



▶ CUSTOMER AWARDS—AN AMAZING EVENT FOR AMAZING PEOPLE



▶ VELA CUSTOMER CONFERENCE



▶ BUZZIN COMES TO STOCKTON

Customer Involvement

KEEPING YOU AT THE HEART OF ALL WE DO

Welcome to the new edition of your Customer Involvement newsletter. If you have a story you would like to feature in our next edition, just contact the Customer Involvement Team.

A night to remember!

On 25 April 2013, customers and colleagues from across the Vela Group celebrated the successes of community champions in Stockton and Hartlepool.....

Our first joint awards ceremony was held at the Wynyard Rooms, with a meal and entertainment from local comedy magician—John Archer.

nominee was a worthy winner. Some of the films caused the odd teary eye as they were very moving.

The ceremony recognised 4 award winners from each town. During the ceremony, films were played explaining why each

Thanks to everyone for making the event a success, you can see more about the winners on pages 2 and 3.



This is your invitation!

Your involvement newsletter brings together updates from the various customer groups at Vela, and contains your invitations to involvement events.

If you would like to attend any of the events in this newsletter, just let the Customer Involvement Team know.

To reduce administration and paperwork, we endeavour to include as many events as possible in the newsletter. This will reduce the need to send out separate letters for each event. Watch out for the red chair, this means you need to contact the team and let us know if you are coming.

Can you see the chair? Get in touch!

This young man has overcome many difficulties in life, and is now succeeding in further education, pursuing a career in farming. Daniel gave a very moving speech on the night, dedicating the award to his mum, Val. And sister Rackel.



Young Achiever Stockton:
Daniel Goldsmith

Charmaine is a mentor for other young people with Central Correctors, her local youth group and is also on the panel of Hartlepool Grant Givers. She also works in one of the local charity shops in her spare time.

Young carers save the Government in excess of £112 billion pounds per year as they receive no benefits or rewards for this role as they are under 16 years of age. With so many adult responsibilities, young carers often miss out on opportunities other children have.



Young Achiever Hartlepool:
Hartlepool Young Carers



Verna is a very active resident in her community of Roseworth. Heidi Laverick, Housing Support Officer for Tristar Homes said: "Verna is a ray of sunshine, and Roseworth is a better place to live because of her."



Resident of the year
Stockton: Verna Pickering

Malcolm and his team at the Bungalow Stores show a keen interest in their elderly and vulnerable customers, and make sure they are all healthy and safe during periods of bad weather.



**Resident of the Year
Hartlepool: Chamaine Twidale**

Kevin has devoted countless thousands of hours to making Billingham and the Clarences a nicer place to live. He is tireless in his commitment to deliver on the many projects he has developed.



**Community Achievement
Stockton: Kevin Pitt**



**Award
Winners!**

Kev's Club is a non-profit organisation that has been running for over seven years. They help people over 17 years old with special needs and their family members.



**Community Achievement
Hartlepool: Kev's Club**



**Good Neighbour Hartlepool:
Malcolm Jones**

Kath takes a keen interest in people new to the area and helps them feel welcome. Many people in Primrose Hill look to Kathleen for advice when they have a problem. She is a really strong voice of the community. She has lived in the same road for 78 years!



**Good Neighbour Stockton:
Kath Walker**

Date for your Diary

*The Annual Tristar Homes
Open day will take place
on 7 August 2013 at Preston Park, Stockton on Tees.*

Last year we had a record breaking attendance of over 5000 people. The weather was fantastic, and we had some great feedback about the range of free activities available for everyone who came.

Activities are still being arranged for this year, but you can be certain it will be another fun packed event, with something for everyone.

Everyone is welcome to this free event, so please join us on the day, and spread the word.



7 August
2013
Preston Park
Tristar Homes
Open Day



Burbank Easter Fun Day

The Bridge Community Association held an Easter fun day on the 3 April at the Burbank Community Centre.

It was a beautiful sunny day and the children enjoyed the Easter egg trail as well as lots other activities such as face painting and cake decorating.

Housing Hartlepool donated the Easter eggs for the raffle. Janice Remington held the raffle and presented the children with the Easter eggs.

Fancy a catch up?

Sometimes a one to one conversation can solve a lot of issues and help us all get on with each other.

Have you had a catch up with a member of the Customer Involvement Team lately? It's a great way for the team to gather your feedback and opinions.

It's also a chance to ask questions and share some information. Why not speak to a member of the Customer Involvement Team to arrange a quick and informal chat over a brew.



