

ALMON NEWS

Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing
August 2007



More than decent homes

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More than Decent Homes

Setting up the ALMO is the first step to getting the £35.8 million of money needed to improve kitchens, bathrooms, heating, double glazing, etc.

But setting up the ALMO is more than just improving homes – as important as that is.

By getting tenants support for the ALMO, and by the Council setting it up, it gives the opportunity to break away from some difficulties of the past.

The ALMO, Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing, will be non-profit making and be owned by the Council, that way, people's tenancies aren't affected and tenants keep all the same rights as they do now.

But Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing will be run independently of the Council and will be able to focus on the housing service and will be free to tackle old problems with new ideas.

"It's about doing things better and doing things differently.

That's what Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing is about. We will improve the housing service we give tenants, we have to, in order to get the money for improving tenants' homes.



More than that though, we want to.

We want our service not only to be rated by our tenants and our Inspectors, the Audit Commission, as good, but to be excellent. Everyone is united in this quest, and we are determined to tackle the issues that tenants have been telling us about for so long.

We need tenants' support for the ALMO though. Unless we can prove that, the ALMO cannot be set up. That's why we are seeking tenants' support. Peoples' homes, present and future, depend on it." Says Ian Saville, Chief Executive (designate) for Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing.

So setting up the ALMO is about so much more than new kitchens and bathrooms, etc – **its about doing things better.**

The Steps We Need To Go Through

Step 1

We need to show that the majority of tenants support the proposal to set up the ALMO. This has to be some positive endorsement from each tenant. It is not enough to support it but to be silent, as it does not count as being in favour. Tenants can show their support by completing a questionnaire, or by filling in the tenants feedback form on our newsletter and leaflets and sending it back to us. It is essential we get tenants' support.

Step 2

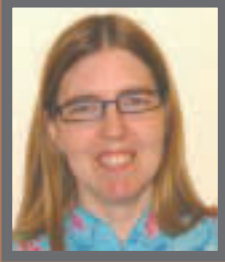
We will be inspected by the Audit Commission in September 2008. **We must get a 2 star (good) rating for our service.** The maximum is 3 stars (excellent). The Council's indicative inspection a year ago awarded zero stars but with promising prospects for improvement, so there is quite a way to go and lots of improvements to make. However, everyone is on board and determined to improve the way things are done, and tackle old problems in new ways. The Audit Commission will interview a number of tenants to find out how well the service is delivered. They will also compare our services to

the national standards that they expect for a 2 star (good) service to make sure we come up to the mark. All this means is, better services to tenants.

Step 3

Within 6 weeks of getting a 2 star inspection rating we can obtain the extra money from the Government to bring tenants homes up to the Decent Homes Standard, **some £35.8 million of extra funding.** Major works to carry out the improvements can then begin.

Testimonials



I am a Housing Officer responsible for Thorpe Acre, Park Court, Victoria Street, Birstall, Rothley and Mountsorrel. I pride myself on delivering a first

class service to the tenants and leaseholders who reside in the areas I manage and I believe that the ALMO will provide me with opportunities to continue to deliver a high quality service. In Tenancy Services there will be recruitment of staff which will allow me to spend more time with my tenants and on the estates I manage which will improve the lives of the people living in the areas I manage.

I feel that the ALMO will provide greater opportunities for my personal development but more importantly it will allow me to provide a first class service for my tenants.

Claire Westrup
Housing Officer



Since the new senior managers have come into post I have noticed a big difference in approach and the service we are providing to tenants has

already started to improve. In particular I think the way we are dealing with repairs is changing noticeably for the better.

As a Housing Officer I am looking forward to the ALMO as it will mean Tenancy Services will get the extra staff and training we need to make much needed changes to the way we work. Extra staff should mean it will be easier for tenants to get hold of Housing Officers and we will be able to deal with issues more quickly and efficiently. I am also looking forward to being able to be more proactive in areas such as tenant involvement, anti social behaviour and working with other agencies on community related issues. There has been a big improvement in staff morale and we are now very optimistic for the future.

Lance Clark
Housing Officer



As Tenant Participation Officer at Charnwood Borough Council I am really looking forward to the challenges and improvements that

Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing will bring. I support the ALMO because it's not just about the money, it's about improving the culture and service from within the organisation.

