

June 2011

## Welcome Essex and Cambridge!

Two years have passed since Cotman joined the Places for People Group. It's been a time of fast and exciting change for us all. As well as getting to know our new customers and properties in Norfolk and Suffolk, staff have been working behind the scenes to embrace new computer systems and different ways of working. Most important to us from the outset was a determination to deliver a consistently high level of customer service.

We were delighted to learn that our efforts had paid off with the marked increase in satisfaction rates which was revealed in our 2010 Customer Survey.

The best compliment we could have come in the shape of an approach by the Places for People Group to take over the management of its Essex and Cambridgeshire owned stock. Following consultation with customers in these areas, the transfer of the properties to Cotman management took effect from 1st April 2011.

Vivien Farrow, Managing Director said "We are delighted to be managing properties across four counties and believe this step makes Cotman a major player in the Eastern region. We are looking forward to working with our new customers to ensure that our services meet their expectations".



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**PEOPLE POWER  
IN NORFOLK**



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**COMMUNITY  
INVOLVEMENT WEEK**



*Residents at Dovercourt, Essex celebrating the recent Royal Wedding.*



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**APPRENTICE  
RECRUITMENT**



## Managing Director's Foreword

I am delighted that Cotman is now managing the Places for People properties in Essex and Cambridgeshire and would firstly like to extend a warm welcome to customers in our new area of operations. I am genuinely excited that we will now be able to deliver good local services to residents throughout the whole of East Anglia. We look forward to working with our new customers and will shortly be arranging open meetings in Essex and Cambridgeshire to discuss future arrangements for customer involvement in these areas.

Looking at the wider picture, we know that the national economic situation is starting to bite. Cuts in benefits alongside general increases in the cost of living are affecting our customers. We can't offer magic solutions, but we can offer access to advice as a result of partnership working with other local agencies and the services of an Income Maximisation Officer at Places for People. Do please contact your Neighbourhood Officer in confidence if you would benefit from a free referral – our team can check that you are receiving the right benefits and can help with applications for housing benefit.

The economic situation also presents challenges to Cotman and we were disheartened, although unsurprised, to learn that our funding for sheltered housing will be cut by almost a third from October 2011. Over coming months, we will be working to consider how we can modify services to people living in these schemes whilst absorbing the cuts which have been imposed on us. These are difficult times but we will consult with customers over any proposed changes and remain committed to ensuring that high quality housing support services are delivered to those who need them most.

I hope you enjoy the newsletter.

Best wishes  
Vivien Farrow  
Managing Director  
Cotman Housing Association



## Cotman Customer Liaison Panel

### By Paul Watkinson

Cotman Customer Liaison Panel Chairman and  
Board of Management Tenant Representative

**Hello and welcome to customers from Essex and Cambridgeshire!**

Since our last newsletter lots of meetings and activities have taken place. The customer training has been undertaken and was very successful (*read more on page 6*), we have had two shaping sessions regarding the future of Customer Involvement at Cotman, which customers, officers and a board member attended, and more recently held meetings regarding last year's Customer Annual Report and assessment of last year's involvement activities.

Following the shaping meetings, the Cotman Customer Body (CCB), and the Cotman Scrutiny Panel (CSP) have been developed. The proposed remit for both panels is very different, for example it is proposed that the CCB will identify necessary policy and procedural changes, and consider the strategic direction of the Association. The CSP may undertake mystery shopping activities, and reviewing of contractor performance. Customers who have previously expressed an interest in being involved have been asked to submit a short manifesto, which describes what skills they bring and why they want to be involved. The next step will be to appoint to the panels from these applications, agree their terms of reference and decide what the remit will be for both panels. The remits of both panels will be published in the next issue of the *Cotman News*, as well as on your scheme noticeboards.

If you are interested in being involved please contact your Neighbourhood Officer or Amanda Marsh, Customer Involvement Co-ordinator on 01603 731699.

## Local Offers

As promised in our 2010 Customer Annual Report, we have produced a number of Local Offers including ones for customers living at Broadside, Glenwood, Ashwell Court, Ashby Court, Cotman Fields, Swaffham and New Costessey. These are some of the areas where we received most feedback about local priorities. We have also developed a Local Offer for customers aged over 60 years of age who live in general needs housing.

The requirement to produce Local Offers was developed by our regulatory body, the Tenant Services Authority. We welcome the opportunity to document how we will work with customers to address issues on individual developments, although this does not detract from the high standards of services we wish to offer all Cotman residents.

Information to pull the Cotman local offers together was gathered from a variety of sources including written submissions, estate walkabouts, focus groups, informal discussion on site and suggestions from Residents Associations

The Local Offers have been displayed on Noticeboards but please contact your Neighbourhood Officer if you would like a copy.

