

HELENA HEADLINES



Autumn 2004

CELEBRATING WITH COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Local residents and community groups in Moss Bank, St Helens came together in September to celebrate the official opening of their brand new neighbourhood office, a £700,000 investment in their local community and environment.

The new facility, built by Helena Housing, is home to a ground breaking initiative, bringing together Helena's local neighbourhood team as well as a Police access point and a meeting place for local community groups.

This innovative and environmentally friendly facility is built on the site of the former Kendal Drive flats, recently demolished by Helena Housing in response to local concerns that they were a vandal-hit eyesore and attracted nuisance. Helena Housing worked closely with local community groups as well as the Police to develop plans for a new base from which it could work together with its partners in the area to make a real difference to the estate.

This close partnership working is already paying dividends, particularly in tackling problems caused by nuisance and anti-social behaviour. Helena Housing's dedicated anti-nuisance team, working closely with the local tenants and residents groups, St Helens Council and the Police, has had some real successes in tackling the worst cases and bringing them to justice using new powers such as anti social behaviour orders. Alongside this, Helena's neighbourhood team has worked with local groups to tackle problems caused by underage drinking and the shops who sell alcohol to young people.



Chief Superintendent Andy Ward and Chairman of Helena Housing Nick Rushbrooke unveil the plaque to mark the opening of the office.

Rob Young, Chief Executive of Helena Housing, who attended the opening, said "Helena Housing is landlord to 1400 families in the Moss Bank area and is committed to working with them to make their neighbourhoods better and more peaceful places to live. We are determined to tackle anti social behaviour and nuisance on our estates. The new Moss Bank neighbourhood office is a symbol of this determination, and our commitment to working effectively with our partners in the community to achieve lasting solutions to local priorities."

Inspector John Vaudrey of Merseyside Police, whose team of ten officers is based at the new Police Access Point said "This exciting new development brings together the very agencies that can work to build effective communities. Being in the same location, and at the heart of one of the biggest estates in St Helens, makes communications easier and breaks down the barriers between the agencies and the communities they serve. It is our aim to build on this initiative to make Moss Bank one of the safest communities in the North West."



Young people from Moss Bank's Activate Project entertain guests at the launch

STOP PRESS!

Helena Housing is pleased to announce its sponsorship of the St Helens team in the Merseyside Youth Games 2005.

YES MINISTER

RepairsDirect
01744 637383



Housing Minister Keith Hill finds out how multi-skilling is improving the quality of Helena's repairs service.

Minister for Housing, Keith Hill, came to St Helens at the beginning of September in a visit organised and hosted by St Helens Council. The visit was a valuable opportunity for Helena Housing to build on its reputation and influence the national agenda for housing.

As well as taking a tour around the town, he called in on a pioneering project run by Helena Housing, a multi-skilling centre where tradespeople can learn new skills equipping them for a wider range of work. The scheme is already paying dividends, not only in increased efficiency but also in customer satisfaction. Repairs to tenants' homes are getting done quicker and satisfaction with the service is at an all time high. 150 operatives will attend the multi-skilling centre which has been set up in an empty property in the town. Their colleagues, including trade union representatives, are on hand to teach them the tricks of the trade.

As Geoff Dancer, Scheme Co-ordinator explains, the scheme benefits everyone concerned. "Our Building Services team carries out 50,000 repairs each year in the homes of 13,500 tenants. One of the frustrations with the service for both customers and employees was that often a job wasn't finished off until a second tradesperson could call. For example, a plumber would fit a new sink, but a plasterer would call later to finish off the work. Under the new way of working, a plumber is trained to carry out small plastering jobs so the work can be completed first time. The customer gets the repair done quicker, and the tradesperson gets a lot more job satisfaction."

The scheme is the result of an innovative partnership between Helena Housing and the three trade unions that represent its Building Services workforce. The partnership has had other benefits as well. A partnership forum meets regularly to highlight any problems and look for solutions. Many of the tradespeople were unhappy with the way the productivity bonus was calculated, so much so that now the partnership forum has agreed to move away from the bonus scheme and pay all tradespeople a fixed salary. This way of working is far removed from the traditional management/ union relationship that previously existed.

