

Open Door



Why residents like you
get involved in our work

Newsletter for all Southern Housing Group residents

**Winter
2010/11**

In this issue:

**Residents deliver a
better society**

- Supporting your communities
- Helping us improve
- The future is green
- Our performance
- Local offers

Our new service offers

“Over the next few months, we will be working with residents to develop our existing service standards into new service offers.”

says Chief Executive Tom Dacey

Bengali Turkish

We are about to launch a new phase for the service standards we introduced in 2009.

Our service standards already set out how we deliver our services and the quality of service you can expect from us. We are now going to develop them further, in line with the new requirements of our regulator, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA).

The TSA now regulates social landlords against six national standards:

- how we involve you
- your homes
- your tenancies
- our work in your neighbourhoods
- value for money
- how we are governed and remain financially viable.

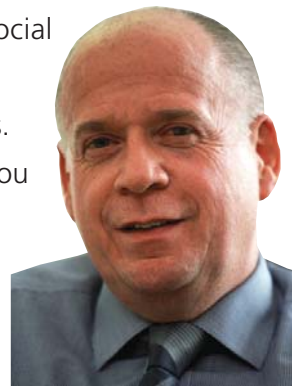
Alongside these national standards, the TSA is asking landlords to work with residents to draw up ‘local service offers’, to show how we will deliver services and meet the new standards for our residents.

Our existing service standards already do most of this job, but we now want to build on them. Between now and March, we will be working with residents to develop our existing service offers around:

- your home – covering repairs, maintenance and major works
- your neighbourhood and community – covering estate services such as cleaning and garden-

ing, anti-social behaviour and estate inspections.

- involving you – covering opportunities to become involved in our work and complaints.



Later in the year, we will explore the development of improved offers in some of the other areas covered by the national standards.

In future issues of Open Door, we will give you details about all the new local offers we have developed.

Our new Resident Service Panels (see page 7) will play a key role in scrutinising the way we deliver the new service offers to you.



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News update

News

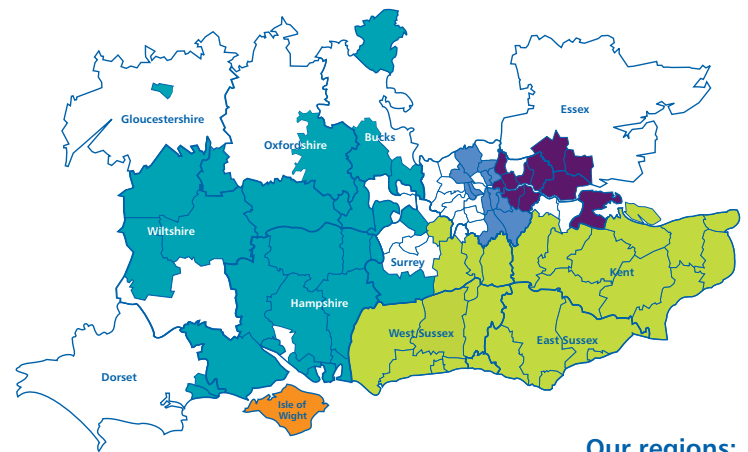
Southern Housing Group Limited: One landlord

Southern Housing Group Limited is now your landlord wherever you live, following its formal amalgamation with James Butcher and South Wight Housing Associations on 1 October 2010.

Alongside our existing London, Thames Gateway and South regions, we now have an Isle of Wight region for residents living on the island, and a West region, which covers homes along the M4 corridor and part of the south coast.

As part of our restructuring, we are setting up new Resident Service Panels for each region, to give you more say in our work at regional level (see page 7).

We have made the change to help to improve the services we offer residents and to streamline our governance structure. We will use efficiency savings to improve services in your neighbourhoods.



Our regions:

■ London ■ Thames Gateway ■ South ■ Isle of Wight ■ West

News

Troy and Paul: new directors for new regions

In September, we appointed two new regional directors to manage our new West and Isle of Wight regions.

Troy Francis is Regional Director for West region and is based at our Theale office.



Troy was formerly Head of Customer Service at Enterprise PLC – a company that specialises, amongst other things, in providing repairs and maintenance services for social landlords. He previously worked for five years as Neighbourhood Director for Amicus Horizon.

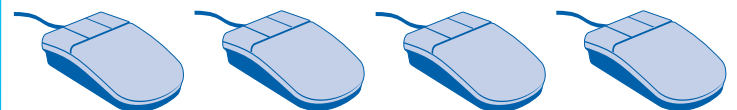


Paul Cotton is Regional Director for the Isle of Wight region and is based at our Newport office. Many residents already know Paul, as he has worked for us since 1990. He was most recently Regional Operations Manager for South region.

Pictured above: Troy Francis. Below: Paul Cotton.

News

A better online service



In November, we brought in a new 'Resident Portal' on our website, following a review of the online services we offer residents.