The focus will now be to address local offers through our existing close work with customers living in our communities with progress reported through Newsletters, Walkabouts and measured through Satisfaction Surveys.

We are happy to produce more Local Offers where there is an identified need and we encourage you to contact your Neighbourhood Officer to give your views!

## IMPORTANT CHANGES

**to Housing and Council Tax Benefit, Non-Dependant Deductions were Increased from 1st April 2011**

As from 1st April your Housing and Council tax benefit may have changed.

If you have grown-up children or other adult friends or family living with you the Housing benefit and Council tax benefit may go down.

This is because deductions are taken from your benefit award for non-dependants that live with you. These deductions are set by the Government each year and have increased from 1st April 2011.

If you or your partner receive Disability Living Allowance (care component) or Attendance allowance, there will be no deduction for any non-dependants so it is important you let your benefit section know that you get this.



If you are disabled and not getting these benefits you can find out more details about claiming it through the national benefit enquiry line **0800 882200** (free from a land line) or visit **[www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)**

If you require any further information please speak to your Neighbourhood Officer.



## Good Neighbours?

Following the success of last year's fantastic awards event, we are once again asking customers to nominate a 'good neighbour'. Successful nominees will all receive personal recognition from David Cowans, Group Chief Executive, and will be in with the chance to attend a celebratory lunch hosted by David in York on 23rd September.

Nomination forms can be requested from your Neighbourhood Officer, or the Customer Services team on 01603 731699.



*David Cowans, second from the right, with customers at last year's event.*

# People power in Norfolk

**Cotman customers attended Norfolk's first county-wide residents conference at Norwich City Football Club on Friday 4th March.**

Eight of Cotman's customers joined other residents from landlords such as Orbit East, Broadland Housing, Flagship Peddars, & Wherry Housing to discuss common issues and with the hope that a residents arm of the Norfolk Housing Alliance could be formed.



The Norfolk Housing Alliance was formed in 2008 as a collective of social housing landlords with a significant presence in Norfolk. Through their strong partnership working, they are able to share best practice and have a strong record of improving services by taking collective action.

Members include Cotman Housing Association, Freebridge Community Housing, Broadland Housing Association, Wherry Housing Association, Orbit East, Saffron Housing, Flagship Peddars Way, Guinness Trust and Victory Housing, Norwich City Council, Great Yarmouth District Council and Minster Housing Association.



Landlords joined together to invite residents to get involved and scrutinise their services. Residents took part in lots of sessions, where they shared ideas on how to get personally involved in the community. They also discussed how their landlords can work together to provide a better service and agreed that they would like to be more involved in decision making and local activities.

Due to the success of the conference, a steering group has been set up to look at the remit of a residents arm of the Norfolk Housing Alliance. Mrs Jacqui Fuller and Miss Jamie Butcher, two of our customers who attended the conference, are part of the steering group and have attended the first meetings. It is hoped that the members of the network will meet regularly to share ideas and thoughts on how they can make their communities better places to live.



One of the inspirational highlights was a presentation by resident, Judy Roberts, on the successful charter launched at Terrington St Clement in King's Lynn last year. The TSA National trailblazer was a commitment made by local residents and their landlords (Cotman Housing Association, Freebridge Community Housing Trust, and Wherry Housing Association) and outlined what each would do to create a greener, safer and cleaner environment.

Judy talked to residents about how the overall satisfaction of residents increased from 87 per cent to 96 per cent with a positive trend of performance over the first nine months of the pilot. Cotman resident, Bernie Raftry, said: "It was a really good conference and I heard a lot of good ideas from other residents from different landlords. It was great to meet others who are involved in scrutiny and monitoring and talk about how we can work together, become stronger and have a single voice for residents in Norfolk."



Anthony Lamb, another Cotman resident who attended added: "Very interesting and exciting thinking that the residents in Norfolk can join together with their landlords and improve lives and circumstances."

# Community Involvement Week

## 18-25 May 2011

Events for Community Involvement Week took place throughout May and the beginning of June. This is the 2nd year we have participated in Community Involvement Week and staff have enjoyed getting out and meeting customers. Below are some of the events which we held, in partnership with a number of contractors and customers.



### Costessey, Norwich

On Wednesday 18th May, staff and customers, from our Costessey schemes, all came together at our 'Get Together' with Norfolk Frames and South Norfolk Council. Residents from leasehold scheme Rowan Court, and our Sheltered Housing scheme came together with families from our Costessey scheme to enjoy a fun-filled afternoon of rounders (Team Marsh beat Team Plumstead quite significantly), badge and fridge magnet making and other arts and craft, led by Gaynor Chappell, Property Services Officer. One customer, said "What a wonderful afternoon, it was a great opportunity to have a chat with my Neighbourhood Officer, Sue Tuckwood, whilst my children ran around in the play area with Gary and Amanda, I hope we do more of this."