Another date for your diary! ***24 July 2013, 11:00am-4:00pm***

Join Central Estate Management Organisation (CEMO), Central Correctors and the Customer Involvement team for a fun family day at the Phoenix Centre on the Central Estate, Hartlepool.

There will be lots of activities for people of all ages, including:

**Rodeo Bull
Bouncy Castle
MUGA
Facepainting
Information stalls
Planting for children
Alternative Therapies
Jewellery making
Arts and Crafts
Body Art**

This event is totally free and open to all who want to take part. Well done to CEMO for organising the event. We will update you about the day in our next edition.

Extra! Extra! Read all about it!

Mandy Peacock has attended the TCP, Customer Panel and Communication Service Improvement Group (SIG) to discuss new ways of communicating, recent PR successes and ways of getting involved with the on going development of the Vela PR plan.

In the meetings Mandy passed around some news articles which feature Housing Hartlepool, Tristar Homes and Vela, and discussed ways you can share your news with us.

The Communication SIG are now helping develop the annual reports for each landlord. This year we have an exciting new e-format that the Communication SIG were really enthusiastic about. Customers also saw the PR plan for the year, and will continue to monitor this and recommend content. The plan is a calendar containing dates of events and milestones that are identified as newsworthy items.

Each of the members agreed to bring news stories from the customer groups they are involved in. If you have a potential news story you can email it to yourviews@velagroup.co.uk. This may also feature in 'Your Home' and 'Tristar News' to encourage more customers to send in their stories.



**Communications & Support
Manager, Vela Group**



Our involvement story

Hello—we are Sheila (56) and Tom (60). We have been married for 38 years and have always lived in social housing.

We moved into Laurel Gardens when it opened in 2010. We used to live in a small bungalow but we needed a place that was suitable for my wheelchair. When we were offered a place in Laurel Gardens, we didn't think we would accept it. It was so different to what we were used to. However when we walked through the doors, we felt at home.

In October 2011 a residents group was formed. We had never been involved in anything like that, and had no intention of getting too involved. I went to the first meeting and when I came back I told Tom he was going to be Chairperson and I was going to be Treasurer.

We had never been to a meeting never mind organising one, so we had no idea what it would be like. Tom didn't particularly like talking to people never mind a room full!

One of the first things we did was to start a Facebook page called Friends of Laurel Gardens. We try to put a comment on every day, usually simple stuff about which group has been doing what. We put photographs on, some people have

thanked us for this, especially those who can't get to see their relatives. Seeing them having a good time on the photographs helps. Tom carries a camera in his pocket now. We try not to embarrass anyone and try not to mention any names.

Then we set about raising some money with the help of Peter Gowland from the Hartlepool Voluntary Development Agency. Our biggest achievement must be getting over £8000 Grant from the Lottery to buy a greenhouse and getting some raised beds made for the garden.

However, what we are both proud of is getting someone in to sign so a deaf couple we have living here can play a full part in our residents meeting. We got funding for the interpreter from the Lottery.

We started a Door Draw where people who want to take part pay a pound a week with a chance of winning £40. We have given over £2000 in prize money away and earned more than £1500 for our funds. We also send out many letters asking for prizes, money, gifts and anything else to keep us going.



Residents fund raise for activities, sometimes we sell craft items.



The community garden was funded by the National Lottery. You can see the latest pictures on our Facebook page.



Above left: Residents taking part in chair exercises.



Above right: Betty and Len are so addicted to chair exercises they even do them on day trips out!

The residents organise and participate in lots of activities. We have an Art Class, Craft Night and Sign Language. We also do our own sign language on another night for people who can't get to the first one.

Our latest activity is chair exercises. We got some money from Greggs so we should be able to keep it going for nine months at least. We also organise Christmas Dinner, Easter Tea, Halloween Supper; all funded through raffles and tombolas etc.

One other small thing we do is send a welcome card to anyone who moves in. We hope it shows that they are moving in among friends.

We are starting to look into having some day trips.

Of course, we are not the only ones that get things done in Laurel Gardens. We have our committee behind us, they are always there willing to help even though they are in their 80s.

As we said at the beginning we had never been involved in anything like this. We have gone from being very quiet, keeping ourselves to ourselves to having lots of friends and being very busy. At the beginning we got the confidence from the manager Jean and it has grown over the last two years. We get some odd requests and some odd questions, and occasionally we are moaned at, but it's all worth it.

When you walk into Laurel Gardens, we believe you can feel the happiness from the residents and the staff. We are very proud of our Shop, Bistro and Hairdressers. From when we thought we would never move into a place like Laurel Gardens we now consider ourselves to be really, really lucky that we did.

