

**IN THIS ISSUE**

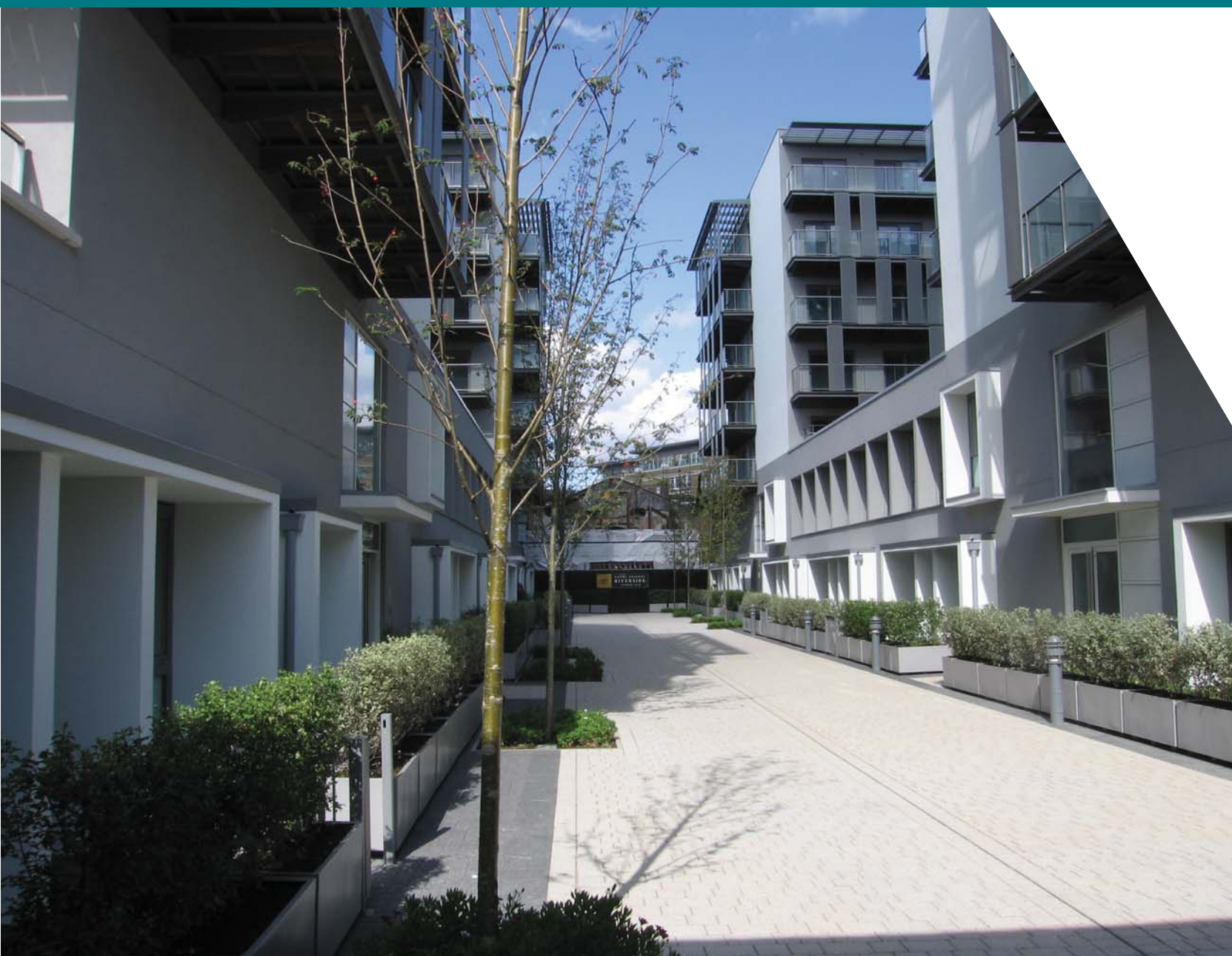
**Focus on**

The Printworks,  
Lewes, East Sussex

**TSA's Peter Marsh visits Group Board  
Belts tighten as rents fall**

**The Armouries provide 300 new homes  
Bringing art to Islington**

# ONBOARD #48



## News

# TSA's Peter Marsh visits Group Board

**The Board of Southern Housing Group welcomed Peter Marsh, Chief Executive of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), to its December meeting. He was accompanied by our regulator, Andy Cook.**

Peter introduced the new TSA framework, which will be used to regulate social housing landlords from April 2010.

