



# Housing News

*Information Bulletin from Wigan and Leigh Housing*

*No. 45, July 2006*

## ***"Better Homes, Brighter Futures"***

Wigan and Leigh Housing has developed a draft vision for the company - "Better Homes, Brighter Futures". The vision has been developed by a visioning working group established by the Board.

The vision sets out five goals that we want to achieve over the next ten years. The five goals are:

- Better Housing Services
- Decent homes
- Better estates
- Access to affordable homes
- Better housing services for vulnerable people

The vision uses the five goals to set out "what we want to achieve" and "how we will deliver" over the next ten years.


The Wigan and Leigh Housing Board has also recently adopted ten core values for the company that will provide the guiding principles to develop the vision into reality.

These core values are:

1. Honest, open and helpful
2. Respect the individual
3. Values diversity
4. Empowers staff and supports development
5. Values feedback, listens and learns
6. Visionary and forward thinking
7. Looks continuously to improve and encourage innovation
8. Strives to go the extra mile
9. Accountable and responsible
10. Believes we are all colleagues in one team

The vision aligns well with the Borough's Community Plan and other key local strategies.

The draft vision is subject to wider consultation with staff and other stakeholders throughout July. The main issues that emerge from the consultation will be reported back to the Board on 15<sup>th</sup> August with a recommendation that the vision be formally adopted, with or without amendments.

Contact: Ashley Crumbley -   
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## ***Improved contents insurance deal***

We have recently negotiated improved terms with our current insurer Norwich Union on Wigan Council's contents insurance scheme. The scheme is available to all council tenants in the borough.



Existing home contents insurance policy holders will pay 15% less and have the option to upgrade to full accidental damage cover at competitive rates.

This is good news for tenants at a time when insurance premiums generally are rising. We offer cover from as little as 88 pence a week for people over 60 and £1.32 per week for all other people, based on 48 weeks.

The new terms are available to all council tenants from 3<sup>rd</sup> July and tenants have the added benefit of being able to pay their weekly premium along with their rent.

We are advising tenants to contact us on 01942 486625 if they would like us to provide more details about the scheme.

Contact: Malcolm Barton - ☎ 01942 486620

## ***Debt collection agency appointed***

Following a rigorous tendering exercise and selection interview process by a panel of officers and Board Members, Rossendales Limited from Rossendale have been appointed to collect former tenant arrears debts that Wigan and Leigh Housing has been unable to recover.

Tenants who vacate their Council homes leaving rent arrears debts will continue to initially be given the opportunity to pay the debt to Wigan and Leigh Housing. If, however, the former tenant fails to come to an arrangement with the in-house team and start to pay off the debt they will be advised that the debt is to be referred to Rossendales.

Rossendales are a professional organisation that operate to high standards. They have a good collection performance from a lengthy client list of local authorities and housing organisations. They also have large staffing resources to chase and recover debts.

Wigan Council has agreed to pay a commission rate to Rossendales for the debt that they manage to recover. Wigan and Leigh Housing will be transferring older debts to Rossendales where the former tenant has failed to make payments. In the future we will transfer new debts to Rossendales if the former tenant has failed to make payments following reminder and warning letters.

Contact: - Malcolm Barton ☎ 01942 486620

## ***Home from home in Hag Fold***

A partnership between Wigan and Leigh Housing and Hesketh Fletcher School is giving much needed support to children and families in Atherton. Wigan and Leigh Housing has provided a two bedroom flat on the Hag Fold estate that is being used for the 'Home from Home ' project.

The project provides a stable and supportive home-like environment for pupils whose own home life can be unstable and sometimes chaotic. Hesketh Fletcher say that it is for children who experience difficulties with school as a direct result of family breakdowns, illness, poverty and unemployment. They often do not know what it is to come home to a comfortable and clean environment to be met by caring and supportive adults. The flat is a community 'safe haven' where children and parents can be supported to show them how home life and positive and committed parenting can make a difference to a child's development.

Home from Home is funded by the government's Single Regeneration Budget (SRB5 Atherton Building Communities) and the school's own monies. Part of the funding pays for two workers who are always at the premises providing meals, support, help with homework and other activities for the children. It has successfully supported 29 children and their parents so far and is part of a web of extended school projects Hesketh Fletcher has created.

This partnership with Hesketh Fletcher School may help prevent

young people from being excluded from society, becoming homeless and falling into potential anti-social behaviour. These young people are likely to be our tenants of the future.

Contact: - Colin Devine ☎ 01942 705706

## ***Contact centre is among the best***

The Wigan and Leigh Housing contact centre based in Leigh has recently been named as one of the top performers by taking a coveted runners-up spot in the prestigious Public Servants of the Year national awards.



The awards are now in their sixth year and aim to recognise and reward the commitment and dedication of individuals and teams who have made 'an outstanding difference to the services received by the general public'.

A small group of staff from the contact centre recently travelled to the Grosvenor House Hotel on London's swish Park Lane for the glittering awards ceremony hosted by newsreader Trevor McDonald OBE and Al Jazzer International presenter Felicity Barr.

Felicity said about the WALH contact centre: "Clever and innovative use of new technology is at the heart of the success being enjoyed by the centre. "It now offers high quality contact services to more than 23,500 council tenants, using software that enables tenants to report repairs required by text and e-mail."

"When the contact centre was rolled out across the borough in 2004, calls rocketed from 7,000 to 17,000 in just one month! Staff have worked hard to create a Solutions Forum to handle the larger volume of calls and this has ensured that all service targets are now being met. "

Contact: Dave Bainbridge - ☎ 01942 767340

***Introductory tenancies to be extended***

Wigan and Leigh Housing began to use Introductory Tenancies in August 2004. Introductory Tenants do not have certain rights that apply to secure tenants in particular:

- Right to assign
- Right to buy
- Security of tenure

Introductory Tenancies last for one year until the anniversary of granting the tenancy. It then converts into a secure tenancy. Currently the only Introductory Tenancies that do not convert to secure tenancies after a year are tenants subject to a Possession Order obtained through the County Court. Their right to a secure tenancy is suspended until the Court Order is revoked.

The Wigan and Leigh Housing Board has recently agreed to adopt new powers that allow landlords to extend Introductory Tenancies over

the one year period for a further six months.

Extended Introductory Tenancies will be used for:

- Cases of anti-social behaviour that has not abated but is neither sufficient to warrant possession action or where there is insufficient evidence for a decision to apply for possession to be made.
- Cases of substantial arrears where Court action has not been obtained.

Introductory Tenants will be given guidance and advice to ensure that they have a clear knowledge of what they have to do to avoid an extension of their Introductory Tenancy.

The message from Wigan and Leigh Housing is simple "If you are a new tenant you will be on probation for at least one year. Where there is anti-social behaviour or rent arrears we will extend the probation for six months. Where tenants fail to play by the rules we will terminate their tenancy."

Contact: - Colin Devine ☎ 01942 705706