



## Improving community cohesion

*Way Forward project brings the  
local community together*



**Plus...**

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# Welcome

to the winter issue  
of *Fortunegate News*



We know how important it is for you to know how we're doing when it comes to the services we provide for you. That's why we've dedicated a large proportion of this issue (pages 4 to 7)

to sharing with you some key information about how we did last year.

With the festive season just over, it's a good time to highlight the celebrations and successes we've recently enjoyed. The grand finale of the Way Forward initiative got a huge turnout (page 3), CCTV has reduced the amount of anti-social behaviour in your neighbourhoods (page 3) and local nursery children got a lesson in the dangers of construction during a visit to Ebony Court (see opposite).

With all this, and much more, there really are plenty of reasons to be cheerful! I wish you all a very happy 2010.

Best wishes,

**Joe Chambers**  
Managing director

## Learning the dangers of construction sites



*Ivor Goodsite shows local Neasden family around the building site at Ebony Court*

The children of St Mary's nursery in Neasden were given a hands-on lesson in the dangers of construction sites by industry mascot 'Ivor Goodsite' in October. Ivor Goodsite took the children to Ebony Court to teach them and their parents how to stay safe around building work.

Organised in conjunction with our construction partners Higgins Construction, the visit is part of the national initiative: The Considerate Constructors Scheme. As members of the scheme, we both work closely with neighbours to ensure that the building work causes minimal disruption and to make sure that the local community is fully involved.

Ebony Court involves the development of 27 new homes, 10 of which will be available to buy through the popular New Build HomeBuy scheme, with the rest allocated for affordable rent.

## Introducing assured tenancy agreements

**We are planning to implement new assured tenancy agreements for residents, which will mean you pay lower service charges.**

On the new agreements you will pay fixed service charges, so you know exactly what your service charge is for the financial year (from April to March the following year). Having fixed service charges will result in many benefits; we will have to be more accurate to safeguard both ours and your interests, the management fee would be lower and the new agreements are easier to read and understand. So if you choose to opt for fixed service charges, the amount you pay will be lower.

Therefore we are proposing that, with effect from April 2010, all new residents be signed up to the new tenancy agreements that incorporate the fixed service charge.

All existing residents will have the option to decide if they want to change from their current tenancy agreement to the new one. These residents should have already received a letter from us outlining these changes. With this letter, we have included a feedback form where you are able to tell us what you think. Please use your feedback form by **Friday 5 February**.

# Residents see the ‘Way Forward’!



*Young people show-off their music skills*

Local people turned out in force for the grand showcase of the Way Forward project during August. During the showcase finale, we laid on a host of fun activities including wall climbing and laser bug. Young people were also given the chance to perform dance routines, show-off their music skills and demonstrate the new skills they had learnt during the workshops.

The Way Forward project was launched at the end of July with a sports day, where children took part in a mix of physical education exercises and sporting activities. The project then offered two workshop days in a range of subjects including IT, Black History, music, media production, and dance. Young people were also given the chance to attend cinema nights at the Unity Centre.

The great part about this project was that the whole community was involved – children were involved in the fun activities on offer whilst parents volunteered to be assistants or workshop facilitators. So it was truly a community event!

## Become a sports leader

**We are now offering an accredited course for residents, in partnership with Sports Leaders UK, where you will have the opportunity to obtain a sports leaders award and even a GCSE.**

The one-day course is an ideal starting point for residents, aged over 16 years, who have no or very little knowledge in sports leadership. During the course, you will be given seven hours of training and resources will be available that should enable you to develop generic leadership skills. This should consequently allow participants to successfully deliver simple sports activities for young people.

Once you have completed the course, you will then be eligible to complete further training in sports and receive a GCSE.

The Sports Leadership course costs just £10 per person and will be held at the Unity Centre. Places are limited and will be offered on a first come first serve basis so book early to secure a space. To enrol yourself on this course or for more information, contact Michelle Brown on 020 8438 1800 or [michelle.brown@chg.org.uk](mailto:michelle.brown@chg.org.uk)



# Annual Resid

It is important that our residents know how we are performing when it comes to the services we provide. That's why this issue includes some key information about how we did last year. We hope this shows just how committed we are to continuously improving the services that you receive.

