



## Changing lives

Prison visits: young residents get wake-up call



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# Welcome

to the winter issue  
of *Housing Matters*



I would like to wish all residents a happy and prosperous New Year.

A New Year's resolution of mine will be to provide better homes and better services for you, our residents.

One of the ways in which we're hoping to do this is by joining together the housing associations within Catalyst Housing Group, our parent company (see page 4).

I would like to thank the residents who gave us their views about our organisational restructure at the consultation workshops we've been holding in January and those who filled in the feedback forms. The consultation will end on 31 January 2011, and after this we'll gather your feedback and present it to our Board in February.

The restructure will ensure we continue to deliver on all the promises we've made to you. We'll be creating a new customer services department and increasing resident involvement, which will lead to you getting a better service from us.

The government has also announced plans to make some changes to housing benefit, and rents and tenancies for new lets (page 8). We don't feel that some of these changes are fair. For example, they may make it harder for some residents to move home. That's why, after speaking to the Catalyst Residents Federation, we've formally responded to these changes, with some suggestions to make the proposals fairer.

We're here to provide better homes and better services for **all** our residents so that, together, we can build a better future. I hope that in 2011 we'll make big strides towards achieving this.

Best wishes,  
**John Foxall**  
Managing Director

## Building homes for older people



Members of Catalyst and Wokingham Council celebrate reaching the highest point in construction of Alexandra Place

Our plans to provide new homes for older people were a step closer to reality in November when we reached the highest point in construction of Alexandra Place in Woodley. The Mayor of Wokingham Borough Council, Councillor Dianne King and the Leader of the Council, Councillor David Lee performed a rooftop ceremony to mark the occasion.

Alexandra Place will consist of 46 one-bed and 18 two-bed apartments. Once complete, Central and Cecil Housing Trust will be leasing and managing the scheme. Additional care, for those who need, it will be provided by Housing 21.

The development will feature an exercise room, hair salon, restaurant, IT café, therapy suite and activity areas. Homes will be suitable for a range of older people – from those who are active and have few or no care needs to those requiring 24-hour care and support.

## Beware of meter cheaters

If you have a prepaid electricity meter, steer clear of doorstep cheaters trying to sell illegal meter top-ups. Criminals are using cloned keys to top-up credit illegally and are offering electricity top-ups at 'discounted prices'.

However, energy companies can detect electricity that has not been paid for and residents can end up paying twice. You should only buy credit for your prepaid meter from official outlets such as the Post Office, PayPoint or Payzone.

If someone threatens you to gain access to your electricity meter, you should contact the police and let your neighbourhood manager know.

For more details on this scam visit [www.top-upsafe.co.uk](http://www.top-upsafe.co.uk)

# Lighting up Dee Park



The festive season came to Ranikhet Primary School, in Reading, during December with a celebration to mark the turning on of the school's Christmas tree lights.

The tree was donated to the school by the Dee Park Partnership (DPP), a joint venture between Catalyst and Willmott Dixon Group in partnership with Reading Borough Council, which is regenerating the Dee Park estate. Members of the DPP team also turned out to the school dressed up as Father Christmas and his elves, with a real reindeer adding to the festive atmosphere.

The £150 million regeneration of the Dee Park estate will include 763 new homes of which 281 will be affordable, 482 for sale and 60 new extra care units. When complete, the new Dee Park will include a primary school, retail facilities and an improved estate layout.

◀ *Christmas tree lights up faces of children from Ranikhet Primary School*

## Older residents get into festive spirit



*Older residents receive early Christmas presents*

Christmas came early for 140 older residents at the Older Tenants' Forum's Christmas party in early December. Residents enjoyed a traditional Christmas meal and were entertained by the St. Benedict's School choir, line dancers and a steel drum band.

Joice Keeble, Chair of the forum, turned into a real-life Santa as she had collected over 140 raffle prizes for the guests, with each resident being given a raffle ticket. This meant that everyone was given a prize and an early Christmas present.

The Older Tenants' Forum represents the interests of our older residents, and meets monthly to discuss up and coming issues.

**To join the forum or for more details, please contact Les Warren on 020 8832 3219 or [les.warren@chg.org.uk](mailto:les.warren@chg.org.uk)**

# Changing for



We want to provide better services and better homes for our residents. To help us do this we plan to join CCHA with the other housing associations in our parent company, Catalyst Housing Group.

