL is to meet the wider agenda of savings within public services by merging the support services functions of three ALMOs into one.

The first staff began work at the new facility, which combines IT, finance, human resources, marketing and communications, at the beginning of July, with the site expected to be fully operational by March 2012. The ABCL centre will in the future also accommodate some housing management functions to ensure the ALMOs can deliver the council's £50 million capital programme on budget.

It is hoped the new facility will also help modernise some working practices, by making more use, for example, of mobile and teleconferencing technologies.

Wider ABCL objectives:

1. To reduce duplication to ensure money and resources are better utilised. This will generate a stronger consistency of services across the city.
2. To contribute to the localism agenda by taking the savings made and re-investing them into local community needs.
3. To ensure customers from all three ALMOs do not experience any impact from the changes as the front line service is unaffected. Impact on staffing has been managed through a popular early-leavers initiative and a recruitment freeze.

In terms of making cost savings, the three partners hope sharing services in this way will prove an effective alternative to councils taking their ALMO back in-house and inspire other ALMOs to consider equivalent projects in their own areas.



Claire Warren, WNWHL chief executive, will lead the ABCL. She told Inside Housing magazine: "It's about long-term viability and making sure there's the best use of skills and talents in all the organisations and efficiencies that can be derived without affecting front line services. It is also about the most effective procurement and the benefits of the economy of scale on procurement."



Steve Hunt, chief executive of ENEHL, said: "We're committed to getting the best value for our tenants. This new organisation will create greater consistency across the city with a central pool of talent to draw from while helping us to channel the savings back into our estates. This new way of working has the potential to be a real game changer for how social housing organisations are run in the future."



Simon Costigan, chief executive of AVH, added: "AVH is proud to be involved in the creation of the ABCL and to be able to benefit from the savings and improvements it will generate through the new innovative and modern approaches to providing core services. "Its creation will lead to greater efficiencies for all three organisations. AVH will use the savings to re-invest in those services which make a genuine difference to our tenants' everyday quality of life. We are living through challenging times, but as ever, AVH will seek to minimise the impact on tenants and ensure that service improvement remains a key objective to improve customer satisfaction in all areas of service delivery."



Young movers and shakers: Hackney Homes tenants enjoying Zumba at the Olympic themed Fun Day in Mabley Green



Olympic fever in Hackney

Residents of all ages in Hackney are getting into the sporting mood ahead of the 2012 Olympics thanks to an initiative aided by Hackney Homes.

A partnership between Hackney Homes, Hackney Council's parks team and the 2012 Olympics Unit has led to two mini-festivals full of adrenaline-packed activities.

In July and August, Haggerston Park and Mabley Green Park hosted fun-filled days out for family and friends. They featured children's activities, lessons about healthy living, sports sessions led by qualified coaches and advice about employment opportunities.

The 2012 Unit was present to give local residents a go at Olympic events such as the long-jump and wheelchair basketball. Hackney Homes staff were also on-hand to provide residents with useful information on a range of issues on how to get involved in their community.

Hackney is one of the five host boroughs for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Par for the course

Elderly residents from Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) sheltered housing schemes joined tenants from other housing associations to compete for the annual Rookie Golf Cup.

Rookie golf is a light, arcade version of the game that uses larger, brightly-coloured equipment. Lessons are delivered beforehand by social enterprise Rookie Sports.

The aim of the tournament was to engage elderly residents with their communities while delivering a fun-filled day of friendly competition, camaraderie and the occasional hole in one. All participants thoroughly enjoyed the experience and after a tense showdown, the honours went to the team from YHN's Welbeck Green scheme. In total, over 70 elderly residents attended the event.

John Lee, chief executive at YHN, said: "We are always looking at new and different ways to get our tenants engaged in the community. Our Positive Activities Programme has been really successful and the Rookie Golf lessons in particular have proved extremely popular."