## *A bit about us*

Fortunegate Community Housing (FCH) was formed in 1998 following the transfer of a large number of Brent Council properties. FCH owns and manages around 1,400 rental properties across Brent. We are one of three member companies within Catalyst Housing Group, but still retain our individuality and independence. We run our services to suit the specific needs of our residents.

## **The Board**

Chris O'Leary (Chair)

Brigid Neal

Rosalie Fitzgerald-Walsh

Paul Vincent

Nike Ogundana

Paula Fance

Ezi Ogbonna

Peter O'Callaghan

Stephen Bright

Cllr Janice Long Cllr Chunilal Hirani



*Our new grounds maintenance team*

## Improving services

### **Lean Systems**

By using this continuous improvement tool, we have become more customer focused in our approach to improving services for residents, as the Lean System approach allows us to shape our services around what residents want. So far we have used the tool to review rent collection, and we are now committed to ensuring that all residents know how much rent to pay, when to pay and how to pay. We will next be reviewing how we re-let empty properties.

### **Reduced rent arrears**

We have continued to cut rent arrears in 2009 in order to ensure more funds are available to maintain FCH properties. It is essential that we have the means to carry out the necessary repairs to properties and provide the services that benefit the community. The time it takes to re-let empty properties has also improved, which has helped to maximise our rental income.

### **Improved relationships**

We have developed stronger relationships with our stakeholders in Brent – including the Safer Neighbourhood Teams and Brent Council – to take steps to reduce and deal with anti-social behaviour. Notices of Seeking Possession have been served on residents where warnings have not been heeded. This has resulted in an improvement in behaviour by the residents concerned.

# Residents' Report



The local community gets together during the Way Forward project

## Improving places

We have made the following improvements to our responsive repairs service over the last year:

- Most residents are now offered an appointment when they report a repair.
- There are a high level of job completions that are 'right first time'. This minimises inconvenience and supports our commitment to deliver a responsive repairs service that is of high quality.
- We have reduced the target times for repairs completions to an average of five days across all repair priority categories.

Our property services team has continued to improve the preparation and distribution of service charge accounts. This is evidenced by the small volume of queries on the actual accounts from our leaseholders and shared owners. We will also continue to look for efficiencies in the procurement of services to ensure that service charge costs are kept as low as possible.

It has been a challenging year for the estate services team. Although they were delivering a good service, there was room for improvement. That's why we bought grounds maintenance in-house. This involved terminating the Vista contract and welcoming the three Vista employees into FCH. Together we are continuing to identify and implement new service improvements.

## Involving residents

Our community investment team has had a busy year and their achievements include:

- The Elders Forum became a fully constituted group that has a committee, and is independently seeking and applying for funding.
- Four residents completed an in-house accredited course in youth work and successfully received an NVQ Level 3.
- We are supporting one resident in setting up a social enterprise business by paying for them to attend the school of social enterprise to expand their business.
- As part of the Way Forward Project, we worked with young local residents to help deliver a summer holiday project for young people and offered them training in youth work to further their skills for next year's project.

We have also been working hard to improve the financial performance of the Unity Centre. A new business plan has been drafted, which takes into account the community's needs and wants. The centre's staffing structure was changed in 2009, and we feel that 2010 is going to be an exciting year as we take the first steps towards turning the Unity into a hub of social enterprise.