In short, we are very proud to be part of this community.



Being older doesn't have to be boring. We are as diverse and fun loving as everyone else.



Why not pay the residents a visit at: www.facebook.com/lauregardens (yes the web address is spelt correctly, there is a an unrelated facebook page named Laurel Gardens). You can also scan your smart phone here to the taken to the page in your phone's browser.



We are Buzzin about positive opportunities for young people in Hartlepool and Stockton!

In the last edition we announced the successful winners of funding to deliver positive youth activity in Hartlepool. In April, Buzzin came to Stockton!

On 17 April 2013, we held a public selection event. Young people, parents and neighbourhood representatives came together to observe and question bidders in a dragons den format, before casting votes about where our positive youth money should be spent.

The venue, the River Tees Watersports Centre is located near the proposed development site for new Vela headquarters in Stockton.

There was a mixture of activities for people to vote on, including; construction, beauty, skateboarding, indoor sports, cookery, filming and citizenship.

After each bidder delivered their presentation, the audience had the chance to ask questions. Voting round 1 was for projects up to £15,000.



Round 2 was for projects up to £10,000. A voting booth was set up so people could deposit their Buzzin Bucks (this years voting currency) in secret.

As the Customer Involvement Team had put a bid together, votes were counted independently by involved customers.

Following the event, Matthew met each of the bidders to finalise the project scope and help them link into neighbourhood initiatives.

During the year a panel of young inspectors will monitor delivery of the projects and help write another Buzzin assessment. You can see their assessment of last year by visiting www.tristarhomes.co.uk/getting-involved.



Clockwise from right:
1 - Tenant Board Director Michelle Bendelow with some of the young voters.
2 - Paul Connor bids for Fighting Chance Phase 2.
3 - The event was attended by 43 people.
4 - New involvee Daniel - he is really keen to join the Good Grub Club.





*Above left: Noreen making notes during the presentations.
Centre: Jennifer and Julie count the votes.
Above right: Votes were cast using Buzzin Bucks*

And the successful bidders are....

Triple X £15,000

The main outcome is to provide weekend and evening urban sports sessions to allow young people, aged 10-19 years (up to 25 years with additional and complex needs) to enjoy their chosen sport in a safe, nurturing supportive environment. This is a partnership between HYPE, Axiom and Elmtree X.

Elmtree X Summer Holidays £10,000

Elmtree has nearly 500 members and will now be able to open 6 days a week during the summer holidays, including weekends due to the Triple X partnership.

The project has been able to demonstrate a significant impact in the reduction of criminalisation of young people.

Matty Brown's Good Grub Club £10,000

Teaching young people from all backgrounds about healthy eating, independent living and managing budgets. Working from the Georgian Theatre in Stockton Town Centre, Matty will be doing roadshows in some of your community centres as well as the Tristar Open day.

Fighting Chance £3000

Fighting Chance focuses on young people aged 16 – 25 who are not currently in education, employment or training. Fighting Chance aims to develop life and employment skills by valuing and recognising young peoples individual talents, skills and potential.

It also supports those who have started their journey of change on the project already, to progress further by offering opportunities to harness energies into productive activities gaining experience required for employment.

Reel Life, Tristar Homes £2500

Short films “by young people for young people”. We want to make some films about problems young people face in our neighbourhoods, managing a home and coping with sometimes very serious problems.

Short films on our websites, Facebook and Twitter pages that can be watched on your mobile phone are a great way of reaching young people. We also want to show them in schools so pupils can learn too.

Next year, we will hold community based workshops to promote more grassroots applications, and provide assistance to those who not experienced at completing funding applications. The workshops will be held in Thornaby Pavilion, Billingham Town Centre, and Newtown Resource Centre with dates communicated closer to the time (January/February 2014).



Paul Dolan: Stockton Central ROAP member

Hello—I am Paul Dolan (56), and although I was born in Hartlepool, I have lived in Stockton most of my life.

Through my involvement with Tristar I am a member of the Stockton Respect Group and Stockton Central Reach Out Area Panel (ROAP). However, I have also volunteered more recently with Stockton Recovery Service (SRS).

I have witnessed first hand the destructive effects and prejudice substance misuse had on a family member and those of us who were close to them. Helping people make a positive change to their life by coming off drugs is really close to my heart.

By working with the ROAP, I have been able to help SRS obtain equipment for positive activities such as fishing, music and multi-agency events.

