

Cancel Christmas!

Apparently, there are many different ways of responding to the Credit Crunch. Germany seems to favour doing nothing – well, not much. Whilst, in Britain we seem to be trying everything. In a giddy period this month, the Government has simultaneously indulged in “crass (fiscal) Keynesianism” whilst looking very closely at a Monetarist prescription (remember the 1980s!) for increasing the money supply called quantitative easing.

But the Banks’ response has taken the festive bourbon. Big names, like Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs have cancelled their traditional expensive Christmas dos. RBS, Lloyds TSB and Northern Rock have also reined in spending. And, although it warms the heart of this old Puritan to hear glad tidings of less conspicuous consumption, this all rather misses the point.

Meanwhile, in the real economy, associations’ entire loan facilities are being threatened with huge upward repricing as the result of non-material or marginal

changes. Aspirant low cost home owners simply cannot get mortgages because some lenders do not appear to understand a mortgage protection guaranteed deal when offered one. And housing associations could do more to help, if they were just given the chance.

With a real possibility that Government new build targets could be undershot by a decade, this is surely the time to act quickly. So, whilst we welcome HCA’s gradual response to our long-uttered calls for more flexible grant rates on deals that no longer stack up and forward land purchases, there needs to be an understanding that the window for effective action is closing fast. If the Treasury and the Bank of England have recognised that now is the time for action rather than reflection – perhaps the HCA can adopt



Derek Long
Head of North
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Federation

the same attitude.

I’m not calling for the first HCA Christmas to be cancelled – rather for this to be a season of goodwill towards swift outcomes and avoiding any process-stuffed turkeys.

Who knows ? Clearer post-Christmas heads might just produce a more realistic and happier 2009 for tenants, home-buyers and associations. After all, it is the season of Hope !

HCA and TSA

The Federation welcomed the launch of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and Tenants Services Authority (TSA) - which respectively will ensure the delivery of affordable homes and safeguard continued high standards for social housing tenants.

From 1 December, the HCA will be the single delivery body responsible for regenerating communities and delivering affordable homes, while the TSA will be the regulator for social housing.

The HCA takes over the housing investment and community regeneration functions of the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships.

The TSA takes over the regulatory and intervention functions of the Corporation. The TSA will protect tenants' homes and monitor the viability and performance of the housing association sector.

The new websites for the Homes and Communities Agency and Tenants Services Authority are now up and running.

www.homesandcommunities.co.uk

www.tenantservicesauthority.org

Shining in the North East

Celebrating the diverse range of housing association activities the inaugural Showcasing Housing Initiatives in the North East (SHINE) awards included a special financial inclusion award.

Judged and presented by Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Iain Wright MP and Federation chief executive, David Orr, the awards celebrated imaginative initiatives aimed at reducing the negative impact of financial exclusion. They here held at the Centre for Life in Newcastle in October.

The winner of the award was Middlesbrough based Erimus

Housing with the Tandem project. Tandem is an independent financial inclusion project, available to all 10,500 tenants. The comprehensive service includes: benefit and debt advice, budgeting, advice on financial products and access to affordable loans.

Winners of the Federation's own What We Are Proud of Award, also Erimus Housing, and recent Gold Awards winners, Isos Housing Group, were presented with a special certificate to celebrate their achievements.

A great night was had by all. Plans are already under way for next year's event.



Fran Rowland – Head of Financial Control and Reporting, and Lisa Fearn – Tandem Project Manager receiving the award on behalf of Fabrick Group from Iain Wright MP

Incommunities makes ‘skills pledge’

Incommunities has become one of the first social housing groups in the North of England to sign up to the Government’s Skills Pledge initiative.

The Bradford-based social housing provider is committed to developing skill levels in the workforce and the signing of the Pledge is seen as a major step forward in developing the organisation and better customer services.

In November, Geraldine Howley, Incommunities Group Chief Executive and Rachel Mann, the

Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Regional Chair for Yorkshire and the Humber took part in a signing ceremony for the Skills Pledge.

The Skills Pledge is a national initiative that aims to encourage employers of all sizes and in all sectors to support their employees to achieve relevant qualifications to NVQ Level 2 and beyond. It is a visible signal to employees, partners and customers of a commitment to provide excellence in the workplace.

Employers who commit to the Skills Pledge will have access to

Skills Brokers as part of the LSC’s Train to Gain Service to support the development of their employees and aid retention levels.