By changing our IT provider, we are now able to offer you a service that looks better, costs less and will allow us to add a wider range of facilities in future.

Over the next few months, we will be using feedback from a survey of existing users to begin adding the additional services you have said you most want.

In the meantime, to log on to the new portal, go to our website at www.shgroup.org.uk, click on 'Residents' login' in the top right of the screen and then follow the instructions to register for the service.

If you didn't take part in the survey, we would still welcome your feedback and comments. Please email us at resident.portal@shgroup.org.uk

Residents deliver a better society

Bengali Turkish

13

The age of our youngest Unlocking the Potential of People award winner

3

Members of one family make a difference in Whitechapel

50

Active residents and their guests attended our Unlocking the Potential of People event

Every year, hundreds of our residents go the extra mile for their communities, as well as freely giving up their time to get involved in our work. With gloom in the economy and cuts on the horizon, your efforts make a vital difference to life in your communities.



Residents and staff discussing your community needs at our event in October.

Supporting your communities

As your landlord, we know that bricks and mortar aren't enough. That's why our Social and Economic Regeneration (SERD) team works with residents and other partners in your neighbourhoods to help promote community life.

None of this would be possible without the active support you give us – whether you rent or own your home, live on an estate or in a residential street, in a sheltered scheme or scheme offering support to groups with particular needs.

In October, we invited some of our most active residents to join us at the Holiday Inn in Camden Lock for round table discussions on being active in the community. We gave them the chance to meet and learn from each other, launched our new Guide to Setting up a Community Group and asked what active residents need from us. We also presented 'Unlocking the Potential of People' awards to residents who are already making a huge difference in their communities.

Julie Jones, a member of Northbourne Action Group, who won our Improving Community Cohesion Award, found the event really helpful. "We swapped numbers, we did a lot of networking. It was just good to meet other people in similar positions who want similar things," she said.

Julie's Group won the award because, since 2006, they have been working with us, local police and councillors to transform their estate in Godalming. They have succeeded in improving community spirit, reducing anti-social behaviour by a third and bringing petty crime down to almost zero. They recently raised more than £58,000 for an estate play area.

Other groups shortlisted for this award were:

- runners-up **The Monday Group** – an inclusive social group based in Ryde on the Isle of Wight, which is run by and for people with learning difficulties

- the **Friends of George** group from George Downing Estate in Hackney, which is bringing different communities together and has set up a parent toddler group
- **Myddleton Grange Residents' Association** from Hackney, which represents everyone on this mixed, multi-landlord estate and has set up courses for adults, and a forum and activities for young residents
- the **Royal Arsenal Project**, which is working to improve community spirit and local facilities at this new estate in Woolwich.

Youth Category winner, 13-year-old **Callum Jenner** was "very pleased" to win an award and found the event really helpful. He said: "I made some contacts and I found out how other people run their youth groups, which is different to how we run ours."

Callum won because of his great contribution to the community-run Phoenix Youth Group in Durrington, West Sussex. As well as designing the club's website, Callum is well known for helping out younger members and challenging negative stereotypes of young people.

The runner-up for this award was 18-year-old **Gemma Bignell** from the Isle of Wight, who is a tireless volunteer for a number of local charities.

We made two 'Significant Contribution to a Community' awards. **Jean Bygrave** from Waltham Court in Goring-on-Thames won for organising daily social activities and fundraising events for fellow residents – despite having personal health problems. Her neighbours say: "Without her, things would be very mundane".

Joint winners, the **Zaman family** from Whitechapel, were recognised for their willingness to run events for the whole community at Fieldgate Mansions, as well as acting as interpreters between us and their neighbours. Shihabuz Zaman said: "Whatever we do, we're working for the community, to improve the community. We live in a multi-cultural society and need to help each other and try to respect each other."

Also shortlisted for this award was **John Havelock** from Ainsworth Court in Freshwater on the Isle of Wight. John tends the communal gardens at the scheme, as well as

helping his neighbours with shopping trips, lifts to clinics and car outings.

The four award judges included Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association resident Jennie Rooney. Jennie told us: "During my time as an involved resident, I have not only learnt more skills than I thought possible, I have great relationships with the local authorities, outside agencies, local police and with staff of the housing association.

"But, best of all I have made lifelong friends – not only locally, but by going to courses all over the country meeting people just like you and me."

The SERD team is now building on the event discussions so that these groups can continue to grow and play a role in the big society.

 **Contact us**

For a copy of our Guide to Setting up a Community Group, call the Service Centre, on 0300 303 1771. Or email service.centre@shgroup.org.uk

Top left - Julie Jones (left), Chair of Northbourne Action Group, winner of the Improving Cohesion Award, is pictured with committee member Claire Marshall and youth group members Mikey and Lewis Brown.



Top right - Youth award winner Callum Jenner (13) pictured with his proud mum Ann-Marie.