He went on to take questions from the Board on the TSA's role and expectations, and commented briefly on his impressions of Southern Housing Group.

The TSA's framework consists of six overall standards, covering tenant involvement, the quality of homes, lettings and housing management, value for money, governance and financial stability.

Landlords will be required to develop their own local service standards around these issues – something Southern Housing Group completed last year, after working closely with residents.

In directions to the TSA, the government has indicated that it will continue to control rent-setting, the Decent Homes standard will remain in force and landlords will be obliged to involve and empower residents.

## News

## Yvette joins the Development Committee

**Yvette Morgan has joined Southern Housing Group's Development Committee.**

Yvette is a qualified practising solicitor with more than 20 years' experience in all aspects of property law, but with particular emphasis on development and regeneration work.



A partner in the Milton Keynes office of Hewitsons LLP, Yvette is lead partner for work carried out on behalf of the Homes and Communities Agency. She is also the Independent Chair of Milton Keynes Council's Housing Services Forum.

Yvette says: "I'm very much interested in how we can achieve good housing for everyone and in how housing delivery fits with sustainability. Everyone is entitled to a decent living environment and that's not just the housing. It will be interesting to see how the affordable housing sector achieves this."

## News

## Customer Services place for Sue

**The Customer Services Committee, which oversees our frontline services, welcomed new member Sue Boyall.**

Sue is a qualified solicitor, who has specialised in property law, conveyancing, and landlord and tenant, over a 22-year period. Most recently, as part of the commercial property department at Forsters LLP for 11 years, she acted mainly for investor and developer clients.

Since leaving Forsters last year, Sue has been assisting her local law centre and the Citizens Advice Bureau, as well the Richmond-on-Thames Furniture Scheme.

Sue says: "Southern Housing Group is a fantastic organisation. What I find so impressive is that it shows a real interest in doing the best for its residents, and in being a fully engaged and socially responsible landlord."

"I'm hoping that with the skills I've acquired in my legal career and elsewhere, and my developing interest in social policy, I can bring something useful to this committee."



## News

## Katherine on board at Southern Space

**Katherine Lyons has joined the Board of Southern Space Ltd, our property development company, and has also been nominated to the Board of Southern Home Ownership.**



Katherine is a solicitor with Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP, where she advises corporate and institutional clients on sales, acquisitions, commercial property lettings, property finance and tax.

Katherine's charitable work has included negotiating a lease for the UK Career Academy Foundation, GCSE Spanish tutoring at a school in Hackney and work with the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Katherine says: "This position will give me valuable insight into the dynamics and decision-making processes of a social landlord. I am delighted to have been selected for this role and hope that I will be able to bring a new perspective to the Boards."

“A poll showed that 69 per cent of tenants would forego their rent cut if it protected community services.”

Opinion

# Belts tighten as rents fall

Social housing landlords are bracing themselves for a further year of belt-tightening as we face the sector's first-ever year of falling rents.

Rents in the sector are calculated by taking the retail price index (RPI) from the previous September and adding 0.5 per cent. However, with prices in the overall economy falling, RPI in September 2009 stood at just -1.4 per cent – leaving landlords looking at a 0.9 per cent drop in rents.

At first sight, it might seem fair to allow tenants to benefit from a government rent-setting formula that gave them a rent increase of 5.5 per cent in 2009. But these are not ordinary times, as the National Housing Federation (NHF) spent the autumn pointing out.

Speaking to the BBC, the NHF's Chief Executive David Orr warned that the government could be harming its own agenda. Instead of building more new homes and providing more services during the recession, landlords would be forced to make cuts. Their reduced rental income, used as collateral, would also affect their ability to raise loans in the private market.

As part of the G15 group of London's largest housing associations, we reminded the government that the decline in our profits from low-cost home ownership had left us with depleted surpluses, despite low interest rates and the higher rents charged last year.

At the same time, our main costs are not dropping in line with RPI. In fact, costs like repairs and loans are likely to increase this year as markets recover and interest rates begin to rise.