The Rookie Golf scheme has the added benefit of keeping elderly residents physically active without the risk of over-exertion. Many participants experience increased hand-eye coordination and improved physical wellbeing. Tenants who played Rookie Golf regularly enjoyed fewer general aches and pains and many arthritis sufferers have seen their



condition improve. Cliff Atherton, an 86-year-old participant, said: "As well as helping me to exercise I like the social side of it as lots of people take part and we all have a good laugh together."

No longer a rookie – resident takes part in Rookie Golf tournament

Achieving your goals

An innovative project funded by Wolverhampton Homes has helped over 50 local youngsters stay on the right track.



Organised by Wolverhampton Wanderers' charity arm the Wolves Community Trust and co-funded by the Football Foundation, the 'Goalz' project was launched to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in Bilston.

Aimed at 10 to 16 year olds from The Lunt, a residential area in Bilston, the project organises a variety of football sessions and educational workshops on issues such as health, drugs and alcohol abuse. Since its inception, the project has helped youngsters develop their skills and confidence.

They include Brett, 17, who joined the army but had to leave due to health reasons. Since then he has been attending the Goalz sessions and is currently working towards an FA Level 1 Coaching Certificate.

Brett said: "I really enjoy attending and helping out at the Goalz sessions. Being able to play football on a Friday night has kept me out of trouble and has given me something to focus on. I've always loved football so being involved with Wolverhampton Wanderers is amazing. I have made new friends and have definitely become much better at football."

Mark Henderson, director of housing at Wolverhampton Homes, said: "We are proud to be involved in Goalz and it is great to see the real impact the project has had on youngsters in the city. Projects like this are vital to keep young people engaged with their communities and help them build skills for a bright future."

Goalz has also been recognised for its positive impact on the local community at the Wolves Community Trust's annual reception and has received support from West Midlands Police, youth workers and other local community groups. Goalz was launched in January 2011 and is set to continue until the end of the year.

A breath of fresh air

Sport and exercise were the main themes of a Homes for Northumberland free health event in April, designed to help local residents lead healthier lifestyles.

Homes for Northumberland joined forces with a number of partners, including Northumberland County Council, to deliver the event, called 'A Breath of Fresh Air', at the Alnwick North Community Centre.

Local people flocked on the day to enjoy a range of activities, from Nordic walking and bulb planting to sports coaching, fresh food cooking demonstrations and zumba, the new dance fitness craze.

Ray Boycott, managing director at Homes for Northumberland, said: "Getting outside

into the fresh air can help to improve your health in a number of ways, including perking up your mood, reducing anxiety and contributing to your children's development.

"A Breath of Fresh Air" was designed to help people think about new ways of getting outside and it was fantastic to see so many people come along and enjoy the day. Homes for Northumberland is committed to going the extra mile for our tenants and our thanks goes to all of our partners for helping to make the day such a great success."

Other agencies involved include the Alnwick Community Development Trust, the Alnwick Lions Club, Real Food Works, Groundwork North East, Sustrans, Surestart, Age UK and Northumbria Police.

Football fun for Gateshead pupils

A sporting chance

Schoolchildren in Gateshead are taking the first step in becoming the next Alan Shearer thanks to a £9,560 grant from The Gateshead Housing Company's community fund.

This grant will allow the Newcastle United Foundation, a charity linked to Newcastle United, to run eight 'Match Fit Clubs' which combine fun, fast-paced football training with lessons on hydration and healthy eating.

Julie Mordue, business development officer for the Newcastle United Foundation, said: "Our aim is to use the passion behind football to encourage learning and promote healthier lifestyles which make a real difference to the lives of children and families in our region."

The Gateshead Housing Company's community fund has supported countless initiatives over the past few years to improve the lives of residents, providing cash awards from £500 to £10,000 and in-kind donations. The fund is supported by Frank Haslam Milan (FHM) North East, Gateshead Council, and Morrison PLC.