Bottom left - Jean Bygrave (right), joint winner of the Contribution to a Community Award is pictured with her friend, Janet Johnson.



Bottom right - (Left to right) Shihabuz, Shayma and Salma Zaman, joint winners of the Contribution to a Community Award, pictured with Social and Economic Regeneration Director Anabel Palmer.





Residents taking part in our first conference for the Group's new West region.

Bengali Turkish

Helping us to improve

“A thoroughly entertaining and very useful day”

Resident Service Panel member's verdict on our Horsham training day

We aim to provide you with good quality homes and services. We also have to show our regulators that we are well-managed and provide good value for money.

We constantly check and report on our performance, and compare it with that of other landlords. But our best reality check is you.

We invite you to get involved so that you can tell us about your needs and actively help us to design services that do a good job of meeting them. Our corporate plan and our service standards both prioritise this work.

We offer a menu of ways to get involved, designed to make it possible for every resident to take part.

- We involve people in our Boards, committees and the new regional Resident Service Panels.
- Customer involvement panels help us develop particular projects.
- Residents give their views at events, workshops and focus groups, and as members of the readers' panel and e-panel.
- Customer service monitors and resident estate inspectors check

our services, while contract reviewers help us monitor the work of our repairs contractors.

- Residents work with us on neighbourhood projects.

Local offers

One of our main projects for this year is to involve residents in drawing up new 'local offers' – to enhance the service standards we launched in 2009.

These new local offers will play an important role in the way we are regulated in future. Chief Executive Tom Dacey explains this more fully in his column on page 2.

We are also keen to hear from you if you feel we need to be developing a 'local offer' to supplement the core service standards for where you live.



Contact us

To find out more about getting involved, call the Service Centre, on 0300 303 1771 and ask to speak to your resident involvement manager. Or email servicecentre@shgroup.co.uk

Resident involvement



Resident Service Panel members at our December training day.

Formal work: **Resident Service Panels**

Our new regional Resident Service Panels have got off to a strong start and are looking forward to starting their quarterly meetings from February.

The regional directors have so far interviewed and recruited 51 residents for the 60 vacancies.

In December, panel members came to our Horsham offices to meet each other and senior regional staff, and to take part in a day of training. We also introduced them to the Housing Ombudsman Dr Mike Biles, whose

service takes up social housing residents' complaints when they have exhausted their landlord's procedure.

In March, the panels will meet Group Board members and senior staff at our London head office.

The panels will play a key role in our regions, working with regional managers to monitor our performance and improve local services. Panel recommendations and feedback will be passed to the Customer Services Committee, which in turn reports to the Board.

Resident involvement

Local projects:
Neighbourhood plans

Community Regeneration Officer Maggie Taylor is working with residents on action plans at three schemes in South region.

Having surveyed residents at Popes Court in Hove, and Heron Court and Juno Close in Worthing, she ran fun days earlier in the year to bring people together to discuss her findings.

As a result, Heron Court residents are considering possible scheme improvements, joining the local credit union and local training and employment opportunities. Popes Court residents were able to local issues with their housing managers. And Juno Close residents have since met activists from other schemes and will be taking part in cooking and budgeting courses.

Residents at Popes Court fun day.



Resident involvement

Resident events: **West region conference**

On 6 October, 40 residents joined us at the Hampshire Stand at Newbury Racecourse for the first annual conference for the new West region.

West region's new Regional Director Troy Francis introduced himself, and residents heard how we are managing homes in the new-look region.

There were also seminars on anti-social behaviour, fire safety and the role of the Social and Economic Regeneration team – which now works in all regions.

Our partners taking stalls included Community Savings & Loans Berkshire, the Illegal Money Lending team, the Neighbourhood Wardens, an arson expert from Royal Berkshire Fire &

Rescue Service and members of the Anyone Can Cook project.

Staff answered queries on Decent Homes major works and advised on aids and adaptations for residents with a disability or mobility problems.

Patrick's advice: Get your gas checked!

Patrick Elliott from Brighton helped us to monitor the performance of Robert Heath Heating Ltd last year.

Open Door: How did you find the monthly gas contract review meetings?

Patrick: It took a little time to slot in, so that I wasn't just moaning, but working as part of the team – also to feel comfortable to speak without feeling silly. I knew I wasn't always right, but it was good to feel relaxed and understand the way things work. The team worked hard to help me fit in.

OD: Why do you think some residents are reluctant to allow access for gas servicing?

P: They don't understand that the boiler or cooker they depend on needs looking after. If this doesn't happen, it's a risk to all their friends

and family. Maybe we should publish a UK-wide update on gas related deaths. We were working to keep everyone safe – including their pets!

OD: How important is it to have the annual gas safety check carried out?