As an Investor in People accredited organisation, Incommunities places a very high priority on its employees to learn and attain valuable and relevant work qualifications. A big success has been its ability to attract Modern Apprentices, in particular within construction trades.

www.incommunities.org.uk



The photo shows (left) Geraldine Howley, Incommunities Group Chief Executive with Rachel Mann, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Regional Chair for Yorkshire and the Humber at the signing of the Skills Pledge

Pupils Travel Through Time

As part of the Coast & Country's Annual Property Maintenance and Investment Conference pupils from South Bank Community Primary School in Middlesbrough were asked to come up with ideas on how housing will look in years to come

The purpose of the conference was to engage tenants and involve them in the ongoing improvements to the service to help Coast & Country develop the way its maintenance service will be delivered in the future. It also gave tenants the opportunity to give feedback on its current investment programme and views on the planning of programmes for future years.

Pupils had to use their Time Lord skills to design posters illustrating a 'House of the Future'. They discussed their ideas in a video booth designed as the TARDIS.

The day was a huge success and the ideas from the day will help to shape improvements to the service in the future. Sonic screwdrivers, however, are still not available to assist.

www.cch-online.org.uk





Liverpool In The Frame

Figures from the worlds of arts, sport and business sat alongside refugees and the homeless in a photography exhibition that looks at Liverpool through the eyes of its migrants.

The Riverside Group commissioned Diverse City to mark its 80th anniversary in Merseyside and celebrate Liverpool's status as European Capital of Culture.

Over 50 people have been captured on film including Riverside residents and staff, homeless people, asylum seekers and prominent figures from the arts, sport, business and public life. Each person chose a location or a series of locations with a special meaning to them in which to be photographed.

Portraits include Joe Smith, aged 83, from Runcorn who moved from Tuebrook in

1978 to a new house and the new town of Runcorn. Joe joins another Runcorn resident Nora Rimmer, board member of the Four Estates community development charity, who moved to Runcorn from Norris Green in the early 1980s.

Also featured is Pam Fenney, aged 64, who has lived in St Helens for over 50 years. She moved with her family from Dovecot, Liverpool to live in a pit house, when her dad left the Navy for a mining job.

The subjects were also interviewed about their experiences of the city by sixth form students from Upton Hall School in Wirral.

Recognisable faces such as playwright Alan Bleasdale and photographer and musician Mike McCartney joined other prominent

Liverpool figures as Diverse City subjects.

The exhibition ran from 26 November to 1 December at the Anglican Cathedral, St James Road, then moved to City Exchange, Old Hall Street, from 4 to 18 December.

The exhibition is the last in a series of arts projects commissioned by The Riverside Group to celebrate its 80th birthday. Earlier this year the organisation commissioned Belfast Loyalist Mark Ervine and Republican Danny Devenny to paint a Beatles themed mural on the gable end of a Riverside property in Litherland.

www.riverside.org.uk



Images of Joe Smith and Nora Rimmer courtesy of Riverside Group

A centre for healthy living

A Housing 21 extra care housing scheme for older people in Blackburn is making a real difference to the health and well-being of the local community.

Spring Bank Court opened in October 2007 and is the product of a partnership between Housing 21 and Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and Primary Care Trust. The scheme offers 36 one bedroom and 4 two bedroom apartments for rent and 8 two bedroom shared ownership bungalows on the same site. It includes a respite unit, shop, restaurant and hairdresser.

While many of the facilities can be found in other extra care schemes around the country, it is the inclusion of a community support unit and health clinic that is having a major impact.

A day support unit has been designed to offer a service to between 12 and 15 people and will be used by a range of voluntary and community groups, seven

days a week. It includes a domestic kitchen area for rehabilitation, bathing suites, private interview and therapy rooms. However, it is the NHS clinic facility that is already bringing real benefits to local people. As no appointments are necessary, people can simply walk in and register to see a team of specialist clinicians.

One such team of specialists can be found in The Healthy Leg clinic which is accessed by up to 40 clients, some from outside the local area. Attendees undergo a comprehensive assessment to identify possible leg problems and the rapid access to vascular consultants allows for urgent diagnostics and treatment, thereby aiding the early detection of vascular disease.

Recent figures show that 244 patients were issued with support stockings to reduce swelling and prevent ulceration. A further 56 people were diagnosed with mild/moderate peripheral vascular

disease and several patients were found to have medical conditions requiring urgent surgical intervention.

The clinic facility is achieving its aim of improving the health outcomes for people, in particular encouraging self care initiatives designed to reduce the demand for acute hospital services. But the benefit to the local community doesn't end there.