Above all, we told the government that allowing rents to fall this year could not be in the best interests of tenants. It would inevitably lead to cuts in our discretionary activities around employment, training and community regeneration. It might also affect our housing development programmes.

A poll carried out by Populus, on behalf of the National Housing Federation, backed our view by showing that 69 per cent of tenants would forego their rent cut if it protected community services.

The government's decision to go ahead with the rent reduction, rejecting the call for a year of 0 per cent change, was surprising and disappointing. It leaves the sector looking for even tighter efficiency savings and threatens the strong work we have been doing in some of the UK's poorest neighbourhoods.

Faced with this challenge, Southern Housing Group will continue to focus over the coming year on achieving good value for money and delivering the best possible services for residents.

**Photo** – Lewis Gardens in Hackney.





“The six shortlisted developments all met the Building for Life criteria of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment.”

Development

## Internal design awards for 2009: Praise for The Printworks, admiration for Admiralty Quarter

**Southern Housing Group’s Internal Design Panel unanimously selected The Printworks in Lewes, West Sussex, as the best-designed scheme we completed during 2008 to 2009.**

For the fifth year of our internal design awards, we asked the panel, which is drawn from the Group’s Development Committee and includes a resident, to choose from a shortlist of six schemes. All six met the Building for Life criteria of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment.



Meeting in December, the panel considered the appearance and context of the designs, as well as comparing the quality of build, energy efficiency and fitness for purpose of each scheme, taking feedback from staff and residents into account.

The panel unanimously selected The Printworks in Lewes for the award, because it achieves the difficult balance of being distinctive and modern, while fitting into its surroundings at the centre of a historic market town. The 14-home scheme makes good use of a difficult, sloping site and provides communal space on the rooftop.

The panel also liked the way intermediate rent properties are mixed with those for private sale and were impressed with the positive resident and management feedback. The signage, hard landscaping and use of flint stone on the ground floor elevations to mirror a stone wall at the rear of the scheme all showed attention to detail.

As runner-up, the panel commended Admiralty Quarter in Portsmouth. This scheme provides 500 homes, an impressive internal courtyard and a large visitor car park for the historic dockyard nearby, without compromising on design. It is extremely popular with residents.

Sandale Close in Hackney was also commended as a good example of how an infill building can contribute to estate regeneration by providing variety.

Sandgate Mews in Folkestone, Scholars’ Place in Reading and Wellington Court in Barking were all shortlisted.

The awards demonstrate the Group’s continuing commitment to good design in the provision of affordable housing.

**Photo top left and featured below – The Printworks in Lewes.**

**Photo left – Admiralty Quarter in Portsmouth.**

Development

## Focus on: The Printworks, Lewes, East Sussex

**Site** Previously home to a small old factory, the site was acquired by the developer, The Raven Group, before we were approached to provide the affordable housing that makes up 40 per cent of the scheme. Lewes is a popular, attractive, medieval town in East Sussex.

**Partners** The Raven Group, RH Partnership, Philip Pank Partnership, Homes and Communities Agency.

**Funding** The overall cost of the affordable housing was £1.98 million, with £641,335 in grant funding, including cross-subsidy.

**Output** Six flats for shared ownership and eight for intermediate rent (let at 20 per cent lower than local market rents). The homes have one or two bedrooms and were completed during September 2008.

**Design** The scheme was designed by Brighton architects, the RH Partnership, who successfully met their brief to provide a clean and contemporary style in keeping with the town’s historic setting.

**Special features** Mixed tenure homes are to be found side by side throughout three of the four blocks. The scheme includes communal space on the rooftop.



## Development

# The Armouries provides 300 new homes

**January to May 2010 will see the completion of the latest phase of homes at the award-winning Royal Arsenal scheme in Woolwich, bringing a further 300 affordable homes to this area of Greenwich.**



The Armouries will provide 55 homes for social rent, including seven wheelchair-adaptable units. There will also be 120 properties for shared ownership and 125 for intermediate rent, both marketed through our Homeflex scheme.

The two apartment blocks face an attractive planted lagoon with fountains. There is an on-site, gas-fired, combined heat and power plant, which will generate electricity for heat, power and hot water, without the need for individual boilers. The system is energy efficient and the development is on course to achieve Level 3 under the Code for Sustainable Homes.