P: It's a must, to make sure where we live is not a death trap. It makes me feel safe and I can't understand why anyone would not want to be safe. Residents say to me: "I got my own fire fitted last year. My son in the USA got it for me", but it still needs to be checked. Are you going to put all you care about at risk because you can't make the time to have a free check?

OD: Do you know about our monthly prize draw for people who give access at the first appointment?

P: Yes! I don't personally know any winners though!

"We were working to keep all of you safe"

Patrick Elliott from Brighton was our Robert Heath Heating resident contract monitor last year



I think this property is sublet:

I think this because:

Names of people living there:

Can we contact you? Yes No

It's fine if you wish to remain anonymous, but it would be helpful to have your name, address, phone number and email address if possible:

Send form to: Service Centre, Southern Housing Group, PO Box 643, Horsham RH12 1XJ.



Important information

Fulham fraudster shown the door

With the help of a long-suffering neighbour and Hammersmith & Fulham Council, we recently recovered a home in Fulham that was being illegally sublet.

Investigators from the Council's anti-fraud team swooped after the neighbour tipped them off. He called them after reading about the Council's zero-tolerance crackdown on illegal subletting in Hammersmith & Fulham News.

He told them: "About 15 years ago a young family moved in, but they suddenly moved out and new people started arriving who would never answer the door. Every time you complained, they just moved out and someone else came in.

"At one point a gang of about 10 builders moved in and kept my family awake all night getting drunk. Once, one of them ran a bath and forgot about it, flooding my bathroom."

The investigation team traced the original tenant, Beata Chojnacki, to a five-bedroom house in Basildon, Essex, with flashy cars parked outside. When confronted, he handed over the keys to the flat. He had been pocketing the difference between the social rent he paid us and the much higher market rent he was charging his 'tenants'.

The neighbour picked up a £500 reward from the Council and we took back the flat for a family that needs it. The neighbour said: "I couldn't believe how quickly things happened. Within a couple of months of my call they were out!"

We now take a much tougher approach to subletting and recently recruited a member of staff to focus on this problem. If you suspect someone is renting out our property, call us on 0300 303 1774 or fill out the form opposite – and we will do the rest.

Advice

Pay on time - You can't lose!



Kirsty Johns from Bunkers Hill in Dover told us: "I'm a bit shocked really, I don't know what to say!", when we rang to tell her she had won £200 in our prize draw of residents with up-to-date rent accounts. She will spend the cash on something for her baby daughter.

We introduced the twice-yearly draw to encourage you to pay on time and in full – including making sure your account is clear when your Housing Benefit is paid.

Mrs Fairey from Catley Court sheltered scheme in Bexhill-on-Sea won the £200 prize draw for residents who pay by direct debit. She tells us she is glad she changed over from paying by standing order last year, as the prize was a lovely surprise just before Christmas.

To find out about paying by direct debit, call the Service Centre.

Information

Grants now available across the Group

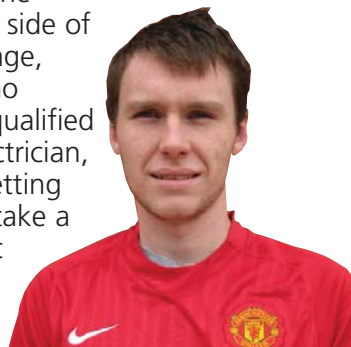
The Social and Economic Regeneration team are now working with social rented residents Group-wide.

Nineteen year-old **Mark Hughes** from Fulham is off to the United States on a four-year soccer scholarship next summer, with additional support from our Sports Fund.

Mark was given a successful try-out by sports scholarship consultancy FirstPoint USA, earlier this year. They will now help him find the best scholarship and college to further his academic and sporting career.

Mark explains that the growing popularity of the game in the United States is providing great opportunities for young British players. "It's so hard to get noticed over here. The standard's so high," he says.

To meet the academic side of the package, Mark, who recently qualified as an electrician, is now getting ready to take a Scholastic Aptitude Test. The



colleges he can apply to will depend on the score he gets. He is also deciding what he wants to study.

Mark is very grateful for the Sports Fund award, which will help to cover some of the fee he has to pay.

Elaine Carter from Portsmouth used her Sir Ashley Bramall award towards the costs of a challenging three-week placement in Tanzania, as part of her midwifery degree.

She says: "I was based at a town called Arusha, on the labour wards of Mount Meru Hospital. We delivered lots of babies, but there were a lot of women with HIV and stillbirths, because there is very little ante-natal care. I spent the last week living in a Maasai hut, giving ante-natal care and vaccinations in the village clinic."

Georgina Bennett is using her Sir Ashley Bramall award towards the course fees for a Diploma in Law.

Emma Wright from Worthing is using her Sir Ashley Bramall award towards the course fees and essential books for a counselling course.

