

Autumn 2009

Cotman joins Places for People



As anticipated in our last Newsletter, Cotman formally became part of the Places for People Group at the beginning of April.

To mark the occasion, a celebration event was held at the Association's Bowthorpe Hall head office in May, attended by representatives of many of the Association's key partner organisations, including local authorities, housing agencies, consultants and contractors.

Guest of honour was Zenna Atkins, Chair of Places for People, who complimented Cotman on its excellent reputation as a local landlord and welcomed the Association into the Group.



Page 3

**'CHANGING LIVES
STRENGTHENING
COMMUNITIES'**



Page 4

**AUDLEY CLOSE,
BURSTON**



Page 5

**JOINING IN
THE FUN!**



Group Chair Zenna Atkins welcomes Cotman to the Places for People Group.



Managing Director Vivien Farrow with Steve Binks, Group Finance and IT Director and newly appointed Cotman Board member.

Greeting guests, Chair of Cotman's Board, Sarah Dixon, said that the event marked the end of many months of negotiations, but that the hard work was just beginning for the Association's staff as they took over the management of Places for People's housing stock throughout Norfolk and Suffolk.

As part of the partnership arrangements, Cotman will retain its local identity and its Board of Management, to which Steve Binks, Places for People's Group Finance and IT Director, has been appointed.



Managing Director Foreword

Welcome to the Autumn edition of Cotman News!

As our front cover illustrates, our entry into the Places for People Group has now taken place. I am pleased to welcome to the Cotman team Places for People staff members Cyndi McAleer, Peter Allan and Nigel Howes, who have joined our Housing Services team working from Cotman's head office in Bowthorpe Hall, and also Estate Officers Peter Nicholls and David Hodgkinson, who have joined Cotman's estate maintenance team.

We have set a date of the end of the year to complete the integration of our computer systems and data records with those of the Group. The management team are therefore very busy ensuring a smooth transition to these new working practices whilst also continuing to deliver a high level of service to our extended customer base, which, with the addition of the Places for People properties, takes us to over 2,100 homes.

Customer service and satisfaction are very important to us, and we want to know if there are areas where we fail to deliver the standard we aspire to. For this reason a satisfaction survey was sent out to all Cotman and Places for People's customers in Norfolk and Suffolk in the Spring, the results are currently being reviewed and key points will be published in a future edition of Cotman News.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter and, as always, we would welcome any suggestions you might have for inclusion in future editions.

Best wishes

Vivien Farrow, *Managing Director*

Outreach Update



You may remember, last December, Cotman were awarded two years' funding for a pilot outreach service by Norfolk County Council's Supporting People. The Outreach Service aims to provide older people in general needs' accommodation in Norwich with the support and services that they would receive if they lived in sheltered housing. The service is open to owner occupiers, private and council tenants, as well as residents of housing associations.

Older people living within a two mile radius of the Association's Ashby Court scheme are supported in their own homes by Scheme Manager & Outreach Co-ordinator, Sheila Moore. Support may include welfare benefits advice; help with home improvements as well as befriending services. Participants are welcome to join in the range of activities at Ashby Court.

Since the launch of the service there have been over 50 expressions of interest, indicating that this is a much needed service. The service has supported over 25 clients, with 12 of those now signed off and a further 11 on the waiting list. Many of those who have been signed off are still involved in activities, with one client saying "We still participate in social activities at Ashby Court (twice weekly) and find everyone very friendly. The Manager (Sheila) is very outgoing and excellent leader for the centre."

Have you got a story to tell?

Is something happening in your community that you think might be of interest to other readers?
Are you organising an event in your neighbourhood?