SRS assist people and their family members through recovery from addictive substances such as alcohol and drugs. Clients are referred from a variety of places, including the Prison Service. SRS encourage people to take part in healthy, positive activities. Some people who SRS have supported have gone on to complete a 16 week qualification and become paid mentors, using their experience to help others to change their lives for the better.

I have been able to take part in job shadowing a range of tasks while volunteering. The needle exchange reduces the risk of harm to the community. It also provides opportunities to talk to drug users about making changes and reducing risks.

So what are drug users like? Well—they are human beings for a start, so like everyone who makes mistakes they need respect and the opportunity to change their life for the better. They are not the stereotypical ‘scruffy looking down and out’. Users come from many walks of life including professionals, unemployed and fitness fanatics. Many have had a life changing

event in their past that triggers substance misuse. Some clients SRS currently work with were born with Infant Alcohol syndrome, raised in orphanages, ex-forces personnel or someone who has lived in an abusive relationship.

Ironically—many clients seek help when they face another life changing event such as leaving hospital or prison for example. This means they often have a lot of issues to be addressed, not just substance misuse. SRS carry out a lot of signposting to help clients resolve their other issues.

In my role as a ROAP representative I try to be an advocate for my neighbours. I encourage people to approach the company when they are experiencing difficulties. Some people don’t understand times have changed and they are still worried about going to see “the council”.

Because of the type of property I live in, many of my neighbours are older or have a disability. I am careful that I don’t take too much on myself, and I try to signpost my neighbours where possible. If they have managed to get help for themselves they find it easier to handle problems in the future.

At the moment I am hoping to move soon. I have been affected by the bedroom tax as I have a 2 bedroom flat and need to downsize. I am a regular visitor to Stratford House to check up on the latest properties and to keep in contact with the housing team who manage my area.

I am also working with Tracy Evans on the Pathways programme to help me back into paid employment. I hope to use the experience I have from working with SRS and job shadowing at Tristar to help me specialise in substance misuse and housing issues.



With Noreen Oliver, Sarah McManus (Fabricker), and Paul Noddings at a Respect meeting.

Vela Improvement People (VIPs)

You might have started hearing the term VIPs in meetings or on the grapevine and wondered what is it all about?

As you know the vision of our regulator, the Homes and Community Agency is that landlords and customers have an open and more accountable two-way relationship. This is called co-regulation and means landlords and customers working closely together in the agreement of standards and monitoring of services.

We already have a number of groups for customers which involve coming to meetings and feeding back your views, as well as Scrutiny groups which look in detail at how we deliver services.

We would like to involve more customers in co-regulation and over the past few months we have been talking to service heads and managers about how we can do so. We have now recruited 30 of our involved customers, the VIPs. They have taken part in training in June and July.

The VIP workplan will be delivered using a range of methods and will be driven by managers and customers in Agreement. Work for customers may involve telephone interviews, talking face-to-face with other customers individually or in focus groups, inspecting properties or estates or carrying out mystery shopping, for example.

This new form of customer involvement is being launched to all customers so if you know anyone who might be interested please get in touch.

Congratulations to the new recruits and existing involved customers. They have taken part in training with Jonathan Cannon, Yvonne Davies and Tracey Rix-Mason during June and July.



Empowerment Standard

Matthew will be discussing the latest results from the empowerment standard with the TCP and Tristar Customer Panel during July.

Satisfaction remains high, however there are some frustrations about document timescales and formats.

100% of respondents said they would recommend getting involved with the Vela Group, and gave the service a huge net promoter score of 77!

In July the Going Forward Together Group will give their suggestions to help improve the way information is collected to measure the empowerment standard.

*Building on the success of its predecessor,
the Hartlepool Housing Academy, we are pleased to launch*



Topics covered are

**What is a housing association,
what is Vela ?**

What makes a good landlord ?

**The National Standards for
Involvement ?**

**Why should we have Customer
Involvement ?**

**What part can you play and where
do you go from here?**

History of social housing

Equality and Diversity

**Choice Based Lettings and the
Compass system**

**Regeneration and new build, why
do we do it?**

**Anti-social behavior and how we
manages our estates**

**How we manage our rental
income**

Repairs and Maintenance

**Our Investment programme—what
we spend our money on.**

The Vela Housing Academy training sessions for newly involved customers started on the 23 May for the three week course at the Phoenix Centre.

The Customer Involvement Team started the first session, the topics covered

- What is Vela?
- What is a housing association?
- Customer involvement and why should customers be involved.

This was followed by history of social housing, equality and diversity, choice based lettings, regeneration and new build, neighbourhood management, ASB and repairs and maintenance.