To find out if you are eligible for a grant, contact our grants officer on 020 7324 1292 or email grants@shgroup.org.uk



Apply now for a grant

If you rent any of our social housing properties, you can apply (but restrictions apply) for:

- a Sir Ashley Bramall grant of up to £500 towards your study costs
- a Sports Fund grant of up to £500 towards your active sports costs
- a Foundation small grant of up to £2,000 towards resident events or outings, community activities or school holiday programmes
- a Working Opportunities Fund grant of up to £500 towards the costs of getting you back to work.

Email grants@shgroup.org.uk, phone 020 7324 1292, or go to www.shgroup.org.uk for more details.

Information

Become an east London greeter

The London Development Agency is currently working with the five Olympic host boroughs (Hackney, Greenwich, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest) to recruit a network of volunteer greeters from across east London.

Greeters are local enthusiasts who will guide groups of up to six people

around areas like Woolwich, the Isle of Dogs, Brick Lane and Spitalfields, and Hackney Central.

To be selected you need to love your area and be able to commit at least two hours a month for a year. To find out more, call Greenwich Council 020 8921 8050. They will refer you to the scheme for your area.

The future is green

Housing accounts for 27 per cent of the UK's carbon emissions, so we can play our part in helping the government meet its climate change targets.



Work starts on the retrofit at Manor Crescent in Compton, Berkshire.

Green and warm

“To us it means we don't have to move from a home we've lived in for 15 years”

Nikki Pinkney from Compton village in West Berkshire

Alan and Nikki Pinkney, who live with their three children in Compton village in West Berkshire, will soon feel the benefits of a project that is refurbishing their 1950s house with the latest green technology.

ECD Architects have been given a development contract as lead designers to 'retrofit' two of our properties – the other is on the Isle of Wight. We will work with them to manage the project.

The funding comes from a UK-wide scheme to reduce CO₂ emissions and energy use in social housing, which is being run by the Technology Strategy Board under the Small Business Research Initiative. The idea is to show how single homes can be upgraded to reduce emissions by 80 per cent. It must also be possible to use the same methods on large numbers of existing homes. The performance of the homes will be monitored for two years.

Alan's and Nikki's cavity wall house has already had Decent Homes improvements, but its energy efficiency needs improving.

The £130,000 'retrofit' package consists of super insulated external cladding, loft insulation, triple-glazed windows and an insulated entrance door. We will install whole-house heat

recovery ventilation and a ground source heat pump, supplemented by a solar photovoltaic array. We will also introduce Wattbox – an innovative, intelligent, house heating controller. It learns household patterns by monitoring electricity use and works out a routine for timing the heating and hot water supply, so that users don't have to set time clocks.

Alan and Nikki are staying in their home during the work and will be fully consulted at every stage. They will also get fuel economy advice and support to use the monitoring equipment. We expect to achieve a major reduction in CO₂ emissions, at the same time as improving the heating and reducing their energy costs.

The project is great news for the family. They had been considering moving because their energy bills were so high. Nikki said: “To us it means that we don't have to move from a home we've lived in for 15 years. It's the only home my disabled son has ever known, as we moved in here just after he was born.

“David has Asperger's Syndrome and he needs things to be ordered and stay the same. I'm doing a blog for him as the house is worked on, so that it doesn't faze him.”

News

Green and **more efficient**

The Combined Heating and Power (CHP) unit installed at Elizabeth Court in Theale two years ago has helped us to reduce our carbon footprint – and cut bills for residents.



The CHP unit is a gas-fired internal combustion engine – the equivalent of a large car engine.

It produces a constant 15kw of electricity and does so more cheaply than we can buy from the national grid.

As a by-product of this process, the unit also generates a constant 30kw of heat for the building, with extra heating produced by new, highly efficient, condensing boilers, as and when required.

The CHP system is now consistently producing around 70 per cent of the scheme's electricity, with just 30 per cent coming from the national grid.

We are also using around 5 per cent less gas.

Between the end of 2008 and the summer of 2010, the new installation cut our carbon emissions by 33 per cent, saving more than 50 tonnes of CO₂. And with smaller bills coming from our electricity supplier, we have passed on savings in the service charge to residents.

The system cost around £140,000 to install and was part-paid with a grant from energy provider e.on.

Green news



Left: Photovoltaic panels on homes in Chale. Right: Vince Wedlock-Ward.

Green and **gold**

Southern Housing Group has won a gold Green Apple Environment Award as the charitable or social housing organisation showing the best environmental practice.

The award is for our role in the Chale Project on the Isle of Wight and was presented to Projects Officer Vince Wedlock-Ward at a House of Commons event in November.

The Chale Community Project aims to reduce carbon use and end local fuel poverty. It has already brought solar panels and source heat pumps to 67 of our households. Our partners in the project are the people of Chale,

the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, the Footprint Trust and Island 2000.