A Homeflex open day in November saw a wave of interest. Homeflex offers the choice between purchasing a minimum 25 per cent share in a home or renting at 80 per cent of the full market value. Both options are aimed at working people who do not currently own a home and whose household income is under £60,000.

Southern Housing Group has invested more than £50 million in developing the Armouries, as well as securing nearly £15.5 million in grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency.

Development of the entire historic Royal Arsenal site is being led by Berkeley Homes (East Thames), in partnership with Southern Housing Group, the London Borough of Greenwich and the London Development Agency. The overall scheme will provide more than 2,500 homes, as well as shops, cafés and workspaces.

When the Armouries is completed, Southern Housing Group will own and manage more than 600 homes at Royal Arsenal.

**Photo** – New homes at the Armouries in Greenwich. The scheme is part of the Royal Arsenal development.

## Development

# By the Wayside in Wokingham

**In December, we welcomed the first residents to Wayside in Old Forest Road in Wokingham.**

Developed in partnership with Taylor Wimpey UK, as part of a mixed-tenure scheme, our homes consist of eight, two bedroom flats and a three bedroom house.

The homes have a number of environmental features, including photovoltaic roof panels to provide environmentally-friendly energy to light communal areas.

The homes also have battery-operated carbon monoxide detectors.

All the properties meet Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes, in support of the Government's 2016 zero-carbon target.

The Southern Housing Group homes were developed at an overall cost of around £1.17m, with £500,000 in grant funding.



“Eugenie’s installation made me think differently about what constitutes urban art.”

## Operations

## National crackdown on subletting

**In line with the new national drive to crack down on sub-letting, launched by the government and the National Housing Federation, we are carrying out more tenancy checks than ever before.**

Over the past year, we carried out audit checks at more than 1,000 homes owned by Southern Housing Group Ltd, taking the opportunity to update our records at the same time, as part of a major tenancy profiling project.

Most of our audits are carried out in one area or at a single estate, with front line and back office staff joining forces to knock on doors, after giving residents notice. However, we also make individual checks when we are tipped off by neighbours or notice anomalies.

Sub-letting is recognised as a persistent problem which needs to be combated to make the most of scarce affordable housing. The national drive will also provide new funding for social landlords, to help us tackle the problem.

## News

## Truncated trunk wins prize for Eugenie

**Fencing damaged by a tree trunk at Southern Housing Group’s Grove Hall Park scheme in Bow, east London, featured in a BBC2 art series recently, winning acclaim for the young artist who salvaged it.**

Eugenie Scrase, who is a student at Slade School of Fine Art, passed the fence by chance and was intrigued by the tree trunk impaled on it. She then approached us for permission to take the fence, before installing it in a gallery.

When Eugenie’s work featured in the School of Saatchi series, Truncated Trunk impressed arts patron Charles Saatchi so much, he selected her as series winner. He is now exhibiting her work in Russia.

Commenting to Inside Housing magazine, our Thames Gateway Regional Director Tony Hughes said: “The tree fell down in a storm and when the tree surgeons came to remove it they left a section of the trunk. Eugenie’s installation made me think differently about what constitutes urban art, and gave me new insight into how we visualise things at our own estates.”

Grove Hall Park now has a new fence, paid for by Eugenie.



## Operations

## Researching resident opinion

**Southern Housing Group’s latest large-scale resident survey is currently underway.**

While we regularly ask for residents’ views on our services at the point of delivery, major surveys allow us to track trends in their opinions. We can also check if age, ethnicity, gender, disability, or the area where a resident lives, makes a difference to the results. Our last major survey was carried out in 2006 to 2007, but we will now run them annually to keep up to date.

In a bid to attract a higher response rate from a more varied group of residents, we are collecting the information mainly by telephone, but we are also providing opportunities for online or postal responses. Residents receive a letter before they are phoned and have the option of asking for an interpreter.

The survey is being carried out on our behalf by the Kwest independent consultancy, which won a contract covering the next three years.

We involved residents in developing the questions we wanted to ask, and resident Board member, David Kelly, was part of the selection process.

Calls are being made to around 2,000 residents living in general needs, sheltered and shared ownership accommodation belonging to all of the Southern Housing Group landlords. The survey results are expected in March 2010. We will report the findings to our regulator, the Tenant Services Authority, as well as to our residents.