20 newly involved customers were invited to attend and 7 of them completed the three week course. They all said that they had learned a great deal more about the organisation and had gained an in depth knowledge to become more involved in the future of our housing association to help shape the services. They all received a housing academy certificate after completion.

The Customer Involvement Team would like to thank all the staff who played there part in delivering the sessions and they hope to run another three sessions in September.



**Graduating class of June
2013!**



The meeting of all 4 Reach Out Area Panels (ROAPs) was held on 19 April 2013 at Newtown Resource Centre.

It was really inspiring listening to the range of community initiatives ROAP members are involved in such as running youth clubs, resident associations, volunteering for local charities, and supporting people through substance misuse and back into work.

Part of the meeting was set aside for members to get to know each other and share the positive experiences of the past year. The second half of the meeting was set aside for group work with housing team leaders to look at a number of key areas which have arisen. These areas were;

- Bidding guidance and bid evaluation
- Neighbourhood issues and how we find time to discuss them
- Budgets and spend
- Promoting the ROAPs and encouraging more bids and more involvement

The Customer Involvement Team looked at some of the key themes and have been speaking with each ROAP to design improved ways of working.

All four ROAPs will be playing a bigger role in estate walkabouts and estate based activities. This will help involvement in ROAPs become more meaningful and interesting.

Stockton Central ROAP and Thornaby ROAP are trialling holding public consultation events. Every customer in the ROAP area will be invited to bid for funds, and the public will vote at the Tristar Homes Open Day or the Thornaby Show. In addition, Thornaby are keen to try public consultation on Facebook. You can join this resident group by searching for 'Reaching out in Thornaby' on Facebook. The ROAP newsletter for your area will be hitting doormats soon, and are also available in the 'Getting Involved' section of www.tristarhomes.co.uk



Tanya Lawson speaking about her community work



Dave Chambers with ROAP reps from Billingham and Stockton North. Workshops discussed ways of improving ROAP feedback on bids

Alison Green and ROAP reps from Stockton North, Central and Thornaby, discussed ways of feeding in neighbourhood issues. Danny Scott helps administer an online group with over 2000 members in Thornaby. Some ROAP reps would like to see the opportunity for more people to take part online, and for all ROAP reps to be online.



Annual Customer Conference

Involved customers from across the Vela Group were invited to take part in this year's Vela Customer Conference, held on 19 June 2013.

This year, the theme of the conference was 'doing more with less'. With welfare reforms having a big impact on income, we want to help customers achieve more with their money. As promised at the last customer conference, the venue was Stockton based. This year it was Preston Hall Museum, located in Preston Park.

Cath Purdy started the conference by sharing the latest information from the housing world, including the proposed Fabrick and Vela merger. If you would like a copy of this presentation, please contact the customer involvement team. We also held two workshops for all delegates to take part in:

Digital workshop with Richard Corser (Head of IT):

This focussed on ways of making and saving money using digital products such as broadband and mobile phones. This topic is becoming even more important now that the soon to be launched Universal Credit system involves going online.

Participants were able to express their difficulties and concerns about getting online. Richard also gave out some handy hints to help you stay safe and secure, and how to be savvy when it comes to choosing broadband providers.



Above—Richard Corser discusses ways of staying safe online.

Below: Customers were informed of a range of money saving methods to help reduce energy consumption and bills.



Green Deal with Tim Cattle-Jones:

This workshop focused on Green Deal initiatives to help people save money and improve the environment.

Northumbrian Water kindly supplied some water saving products such as tap inserts, and shower timers. Customers were given information on how to understand energy tariffs and make energy savings. Becky Ferry also showcased an electric car in the park for customers to see one in action.



The day ended with a session to discuss ways the business can support you through changes in the future. Everyone was able to share their views on the proposed new group using voting buttons (just like ask the audience on Who Wants to be a Millionaire)

Customers also shared thoughts on potential problems that may arise and gave their ideas for some solutions. This information is really useful for the Customer Involvement Team, and will help us continue to deliver a valuable service during this period of change.

All attendees left with a family pass to Preston Hall Museum valid for a year. Thank you to everyone who took part in helping us raise £60 for our chosen hospice charities.



There were networking opportunities for customers and senior management staff



56% feel services will increase and improve.

72% feel their ability to influence their landlord will remain or improve.



94% said they could see benefits from the merger including more new homes, increased regional voice and better services for customers.



Right: Lindsay and Michelle cast their votes during the supporting you through change session.

Below: feedback says most people enjoyed the workshops.