If so, contact Cotman's Amanda Marsh on 01603 731699 or amanda.marsh@cotman-housing.org.uk

Our Annual Performance

| Properties in management at end of year | 2008 | 2007 |
|---|------|------|
| General Needs | 1083 | 1077 |
| Sheltered Housing | 102 | 101 |
| Supported Housing | 38 | 38 |
| Shared Ownership | 26 | 26 |
| Leasehold for the Elderly | 62 | 62 |
| Managed on behalf of others | 46 | 46 |

| Tenanted Accommodation | 2008 | 2007 |
|-------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Rents | | |
| Average weekly rents | £65.46 | £62.08 |
| Average increase in rent | 5.44% | 3.68% |
| Rent lost to vacant dwellings | 0.60% | 0.76% |

| Lettings | 2008 | 2007 |
|--|-------|------|
| Lettings | 169 | 165 |
| Re-let time (weeks) | 2.2 | 3.3 |
| Tenancy turnover (excluding move-on accommodation) | 13.1% | 9.2% |
| Letting to BME households | 6.8% | 6.2% |

| Management | 2008 | 2007 |
|--------------------------------|------|------|
| Management costs per property | £663 | £637 |
| Maintenance costs per property | £489 | £301 |

| Stock Condition & Repairs | 2008 | 2007 |
|---|------|------|
| Repairs notified | 3835 | 3139 |
| Emergency repairs completed within target | 100% | 100% |
| Urgent repairs completed within target | 99% | 99% |
| Routine repairs completed within target | 99% | 99% |

| General Needs Housing average weekly gross rent comparison | 2008 | 2007 |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Broadland Housing Association | £71.36 | £67.31 |
| Colne Housing Society | £81.64 | £78.98 |
| Cotman Housing Association | £68.54 | £65.68 |
| Orwell Housing Association | £68.30 | £64.90 |
| Peddars Way Housing Association | £68.05 | £62.79 |
| Saffron Housing Trust | £62.20 | £58.39 |
| Suffolk Housing Society | £64.96 | £61.93 |
| Victory Housing Trust | £58.14 | £53.59 |
| Wherry Housing Association | £70.11 | £68.16 |

'Changing Lives, Strengthening Communities'

Cotman Housing Association was proud to lead an Employment Skills Fair on 8th and 9th July following their successful pilot in Bowthorpe.

The event, held in the Mile Cross area of the city where Cotman has a strong property base, was hosted in conjunction with a wide number of local partners, including Norwich City College, the Job Centre, Voluntary Norfolk, Jark Recruitment, Lovell, Roalco and Connexions. The Lord Mayor, Evelyn Collishaw, attended the event.

The event helped local people in the Mile Cross, Fiddlewood, Catton and Hellesdon areas of Norwich, including Cotman customers, find employment or equip them with the skills necessary to broaden their skills base and ease the transition back into work. As well as promoting job opportunities, the Employment Skills Fairs offer advice about learning avenues, voluntary work, interview techniques and impact on existing benefits, making this a one-stop shop for residents seeking work.

Cotman Managing Director, Vivien Farrow, said "We feel the Employment Skills Fair is a much needed partnership initiative in tackling economic deprivation and worklessness. We feel our local knowledge and strong reputation makes us ideally placed to encourage and signpost individuals seeking work, but lacking self-assurance and awareness of the opportunities which exist."

These two events have had over 200 people in attendance, with approximately over 30% of attendees finding a job, going back in to education or looking at setting their own business up.

We hope to hold more of these events, with the next one being planned for the NR1 area of Norwich early next year.



The Jark Team: Lorna Dootson, Gemma Pierce and Sarah Loades Evelyn Collishaw, Lord Mayor of Norwich.

Residents Forum Panel & Area Community Liaison Panel

As Cotman prepared to enter the Places for

Update

People Group at the beginning of the year, the members of Cotman's Residents Forum Panel and the local Places for People Area Community Liaison Panel have held regular joint meetings. These meetings have been held to monitor and feedback on any concerns or queries that residents might have as our two landlords came together. The two groups of residents have worked well together and at our next meeting we will be forming a single group to represent all residents whose homes are now managed by Cotman.

At the same time the Group was undertaking a major review of the ways that residents can be involved in influencing and challenging the decisions and services that affect them. The Residents Forum Panel has received presentations and details of the review, which has recently been completed, and details of the whole range of involvement opportunities that are available to residents will be included in the next edition of *Cotman News*.

Paul Watkinson, current chair of the Residents Forum Panel, "I am pleased with the way we are coming together as a single group, it will ensure confidence in our members and hopefully dispel any doubts they may have had.

I would also like to thank everyone who took the time to complete and return the customer satisfaction survey which will help to ensure that we receive good quality services."

Streets ahead!