Community regeneration

“The Foundation spent £438,000, and attracted a further £1.2 million in external funding, for projects that benefited 10,000 residents.”

## Review highlights Foundation successes

**The Foundation’s Annual Review for October 2008 to September 2009 demonstrates the impact of Southern Housing Group’s social and economic regeneration work.**

During the year, the Foundation spent £438,000, and attracted a further £1.2 million in external funding, for projects that benefited almost 10,000 residents.

In the current recession, employment and training topped the Foundation’s priority list, and a particularly successful outreach project in Hackney assisted 150 residents into work or training.

After reviewing the use being made of the Group’s estate-based community centres, the Foundation will now manage these resources to maximise the benefit to residents and make sure they are sustainable through rental income.

As partners in the Activate London project, led by Peabody Trust and funded by the Big Lottery, the Foundation took sporting and health activities to a number of London estates last year, culminating in a fantastic pan-London sports event at Mile End Park in Tower Hamlets.

The Foundation worked with young residents to establish six youth forums, which will help us in our work with young people across the Group.

The Foundation has a varied programme of projects planned for the coming year, including further employment and training schemes, a youth conference and work to increase the number of residents with access to computers.

The Foundation is also bidding for funding for a new welfare benefits advisor and has just been awarded new funding to pilot a floating family-intervention project.

### News

## Noel’s Christmas spread gets no complaints

**Complaints Service Manager Noel Khine promised full customer satisfaction when he represented Southern Housing Group at Inside Housing magazine’s first festive cookery contest in December.**

Aptly named Noel took his place alongside Amina Rahman from Family Mosaic, and Alexander Netherton from Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association, in a bid for the title of Christmas Cook-off Champion 2009.

The closely fought contest was held at St Mungo’s brand-new Spring Gardens hostel in Lewisham, with judging by chef Gerry Rae from Simpson’s in the Strand, assisted by Spring Gardens’ Deputy Manager El Thomson and a hostel resident.

Noel’s herb-stuffed turkey with brandy sauce wowed the judges as a good seasonal dish, but Gerry’s final verdict, in the spirit of Christmas, was to award a three-way tie.



### Community regeneration

## Getting residents back to work

**Southern Housing Group has launched a Working Opportunities Fund to offer grants of up to £500 to residents who need support as they make the transition into work.**

Residents can apply for funding towards the costs of items such as clothing for interviews, work tools, accreditation with registered bodies, travel costs or childcare.

Employment and Training Project Manager, Tim Lovett, said: “Research shows that initiatives like this help people overcome the barriers that stop them maintaining paid work.

“We consider each application on an individual basis, and applicants are expected to make a contribution to the costs themselves. We hope this scheme will make it easier for residents to find and keep the job they want.”



News

## Community radio focuses on housing

**James Butcher Housing Association (JBHA) joined other landlords to support community radio station, Reading4U, in a week of broadcasts on housing issues.**

JBHA took part in discussions about claiming benefits, getting support with rent arrears and how to find a home in the Reading area.

One of the star guests was a JBHA resident, Mrs Gurung, who lives at Taylor Court sheltered scheme in Reading. Mrs Gurung spoke to the Chairman of Reading Community Radio, Eddie Winship, about the support JBHA gave to a number of Gurkha families during their successful campaign for UK residency.

Mrs Gurung said: "My husband and I were housed by JBHA during a very uncertain and worrying time, and I was pleased to be able to share my experience on the radio."

JBHA's Community Involvement Officer, Kim Jakubiszyn, said: "We were very pleased to play a part in Reading4U's week of community radio. It was a great way to spread the message about the ways housing associations can help local people."

**Photo above** – Reading Community Radio Chairman, Eddie Winship, is pictured with (from left to right) Janet Feakes from London & Quadrant Housing Association, Kim Jakubiszyn from JBHA, Debbie Pack from the Home Group and Holly Rosenegk from Catalyst Communities Housing Group.

News

## Better fire safety for residents on the Isle of Wight

**South Wight Housing Association (SWHA) is working with Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue, Wightfire Ltd and Firesure UK to improve fire safety for residents and staff.**

SWHA began upgrading fire safety at its blocks of flats last year and decided to launch a resident fire safety initiative at the same time.