He spent time chatting to trade union representatives as well as trainees, telling them how impressed he was with the scheme and asking about the benefits to both customers and employees.



Keith Hill with tradespeople and managers from Building Services.

CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME

The information below is about Helena Housing's plans to become a charity and how it will affect you as a tenant. It explains the reasons why your landlord believes being a charity would be better for the company and for tenants. It also tells you about how you can have a say in the plans before any changes are made.

Why become a charity?

Most of the things Helena Housing does are things that a charity can do. We provide affordable homes for people who may not have the means to buy or rent a home privately, help people who are homeless and provide support to older or disabled people to help them live independently in their own home. Because of the sorts of things we do as a company, we can apply to be a charity and so reduce the amount of tax we have to pay. This will mean we have more money to spend on things that matter to you like improving your home and your estate or providing better services.

Why wasn't Helena Housing a charity from the start?

The company was set up in a way that would not limit what it could and couldn't do in the future. Charities do have some limits on what they can do. Two years later, we have a far better picture of how we want Helena Housing to develop and this is consistent with being a charity.

The amount of tax we will have to pay in the future is different to that initially predicted in the company's business plan because the rules have changed. This means that if we do not become a charity, we will have to pay up to £30 million more tax than we originally thought. We believe this money is better spent on our homes, our neighbourhoods and our services.

What are the benefits of becoming a charity?

The main advantage is that we can reduce the amount of tax we have to pay by up to £30 million. Apart from this, Helena Housing can also reduce the amount of other taxes it pays like VAT and business rates. We would be recognised as a charity and would be able to raise funds from other sources such as government grants.

Are there any disadvantages?

One disadvantage of being a charity is that we would be restricted in the type of activity we could carry out. For example, if we wanted to provide our repairs and maintenance service on behalf of another housing association, we would have to do this under a separate part of the organisation called a trading subsidiary. We would pay tax as normal on any money we made doing this kind of work.

Is it usual for housing associations to be charities?

Yes, many traditional housing associations have always been charities. Many other newer organisations like ours are considering applying because of the advantages outlined in this leaflet.

How will this affect the way Helena Housing is organised?

All the work we do for tenants will continue to be done by Helena Housing. There will be no change to the way we organise the work we do on your home or the services we provide because of the change to a charity. Any work we do for other people or organisations which we get paid for will be done by the trading subsidiary which is a separate part of the same organisation. The management board and organisation's structure will stay the same. We may create a separate board to manage the trading subsidiary.

Who will regulate the charity?

You may know that charities in the UK are registered with the Charities Commission, and to become a charity we will need to meet their requirements. We will still be a registered social landlord (RSL) and as such will continue to be regulated by the Housing Corporation.

When will the changes be made?

Once the Board has listened to the views of tenants about the changes we will ask the Housing Corporation and Charities Commission to approve our application for charitable status. If granted, we will become a charity in about six months time.

Will the employees of Helena Housing be affected?

No, they will continue to be employed by Helena Housing and will keep the same terms and conditions they have now.

Will tenants be affected?

The services you receive, your rights as a tenant, the way you can get involved through local tenants and residents associations and the tenant members of our board will all remain the same. The main benefit of becoming a charity is that we will save money on tax which will mean we can do more to improve homes and services.

Have your say

We want to hear your views about whether Helena Housing should become a charity or not. Here's how you can get involved:

- Read this leaflet carefully so you understand why Helena Housing wants to become a charity.
- Come along to your local area committee to find out more and talk to us about any concerns or questions you may have.
- Phone the number below and record your question or concern on our hotline. If you want us to reply, don't forget to leave your name and number.
- E-mail us at the address below to give us your views or ask a question.
- Write to us at the address below.

Please get in touch. Your views will help us to make the right decision for Helena Housing and our tenants.