You can view a short film about customer conference on the Vela Youtube channel. Visit www.youtube.com/velahomes or scan your smart phone here:

Myth Buster

Be informed...
Migration Matters



About Myth Buster

This Myth Buster was produced by the Newcastle City Wide Asylum Seeker / Refugee Support Group: A group of statutory and voluntary sector organisations who have been working collaboratively in the field of migration since 1999. Much of what is printed in the media and elsewhere about migration is simply untrue. Here are some facts that might make you see things differently. For more information please go to: www.cityofsanctuary.org

THE NORTH EAST IS 'FLOODED' WITH ASYLUM SEEKERS

IS IT REALLY? THE FIGURES MAY SURPRISE YOU

The North East has a population of over 2.6 million people. There are less than 2,400 asylum seekers here; they represent less than 0.08% of the total population of the region. At the time of writing, official statistics show that migration to the UK is in decline.

At the end of March 2013 there were 2,378 asylum seekers in our region, with around a third living in Tyne and Wear and two thirds in Tees Valley.

1. Middlesbrough	818
2. Stockton-on-Tees	632
3. Newcastle	357
4. Sunderland	193
5. Gateshead	159
6. Hartlepool	113
7. North Tyneside	65
8. South Tyneside	36
9. Redcar and Cleveland	5

(Numbers of individuals supported by the Home Office. Source: Jomast, April 2013)

THEY'RE HERE ILLEGALLY

NO. WE ALL HAVE A RIGHT TO SEEK ASYLUM

International law states that anyone has the right to apply for asylum in another country and remain there until the authorities have assessed their claim. There is no such thing as an 'illegal' or 'bogus' asylum seeker.

The burden is on the person seeking asylum to prove and evidence "a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion"

(1951 UN Convention on Refugees)

The UK asylum system offers this protection but is strictly controlled and complex.

THEY DON'T WANT TO WORK AND DON'T CONTRIBUTE TO THE ECONOMY

THE LAW WON'T LET THEM!

Many asylum seekers are skilled and want to work and contribute, but the law prevents this until their asylum claim has been decided, which can take many months. After this, many refugees contribute strongly to the economic success of the country.

THEY ALL WANT TO COME TO BRITAIN

NO, THEY JUST WANT TO BE SAFE

People fleeing danger in their own country simply want safety. In fact, it is the poorest countries in the world, often those bordering war and crisis zones, which accept the largest number of refugees.

Most asylum seekers do not choose their destination country. When fleeing persecution, it isn't the first thing on an individual's mind. Those with some choice often come to the UK because they have friends or family here.

A Home Office report concluded that there was absolutely no evidence to suggest that asylum seekers had a detailed knowledge of the UK welfare benefits system.

(Understanding decision-making of asylum seekers, UK Home Office report)

THEY TAKE OUR HOMES

NOT TRUE

Asylum seekers are not put on housing waiting lists; they're housed under a separate system and can't choose where they live. The Home Office allocate asylum seekers to accommodation which will usually be a specialist hostel or a hard-to-let empty property.

EUROPEAN COMPARISON

In 2012, the UK ranked 11 out of the main 15 EU countries in terms of asylum applicants per head of population. The UK received a total of 27,500 applicants (including dependents).

France, Germany and Sweden all received more applications than the UK - 60% of the total - with France and Germany both receiving more than 60,000 applicants each.

Source: UNHCR

WHAT THEY RECEIVE

FACT

A typical asylum seeker has to live on £36.62 per week - just over £5 per day. That's significantly below the poverty line, and half of the payment to an individual on jobseekers allowance.

ASYLUM SEEKERS MEAN HIGHER COUNCIL TAX

ABSOLUTELY NOT

Asylum seekers are looked after by central government, not local councils. No money from Council Tax is spent on housing asylum seekers. There's no evidence that areas with higher asylum seeking or migrant populations have correspondingly high council tax rates.

BRITAIN IS A SOFT TOUCH

NOT TRUE

Think about how you would feel having to leave your country very quickly to go to a place where you have no family, friends and little knowledge of the system. People fleeing their own country are usually very frightened, often leaving everything they know because their own and their families' lives are in danger.

Seeking asylum is never an easy option, and on reaching a place of sanctuary in the UK, all asylum seekers are:

- fingerprinted (even children)
- photographed
- security checked
- issued with ID cards

All must

- report at regular intervals to immigration reporting centres

All can be

- detained at any point during their asylum application (including children and pregnant women)

 CITY OF SANCTUARY



SO, WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY...