A series of talks on fire safety will be held for users of SWHA's outreach services, as well as residents of its supported housing schemes for young people and young parents, homeless people, and those with mental health problems or learning difficulties.

There will also be training days for scheme managers and their care and support partners from Islecare, the Real World Trust and the Island Women's Refuge. The training will include fire simulations and participants will be shown how to use fire detection equipment.

SWHA's Property Services Manager, Neville Tomblin, said: "The programme of fire safety upgrade work, in combination with the resident and staff initiatives, has been immensely beneficial and we have received positive feedback from our residents.

"We want to ensure that our residents and service users have the highest level of fire safety."

News

## SAVE IT at Spring Court

**Residents at James Butcher Housing Association's (JBHA) Spring Court sheltered scheme in Lee-on-the-Solent in Hampshire have launched an energy-saving group called SAVE IT.**

The group was set up after residents expressed concerns about the effect of high energy prices on their service charges.

SAVE IT will help JBHA get the best energy prices and cut energy usage at the scheme. The group will produce an energy-saving leaflet, invite a speaker from the EDF energy company to give them advice and check the deal we are getting from our current energy suppliers. It will also look for ways to reduce energy usage and save water at Spring Court.

JBHA Board member and energy champion Steve Donnelly will also meet with the group to discuss energy-saving ideas.

Using our influence to inform and work with residents around energy usage is one of the priorities of Southern Housing Group's environmental sustainability strategy. The SAVE IT project is also in keeping with our commitment to reducing fuel poverty amongst residents.





Community regeneration

# Residents celebrate Black History Month

**Supported housing residents from London and the south east celebrated Black History Month at our Janson and Gurney Road sheltered scheme in Stratford on 15 October.**

To mark the celebration, pupils from Grangewood Primary School gave a reading of Martin Luther King's famous speech, 'I have a dream'. The residents were also entertained by a steel band and disco.

Alison Park, Scheme Manager at Mitchell House in Sussex, said: "The event was a great way to celebrate and reflect on important people and events in black history. It provided the perfect opportunity for sheltered residents from our different regions to meet each other."

Bim Amokeodo, Headteacher of Grangewood School said: "We were delighted to be invited to take part.

"The event was a great way to celebrate and reflect on important people and events in black history."

"Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the pupils' performance of Martin Luther King's speech, which they will also share with their peers in assembly."

Established in 1926, Black History Month is marked every October to celebrate and promote knowledge of black history and culture. The event in Stratford was funded by our Foundation.

**Photo** – Left to right, residents from Lewis House and Peach Court: Mrs Olive Salmons, Mr Abdul Attah, Mr Joseph Pilgrim, Mrs Lewis and Mrs Jean Goodney.

Community regeneration

# Teaching residents new skills

**Southern Housing Group's Foundation is launching a free training scheme to teach the skills residents need to become active in their communities.**

The course will be open to all, but especially those who already organise local events, run residents' groups and act as community champions. It will offer participants:

- personal development opportunities, which could enhance their CVs and job prospects

- the tools to organise community events
- practical tools to enable them to access funding
- the opportunity to get involved in their local community and get to know their neighbours
- new skills from chairing meetings to running a range of projects.

Building on our residents' skills and resources is one of the Foundation's key priorities.

News

## Wale invited to Downing Street

**Resident Wale Yusuff from Parkside Place (formerly Market Estate) in Islington was invited to Downing Street to mark Social Enterprise Day on 19 November 2009.**

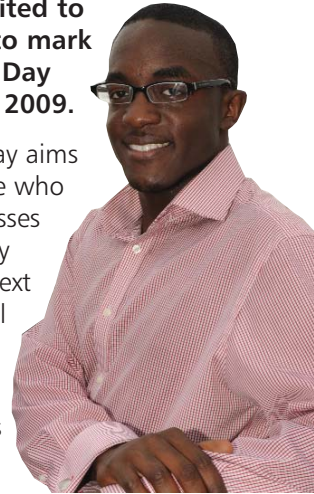
Social Enterprise Day aims to recognise people who are running businesses for their community and to inspire the next generation of social entrepreneurs.

As we reported last issue, Wale has set up Drivers Edge UK to educate young people about driving safety. He is currently being sponsored by Southern Housing Group's Foundation on a part-time one-year course at the School for Social Entrepreneurs.