Although people may access the building for a specific health need, they can also make use of the other facilities on offer, such as the café/restaurant, hair salon and retail shop. This open access policy therefore allows Spring Bank Court to become a focal point within the community. For example the tea bar and open lounge area in the clinic means that people are popping in to catch up with others. This is not discouraged as it recognised that some people are socially isolated. The popularity of Spring Bank Court's facilities is rapidly increasing, with the café becoming a popular lunch time meeting place. School children pop into the shop to purchase sweets on their way home from school and this, in turn, leads their parents to become aware of what's on offer.

In a little over one year, Spring Bank Court has established itself as a vital hub for the local community. With more clinics planned and as the day support unit becomes fully operational, the outlook for Spring Bank Court is looking very healthy.



Building Neighbourhoods in...

Building Neighbourhoods in... events throughout the North will take place early next year.

These events promise to be a major turning point in the provision of affordable housing regionally.

The conferences will be the first chance to hear - and question - what key national and regional staff from the Homes and Communities Agency and the Tenant Services Authority have in mind for our region.

The event will also provide an opportunity to hear from David Orr about the Federation's take on the credit crunch and how we will help members through these challenging times.

With the current unprecedented scale of change that we all face there has never been a more important time for stakeholders to discuss their common purposes.

The conferences will focus on affordable housing, investment, delivery and regulation

Confirmed speakers

Peter Marsh

Chief Executive
Tenants Services Authority
North West and Yorkshire and
Humberside Events

Richard Moriarty

Executive Director Market
Development
Tenants Services Authority
North East Event

North West

30 January 2009
10.00 - 13.00
The Ramada Hotel
Salford Quays

Yorkshire and Humberside

11 February 2008
10.00 - 13.00
The Queens Hotel
Leeds

North East

27 February 2008
10.00 - 13.00
Centre for Life,
Newcastle-Upon-Tyne

Short notice inspection

The Federation working with the Audit Commission has put together three regional half day seminars on short notice inspection. Yvonne Davies, Head of Housing - North, Audit Commission will provide an update on the radical move to short notice inspection, the implications and the reality of how they will work.

There will be a chance to hear from an association that took part in the pilot initiative. They will share their experience of the inspection and how staff, tenants and board members were involved in the process.

This seminar will benefit senior managers and board members as well as officers responsible for continuous improvement.

North West

8 January 2009
Federation Manchester Office

Yorkshire & Humberside

12 January 2009
Connect Housing, Leeds

North East

13 January 2009
Gentoo, Sunderland

Further information and booking forms for these and all forthcoming North events can be found at www.housing.org.uk/north or by emailing north@housing.org.uk.

4NW - The Leaders Forum



Deborah Shackleton
Group Chief Executive
The Riverside Group Ltd

4NW, the Regional Leaders Forum is a new organisation created following the voluntary winding up of the NW Regional Assembly. It was run by an Executive Board consisting of key NW local authority councillor representatives and a small number of economic partners from the business sector. The Assembly had 24 social economical and environmental partners representing a range of voluntary sector organisations and functional areas including housing (National Housing Federation, Shelter and House Builders Federation)

When the government announced its intention to abolish Regional Assemblies and replace them with smaller Leaders Forums populated by local government representatives, the regions responded very differently. Some Assemblies are still clinging on till the bitter end – but here in North West we accepted the message

and took the initiative to close the Assembly and transform the Executive Board into a new Leaders Forum. To the credit of the local government representatives, they made the case to Government to retain the engagement of business and other civic leaders and indeed, to enhance their role on the new Forum. That resulted in 3 additional posts being advertised and filled by Mike Blackburn from British Telecom, Michael Damms from Chamber of Commerce East Lancashire and me.

4NW retains the role of Regional Housing Board and the Regional Assembly responsibility for Planning and Transport until these are handed over to NWDA once the new legislation is in place. Its job then reverts to one of Regional Strategy and Scrutiny of NWDA

At my first meeting we had an update on how the current economic situation is impacting the North West and a presentation from the Strategic Health Authority, one of the few public services not linked to the regional architecture described above. The message was clear that the SHA understands the impact housing, the economy and the environment have on people's health and that health inequalities can only be redressed by joint work to tackle multiple deprivation.

The Forum also received updates

on the Regional Spatial Strategy, which was finally published on 30 September 2008 with a very limited partial review focussing on Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Show People.

The Regional Housing Strategy is also being refreshed and 4NW is working towards publication of an integrated regional strategy linking planning, transport, housing and the economy, to be published in 2010. 4 Northwest will: "make tough choices, broker political agreement and ensure evidenced prioritisation".

In the meantime, there was a brief debate on the need to stick to our long time goal of developing 38,000 new homes in the North West, but to recognise the impact of current housing market conditions, to take opportunities offered and to remember that the solution lies not just with new build but with renewal and regeneration.