As we join together, we will develop:

- Local boards for London and the South East, which will make decisions about local services
- A single customer services department, which is open for longer and on Saturdays
- A system that allows neighbourhood managers to work more with our communities
- Improvements to how residents access our services, which will ensure that we get it right at the first point of contact

We intend to keep local offices in London and the South East. Our work will be structured to reflect these two key operating areas and each area will have its own, separate local board. This should allow us to better tailor local services to meet local needs (see page 10 to find out how we're developing local

offers). Up to half the places on the boards will be reserved for residents. If you'd like to put yourself forward to become a local board member, see page 7 for details on the ways you can get involved.

The restructure won't affect your rights or the terms of your tenancy agreement. As CCHA is the biggest member of the Catalyst Housing Group, the assets of the other companies will be transferred over to us. CCHA will then be renamed as Catalyst Housing Limited. This means that we will still be your landlord and you will not have to sign a new tenancy agreement.

Since mid-December we've been formally consulting with you about our plans. Hundreds of you filled in feedback forms and attended the workshops we've been holding in January.

Thank you to those residents who gave us their views, which we'll be using when devising plans to deliver services within one unified organisation.

# the better

## Consulting with your reps



*Resident representatives hear about our plans from John Foxall*

The consultation will end on 31 January, and your feedback will be presented to our Board in February. Subject to your feedback, we expect to be given the final go-ahead. We will, of course, keep you updated on our progress.

Unrelated to our proposed restructure, the government has recently announced plans to make some changes to social housing tenancies and rents. These changes won't affect existing tenants but may affect new tenants and existing tenants who transfer to new homes.

We feel that some of these proposals are unfair. For example, they may make it harder for some residents to move home. That's why we've been working with other housing associations in London and our residents to feed in suggestions that would make the proposals fairer. See page 8 for more details.

**More details on these proposals are available on our website at [www.chg.org.uk](http://www.chg.org.uk)**

John Foxall, Managing Director at CCHA, met representatives of the London Residents Forum (LRF) in December to speak about our proposed restructure (see opposite) and how residents will be affected.

John answered many questions from LRF members on a range of issues. This included how resident involvement would be managed centrally, the need for improvements in IT systems, the lack of clarity on the services received by leaseholders and the new size of the neighbourhood manager patches.

After hearing John's response to their concerns and the benefits of our proposals, LRF representatives agreed to talk about the proposed restructure to other residents living in their areas and encourage them to get involved.

The main question on everyone's mind was whether residents will still have the opportunity to get involved. The answer to this is 'yes' – in fact our plans will increase resident involvement.

**See page 7 for details on the resident involvement initiatives we provide.**



# Changing lives

*Residents Emily Williams (left) and Shaneila Harriot (right) reflect on their trip to the prison with our resident involvement officer Katerina Getsevich (middle)*

Nine residents between the ages of 14 and 17 headed to HMP Send Prison in December to find out what life is like behind bars.

‘I’ll never do a bad thing again because I don’t want to end up in prison’, said Emily Williams. During the visit, Emily, 16, participated in exercises that made her think about her actions and their consequences as well as peer pressure. Emily has now pledged to change her ways and not hang around with people who encourage her to take part in nuisance behaviour, and she’s sticking to this.

The day after the trip, Emily’s friend asked her to go along to a local shop to ‘cause trouble and have fun’. The first thing that Emily then thought of was prison. ‘If I do small bad things now, then they’ll become big bad things and eventually bigger bad things. Someday I might end up in prison.’

The thing that shocked Shaneila Harriott, 14, the most during the prison visit was the enormity of the crimes committed. ‘They just seemed like normal people and then they told us they were murderers.’ It was then she realised that crimes aren’t just committed by ‘gangsters’, but that ‘normal’ people can also fall into this way of life.

However, Shaneila did feel sorry for the inmates when she was going home. ‘When we said our goodbyes, some of the prisoners said “I wish I was going home and I could turn back time”. I realised then how lucky I was.’ Shaneila now truly values her freedom and uses her time to do things that will help improve her life.

Some of the young adults who went along to the trip are in the process of becoming young representatives for us. This involves speaking to other young residents about their future and the resident involvement activities we offer. The young people have also encouraged their parents and other family members to get involved.

The prison trips were organised by Successful Futures, our young adults’ forum, and is part of our drive to increase resident involvement and reduce anti-social behaviour in our communities.

**If you or anyone you know would be interested in taking part in one of our prison visits, please contact Katerina Getsevich on 020 8832 3204 or [katerina.getsevich@chg.org.uk](mailto:katerina.getsevich@chg.org.uk)**

# Ways to get involved

We're committed to placing residents at the heart of our decision-making process. As the customer, you're in the best position to tell us what works well and where we can do better. By being responsive to your needs, we're able to continuously improve the services we provide.