At the Downing Street reception, Wale met Gordon Brown, Tessa Jowell and prominent figures from industry.

He said: "Visiting 10 Downing Street was the experience of a lifetime. In his address, the Prime Minister said to us, 'You should be proud of what you're doing; you're changing lives, which means you're changing the world'. It was an honour to be involved, and I'll remember that message for a long time to come."

Community Regeneration Manager, Palma Black, said: "Wale's achievements and ambitions are inspirational. His business model will benefit both himself and the community. We were pleased to sponsor Wale and wish him the best of luck."





News

## Partnership maintained

**The extension of our successful partnership with maintenance contractors mhs commercial was marked with a celebration at their Chatham head office in December.**

Addressing residents and staff, Southern Housing Group's Maintenance Manager Kevan Allaway and mhs commercial's Director Carl Dewey spoke of their strong business relationship and laid out joint aims for the future. The talk was followed by lunch and a chance for guests to meet.

Kevan Allaway said: "We have a very good understanding of what our residents want from our repairs service."

"We expect our business partners to share our ethos of excellent customer service and this has been the basis of our success with mhs for the last eight years."

mhs commercial Director, Carl Dewey, said: "Our knowledge and experience of providing services to housing associations has helped us strengthen and continue this unique partnership with Southern Housing Group. We are committed to achieving excellent customer service for our partners and residents."

**Photo above** – mhs commercial's Director Carl Dewey (left) and Group Maintenance Manager Kevan Allaway (right) celebrate the extension of the partnership.

Operations

## Reliable residents

**James Butcher Housing Association (JBHA) is piloting a 'reliable resident' scheme, which will pay a small retainer to residents who keep an eye on their estates.**

Their duties will include, for example, reading meters, holding keys for contractors, attending and following up on inspections, and reporting repairs and other problems.

The scheme is seen as a good way to increase resident involvement at our schemes and to improve resident satisfaction levels with local services. Residents are also encouraged to take part in the regular scheme inspections we carry out at all our estates.

News

## IT suite for Atkinson House

**South Wight Housing Association (SWHA) held the official opening of a state of the art IT suite at Atkinson House young people's hostel in Newport on 10 December.**

A £4,500 grant from Isle of Wight Council's Youth Opportunities Fund enabled SWHA to buy three computers and software aimed at supporting the education and training of young people in our hostels. The grant was awarded after staff and young people put forward a bid.

At the opening event, Isle of Wight High Sheriff, Gay Edwards, carried out the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

SWHA Service Manager Jim Bodle said: "The opening of the new IT suite was a really celebratory event."

"Our staff supported the young people to secure the funding, and I'm proud of their achievements. I have no doubt that having easy access to IT equipment will be of huge benefit."

**Photo** – Young people from our young people's hostels are pictured with Ben Locke, the computer technician, and Gay Edwards, High Sheriff of the Isle of Wight.





Community regeneration

# Bringing art to Islington

Young residents at Parkside Place (formerly Market Estate) in Islington took part in an exciting graffiti art project in November.

**A graffiti art session led by the Tall Tales design practice gave 13 to 18 year-olds the chance to express their creativity using spray paints and sketch books. The project was sponsored by Southern Housing Group's Foundation.**

This was the estate's second art event in recent months, thanks to the input of artist Gadi Sprukt, who is a student at Central St Martin's College of Art. Gadi is living as a 'guardian' in one of the empty blocks at the scheme, which will shortly be demolished as part of the regeneration of the estate.

In the summer, with funding from the Market Estate Committee, Gadi involved 25 residents in a photo project. They were all given a single-use camera and a week to record their estate on film – before the last of the old homes are demolished.

Gadi and fellow artists are now working with residents on a bigger project that will transform empty flats and spaces into a series of art installations. An exhibition is planned for February 2010.

**Photos above and below** – young resident Jordan Gomez works with an artist from the Tall Tales design practice.



**Front cover:** The Armouries at the Royal Arsenal Scheme in Woolwich.

Printed on Revive 75 White Silk, a recycled paper produced using 75% recycled waste, at a mill that has been awarded the ISO140001 certificate for environmental management. The pulp is bleached using a totally chlorine-free (TCF) process.

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