### Aldwyck Way/Aspinall Close, Lowestoft

Residents and children came and joined staff and Norfolk Frames to plant hanging baskets for outside their property, and then joined us for an evening walk round the estate on Thursday 19th May.

### Broadside, Oulton Broad

Customers at our scheme in Broadside wanted to brighten up the entrance to their scheme, so with help from Seddons who provided window boxes, planters and workers to help, Neighbourhood Officer, Cyndi McAleer and Ian Millea, Maintenance Surveyor got together with customers on Wednesday 25th May, where even the local PCSO popped in to offer a helping hand!



### Chestnut Court, Norwich

Held last year with great success, residents and children of Chestnut Court were invited to come along and re-plant last year's baskets, with help from local contractor, Mobile Housewife.



### Finally...

We would like to express our thanks to local contractors, Mobile Housewife, Norfolk Frames and Seddon Property Services for their sponsorship and support throughout Community Involvement Week, all three contractors donated both time and money to each of the events they attended.

*If you would be interested in organising an event for your community please contact your Neighbourhood Officer or Customer Involvement Co-ordinator, Amanda Marsh.*

# Apprentice Recruitment

Seddon Property Services Limited is a Painting, Decorating and Maintenance company working in conjunction with Places for People nationwide. As a company they annually recruit 30 new apprentices with a view to securing suitable role on successful completion.



## Seddon

Property Services Ltd

As a member of the Places for People Group, Cotman Housing Association has been advised by Seddons that they have an apprenticeship opportunity within the East Anglia area.

This three year Painting & Decorating placement is offered on a site/college basis and successful achievement will depend on satisfactory attendance to both. The minimum criteria is 3 GCSE's grade C or above.

The opportunity is open to all age groups, male or female. No previous experience is required. Interviews are being held at Cotman's offices in Norwich on Wednesday 27th July, shortlisted candidates will be required to join Seddons on a residential selection week in York commencing Monday 8th August 2011.

Closing date for applications is **5.00 pm Monday 18th July 2011**

For further information please call Jackie Budden, Seddons on 07989 984915 or email on [jackie.budden@seddon.co.uk](mailto:jackie.budden@seddon.co.uk) or for an initial enquiry give Customer Involvement Co-ordinator, Amanda Marsh, a call on 01603 731699.

## Residents Training

As you may remember, in January, we began a series of training courses for residents in partnership with Norfolk County Council Adult Education with subjects such as Team Roles, How to Run Effective Meetings and Basic Computing.



The feedback from residents who attended these courses has been very positive, and in fact they have requested more training, in particular for computing.

We are currently in discussions with Adult Education with a view to providing further training for our Customers in Norfolk and Suffolk, and we have also made contact with Adult Education Services in Essex and Cambridge. If you would like to find out further information or have some suggestions for training for your community please contact Amanda Marsh, Customer Involvement Co-ordinator, on 01603 731656 or [amanda.marsh@cotman-housing.org.uk](mailto:amanda.marsh@cotman-housing.org.uk)

## New Contractors

AARON SERVICES LTD



We are pleased to announce that, following an extensive tendering process, from September 2011, Fosters Property Maintenance will begin delivering our day-to-day repairs service and Aaron Services Limited will be delivering our gas servicing and repairs service.

As mentioned in the last newsletter, a number of interested customers took part in the tender evaluation and award process, including developing specific "customer" questions that all of the contractors were required to answer and then later scoring their responses to the questions. A small group of customers took part in the interviews that all of the contractors were required to attend and, finally, site visits with officers and other members of the Eastern Procurement Consortium (EPC) to contractor offices and premises.

We will be providing customers with further details of the introduction of the new contractors as they are finalised. We would also like to take the opportunity to thank all of our existing contractors for the excellent service they have provided over the years and continue to deliver.



Jae Lee

## Future Jobs

Some of you may have noticed some new faces in our Norwich office. Francesca Revell and Jae Lee have joined us for 6 months' work experience through the government's Future Jobs Fund and in partnership with The Grow Organisation.



Francesca Revell

The Future Jobs Fund (FJF) was announced in 2009 and by the end of March this year it is thought that it will have funded around 100,000 jobs, mainly aimed at 18-24 year olds who have been out of work for six months and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance. Fran and Jae are actually employed by The Grow Organisation, but are working at our Norwich Office. After having a trial in each department, Fran is now working with the Customer Services Team, and Jae is working as part of the Property Services Team. Fran says "Coming to Cotman has been a great experience, before I started I had been out of work for nearly a year and had only got experience in retail, but I wanted to work in administration, and now I have the chance to learn new skills whilst being paid!"