We offer a range of resident involvement initiatives. Some activities take up a small amount of time, whilst others take up a larger amount of time. Below are just some of the ways in which you can get involved.

**Local Boards:** as part of our restructure proposals (page 4) we'll be setting up local boards in London and the South East. The boards will make decisions about local services and monitor how services are delivered in each area. Up to half the places on the local boards for will be reserved for our residents.

**Catalyst Residents Federation:** is an independent body of residents drawn from various residents' groups. It represents the needs of residents by scrutinising Catalyst's services and making proposals for improvements to services which affect all residents.

**Residents' groups, associations and forums:** these independent formal organisations work with us on issues that are important to local communities and make suggestions about local service improvement.

**Block representatives:** you can represent the interests of a block of flats, a street, a community group or any other agreed specified area.

**Surveys and focus groups:** this includes taking part in satisfaction surveys, focus groups and telephone surveys.

For more details on the resident involved initiatives we provide:

- **If you live in London, contact Michael Simms on 020 8832 3111 or [micheal.simms@chg.org.uk](mailto:micheal.simms@chg.org.uk)**
- **If you live in the South East, contact Sasha East on 0186 533 4802 or [sasha.east@chg.org.uk](mailto:sasha.east@chg.org.uk)**



# Government changes to housing: *a quick guide*

During 2011, the government is planning to make some changes to housing benefit, and to rents and tenancies for new lets. *Most of these things will not affect our existing tenants but there are housing benefit changes on the horizon which may affect you.*

These changes are still at the planning stage, so some details are not yet clear. You will find a short guide to the key points below, and we will keep you updated as things become clearer.

## Setting rents

For existing tenants, there will be **no change** to the way that we set our rents. However, the government wants to change the funding system for building new homes – providing less government subsidy but allowing housing associations to charge higher rents.

The higher rents would apply to the new homes and to some relets. This will affect new tenants and existing tenants who transfer to new homes, and may affect existing tenants who transfer to relets.

We are waiting for more information about how this system will work, before deciding whether we want to develop more new homes on this basis. We are keen to keep developing if we can, because so many people need homes. But it is also important that customers can afford the homes we build. We will let you know when we have worked out what we are going to do.

## Tenancies

For existing tenants, there will be **no change** to their tenancy. However, the government wants most tenants who move into new homes to be on fixed term tenancies.

Catalyst and the Catalyst Residents Federation have argued that housing associations should be able to make their own decisions about the types of tenancy they offer and we believe that the government has accepted this.

This is very important because we want to be free to allow existing tenants to carry their current tenancy agreement to any home that they transfer to. Catalyst will develop its tenancy policy and we will update you about this as soon as we can.

**We will provide further information about these changes as more information becomes available. In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, please contact your Neighbourhood Manager.**

## Benefit caps

The government plans to cap the total amount of benefit that any family can receive at a maximum of £500 per week, including housing benefit. We don't think that this cap is fair or workable, and we have suggested that the benefit cap should be raised for larger families.

## Other changes to housing benefit

The government is also proposing some other housing benefit changes that **may affect some tenants**. For example, from April 2013 there will be housing benefit reductions for under occupiers (people living in properties that are larger than they need), and for people who have been on Job Seekers' Allowance for more than one year.



I'm helping  
to build my  
**OWN** home

*Mill Farm Close resident, Leon Brown, gets to grips with the regeneration of the estate*

Apprentice Leon Brown, who lives on Mill Farm Close in Harrow, has been given the opportunity to learn a new trade and help build his own home, as part of an employment programme run by Catalyst Gateway.

Leon, 30, will be working alongside construction professionals to help build the first phase of 110 new houses and flats at Mill Farm Close.

Leon said: 'I had been in and out of work doing jobs like gardening and labouring. Then somebody told me about the employment scheme and I immediately applied. I live in a studio flat at the moment but I'm going to be allocated a one-bedroom flat when phase one of the redevelopment is completed. So I'm basically going to be building my own house!'

Construction work on the Mill Farm Close estate started in September 2010, and the project will deliver 158 new homes. For more details visit [www.millfarmclose.org.uk](http://www.millfarmclose.org.uk)

**For more information on the training and employment opportunities provided by Catalyst Gateway, call 020 8832 3377 or email [luciana.buzak@chg.org.uk](mailto:luciana.buzak@chg.org.uk)**

## Get learning

**Catalyst Gateway provides a range of training courses especially designed for you, our residents.**

Courses include:

- Chartered Institute of Housing Certificate in housing (level 2)
- The role of a resident housing inspector
- Board member skills
- Effective scrutiny within social housing
- Understanding the role of mystery shopping
- Developing customer service skills

By offering these courses we hope to improve your skills, knowledge and experience. All courses are free and if you complete three of them you'll receive an OCN Level 1 Progression Award as a resident regulator.