You can come along to one of our area committees:

Thursday 7th October – 6.30pm
Leaf Centre, Cannon Street, Clock Face

Monday 11th October – 6.30pm
St David's Church, Eskdale Avenue, Moss Bank

Wednesday 13th October – 6.30pm
St Patrick's Church Social Club, Marian Avenue,
Newton-le-Willows

Thursday 21st October – 6.30pm
The Citadel, Waterloo Street, St Helens town centre

Or you can telephone, text, email or write to us:

Rob Young, Chief Executive, Helena Housing, Alexandra Park,
Prescot Road, St Helens, WA10 3TT

Tel: 01744 675701

Email: yourviews@helenahousing.co.uk

Text: 07795266366

TENANTS SATISFACTION SURVEY

This summer we carried out a full tenants' satisfaction survey and were delighted to get a response of 26%. This survey told us that 74% of our tenants are either satisfied or very satisfied with the services we provide. Only 9.8% were dissatisfied. Tenants who completed the survey were entered into a prize draw. Congratulations to Mrs Skura of Trapwood Close, Eccleston, who won a TV and video and Mr and Mrs Collet of Maple Avenue, Newton-le-Willows, who won Argos vouchers to the value of £250.



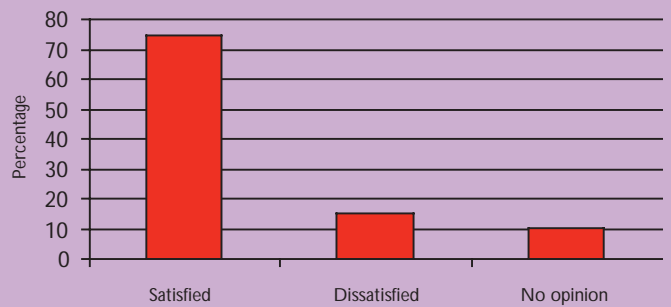
Left to right - Area Manager Tom Bate and Neighbourhood Officer Ceri Kilmartin with Mr & Mrs Collet



Neighbourhood Officer Colin Ross with Mrs Skura

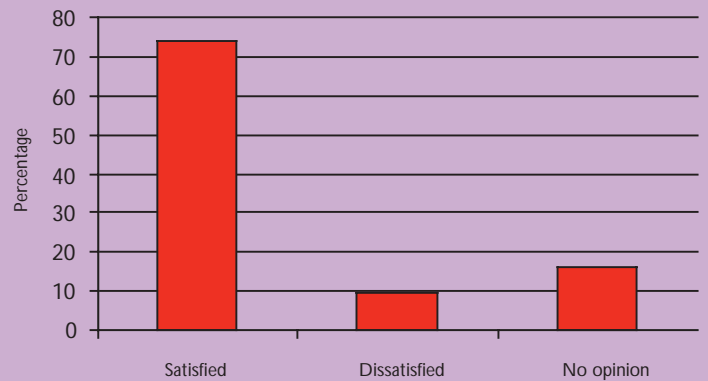
HOW SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED ARE YOU WITH YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD AS A PLACE TO LIVE?

Overall satisfaction with neighbourhoods is high at 74.5% and the results show that most customers feel that Helena Housing has had a positive impact on where they live. The areas of concern identified are litter and rubbish, vandalism, drug dealing and stray dogs. The results show that most customers do not think there are serious problems in their neighbourhood.



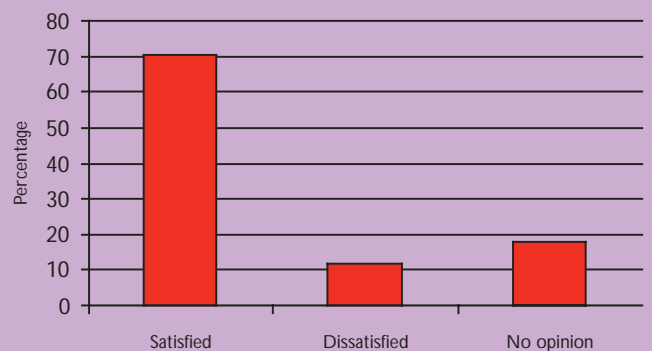
LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE OVERALL SERVICE

73.9% of customers are satisfied with the overall service offered by Helena Housing. The percentage of people who aren't satisfied has gone down by 5% since the last survey of tenants which was carried out in 2000. Responses from tenants from black and ethnic minorities and those with a disability show a higher level of satisfaction.