The annual Lowestoft Fun Day was held in Aldwyck Way earlier this year. Once again the street party was a huge success, and combined with other events has now raised £10,390.00 over three years for Palliative Care East.

Resident and organiser, Tracey Harper said "I originally began this event in memory of my late husband and I have been overwhelmed with the support the street party has received and how much money we have raised to date."

A massive thank you to Tracey for organising the fun day and congratulations on the success of the event.



L-R: Rev'd Cubitt, Bett Barrett, Jim Morley, Mr Bill Collier, Mrs Val Collier, Basil Tibbenham (Chairman), Antoinette Faulkner

Mr & Mrs Collier, of Brewster Court, had 50 reasons to smile as they celebrated 50 years of marriage on 31 October 2009.

Pictured above, the happy couple are presented with a bouquet of flowers, to congratulate them on their Golden Wedding anniversary, from Basil Tibbenham, Chairman of the Trustees.

"Like winning the lottery"



Eight new properties (4 houses and 4 bungalows) were developed by Icen Homes on behalf of the Association and built by J. S. Hay Construction in Audley Close, Burston, under a Section 106 agreement (Section 106 means that they are housing built primarily for households in housing need in Burston and its surrounding villages).

The properties were let on 1 June 2009 and we are pleased to say that four of the households came from the village of Burston itself and the other four are from surrounding villages.

Households comprise of a mixture of families, couples (including one couple who found time to get married between the viewing and the letting!), and single persons.

Early indications are that all are settled and happy with their new homes. One response from the lettings questionnaire said "We are very impressed by the pleasant professional manner we were dealt with, like winning the lottery, we are very fortunate and blessed, thank you".



Cotman and Wherry Housing join forces for a Fun Day at Terrington!

This took place on the green at Alma Chase. Over 100 Cotman, Freebridge and Wherry residents of all ages attended.

The family event had activities including professional face painting, t-shirt graffiti, speed kick, refreshments, and a bouncy castle.

Sarah Franks, a Cotman resident (*pictured on the left*) won the adults speed kick competition said "It was great to have a fun day at Terrington. The kids really enjoyed it and it was an opportunity to mix with our Wherry and Freebridge Housing neighbours. Best of all though was me winning something!"



Stepping back in time...

The years were rolled back when residents at Ashby Court in Norwich were treated to a play about a munitions factory in the Second World War. The play was followed by a sing-along and variety show.

The event was organised by Sheila Moore, Scheme Manager & Outreach Co-ordinator who also wrote and directed the play inspired by her mother's experience in the local munitions factory at Hewitt. In the run up to the war, many munitions factories were opened to supply the guns and ammunition needed by the armed forces. Many local companies turned their factories over to wartime production and by 1943, 90% of single women were employed in the war factories.



Sheriff of Norwich, Tim O'Riordan, Sheila Moore, (Scheme Manager), Mike Hall (Resident)

The show's cast and production members were all either residents of the scheme, clients of the Outreach service or family members of residents, including Mrs Moore's own family.

Money raised from the show will be put towards funding the annual pantomime at Ashby Court, and a donation of £150 was also made to Normandy Veterans Association. The Sheriff of Norwich, Professor Tim O'Riordan presented the cheque to John Curson who is not only a resident of Ashby Court but also a member of Normandy Veterans' Association.

Vivien Farrow, Cotman Housing Association's Managing Director said, "This was a good social opportunity for residents and a great time was had by all. As well as helping the residents to socialise, the event provides a chance for staff and residents to get together."

Swine Flu

The announcement of a swine flu pandemic is a concern for us all and the Association wants to assure residents that we have put controls in place to reduce the risk of infection and ensure continuity of service in the event of an outbreak.

Below is an overview of action to date:

- All staff have been issued with NHS guidance on preventing the spread of infection, personal hand sanitisers and advice on what to do should they or family members be diagnosed with swine flu.
- NHS "Catch It, Bin It, Kill It" posters have been sited around the Association's offices.
- Anti-bacterial soap and hand-sanitisers are available for general use by staff and visitors to all Cotman offices.
- All contractors have been asked to confirm they have appropriate procedures in place to maintain services should they face an outbreak of swine flu in their workforce.