**Interested? Contact the Catalyst Gateway training and employment team on 020 8832 3377 or [luciana.buzak@chg.org.uk](mailto:luciana.buzak@chg.org.uk)**



# Local offers for local people

What are your priorities for the services you receive locally? Your feedback at the resident consultation workshops which are taking place throughout January will help answer this question and allow us to tailor our services to local needs. The focus of the workshops was finding out what you think of how we deal with reports of anti-social behaviour and how we manage the cleaning and grounds maintenance on your estate or on the block where you live.

Once all the workshops have taken place, we'll be putting together and publishing 'local offers' based around your key priorities. This will ensure we deliver the services that are most important to you in the way you want them to be delivered.

We've already set local offers for tenant involvement, customer care, and repairs and maintenance. For details on these, download the CCHA Residents' Annual Report from our website at [www.chg.org.uk](http://www.chg.org.uk)

As part of our organisational restructure (see page 4), we're proposing to set up local boards, which will monitor our services. But we also want residents other than local board members to monitor how we're performing. Your involvement will ensure that we're providing the right services, of the right quality and that they are good value for money.

## To get involved in monitoring and shaping our services

- If you live in London, contact Michael Simms on 020 8832 3111 or [micheal.simms@chg.org.uk](mailto:micheal.simms@chg.org.uk)
- If you live in the South East, contact Sasha East on 0186 533 4802 or [sasha.east@chg.org.uk](mailto:sasha.east@chg.org.uk)

You can also contact Michael, Sasha or your neighbourhood manager if you were unable to attend the workshops and want to have your say.

# Take the power

We're looking for residents to 'take the power' and get involved in community activities at the Windmill Park Community Centre and other centres in Southall.

You'll have the chance to make a difference in the community and get accredited training. The best thing about this is that it's all **free!**

Activities on offer include music recording and production sessions, computing and sewing classes, hand massage for older people, nutrition advice, employment and training support, job clubs, as well as various sports activities.

# A blizzard of activity at youth project



*Young Oxford resident enjoys his time at youth projects's winter holiday programme*

40 young people from Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys in Oxford braved the snowy weather to take part in the Leys CDI youth project's winter holiday programme in December. Wrapped up in their hats and scarves, the young people trundled through the snow to join in the fun at the community centre.

Activities on offer included street dance, web design and making music in a recording studio. The young people also got the chance to take part in various games activities to keep themselves warm. These included table tennis, and computer games on the Xbox and Wii.

Marsha Jackson, Youth Project Manager, said: 'This has been a busy and successful year, and it's good to see it all ending on a high note. Everyone really enjoyed the activities the project laid, especially the Christmas party.'

Leys CDI youth project's winter holiday programme was made possible with a £2,000 grant from Oxford City Council's Positive Future initiative. The project also receives support from our South East community involvement team, which they have been praised for by Leys CDI.

Leys CDI was formed in 1995 to support local projects benefiting local people. The initiative also supports a project for older people based at the Clockhouse in Greater Leys, a community centre designed specifically for older peoples' activities.

**For more details on the activities and projects we hold in the South East, please contact Sasha East on 0186 533 4802 or [sasha.east@chg.org.uk](mailto:sasha.east@chg.org.uk)**

Take the Power began at the start of 2010 when the Windmill Park Estate community centre was transformed after building a new media and arts room in the centre. This was made possible after the community centre was awarded £50,000 from Big Lottery, and £30,000 from Catalyst Gateway to support the project for the next three years.

The project will have a huge impact for families in the local neighbourhood, opening up opportunities to learn everything from basic computer skills to making their own clothes. The new facilities will also help the estate to combat problems of unemployment and

anti-social behaviour by providing activities and volunteering opportunities along with education and employment guidance.

**Interested? Contact Nuria Rodriguez on 020 8832 3233 or [nuria.rodriguez@chg.org.uk](mailto:nuria.rodriguez@chg.org.uk)**



# Keep communal areas tidy - and safe

Did you know that you're risking someone's life by dumping rubbish or leaving personal items in the communal areas where you live?

These items can block hallways, staircases and exit doors which increases the time it takes for someone to exit the building. In the event of an emergency, such as a fire or a gas leak, it can lead to people becoming trapped.

It's part of your tenancy agreement that you don't dump rubbish or leave personal items in communal areas. We will remove anything left in them and take action against persistent offenders.

If someone is dumping rubbish or leaving personal belongings in the communal area of where you live, please let us know by contacting the customer services centre in your area (numbers below).