It is about customers being at the very heart of their housing organisation and the decision making processes from their presence on the Board to their involvement in the forums and area boards. It's about making a difference and improving the quality of lives of the tenants and leaseholders of Charnwood Borough Council. It's about changing relationships internally and externally and ensuring our customers are partners.

It is a fantastic opportunity for both staff and tenants to have more say in what's happening and to actually see the differences their contribution will make. Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing is already proving to be a forward-thinking, dedicated housing organisation committed achieving the 2 star and above standard for the benefit of everyone. Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing represents the future of social housing in Charnwood and the future is here to stay.

Nick Jones
Tenant Participation Officer



The ALMO give us a chance to break away from the past and really improve services and people's homes.

It is clear we cannot stay as we are. But we need tenants and leaseholders support by saying 'yes' to the ALMO and completing the feedback form and posting it back to us. With tenants support we can then make real improvements to the housing service.

Ian Saville
CNH Chief Executive (designate)



I came here in April from Kenisngton and Chelsea TMO, which was the first tenant led ALMO.

Following a two star Audit commission

inspection in 2002 and then a three star inspection last year, we obtained over 60 million pounds of government funding to carry out decent homes work to our properties, but more importantly, we improved our services to our tenants and leaseholders beyond all recognition.

I have worked for three leading local authorities over the last twenty two years but there is no doubt in my mind at all that the only way to deliver a real improvement in the quality of local housing services is by becoming an Almo and letting residents have a voice.

I believe that it is the only way that Charnwood residents will get the quality service that they deserve.

Isobel Rickard
Director of Housing Operations
(Designate)



"I've worked within the ALMO movement since 2002 working in a number of management positions at 3 star Excellent rated Ashfield Homes in

Nottinghamshire who were one of the first ALMOs to be formed and more recently 2 star rated Berneslai Homes, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council's ALMO with a housing stock of over 20,000 properties,

The freedom, flexibility and independence of working for an ALMO has in my experience enabled me to perform at my very best to deliver significant service improvements and excellent customer care to tenants, with reduced bureaucracy and focused direction from an independent board that is committed to delivering excellent housing services.

Steve Wilson
Director of Investment and Regeneration

What you've been telling us

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'We feel that the ALMO will give us more opportunities to become involved with decisions that affect our living conditions.'

'We have to support the ALMO bid as it is an alternative to the present system which has not done much for us.'

'Let's go with it as it appears to offer us a say in what matters.'

Tenant comments, Sileby

I'm over the moon with my kitchen, I couldn't have done it better myself. They even sent their own cleaners in afterwards and told me not to do it myself. I think the ALMO is a good thing and it's about time things got better. I'm happy, I'm satisfied and more than pleased and thanks to everyone involved.

Mrs Perrett, Anstey

We would like to congratulate the staff of the ALMO and wish them success for the future, also to take this opportunity to say thank-you for explaining in detail how ALMO will work for us as tenants. If anyone has any questions - ask the ALMO team they are happy to help. Once again thank-you.

Mr & Mrs Heffer, Sileby

'Dear Newsletter,
This ALMO thing, I was very wary about it; 'What does it mean?'

I have recently attended several Leaseholder and Tenants meetings. On Wednesday 30th May I met the people concerned. Yes, I was ready to give them a 'going over' - both barrels you might say. But what a surprise! Steve Wilson, Head of Investment. Isobel Rickard, Head of Housing. Tal Mehta, Head of Maintenance Programme - No Airst and Graces with this lot! All experienced people and I might say patience untold and good listeners.

'There is no fear.' The ALMO means modern better houses so that everyone can be proud of their homes and the area they live in. Leaseholders and tenants will not be forced into anything the ALMO means we will get it by working together.

Steve, Isobel and Tal say they want to build trust and they want our trust to help manage this ALMO. Yes, you have my trust to manage this vast project. Say Yes to ALMO. Better modern homes. Better Estates. Better Life.'

Mr J Holmes, Leaseholder, Barrow upon Soar

This (Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing) is an opportunity for all tenants to have their homes improved to a similar standard throughout the Borough. My advice is tenants should grab the chance with both hands and support the ALMO.

Mr Balaratnam,
Loughborough

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Board Working Well



The Board which comprises of 15 unpaid volunteers, 5 tenants/ leaseholders, 5 Council nominees, and 5 independent people with skills that are helpful to the ALMO (Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing) have all been working hard. The emphasis is on team work and everyone working together and contributing their skills and experience and views, to make Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing a success.