SATISFACTION WITH REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

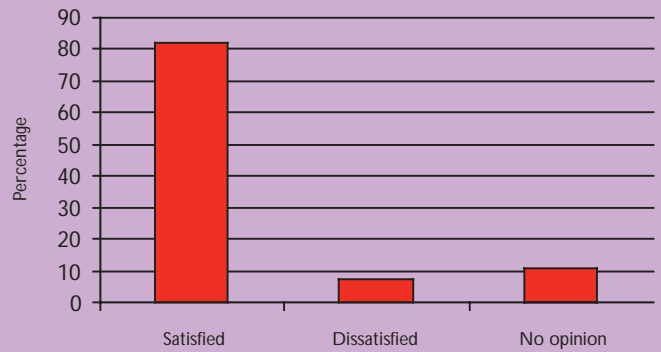
70.4% of customers are satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service. We are delighted that the percentage of people who are dissatisfied has gone down from 22.2% in 2000 to 11.9%. Customers rated the attitude of workers, the speed of the work being completed and the overall quality of the repairs as the most important factors. The way repairs are reported and handled has changed this year since Repairs Direct was launched. This has had a very positive impact on our performance.



HOW SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED WITH YOUR ACCOMMODATION

81.8% of customers are satisfied with their home.

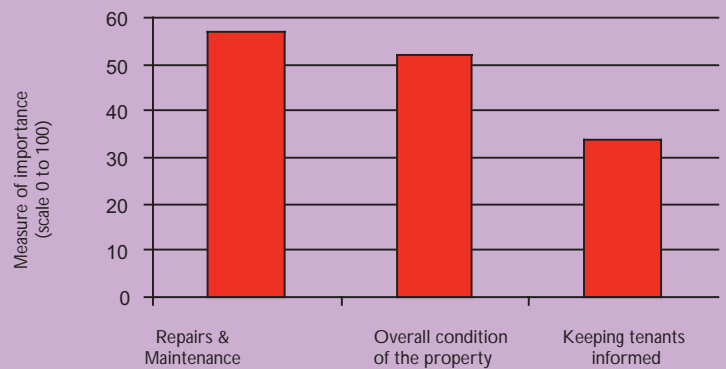
Again this confirms that there is an overall positive attitude and positive opinion towards Helena Housing.



THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS TO TENANTS

Repairs and maintenance, the overall condition of your home and keeping you, our customers informed, are the three most important aspects of our service, according to the results from the survey.

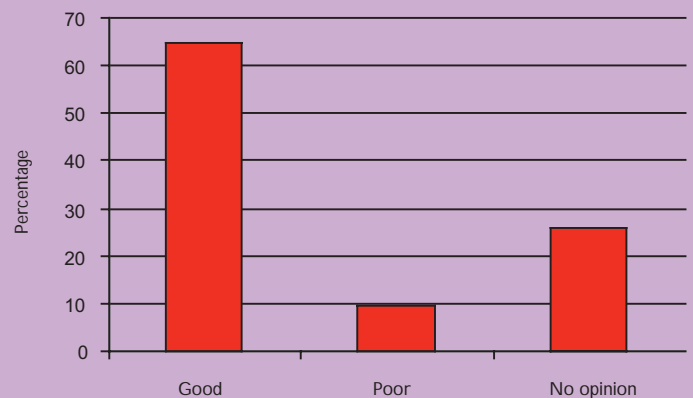
The high levels of satisfaction with all three confirms that we are focusing on the things that are important to you.



VALUE FOR MONEY

0.7% of tenants think that value for money is in their top three of important considerations.

64.7% of those who responded think that the rent they pay represents good value for money.



HOW WELL ARE YOU KEPT INFORMED?

A massive 81.5% of customers feel that they are kept well informed about the things that may affect you as a tenant. There is also strong evidence which suggests that the information you receive from Helena Housing is clear and easy to understand.

This newsletter is just one way in which we aim to keep you informed of our services.



SAYING THANK YOU TO THE COMMUNITY

Representatives from almost 40 community organisations attended Helena Housing's first Community Fund Awards volunteers' event at the Hilton Hotel in July.