Vince's work on this and other projects won him an Eco-Islander of the month medal in September from the Green on Wight organisation, in association with Bestival. Vince has already overseen the installation of more than 30 solar thermal panels, 300 photovoltaic panels and 70 air source heat pumps, in our island properties. He is now working with green energy provider Eaga on a project to bring free solar energy to up to 300 residents, saving them around £200 a year on fuel bills and cutting their annual carbon emissions by around 1.2 tonnes.

Green news

Green and **great design**

Baden Powell Close in Dagenham won Best Small Development at the Affordable Home Ownership Awards 2010 – and was recently shortlisted for a design award by the Royal Institute of British Architects.

The 14-home scheme designed by Peter Barber Architects has high eco credentials. It meets the EcoHomes Very Good standard and won a silver Building for Life award. Three homes have ground source heat pumps to heat the homes and hot water. Every home has a Sedum 'green' roof to absorb rainfall and provide insulation.

Resident Diane Pace says: "The green roofing is brilliant. I'm using rain water that drains into barrels from the roof, to irrigate my plants."



Your pages

We want to hear from you! Send us a letter, a photo or an email to tell us what's going on in your area or your views on anything you read in Open Door. Write to the Editor via the Service Centre or email opendoor@shgroup.org.uk

Phyllis Bond Hackney



Friends and family got together for the unveiling of a bench at Charles Utton Court in memory of Phyllis Bond, who died recently. Phyllis was born at Liverpool Road Estate in 1916 and was our longest-standing female resident.

The unveiling was held on what would have been her 94th Birthday.

Young people's hostels Ryde



Young people at our hostels in Ryde on the Isle of Wight are making great use of five laptop computers, after successfully applying, with our help, for a grant of £3,500 from the Youth Opportunity Fund.

The youngsters use the laptops for study, job and home searches, as well as budgeting and preparing CVs.

Wale Yusuff Islington



Wale Yusuff from Islington, was invited by Westminster Council to act as a judge for a school business competition recently.

Year 9 pupils at Westminster School, one of the country's top public schools, were challenged to design a social enterprise by and for the community.

Wale judged the entries for one form group, and selected 'Funday', an event and online ticket sales company, whose profits would allow disabled people to attend events free.

Wale's real-life social enterprise - Drivers Edge UK - is a project to teach young people about driving safely.

Liverpool Road Estate Islington



Tea, scones, cucumber sandwiches and home-made bunting were the order of the day, as Liverpool Road Estate residents held a traditional Edwardian tea party to celebrate the centenary of their estate.

The Tall Tales community art collective ran pre-event projects from cake designing to water colour painting and got residents to make hundreds of triangles for the bunting. On the day there were Edwardian costumes to try on, arts and crafts activities and a brass quartet played songs from the early 1900s.

Liverpool Road Estate opened on 4 April 1910 and is our oldest estate.

Emily Shepherd Bethnal Green



Emily Shepherd, who spent the war years at our Cyprus Street Estate in Bethnal Green, has contributed her memories of the Blitz to a BBC website item commemorating the 70th anniversary of the bombing of London.

Emily's memories can be viewed online at www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11222260

Vicky Birch, Chanette Kennedy & Vicki Hewitt Ryde

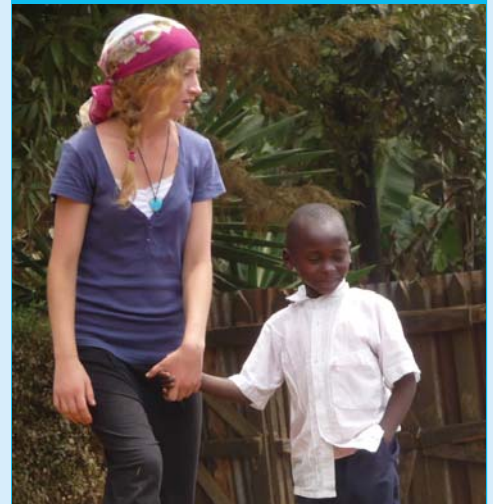


Vicky Birch, Chanette Kennedy and Vicki Hewitt from our Ryde young people's schemes on the Isle of Wight got the chance to take part in a trip from Gosport to Ipswich on a tall ship named Queen Galadriel.

Spending five days and four nights on the ship, they learnt about buoys, nautical terms and knots, and how to take the helm. They also learned from experience that sometimes you have to reposition a ship in the middle of the night to stop it tipping!

At the end of the voyage the young people all received competent crew certificates from the Royal Yacht Association.

Gemma Bignell Ryde



Gemma Bignell from the Isle of Wight has just had the trip of a lifetime, after being selected to spend seven weeks volunteering in Kenya for an organisation called Platform Two. Gemma helped dig ponds for poor communities, clear vegetation that uses up valuable local water and taught primary school children.

She says: "The experience was breathtaking. We were able to experience life as a local and see some amazing animals like hippos, cheetahs and elephants at work in the forest.