The Board is working hard and is meeting every three weeks to make all the decision necessary to set up Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing.

At its last meeting the Board met with Ann Bennett and Graeme Bennett of the Audit Commission to discuss the Audit Commission inspection of Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing scheduled for September 2008.

Other issues the Board have agreed include:

- Approving the constitution and role of Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing, which is a non profit making company owned by the Council, but operating independently and at arms length from it.
- An appraisal of the Decent Homes Procurement process, which has selected Frank Haslam Milan as the contractor to deliver our programme of improvements to kitchens, bathrooms, central heating, double glazing and other improvements.
- An appraisal of our preparations for the Audit Commission inspection next year.
- An early report on the Management Agreement which is the legal document between the Council and Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing which sets out what is expected from the ALMO
- The Tenant Participation Strategy which sets out a framework of how tenants can be involved in what happens to their area, and in the housing service generally.
- Board members roles and responsibilities, setting out how Board members should work and the legal responsibilities that fall on their shoulders.
- A draft staffing structure for the ALMO to ensure that there are enough staff on the front line to deliver services, and the right staff to deliver an efficient organisation.

Board Member Roger Merchant says, 'A lot has been done by the Board, and there is more still to be looked at before Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing goes live. However, the Board is working well and everyone is dedicated to make sure we use this opportunity to really improve the housing service in Charnwood.

We need tenants to support us, as it will only go ahead if the majority of tenants say "yes".'

SHADOW BOARD NEWS

Our Board Members are:

John Hipwell (leaseholder)

John has lived in Mountsorrel for 38 years and is an active member of the local methodist church. He works for the NHS. John has been involved with the Board from the beginning and believes Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing is the best way to achieve the Decent Homes Standard for Council tenants.



Marie Hannabuss (Tenant)

Marie has been a tenant member of the Shadow Board since it was formed and is committed to the success of CNH and the improvements to the Housing Service for tenants and leaseholders. Marie is a skilled multitasker and is actively involved in voluntary and community work and is an advisor for Pregnancy Crisis. She is a member of the Ashby Road Estates Community Association and helps at Church and the Boothwood School PTA. Marie also runs two toddler groups in the local area.



Sandie Gough (Tenant)

Sandie has been involved with the Shadow Board from the very beginning and is totally committed to improving services for tenants. She is very actively involved in the community and has been involved with housing for 8 years and was Chair of the Warwick Way Tenants Association for two years and also a member and Chair of the Association of Charnwood Tenants for many years. Sandie was a Councillor representing the Ashby ward between 2003 and 2007. She was Chair of the Housing Scrutiny and was Cabinet Lead Member for Leisure and Environment.



Ann Watkinson (Tenant)

Ann is a former company director, and is now self employed. She is active in the community and is Vice Chair of Shelthorpe Community Association and volunteers at a local animal sanctuary charity shop. Ann has been a tenant member of the Shadow Board from the very beginning and is committed to the success of Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing.



Ian Montgomery (Independent)

Ian works for an ALMO outside the borough and brings with him knowledge of the inspection process, performance management and partnership working. Currently the manager of a customer involvement team Ian is committed to customer care and access to service issues. Ian is keen to bring to the Board his skills and experience learnt and applied in other ALMOs.



Helen Issac (Leaseholder)

Helen has been a Leaseholder Member of the shadow board since it was formed last year. Having worked in Consultancy and Human Resources at HM Revenue & Customs, Helen has a strong interest in the 'people' side of the business, customer services and communications within the new organisation. She has been active in the tenant participation movement in Loughborough and is committed to ensuring that Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing provides an excellent service to all tenants and leaseholders in the Borough.



Roger Merchant (Independent)

Roger is a qualified Chartered accountant and is a partner in a practice in Nottingham. Roger lives in the Borough. He is currently Audit partner responsible for non profit organisations including social housing, and has audited one of the East Midlands ALMOs. Roger has a good understanding of the property market in the Borough, has experience of rented housing, and brings essential financial management and auditing skills to the Board. Roger is committed to the area and takes part in various fund raising activities for local charities.



Patrick Cole (Independent)

Patrick lives locally and is currently the Director of Personnel Services with Loughborough University. Patrick brings to the Board extensive management skills, governance skills and a deep understanding of the personnel issues arising from organisational change, business growth and staff transferring between organisations.