Going above and beyond the call of duty

In this issue of ALMOs in Action, we shine the spotlight on **ALMO staff** who have given **extraordinary service to residents** and have proven that 'it's not in my job description' is not in their vocabulary.

Purr-fect idea - Dave Parker

Dave Parker, a caretaker at Northwards Housing renowned for going the extra mile to help tenants and colleagues, has helped a widowed resident regain some happiness.

After the loss of her husband, tenant Trish Walker confided in Dave that she was going through a troubled time and feeling lost. Concerned for her wellbeing, Dave bought her a cat, hoping that having a pet to look after may help give her a renewed sense of purpose.

Trish said: "When Dave came round with the cat, I was overjoyed! I can't put into words how much of a difference having her has made in my life."

"Dave Parker is warm, positive and selfless."

Pat Scappaticci, Northwards Head of Retirement Housing and Caretaking Services

Local hero - Sandra Pickles

Sandra Pickles' passion and determination to help East North East Homes Leeds tenants receive the support they need has seen her go the extra mile in her role as debt and benefit advisor.

Convinced that there were residents who were not receiving the financial help they were entitled to, Sandra set up benefit surgeries in areas with high levels of worklessness including Halton Moor, Gipton and Seacroft. Her determination paid off and resulted in one mother claiming back £11,000 in overpaid rent which she should have been receiving to help raise her daughter.

Sandra said: "I have dealt with tenants who had more than one creditor and were struggling to pay their rent. I've seen firsthand the problems associated with debt and how stressful it can be for tenants having to manage these issues, which is why I'm glad to be able to help."

A good sign - Leanne Lewis-Parton

Wolverhampton Homes customer service advisor Leanne Lewis-Parton has completed a British Sign Language (BSL) qualification to help customers with hearing difficulties.

In her role at the organisation's One Stop Shops, Leanne regularly deals with people who have hearing difficulties. However, under the previous system these customers had to wait for an appointment with a signer who could deal with their enquiry.

That was until Leanne decided to improve the situation by enrolling on a BSL Level 1 course. Leanne's new skills have made a huge difference to customers with hearing impairments and earned her an award in recognition of her achievement.

She said: "I don't feel like I have done anything 'above and beyond'; to me it was an obvious next step in my role and it puts a smile on my face when I am able to help someone using my new skills."



Flying high - Chris Corker

Chris Corker, a housing management officer at Berneslai Homes, has been congratulated for setting up the 'Kes Project', which works with birds of prey as a diversionary activity to address anti-social behaviour in young people.

The pilot project, inspired by the 1969 film 'Kes', was set up to address the persistent anti-social behaviour of 16-year-old Ben Brettoner, who was causing problems both at school and on Berneslai Homes' housing estates and had been given a five year anti-social behaviour order as a result. When Chris met Ben he realised he showed a real passion for birds of prey. Chris, who keeps and shows the animals, decided to set up the course to give Ben the chance to complete a eight-week course for a Bird of Prey Husbandry qualification.

Ben successfully qualified and has since become a positive role model to his peers on his estate. Ben said: "I am so pleased to have passed the course. I would love to get a job in the future working in falconry." Chris Corker's manager Paul Dawson added: "I am delighted the project has been a great success. I would like to thank Chris for his hard work; he has gone above and beyond his role and he is a huge credit to Berneslai Homes."

Going the extra mile

- Louise Dolling

Over the past year, Louise Dolling, estates officer for the Welwyn Hatfield Community Housing Trust, has implemented a number of innovative schemes which have improved services and local neighbourhoods as well as saved the organisation over £7,000.

One of her initiatives, called 'Walkabout Wednesdays', involved meeting local tenants and residents to talk about particular issues or areas of concern and discuss possible solutions. Numerous improvements were made as a result, including the re-negotiation of a contract for fly-tipping removal, which has saved the ALMO several thousand pounds per year. Louise has been formally recognised as "GEM of the Year" for her outstanding achievements by colleagues and customers for 'Going the Extra Mile' for the local community.