Helena Housing launched its Community Fund in Spring 2003 to provide funding for local community groups and activities that directly benefit Helena Housing tenants and surrounding neighbourhoods.

Groups are asked to complete an application form as part of their bid. These bids are then reviewed quarterly by a panel made up of tenants and Helena Housing staff.

Within the first 12 months of the Community Fund being launched, £20,000 has been split between 48 community groups who bid for funding. We are pleased to announce that this amount has been increased to £24,000 for the coming year.

The event at the Hilton was an opportunity for the people who have benefited from the Community Fund to come together, celebrate the work that has taken place and be thanked by Helena Housing for the contribution they have made to their own community.

We received many positive comments from people who attended the event including one tenant from Downall Green who said: "Full marks to "the team." With a big turnout the organisation was very good and the event went very smoothly."

The group profiles that follow demonstrate how the funding is used in very unique ways.



Representative from St. Theresa's with Cllr Leon McGuire

Carouselles Morris Dancers who are based in Blackbrook used the funding for a presentation evening designed to reward the dancers, share their work with the local community and to teach the dancers respect for their peers. St Theresa's Primary School in Queens Park wanted to fund a litter awareness campaign and make pupils more aware of environmentally friendly issues. With the help of community funding they bought litter bins in the shape of frogs for the school's playground.

The annual Four Acre TRA gardening competition which encourages tenants on the estate in Clock Face to take care of and pride in their gardens and the overall appearance of the estate was again supported through Helena's community fund. The Clock Face Miners AFC used their funding towards a family



Representatives from Four Acre TRA with Cllr Richard McCauley



Representatives from CETRAN with Cllr Richard McCauley

fun day designed to involve the local community in a variety of different sports and health related activities.

In the Newton area CETRAN funded a children's trip to Southport with and FETRA funded a Christmas party. Both events brought together people from a variety of backgrounds, some of whom might not have been able to take part in events such as these without the help of the community fund.

Carr Mill FC has brought together youngsters from the estate by setting up this new team and buying a brand new kit whereas St Aidens School in Billinge needed extra funds towards a roof to replace a leaking one.

As you can see a grant from our Community Fund can go a long way to help individuals and communities. If you are a community group or tenants' and residents' group in St Helens and are not profit making then you will probably be eligible to apply.



Representative from St. Aidens with Cllr Leon McGuire

To apply for a grant in the next round of bids contact the Regeneration and Community Initiatives team on 01744 675678.

St.Helens Hate Crime Partnership
TACKLING HATE CRIME

WHY DON'T WE STOP RACISM NOW

Racist Incident Hotline 0800 138 1688
Homophobic Incident Shoutline 0800 328 2244
Police Contact Number 0151 709 6010

St.Helens Hate Crime Partnership - Report on-line at www.sthelens.gov.uk

Different people, one community

What does equality and diversity mean to you?

It means that we want to make sure everyone is treated fairly and has the same opportunity to use our services. It also means that we recognise everyone is not the same and that these differences, whether because of race, religion, sexuality, disability or gender, add value to our lives and our communities.

In practice this means we will:

- treat everyone with dignity and respect
- promote diversity and cohesive communities
- take action on harassment
- consult with our diverse communities about their needs
- provide services that are accessible and meet those diverse needs
- make sure our contractors and suppliers promote equality and diversity
- be open and accountable in the way we provide services and not discriminate against anyone

You should let us know if you feel you have been treated unfairly or have suffered discrimination, prejudice or harassment because of race, gender, religion, sexuality or disability. You can do this by speaking to your local neighbourhood officer or manager. If you want to find out more about our approach to equality and diversity or dealing with harassment and nuisance behaviour, please ask for one of our leaflets.

Quality Homes. Quality Services. Quality Communities

WELFARE RIGHTS...ARE YOU MISSING OUT?

The specialist rents teams that were set up earlier this year are making great progress in tackling rent arrears.

Another specialism of the team is welfare advice and some of our tenants have already benefited from their expertise. One elderly lady who moved into a Helena property earlier this year had less than £10 a week to live off after she had paid her rent. Our welfare benefits adviser carried out a full assessment of her circumstances and found that she was entitled to claim full housing benefit, council tax benefit and a weekly pension credit allowance.