"We visited the world's second largest slum, where I met a little boy called Harry who was seven years' old but weighed as much as a three-year-old in this country. It was heartbreaking to see how ill some of the children were."

Gemma also saw how deeply corruption affects people's daily lives and leads to animal cruelty.

"It was an amazing experience to learn about different cultural values. It has encouraged me to try and take part in changing views of animal rights' legislation and law within the country and others like it."



MAD for IT! mothers & daughters London & Thames Gateway



Mums and daughters from Thames Gateway region are taking part in a free, 10-week, health and fitness programme known as 'MAD for It!'. Our partners Groundwork London are running the project for us, after successfully piloting it last year in Hackney and Islington.

The mothers and daughters try out different activities at weekly sessions. They can also work towards first aid accreditation or a sports leaders' community award. As well as encouraging them to get fit, the programme aims to help mothers and daughters to bond.

The scheme is part of the Activate London campaign to promote healthy and active communities. Activate London is funded by the Big Lottery Fund and led by Peabody Trust.

Pictured: Mums and daughters from last year's pilot, taking a hike.

Tackling anti-social behaviour

Still saying no to nuisance

Tackling nuisance so that ordinary residents can enjoy their homes peacefully is still a high priority for us, as two recent cases show.

In June, we evicted a Brighton resident, who had been disturbing his neighbours for more than five years.

Residents at this street property first contacted us in 2007 to complain about loud music, fighting in communal areas, shouting, swearing and drunken behaviour, and the constant breaking of the security lock. The resident also kept a dog at the flat without permission, allowing it to bark and urinate in shared areas.

By February 2008, we had compiled enough evidence from neighbours to take the resident to court. We got a

postponed eviction order and things were quieter for a while. But, by September 2009, things were as bad as ever, so with police support we kept going back to court until we got a full hearing in May this year.

On the day, two neighbours gave evidence, impressing the court with their courage. The court made sure they had a separate place to wait, while the police gave their phone calls special priority. The judge agreed that the defendant had caused persistent noise and was unlikely to change, so he granted us an eviction order.

In another case, we recently evicted a resident from Lake on the Isle of Wight. This resident had forced his neighbours to put up with long periods of loud music, often into the early

hours of the morning. His visitors had also harassed and intimidated the people living around him.

Although we tried to get the resident to see the effect he was having on his neighbours, all attempts failed. This meant we had no option but to take him to court, where we were given permission to evict him.

Again, it was the willingness of local people to come forward with evidence that made it possible to restore peace and quiet to the area.



Improvement news

Getting to know you



Residents who took part in our 'getting to know you' project over the Christmas break got the chance to win one of two £50 prizes in our latest prize draw.

We asked you to phone the Service Centre to help staff update the data we hold on you. We need these details so that we can communicate with you better and improve our services.

We recently updated our computer system to make it easier for staff to view and collect this data. They now see all your details on a single screen, including your ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, whether anyone in your household has a disability, your email address and phone number.

Over the new few months, we will be adding data we hold that is not

yet on the system. Once we have more data overall, we will be looking at positive ways to use it.

For example, it will help us to carry out 'equality impact assessments'. This is where we look closely at the impact of our policies and ways of working, as well as the events we run, to check whether we act fairly with all our resident groups or need to make changes.

Having a good picture of who lives where will also help us to plan local events and consultations, contacting you in the ways that suit you best.

If you have any suggestions about how we could use the data, we would be pleased to hear from you. Call the Service Centre, or email policy.feedback@shgroup.org.uk

Improvement news

New IT system for complaints and ASB

From March 2011, we will be using a new IT system to manage your complaints and reports of anti-social behaviour (ASB).

Unlike the current system, which uses separate software, the new system has been added to our existing housing management program – which is used across Southern Housing Group to manage your homes and tenancies. Bringing the two together means that it will be easier for our staff to use, as well as being cheaper.

In designing the new system, we used feedback from residents and staff, before working closely with our IT providers to get the program we wanted.

One result is that it will be much easier to keep you updated as we work to resolve your complaint or report of anti-social behaviour.

Our performance

This page tells you about our performance in recent months. The 12 key service standards were chosen by residents, and we also report on three other important measures.

Our performance

Our key standards

Our 12 key standards have been chosen by residents to reflect your priorities. We have added three others (written in blue) because our regulator expects us to report on them.

Our staff are now making much greater use of these figures as they manage services – making them a real focus for improvement.

Performance changes

Our figures for responding to your letters and emails are now more accurate, because we are weighing up records from the Service Centre equally with the findings of our resident mystery shoppers. Our mystery shoppers carry out only a few tests, so their findings can have a significant effect on the figures.

We are doing a lot more estate inspections and responding faster to your reports of graffiti and serious anti-social behaviour.

We are still concentrating on getting your repairs fixed on the first visit and making great progress – since the spring, our 'first-time fixes' have gone from 72 per cent to 85 per cent.