## DEVELOPMENT NEWS...

Cotman's first new housing development to start since joining Places for People, a supported housing scheme at Mandela Close, Norwich, was completed and ready for our new customers in early June 2011. This scheme of 5 self-contained one bedroom apartments, with an apartment for the support staff, will be providing much needed accommodation for people with learning difficulties, allowing them to live independently with help on hand when needed.

The project is yet another excellent example of Cotman working in partnership other agencies to address local housing need, including Norwich City Council from whom the land was purchased, Norfolk Supporting People, Norfolk Learning Disability Service and a local building contractor, Draper Nicholls.



We have designed a modern looking building on three floors, which meets the current high standards in reduced energy requirements. This will mean our customers have lower running costs and we are also harvesting the roof rainwater as water for flushing to toilets.

Our second new scheme, of twenty, one bedroom self-contained apartments for people with mental ill-health together with five general needs houses at Estcourt Road, Great Yarmouth, has now also started on site, and is being constructed by local builder John Young. These twenty five properties are reaching even higher standards of design and low energy consumption to meet the needs in reducing energy use and carbon emissions.

This scheme will be completed in August 2012, adding yet more highly required accommodation for the local area of Great Yarmouth.

### 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 Amanda Marsh on 01603 731699 or [office@cotman-housing.org.uk](mailto:office@cotman-housing.org.uk)

# Get set for digital

Earlier this year Sandy Heath (Cambridge area) transmitter was switched over to digital broadcast. On 6th July the Sudbury (parts of Suffolk and Essex) transmitter and on the 9th November the Tacolneston (Norfolk and north Suffolk) transmitter will be switched over to digital broadcast. For the majority of customers this will make little difference, since ordinary individual house aerials are capable of receiving the signals.



If you are currently on a communal aerial system, the situation is different and we will contact you separately to advise what is entailed. Wherever you live, you will have to make sure you can receive a digital signal. Most new models can do this but even if your TV is old, it is very likely that it can be converted with a digital box. It may be that you already have, or will choose to get, a Freeview box or subscription services.

If you want some more information on the digital switchover, including details on financial assistance that may be available to people who are 75 or over, have lived in a care home for six months or more, or have certain disabilities, contact Digital UK on **08456 50 50 50**. Lines are open Monday to Friday, 8.00 am to 7.00 pm, and Saturday 10.00 am to 4.00 pm, with extended opening hours on switchover dates. Alternatively, visit [www.digitaluk.co.uk](http://www.digitaluk.co.uk)

## From Top Chef to Chair of Service Users' Council!

**Stephen Fletcher has been a customer of the Association for just over a year, and lives at one our schemes in Norwich City Centre. He has an impressive history as a world class chef who once succeeded Gordon Ramsay as king of the kitchen on board a luxury yacht belonging to Australian TV mogul Reg Grundy.**



Stephen, who was born in Drayton, began his career by washing glasses at the Crown Hotel in Fakenham, but rose to the heady heights as head chef in restaurants in elite hotels in London, Paris and Geneva.

He spent 14 years living and working in Canada, however his job on the Grundy family yacht was to be his last before Stephen and his impressive career fell victim to alcoholism. He ended up becoming homeless and sleeping rough on Miami Beach before coming home to Norfolk.

Stephen has little doubt that the long hours and intense demands of his career played a part in his downfall. He says: "Being a chef is a pretty cut-throat, its demanding both physically and mentally. You have to assess labour and food costs, and the kitchen has to be disciplined, like Gordon Ramsay's, otherwise it would fall apart. But alcoholism is a big problem – it's a trade which is known for it."

When Stephen came back to Norfolk he ended up in a bed and breakfast in Great Yarmouth, and with the help of his landlady was admitted to the James Paget Hospital. "I started getting therapy and went to meetings, where I was introduced to the Norfolk & Waveney Mental Health Trust's Service Users' Council. I enrolled in that, and it was almost part of my therapy, as having too much time on your hands can be an alcoholics worst enemy.

Stephen has been "dry" for several years now, and in addition to chairing the Service Users' Council he has been a Trust governor for a number of years. He says he has thrived on the responsibility of both roles, and attributes part of his recovery to his involvement.

Stephen still cooks some elaborate meals but is also just as happy having mushy peas off Norwich market! He says "I am enjoying my apartment which looks over Upper St Giles Church in the centre of Norwich, a wonderful city".