If you think you might be entitled to new or additional benefits or if you are having problems paying your rent call the number below that covers the area you live in or email: rents@helenahousing.co.uk

Ashtons Green	01744-671428
Billinge	01744-675007
Blackbrook	01744-671428
Chester Lane	01744-671426
Derbyshire Hill	01744-671499
Eccleston	01744-675009
Fingerpost	01744-675011
Hard Lane	01744-675014
Haresfinch	01744-675014
Haydock	01744-675013
	01744-675011
Moss Bank	01744-675007
Newton East	01744-675008

Newton West	01744-675012
North Ashton	01744-675013
Parr	01744-671405
Peasley Cross	01744-671405
Rainford	01744-675009
Rainhill	01744-671424
Springfield	01744-675013
Sutton Heath	01744-671424
	01744-671498
Sutton	01744-671427
Thatto Heath	01744-671498
Town Centre	01744-675009
	01744-675014
Windlehurst	01744-675014

TENANT BOARD MEMBER ELECTIONS



Joe Andrews



Marcelline Regan



Keith Aspinall

Earlier this year tenants were sent information through about Tenant board member elections and given the chance to stand for election, nominate somebody else as a candidate or vote in the elections which were at the World of Glass. Tenant board members make up one third of our management board and exist to make sure that the views of tenants are listened to when decisions about homes and neighbourhoods are made. Tenant board members are elected for three years. After that they must stand down, although they can stand for re-election if they wish. We are pleased to confirm that Marcelline Regan and Joe Andrews were re-elected to the board of management and would like to welcome Keith Aspinall, a brand new tenant board member.

Keith, who lives in Rainford, works at Warrington Hospital. In the past he has served as an elected parish councillor on Rainford Parish Council and is currently a governor on the board of two local schools.

GAINING SOME GROUND

Some time ago contractors were asked to tender for Helena's Grounds Maintenance contract. Customers were involved in this process and eventually a new contractor, Glendale, took over the contract this April.

After a slow start with spells of very wet and humid weather causing delays and leading to excessive growth, we are pleased to say that grass cutting around our estates is coming back under control.

We are putting plans in place to ensure that we get off to a good start next year. Over the winter period catch up work will take place covering issues such as shrub beds, weed killing and the mulching of planting beds at sheltered housing schemes.

We are working very closely with our contractors Glendale to ensure that we make full use of the grounds maintenance budget and to provide a quality service.

Our priority after the above programme works during the winter will be to ensure that we get a flying start in the new growing season and that everyone is working together to tackle the challenges. For more information or to make a comment on the grounds maintenance service contact your neighbourhood officer.

LOOKING FOR ADVICE?

A brand new website has been launched by the St Helens Community Legal Services Partnership and is packed with information on legal and advice services in the local area. Find out more by logging on to www.advicesthelens.net

YAHOO... WE'LL SOON BE ON THE WEB

This December sees the launch of www.helenahousing.co.uk. Our website will be full of information on our history, services and contacts and latest news and views. Customers will be able to express their views online, look at the company's plans for the future and even find out what it's like to work for Helena Housing. Tenants had their first glimpse of the site at our Tenants' Conference and will get involved in the testing process to ensure that our site is accessible, clear and easy to use. We'll tell you more about the website in the winter edition of Helena Headlines and you'll be able to log on before Christmas.



CONTACTS

For general enquiries about Helena Housing call: 01744 675555 or email: enquiries@helenahousing.co.uk

Neighbourhood Offices:

Derbyshire Hill	01744 677000
Moss Bank	01744 677050
Newton	01744 677900
Sutton Fold	01744 671400
Duke Street	01744 675667
Thatto Heath	01744 677125

To report a repair call Repairs Direct on: 01744 637383.

You can email non emergency repairs to: repairs@helenahousing.co.uk

If you would like a copy of this newsletter in larger print, another language or on audio tape please contact:

Caroline Tubb, PR & Marketing Officer

Tel: 01744 675708 Email: caroline.tubb@helenahousing.co.uk