Roy Brown (Council nominee)

Roy is self employed. He has been a Councillor for a number of years and represents the Sileby ward in Charnwood. He is actively involved in Licensing, Planning and Community and Partnership Committees at the Council. Roy is Chairman of Charnwood Road Safety Committee and is a school governor for Humphrey Perkins School.



Peter Gardner (Independent)

Peter has 27 years of experience in the affordable housing sector and has worked for Derby City Council as Senior Assistant Director, and Solihull Community Homes as Director of Asset Management and was also Head of Asset Management of a large housing association. He is also an affiliate inspector with the Audit Commission or HQN. Peter brings a wealth of experience in repairs and maintenance, stock investment and refurbishment, asset management, performance and financial management, and the inspection process.



Neville Stork (Council nominee)

Neville is the Councillor for Loughborough Shelthorpe and a County Councillor for Loughborough South. In a professional capacity Neville works for a Local Authority as a Community Development Officer. He is a passionate environmentalist and works to promote renewable energy in Leicestershire. As part of his work Neville works with community groups and helps them to gain funding. He maintains strong links with the Princes Trust, and supports their work where he can.



Zoe Wortley (Independent)

Zoe lives locally and has eleven years experience in the affordable housing sector. She has undertaken a variety of roles with the Housing Corporation, National Housing Federation, and the Longhurst Group where she is now group strategy executive. Zoe brings to the Board a wide range of skills including policy and strategy development, governance, performance, financial management and preparing for inspection together with a wide range of housing knowledge in a variety of contexts.



Cynthia Popley (Council nominee)

Cynthia is a Borough and Town Councillor representing Shepshed East. She is a member of the Community and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee, Licensing Committee Plans, Committee and the Charnwood Health Forum. Cynthia was born in Loughborough and has lived in Shepshed since 1975. She is a former district nurse and English teacher. Now having her own business as a Wedding Planner she keeps her teachings skills up to date, occasionally working as a supply teacher. Cynthia is actively involved in the community and was a school governor of Oxley Primary School for 11 years.



Margaret Allen (Council nominee)

Margaret was a councillor for eight years and had an active interest in housing issues. Margaret represented the Outward Ward and has been a school governor for Mountfields Lodge Primary and Limehurst High schools. Margaret has been Chair of the Community and Partnerships and Vice Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Committees and has a detailed knowledge of the area. Having been involved in the Board from the very beginning Margaret is committed to the success of Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing.



Paul Day (Council nominee)

Paul is a Councillor representing Anstey. He was first elected to Anstey Parish Council in 1974 and was Chairman for 14 consecutive years. He has also served as a governor at the three schools in Anstey. A member of the Investigation and Review Committee, and the Plans Committee, Paul has been a councillor for twelve years, also a former chairman of Health and Housing. Before retiring, he ran his own building firm for 26 years. He has a wealth of knowledge and experience in repairs and maintenance, both from the practical and the management side. Paul is committed to the success of Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing.



Everyone is entitled to live in a home which is warm, has modern facilities and is in a good state of repair.

That's what the Government has laid down by law and housing departments like ours in Charnwood are working towards ensuring that council homes meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2010.

There is a minimum standard that the housing department and housing associations have to meet, however some landlords will want to carry out work to a higher standard than that defined by the Government. This may include fitting double glazed windows, improving security or working to make the local environment better, provided the money to do the work is available.

Your Right to

A decent home can be defined as one that:

- meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing
- is in a reasonable state of repair
- has reasonably modern facilities and services
- provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

At Charnwood we have around 1869 homes currently failing the Decent Homes Standard, this equates to 31.72% of our stock.

Eighty eight percent of our properties are traditional construction and have been reasonably maintained on a day-to-day basis, but have lacked major capital investment over a number of years.

The remaining non-traditional stock suffers from all the normal non-decency issues identified within the stock as a whole, but in addition they are difficult to keep warm and suffer from poor sound insulation.

Even though Charnwood is currently spending a significant amount every week on housing repairs, it doesn't have all the funds it needs to make sure homes meet the Decent Homes Standard. That is why the council is proposing the creation of an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) called Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing which could open the door to up to £35.8 million in additional investment.

Setting up an ALMO means tenants' homes would still be owned by the council, but it unlocks more money to pay for improvements.



a Decent Home

Does your home meet the current statutory minimum standard for housing?