Asylum Seeker

Someone who is fleeing persecution in their homeland, has arrived in another country, made themselves known to the authorities and exercised the legal right to apply for asylum.

Refugee

Someone whose asylum application has been successful and who is allowed to stay in another country having proved they would face persecution in their home country. Refugees have the same rights as permanent residents of the UK.

Migrant

A person who moves from one country to another for the primary purpose of work or study, whether permanently or temporarily. Many of these migrants have arrived from other European Union states, as they are entitled to do under the European Treaty.

THE UK TAKES MORE THAN ITS FAIR SHARE OF MIGRANTS

THE UK EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IS NOT REMARKABLE WHEN COMPARED WITH OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES

The UK operates in a global economy where people will migrate to and from areas responding to the supply and demand needs of the labour market.

Not only has the UK's immigration grown in line with world migration, but the UK has a smaller proportion of immigrants and lower rates of net immigration than the US, Canada, Australia and several large European countries.

Less than 3% of the world's migrants live in the UK compared with 5% in Germany and 20% in the US.

(Finney and Simpson, 'Sleepwalking to segregation'? Challenging myths about race and migration 2009)

Many of the migrants arriving in the UK from Eastern European countries during the economic boom of the early 21st century have since returned home

THEY'RE TAKING OUR JOBS

NOT TRUE

Migrant workers move to areas where there are vacancies, and they are filling vacancies where there are skills shortages.

Under the new 'points based' system, migrants from outside the EU are only permitted to take jobs where there are recognised skill shortages and where they can prove before they enter the UK that they have qualifications, skills and abilities, and are sponsored by an employer.

The North East has a long history of recruiting workers from abroad, and as many as one in four businesses depend on migrant workers to stay in business. This includes the National Health Service with all the benefits that this provides to citizens of the North East.

(UKBA; IPPR)

MIGRANTS BRING CRIME TO OUR STREETS

THERE'S NO EVIDENCE

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) say that offending rates among migrant communities are in line with the general population.

However, migrants are more likely to be victims of crime, suffering harassment in the community and discrimination in the work place.

MIGRANTS ARE GIVEN PREFERENTIAL ACCESS TO SOCIAL HOUSING

IT'S JUST NOT TRUE

Recent research commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission found no evidence of migrants being given preferential access to social housing.

Pressure on housing is caused by changing household structures (the trend for smaller household numbers and larger houses) rather than population growth through immigration.

WHAT DO MIGRANT WORKERS CONTRIBUTE TO THE UK ECONOMY?

MUCH MORE THAN YOU MIGHT THINK

In 2011, migrants paid 37% more in taxes than was spent on the public services that they received.

Migrant workers pay income tax and National Insurance contributions. According to the Home Office, migrants and refugees made a net contribution of about £3billion to the UK economy – that's worth 1p on income tax.

The UK has an ageing population as a result of declining birth rates and the fact that people are living longer. Migrant workers are needed to ensure that there is a sufficient skilled workforce to fill available jobs, especially after the recession, and pay the taxes that will fund pensions in the future.

(Britain's Immigrants: an economic profile IPPR)

MIGRANT WORKERS ARE DRAINING THE REGION'S PUBLIC SERVICES

NO - QUITE THE OPPOSITE!

Migrants are more likely to be young, healthy and well qualified, and contribute more to the tax and benefits system than they receive.

Far from acting as a drain on public services, new migrants help to deliver vital services in areas such as social care, education, construction, and particularly in the health service.

THEY'RE ONLY HERE FOR THE BENEFITS...

NO ...MIGRANTS ARE LESS LIKELY TO CLAIM WELFARE BENEFITS AND LIVE IN SOCIAL HOUSING THAN PEOPLE BORN IN THE UK

National Insurance data shows that migrant workers overwhelmingly come to the UK to work, not to claim benefits.

Migrant workers are often highly educated people – more than a third left full time education after the age of 21 – twice as many as in the UK population. Despite higher education and skill levels, their wages are substantially lower than UK born workers.

(Migration Observatory 2012)



Venue: *Trafford Hall*
Course: *Tenant Panels, Improving Repairs*
Trainer: *Engage Associates*
Eileen Adams & Tim Morton
Attendees: *John Lynch, Brian Binns,*
Roger Campbell & Gillian Forster

This course was to explore the repairs service offered by landlords and to identify the role of Tenant Panels in repairs. In addition it offered the opportunity of learning from others, reviewing innovative practices and the ability to benchmark our service against others.

We studied in depth the process of repairs from reporting a problem to its final completion to the tenant's satisfaction. Of particular interest was the Tenant Cash Back policy where we explored the opportunities for tenants to access the benefits provided by the policy.