If you need any part of this information in large print, Braille, on CD or explained in your own language please contact us the numbers below.

Ky dokument ju jep informacione në lidhje me të rejtat për strehim, ngjarjet dhe informacionet locale, nëse ju duhet ndonjë pjesë e këtij informacioni në Braille, në CD, në kasetë ose të shpjegohet në gjuhën tuaj, ju lutemi kontaktoni në numrin poshtë.

এই দস্তাবেজটি বাসস্থান সম্পর্কীয় খবর, ঘটনা ও স্থানীয় তথ্য সম্বন্ধে তথ্য সরবরাহ করবে। যদি আপনি এই তথ্যগুলোর বে কোন একটির সম্বন্ধে বিস্তারিত জানতে চান, অথবা আপনার নিজের ভাষাতে ব্লে, সিডি, অডিও টেপ-এ পেতে চান তাহলে নিম্নলিখিত নম্বরে আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন।

本文档提供关于住房新闻、事件和当地信息方面的信息。如果您需要将这些信息的任何部分以大字印刷形式、盲文形式，或通过 CD、磁带，或以您的本国语言的形式提供给您，请通过以下号码与我们联系。

Niniejszy dokument zawiera nowości z rynku mieszkaniowego, informacje o wydarzeniach społecznych oraz doniesienia miejscowe. Jeżeli potrzebujesz aby całość lub część tego tekstu były przedstawione większą czcionką, w języku Braille'a, na nośniku CD, na kasecie audio lub zostały przetłumaczone na Twój język ojczysty, prosimy o kontakt pod numerem podanym niżej.

ਇਹ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਰਾਹਿਮੀਗ ਖਬਰਾਂ, ਪ੍ਰੋਗਰਾਮਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਸਥਾਨਕ ਸੂਚਨਾ ਬਾਰੇ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਦਿੰਦਾ ਹੈ। ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਦੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਹਿੱਸੇ ਨੂੰ ਬ੍ਰੇਲ, ਸੀਡੀ, ਆਡੀਓ ਟੇਪ ਵਿੱਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਜਾਂ ਅਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਮਝਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

Dokumentigan wuxuu ku saabsan yahay warka cusub oo guriyo, dhacdooyin iyo gobol ah. Haddaad u baahan tahay warkan afkaaga-hooyo, afka loogu talagalay dadka aan arki karaan – afka faraha ama CD-ga ama ajeladda rekorka nala xirir. Namberkan isticmaal.

یہ دستاویز اقامت گاہوں کی خبریں، واقعات اور مقامی معلومات کے بارے میں جانکاری دیتا ہے۔ ان معلومات کے کسی حصہ کی اگر آپ کو بریل، سی ڈی، آڈیو ٹیپ یا اپنی زبان میں وضاحت کی ضرورت ہو تو براہ کرم ہم سے نیچے دیے گئے نمبر پر رابطہ کریں۔

यह दस्तावेज़ आवासीय खबरों, आयोजनों और स्थानीय सूचना के बारे में जानकारी देता है। अगर आप इस जानकारी के किसी भी हिस्से को ब्रेल, सीडी, ऑडियो टेप में चाहते हैं या अपनी भाषा में समझना चाहते हैं, तो कृपया नीचे दिए गए नम्बर पर हमसे सम्पर्क करें।

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**Housing Matters** is published by:  
Catalyst Communities Housing Association,  
Ealing Gateway, 26-30 Uxbridge Road, W5 2AU.

Printed by Countrywide Publications IP19 8BX

## How to contact us

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Monday to Friday, 8am-5pm.  
Translation services are available if you visit in person or call.  
**Telephone:** 020 8832 3298  
**Emergency repairs:** Call Mears Group Plc on 01707 290561 (from 5pm to 8am)  
**Gas heating & hot water:** Call Mears Group Plc on 01707 290562 (from 5pm to 8am)

### South East (Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire)

**The Farmhouse**  
Nightingale Avenue  
Blackbird Leys  
Oxford OX4 7BU

Monday to Friday 9am-5pm except the first Wednesday every month for staff training days. Residents can call the emergency repairs number for any queries.  
Translation services are available if you visit in person or call.  
**Telephone:** 01865 712244  
**Emergency repairs:** Call Frontline on 01489 884697 (from 5pm to 9am)  
**Gas heating & hot water:** Call Robert Heath Heating Ltd on 0800 783 0833 (from 5pm to 9am)

### Website

You can contact us on the web by visiting [www.chg.org.uk](http://www.chg.org.uk)



**Catalyst  
Communities**