As we caught up on a backlog of repair quality checks, the percentage of jobs we checked dropped back towards our normal target.

Note

1. Where we have not supplied a figure, this is because only a very small number of mystery shopping tests were carried out in this period.
2. Figures show how many inspections were carried out.

Customer care 1 April to 30 September 2010

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept
1 If you write to us, we will respond within 10 working days	68%	88%
2 If you email us, we will respond within five working days	71%	87%
3 We will answer 80% of phone calls to the Service Centre within 20 seconds	74.3%	72%
4 If you visit our main offices, you will be met by a polite and professional member of staff wearing an identification badge with a photograph	80%	100%

Managing where you live 1 April to 30 September 2010

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept
5 We will inspect where you live as often as we agree with you (monthly, or every three or six months) ²	651	771
6 We will get rid of offensive graffiti within one working day of being told about it	91%	95%
7 If you report an incident of anti-social behaviour that we think is high risk, we will contact you within 24 hours	58%	65%

Paying rent & service charges 1 April to 30 September 2010

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept
8 We will make sure your payment is on your rent or service charge account within two working days (if you send a cheque we must receive it first) ¹	-	100%
9 We will keep the amount of overdue rent as low as possible (total on last days of June and September)	4%	4%

Letting homes 1 January to 1 April to 30 September 2010

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept
10 Within six weeks of you moving in, we will visit you, to see how you are settling in	76.2%	100%
11 We will keep as low as possible the average number of days it takes us to tidy up and relet empty homes (totals on last days of June and September)	34 days	34 days

Repairs and maintenance 1 April to 30 September 2010

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept
12 We will visit you to carry out quality checks (at least 10% of all repairs each month)	17%	14%
13 We will offer you an appointment to carry out your repair	75%	87%
14 We will try to get repairs completed in one visit	81%	85%
15 We will get a valid gas safety certificate for all our homes every year (totals on last days of June and September)	99.3%	99.7%

Diary dates

27 March National Census Day **Make sure you count!**

The government's latest 10-year survey of UK households will be carried out in March. The forms will be sent to 25 million homes and, for the first time, you will be able to file your answers online.

Local and national government agencies use this data to help them create a snapshot picture of who lives in Britain. The information is vital to the agencies planning services such as education, health, housing and transport.

The personal information you provide will be kept strictly confidential for 100 years. After that, it is made public, forming a fascinating resource for historians and others.

If you would be interested in paid work for the census project, you can find out more at www.ons.gov.uk/census

Contributors

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You can write to the editor via the Service Centre or send an email to opendoor@shgroup.org.uk
The deadline for contributions to the next issue is Friday 4 March 2011.



Contact us

Service Centre opening hours
8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday

If you live on the UK mainland, phone 0300 303 1771

If you live on the Isle of Wight, phone 0300 303 1772 (also out-of-hours emergencies)

Email us at
servicecentre@shgroup.org.uk

Write to Service Centre
Southern Housing Group,
PO Box 643, Horsham RH12 1XJ

Out-of-hours emergencies
If you rent a home on the UK mainland, phone Homeserve on 08457 573 764 (all regions except West) or 08456 013 225 (West region)

If you own a home on the UK mainland, phone Homeserve on 08456 000 453

Competition

Find the answers to the questions below, in this issue of **Open Door**, for the chance to win one of three vouchers.

- 1 What are the names of the two new regional directors?
- 2 How old was the youngest Unlocking the Potential of People awards winner?
- 3 What date is the National Census being held on?

Email opendoor@shgroup.org.uk or write your answers on the back of an envelope or postcard with your name, and address and post to: Open Door Competition, Southern Housing Group, Fleet House, 59-61 Clerkenwell Road, London EC1M 5LA. The closing date is **Friday 4 March 2011**.

Winners from last issue: Jane Weedon from Middlesex, Jean Sinclair from Kent and Mary Grant from London.

Win!
£20
in
Vouchers

Translations

For help with translations, or information in Braille, large print or as an audio version, contact the Service Centre on 0300 303 1771.

Arabic

إذا كنت تريد الحصول على ترجمة لأحدى المقالات،
اتصل برقم 0300 303 1771.

Bengali

যেসব আর্টিকলে এই চিহ্ন দেয়া আছে আমরা সেগুলির
বাংলাতে সারসংক্ষেপ সরবরাহ করি। কপির জন্য
0300 303 1682 নাম্বারে ফোন করুন।

Bengali

French

Si vous souhaitez faire traduire un article,
appelez le 0300 303 1771.

Somali

Haddii aad rabtid in maqaalka lagu turjumo
wac 0300 303 1771.

Spanish

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llame al 0300 303 1771.

Turkish

Üzerinde bu işaret bulunan yazıların Türkçe
özetini verebiliriz. Bir kopya edinmek isterseniz
0300 303 1683'ü arayın.

Turkish