I suspect that many local authorities have not yet grasped that the Housing Association 'Low Grant rates subsidised by Shared Ownership Sales Model' is broken and higher subsidies are needed to keep our social rented programme going. I'm sure we will return to this at future meetings.

The Cabinet on the move



Julie Gamble

National Housing Federation
Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Manager

across our major issues and asks and was supported by others echoing our concerns and findings. These included representatives from public health, social care, training and enterprise. Two young people were present, one from a single parent family living with grandparents and unable to access affordable housing. The other was suffering the effects of unemployment and the other struggling to pay the fuel bills.

worklessness, and more head teacher involvement in local leadership.

I flagged our concerns around proposals to end permanent tenancies as gaining employment could increase people's fear of losing their home. Health colleagues asked Government to consider allowing Primary Care Trusts to assist vulnerable people unable to pay heating bills with one off payments in extreme cases where they have presented with associated medical conditions. I raised our call for action on pre-payment meter customers paying more for their energy.

Gordon Brown took the main Q&A session, responding to calls for urgent intervention in the construction industry, recognising job losses and the impact on both private and social house building. Assurances were made not to cut budgets for local projects – recognising a vital lifeline to many communities. Calls for pressure on lenders for affordable mortgage finance and greater regulation was responded to positively.

The day was a fantastic experience. I took the opportunity to talk with Ministers directly and it felt like our concerns were heard and understood, and hopefully made a difference.

It was all a bit of a mystery! I received an invitation to attend a “cabinet meeting” at an undisclosed location on Friday 28 November. Although there were no more details available I was assured by the caller that it was “definitely worth attending!” From talking to other stakeholders I couldn't find anyone else who had been invited. It all became clearer on Friday when the top TV story was on an historic visit of the full Cabinet (only 2nd time outside London since the 1920's) to an undisclosed location in Leeds.

After security checks, I was directed to a table of around 8/10 people. We were assigned our Minister, Shaun Woodward MP and asked to share the issues our sectors faced in the current economic down turn, and what actions Government could take.

I grasped the opportunity to put

The makeup of our table confirmed the importance of our campaigns. A lively debate followed for about an hour, all points being recorded by Government Office Yorkshire and Humber. The Minister explored with us in detail any suggested interventions to grasp what change would be affected as a result of our suggestions, and promised to respond to us in due course.

We discussed at length concerns around Supporting People budgets post removal of ring fence, and how Individual Budgets may result in a potential loss of service providers. Another issue was increasing tensions in local communities as more people hit by redundancy then find their access to social housing limited. Small Businesses cashflow problems with increased cost of private lending was another hot topic. The college sector asked for funding flexibilities to respond to

Awards and Accolades

- **Cobalt Housing** in Liverpool has been awarded two stars with 'promising' prospects to improve in the future from the Audit Commission.
- **The Regenda Group's** regeneration housing development on Halifax Road, Hamer in Rochdale, won a "Silver International Green Apple Award for Environmental Best Practice and Sustainable Development"
- **Gentoo Ventures'** exciting conversion of one of Sunderland's most significant buildings has claimed a prestigious award. The Mowbray won the Best Residential Development category at the Journal Landmark Awards, which recognises projects which have improved the local area.
- **Incommunities** tenant Brenda Everett has received a top award for her inspiring work to help fellow residents and tenants. It's the second year running Brenda has won the Gerry Pickersgill Award for outstanding tenant involvement which is made annually by the Bradford District Federation of Tenants and Residents
- **Parkway Green Housing Trust (PGHT)** has marked its second birthday celebrations by completing its 6000th home improvement in West Wythenshawe. Connaught, who is working in partnership with PGHT to deliver kitchen and bathroom improvements to properties in the area, completed the 6000th home improvement for lucky resident Ms Ellis of Newall Green, Manchester.

Northern Voice - Are You Getting Your Copy?

The National Housing Federation in the North is the voice for over 360 not-for-profit, independent housing associations who provide affordable homes for almost one and a half million Northern people. Working with the support of our national organisation, we promote the work of northern housing associations and campaign in Parliament and with regional stakeholders for better housing and neighbourhoods.

Northern Voice is the regular newsletter, produced by the Federation for our members, stakeholders and partner organisations in the North of England.

If you have a news story or feature please contact Malcolm Struthers on 0161 848 8132 or malcolms@housing.org.uk.

Mailing List

Make sure you receive your copy of Northern Voice direct - to be added to the mailing list please contact Wendy Taylor on 0161 848 8132 or wendyt@housing.org.uk

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