Older people are more at risk than others should they contract swine flu and extra measures have been put in place at sheltered schemes to help reduce the spread of infection:

- Wall-mounted hand-sanitiser dispensers have been placed at the entrances to sheltered scheme common rooms, together with NHS "Catch It, Bin It, Kill It" advice posters in communal areas.
- Residents diagnosed with swine flu are advised that they should not attend community activities for at least seven days.
- Where it is clear there is a serious outbreak on a scheme the scheme manager will cancel social activities until the scheme is cleared of the virus.
- Scheme Managers will establish what support is in place for persons diagnosed with swine flu, such as other agencies/family visits etc. If sufficient support is in place, they will not visit themselves until the virus is cleared.
- If there is no support, the scheme manager will maintain contact with the person as normal, taking precautions to prevent becoming infected or spreading the virus by following recommended hygiene practices.
- As a goodwill gesture, residents of the Association's sheltered schemes have each been given a hand-sanitiser and NHS guidance leaflet.

Should you have any concerns regarding Swine Flu please call the dedicated pandemic number: 0800 1 513 100 or visit the website:

www.pandemicflu.direct.gov.uk

FIRE SAFETY

**TEST it. CHANGE it.
REPLACE it.**



It is recommended that you test your smoke detector each week, to ensure it is working properly.

The way you test your detector depends on the type of detector you have:

Newer properties will have smoke detectors fixed to the ceiling. They can be tested by pushing and then releasing the small test button on the detector, which if it is working properly, should cause the alarm to sound for a short time.

Some properties have Fire Angel detectors, which are fitted to a light fitting, usually in the lounge, hall and/or upstairs landing. These can be tested by switching the light off then back on quickly which, if working properly, should cause the alarm to sound for a short time.

Should you ever notice that your fire angel/smoke detector occasionally makes a "beeping" or "chirping" sound; this is normally a warning that the back up battery which is built into it is getting low and needs replacing. If this should occur, please contact the Association immediately to arrange for it to be checked and, if necessary, replaced.

In a few properties, where a Fire Angel could not be fitted, a battery operated smoke detector will be in place and can be tested by pushing and then releasing the small test button on the detector which, if it is working properly, should cause the alarm to sound for a short time. You should replace the battery at least once a year.

As well as testing your smoke detector regularly, it should also be lightly vacuumed at least once a year to remove any dust that may have accumulated.

If you need assistance testing your smoke detector at any time, please contact the Association and we will be happy to arrange a time with you for a member of staff or one of our contractors to check it.

If, when you have tested it, you do believe your smoke detector is working properly, please contact the Association immediately to arrange for it to be checked and, if necessary, replaced.

Should you have any concerns, please contact the Customer Services team on 01603 731699.

Any questions?

Would you like to ask a question about anything to do with your home?

Please email us at:
office@cotman-housing.org.uk
or write to the address on the right and we will answer as many of your queries as possible in the next *Cotman News*.

Ask the Association,
Cotman Housing Association,
Cotman House, Bowthorpe Hall,
Bowthorpe Hall Road,
Norwich NR5 9AD

Staff News

Pam's Retirement

The Association bade a fond farewell to **Pam London** in July, who retired after 20 years with Cotman as the Scheme Manager of our Bullace Road sheltered scheme.

Best wishes for your retirement Pam! Hugh McGlyn is temporarily acting as scheme manager.

Ben goes to pastures new

Ben Veal decided to start a new life (and job) with his lovely wife Emma in deepest Wiltshire.

His last day with the Association was Friday, 12 June.

Obviously we are very sorry to lose him, but I am sure, like us all in the office, you wish him well in furthering his career.



Rowan Court's Good Neighbour retires

Lesley Crowe and Rita Mathieson

There's a new face at the Association following the recent retirement of **Rita Mathieson**, Part-time Resident Caretaker/Good Neighbour at Rowan Court/Three Mile Lane, Costessey. Rita retires after 14 years working at the scheme, and is now looking forward to spending the coming months relaxing and enjoying retired life.

Stephen Harland was appointed in mid-May to fill the position at the scheme.

New Additions

Michelle Maher, HR Officer, recently announced she was expecting her second child in March 2010.

Congratulations to Michelle, Jon and Ralph!!