The course gave a good balanced view of the obligations of both landlord and tenant with regard to repairs and presented an objective picture of the matters that drive a repairs service from the landlord's perspective. The tenant's viewpoint was then explored and areas of conflict identified.

Given the drive for both savings and value for money by the landlord it might appear to be difficult to match the tenant's requirement for repairs to be completed promptly and at a convenient time. However we were presented with a scheme set up by Stoke City Council and repair contractor Kier which appeared to address all the problems. By empowering their staff with multi skilling and accessible materials they were able to provide repairs promptly when the tenant wants it with fixed time appointments. Much to our surprise this had been achieved with fewer resources at lower cost and with a greater customer satisfaction. This information has been passed to Andy Powell who is looking into it with interest.

Examples of Tenant Cash Back Scheme:
Home Housing (Homegroup.org)
Bromford Housing (Bromfordgroup.co.uk)

Useful Web site:
www.nationaltenants.org/tenantpanels

This article was kindly contributed by Roger Campbell.



The latest courses at Trafford Hall are available to request using the training form enclosed with this newsletter. The deadline for requests is 19 July 2013.

National Tenants Resource Centre, Trafford Hall. We cover transport, accommodation and training costs for courses when you request and book training through the customer involvement.

Venue: *Trafford Hall*
Course: *Wider World*
10 – 11 June 2013
Trainer: *Engage Associates*
Eileen Adams & Tim Morton
Attendees: *Roger Campbell & Gillian Forster*

Gillian Forster and I attended Trafford Hall for a course entitled Local Support Services Framework. This course was designed as consultation requested by Lord Freud. His course, The Wider World is a follow on looking primarily at the Localism Act 2011 and Welfare Reform Act 2012. A summary of the group's findings have been captured by Engage and submitted to the DWP for their consideration. This report runs to 8 pages so I have not included it here but it is available if anyone is interested.

Welfare Reform is very much a moving target. Whilst you are up to date today things may well have changed by tomorrow so our first task was to explore our own understandings of the changes and to update or correct those that had changed.

The changes brought about by the acts were explained in detail along with the drivers behind the decisions. The consensus was that whilst the thinking was well intentioned, reality did not match up to it. The "Bedroom Tax" would be less painful were there sufficient alternative properties for tenants to downsize in to.

Most time was spent on the Localism Act, decentralisation and the Big Society. The Act brings a number of new powers for communities all aimed at decentralisation and empowering the people. The main change affecting tenants and social landlords are:

- Provide a new form of flexible tenure for Social Housing Tenants
- Reform the Housing Revenue Account system
- Gives Local Authorities the power to limit who can apply for social housing within their area
- Amend the way in which a social tenant can make a complaint about their landlord
- Improve the ability of social tenants to move to different areas

With the loss of the TSA, tenants are expected to hold their landlords to account. Landlords are expected to assist tenants with this and work in partnership with tenants (co-regulation) to build better homes and communities.

There was a lot to take in in two days and there are a number of sources of further information still to be researched hopefully before it all changes again!

Useful Web sites:

<http://tinyurl.com/7mydv4m> (The Spartacus report. The report was entirely written, researched, funded and supported by sick and disabled people.)
www.communities.gov.uk (Communities and Local Government Department)
www.tpas.org.uk (Tenants Participation Advisory Service)
www.taroe.org.uk (Tenants and Residents Organisations of England)
www.nftmo.com (National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations)
www.cih.org (The Chartered Institute of Housing)
www.housing.org.uk (The National Housing Federation – NHF)
<http://tinyurl.com/717r9le> (NHF briefings on welfare reform)

Have you taken part in training and would like to share your knowledge?

Do it here!

Contact the customer involvement team.



Why not *Get involved?*

Don't forget!

Trafford Hall requests need to be submitted by 19 July 2013

Join us:

*Wednesday 24 July 2013 11:00-4:00
Phoenix Centre, Central Estate—Hartlepool*

*Wednesday 7 August 2013 11:00-4:00
Tristar Homes Open Day, Preston Park—Stockton*

*So that we can make the experience as pleasant for you as possible,
please tell us about any special requirements you have.*

*Special requirements can include things such as free transport, travel
expense refunds, only attending part of the event, dietary requirements,
childcare, general support, mobility assistance and communication
requirements such as Braille, sign language or an interpreter service.*

*There may be other things you can think of that we haven't mentioned, so
just ask us!*



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Just ask for the Customer Involvement Team

Vela 