Continued ►

## Facts and figures for 2009

Data provided at:	31 March 2007	31 March 2008	31 March 2009
<b>Properties managed</b>	1336	1414	1398
<b>Voids and lettings performance</b>			
Average re-let turnaround times (days)	65	51	99
Total number of dwellings vacant	13	61	6
Dwellings vacant	0.97%	4.31%	0.43%
<b>Rent collection</b>			
Rent collection as percentage of rent due	98.89%	98.14%	103.12%
Current residents arrears as percentage of rent roll	12.36%	12.09%	9.97%
<b>Resident satisfaction</b>			
	<b>Status 2004</b>	<b>Status 2008</b>	
Satisfaction with their last repair	62.60%	86%	
Satisfaction with the service provided by their landlord	63.80%	78%	
Satisfaction that views are being taken into account	60.30%	63%	
<b>Reactive repairs</b>			
Number of emergency repairs completed	128	276	328
Number of urgent repairs completed	106	500	826
Number of routine repairs completed	4294	3819	4292
Emergency repairs completed within target	100%	98.19%	98.78%
Urgent repairs completed within target	95.28%	97.00%	94.67%
Routine repairs completed within target	98.95%	97.16%	95.50%
Homes with valid gas safety certificate	99%	97.03%	97.86%



# Fighting fraud

A new anti-fraud initiative has been launched to ensure our homes and resources are used to benefit those with genuine needs and entitlements.

Fortunegate is participating in a national exercise with the Audit Commission, other social housing landlords and local councils. This will involve sharing information with the Audit Commission about which tenants are occupying our properties, so that data can be matched against that provided by the other social landlords and councils.

The process will involve comparing computer records held between the organisations to see if they match. This might include personal information, such as names, addresses and dates of birth. Where a match is found between data, then further investigations will be undertaken to determine whether there is an error in the data or whether fraud of one kind or another is being committed.

The Audit Commission has specific legal authority to carry out data matching, which means that it does not require the consent of individuals under the Data Protection Act. However, this exercise is subject to a strict code of conduct to ensure the proper use of the information provided. This code can be found at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/localgov/audit/nfi/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/localgov/audit/nfi/Pages/default.aspx).

**If you require further information, please contact your local housing office.**



## CCTV proves a success



We have installed a total of 13 CCTV cameras around your neighbourhoods over the past year, as a response to residents' concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB). So far they have proved a great success as the presence of CCTV has reduced the level of ASB and, in some cases, the ASB has completely stopped!

Armstrong Road was a place that suffered high levels of ASB. Residents complained about gangs of youths entering the two blocks and vandalising the communal areas. We then installed a total of five CCTV cameras in this area – two in each of the blocks and one in the green space surrounding the blocks – and the amount of ASB substantially decreased!

The CCTV cameras are all linked back to our head office and we are able to monitor them during normal working hours. They can be moved remotely and there have been many occasions when we have identified incidents that have been subsequently dealt with by the police. Fortunegate is committed to responding to problems of ASB in our neighbourhoods and we believe this technology supports this objective.

### How to contact us



**223 Church Road  
London  
NW10 9EP**

9am to 5pm each weekday apart from Wednesday when the office shuts at 2pm for training (phonelines remain open). The office also shuts on Bank Holidays. Translation services are available if you visit in person or call.

*General enquiries:* 020 8438 1800

*Maintenance (freephone):* 0800 731 5282

*Out of hours emergency:* 020 8937 1234

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

On the website you can:

- report a repair
- make a housing enquiry
- download guides and residents' magazines
- find out the latest news on Fortunegate Community Housing
- make a suggestion or complaint.

Services on the web are quick and easy to use and available 24 hours a day.

### Neighbourhood services

**Lilah Haire, neighbourhood manager**  
020 8438 1820

**Muna Jama, neighbourhood support officer**  
020 8438 1811

**Norma James, neighbourhood manager**  
020 8438 1813

**Thelma Grant, neighbourhood support officer**  
020 8438 1821

**Karen Platt, neighbourhood manager**  
020 8438 1815

**Binta Kinteh, neighbourhood support officer**  
020 8438 1819

### Property services

**Ahmed Gasim, property surveyor**  
020 8438 1812

**Brendan Scanlan, property surveyor**  
020 8438 1817

**Kelechi Ukachukwu, service charge & sales officer**  
020 8438 1805

**Frances Holder, property services administrator**  
020 8438 1818



**Fortunegate**  
Community Housing

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A charitable housing association, part of Catalyst Housing Group.