'New Learning, New You'



Following on from the success of previous years' events, the third 'New Learning, New You' Fair was held at The Castle Mall in Norwich on Thursday 3 September.

The event was carried out in partnership with Norwich City Council, Orbit East, Broadland Housing Association, the Community Learning Mentors Norwich City College, Norfolk County Council Adult Education and Workers Education Association (WEA) and provided information and advice about adult education available in the area. There was also the opportunity to win Castle Mall gift vouchers in prize draws held throughout the day.

"We had a fantastic turn out, our best one yet and everyone who came was very positive about the event" said Senior Customer Services Officer, Amanda Marsh (*pictured above, third from left*).

"Thank you to everyone that attended the fair. Continual learning is so important especially given the recent recession as it gives people the chance to develop new skills which can often lead to employment."

Are you being served?

You may recall that over the summer you received a survey to complete and return to a consultant who was undertaking a resident satisfaction survey for Cotman.

The purpose of the survey was to enable the Association to measure current satisfaction levels and, by repeating the survey again in a year's time, to assess if the levels have changed following Cotman joining *Places for People*. The results will also help to identify any services or locations where satisfaction is low so that they can be investigated further, and where possible, action can be taken to address the issue(s).

The survey has now closed and the consultant is currently preparing a report on the results of the survey which will be presented to the Association's Board of Management for consideration and a summary of the results and any actions to be taken will be published on the Association's website and in the next edition of *Cotman News*.

Women's Employment Enterprise and Training Unit (WEETU)

This was set up as an independent voluntary agency in 1987 in Norwich. WEETU helps women take control of their economic lives, offering advice, training and support to develop employment and enterprise opportunities within the Norwich area.



For further information about WEETU please visit their website www.weetu.org or contact them on 01603 230625 or via email admin@weetu.org



Lynne Sowersby (pictured left with Housing Officer, Lyndsey Burgess) has lived in a Cotman property, with her son for nearly ten years. Lynne now works for WEETU.

WEETU means that I am able to give back a little of what I received during that time.

What were/are the challenges?

It is natural to be afraid of change and I had reservations about juggling full time work with being a mum. I wasn't sure that I would have the right skills for some of the work involved, my computer skills were minimal and there was a lot to learn about the organisation. With help and support from employees at WEETU it didn't take long for me to feel more confident and comfortable in my new role.

I hear that part of your job entails a yoga class, what other rewards are there?

The main reward is celebrating the success of my clients. Seeing people's confidence rise and aspirations change, gaining employment or becoming self-employed. I enjoy encouraging people and helping them to achieve goals they have set themselves.

Do you think the current climate has influenced the need for the services WEETU provide?

Yes, definitely. We are now offering two new courses, one is called Pennies, Pounds and Plastic, for the 16-25s which shows how we can manage our money, the true cost of borrowing, and aims to empower attendees by creating tools for spending and saving as well as providing the knowledge of where to go for further help and advice. The other course is called Make Money Work and this aims to help clients identify barriers that they face regarding money/finance and how to help them to overcome these barriers and increase financial awareness about the effect of going back to work.

On a personal note, I feel that if I had known what help was readily available when I was unemployed it would have been considerably easier to move forward and maybe I wouldn't have been out of work for so long.

How long have you worked for WEETU?

I started working for WEETU in November 2007, so it will be two years this coming November.

How did you get the job at WEETU?

I found the position for the Outreach worker vacancy in the Norwich Job Centre. I still think back to that day and think I must have been having a very positive day to even apply!!

Why do you say that, were you not already doing that kind of work?

No, by that time I had been unemployed for two years and before that I had done various jobs such as working on reception, shop work and cleaning. I knew I wanted to work within a role that involved helping people and was looking for an opportunity to develop skills.

What makes you able to relate to your clients?

Before I started to work for WEETU I lacked confidence in my abilities. It's a challenge to remain positive when you are unemployed and I had financial difficulties too, I struggled to pay my rent, which created arrears. I think I relate well to my clients because I realise what can be achieved with some support. Working at WEETU has changed so much for me, personally and practically. I've now cleared my arrears and life is looking up. I do think that what got me through the tough times was having people around me who believed in me, therefore my role at