Your home is likely to meet this standard if:

- Your walls, floors and ceilings are free from damp and large cracks
- Your home has good natural light through windows or roof lights
- Your home has good ventilation through windows that you can open and/ or extractor fans
- Your kitchen and bathroom is free from drainage problems and you have a good supply of hot and cold water
- Your kitchen has sufficient space for you to have the necessary equipment to prepare and cook food

Is your home in a reasonable state of repair?

Your home is likely to meet this standard if:

- Your roof does not leak
- Your window frames are secure and you can safely open and close your windows
- Your electrics are safe, such as that there are no exposed wires and no broken sockets
- Your home is efficiently heated through gas central heating, electric heating or communal heating, including, if relevant, an efficient gas boiler.
- The external structure of the building, including any chimneys, is safe
- Your kitchen and bathroom are in a reasonable condition with no major need for replacement of facilities.

Does your home have reasonably modern facilities?

Your home is likely to meet this standard if you have at least three of the following:

- A kitchen which is less than 20 years old
- Your kitchen has sufficient space for you to have the necessary equipment to prepare and cook food
- A bathroom which is less than 30 years old
- A main bathroom which is not off a bedroom or outside
- You do not suffer excessively from external noise
- Entrances and lobbies in blocks of flats are of adequate size and layout

Does your home provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort?

Your home is likely to meet this standard if:

- Your home is insulated and efficiently heated through gas central heating, electric heating or communal heating

The Council is updating the detailed condition survey of all its housing. This information will be used to plan what work Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing would need to do to bring all properties up to the Decent Homes Standard.

We will be surveying homes to find out just exactly what we need to do. Although £35.8 million is a huge amount of money, if we shared it out equally it would come just over £6,000 per property. Some homes will need more work than others and certain work will take priority but we are committed to ensuring that all Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing properties meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard as quickly as possible.

ALMO Roadshow hits the road

The ALMO roadshow gives you the chance to come and find out exactly what setting up Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing would mean for your homes and housing service.

The roadshow which hit the road on Monday 18 June in the Carillon shopping centre, Loughborough and has attended events at the Ashby Road Estate, Thurmaston, Shelthorpe, Birstall and will be at many other community events until September.

Housing staff will be available to answer any of your ALMO questions face to face and asking tenants to complete questionnaires.

Ian Saville, Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing Chief Executive said 'This is your chance to come

and talk to staff and find out for yourself the difference Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing would make. I would like to say a big thank you to all of you who have paid us a visit already and encourage those yet to visit to look out for us at your local events.'



Remaining events are:

- **Syston Carnival** – Saturday 1 September
- **Loughborough Mela** – Sunday 2 September
- **Loughborough Town Hall** – Thursday 6 September
(Live it up – come and celebrate older age!)

If you are organising an event or know of an event near you please let us know and we'll come along. Call 01509 634562

Please take time to watch the DVD which will be sent to you shortly. It will give you some important information about the Council's ALMO proposal.

The DVD forms part of the ALMO consultation and the Council believes that providing information in as many forms as possible gives its tenants the best opportunity to understand the ALMO proposal.

Over the coming months we will be working on setting up Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing and we need your support.

Please could you answer the questions on the freepost 'Your Feedback' section of the leaflets sent to you with the DVD.

YOUR VIEWS COUNT!!!

Press play ►► for the ALMO Story



Rents And Rights – A Reminder

- The Council will still be your landlord, so your rent would continue to be set by the Council as it is now
- Tenants will not be charged extra rent as a result of the improvement work carried out in homes
- All your rights and entitlements will remain unaffected
- You will remain a tenant of the Council, with a secure tenancy
- You will still be entitled to claim Housing Benefit
- You will still have the same Right to Buy entitlement as you do now

Become a Mystery Shopper

The search is on for tenants to help Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing improve services for you.

We are looking for tenants who will become **'mystery shoppers'** by taking part in a programme of receiving our services and seeing how well we do and letting us know what we need to do better. We are looking for six tenants to become mystery shoppers.

Please complete the following slip and return it to Nick Jones.

Each mystery shopper will receive **£25.00 for each mystery shopping test they carry out.**



I would like to be a CNH mystery shopper

Name:

Address:

Please return to Nick Jones, Tenant Participation Officer, Charnwood Borough Council, Southfields Road, Loughborough, Leicestershire. LE11 2TN