



Forward together

Moving **forward together** as one, stronger organisation

Issue 4, August 2011

Welcome to the fourth newsletter keeping you up to date with the changes going on to bring together all the organisations in Somer Housing Group. As reported in the last issue, the boards who run Redland, Shape and Somer Community Housing Trust have all voted to join together and start working as one organisation.

If these changes are all news to you, or you just want a quick reminder of what is happening, have a quick look at the 'at a glance' box'. Page 2 has news of some important work that residents are leading on to bring you consistent opportunities to get involved in the running of Somer Housing Group.

We also explain why good 'governance' is good for you and why boards shouldn't be boring!

I have also answered some more of your questions about these changes on page 3. Please do keep them coming in – our contact details and a feedback form are on the back page.



Victor da Cunha
Chief Executive, Somer Housing Group

At a glance

What's happening?

- » The organisations in Somer Housing Group (Redland, Shape and Somer Community Housing Trust) have agreed to join together and to have one Combined Board.
- » These changes will not have any effect on what we charge for our homes. Ownership of your home will remain within Somer Housing Group – as it is right now.
- » It's business as usual despite these changes. Providing you with the high-quality services you need remains our top priority.
- » Although we are reducing from four boards down to one, the ways you can get involved in the running of your organisation will not be weakened.

And why?

- » These changes will help us to become more efficient, more effective and to give you better services for better value for money.
- » We will be able to reduce duplication and plan for the best interests of all of our customers.
- » Decision-making will be quicker so we will be more responsive.
- » We will be able to think about all of our customers at the same time.
- » We will be able to respond better to a tougher housing environment which faces big cuts in government funding.

Board matters

Running a good business for you

We exist for you, our residents, and making sure that you have a genuine say in the way your organisation is run is vital. Here we take a look at why having an effective board really matters for you, and we have news of some work looking at other ways you can get involved in the running of Somer Housing Group...

Boards and what is called 'governance' (how an organisation is run) can be a bit of a turn-off. But getting governance right is incredibly important, as new Group Chair Roger Thomas explains: "Having a strong and effective board is vital for the business and, ultimately, for you, our residents."

"Your board is responsible for making sure that we are run properly, and must take big decisions that will affect what we do and how we do it. It is essential that the board does its job properly – getting a big decision wrong or allowing us to overspend could have serious consequences on the services that we provide for you."

The new Combined Board will have four residents on it. We are putting a lot of effort into making sure that the board represents your best interests and runs your organisation effectively.

We are recruiting to the new board now and are set to have a strong group of board members in place by October 2011. We are still looking to fill a position on the Board for a Trust tenant – details have been sent to every Trust resident.

Giving you more ways to get involved

In the last issue we talked about the other ways that residents are being involved in these changes.

Since then we have made good progress on an important piece of work which is looking at all the ways you can get involved in the running of your organisation.

Today there are many different groups, committees and panels across Somer Housing Group. Some only represent Redland, some only Somer, and many are looking at very similar issues at the same time.

As we increasingly work as one organisation it makes sense to bring together many of these groups. But as we do that, we want to increase, not reduce the opportunities they give you to get involved.

Residents are taking the lead on this important work. There are 10



What happens next?

The timeline on the right shows you the important milestones.



June 2011
All boards officially agree changes.

July-Oct 2011
Planning new framework for resident involvement.



Ask Victor...



Thanks for all the comments and questions that you have been sending in about these changes. Here Somer Housing Group Chief Executive, **Victor da Cunha**, answers some more of your questions.

The last issue of this newsletter said that rents would not go up because of these changes. But what about home-owners? Could there be any changes to charges for people who have bought their homes?

“Service charges will not go up because of these changes. If anything we ought to be able to bring some charges down for leaseholders. That’s because we will be looking at how we can get a better deal from suppliers by pooling our buying power as one organisation.”

Will Shape [our specialist supported housing charity] be swallowed up by these changes? What will happen to the vital supported housing services that Shape provides to young homeless people?

“The Group already provides a wide range of supported housing services, from support for older people to homelessness prevention work. Shape, like other members of the Group, does a great job in delivering such important local services. In a world where public spending is being cut and demand for support, homelessness prevention and personal care is increasing, we need to ensure that the Group is well placed to remain able to play its part, helping local people sustain independent lives. This is just one of the important areas the Board will need to think about in the next few months.”

residents on the project group working with a team of four staff members. It’s early days but the group has met already and is planning some events for the summer with existing resident groups like Somer and Redland’s Residents’ Committees. After that the group will be ready to put their ideas to residents more widely.

Watch this space!

Thanks...

In the last issue of this newsletter we asked you to let us have your views and comments about these changes. We have had a good number of replies – so thanks to everyone who got in touch.

Questions ranged from issues relating to customer services to requests for help with individual problems. We are replying to everyone who asked us questions and we have published a summary of these and other frequently-asked questions at somerhousinggroup.co.uk/forwardtogether. We can also send you a copy – our contact details are overleaf.

» Any questions? Please get in touch – turn to the back page for details.

Aug-Sept 2011
Recruit Trust Tenant Board Member.

Sept 2011
Annual general meetings appoint board members.

Oct 2011
New Combined Board meets for the first time.

May 2012
Residents’ conference on future strategy.

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Please ask us if you would like this newsletter in large print, audio or another language.

Arabic

إذا كانت لغتك الأصلية ليست الإنجليزية وكننت بحاجة الى ترجمة فانه بإمكاننا ان نوفرها لك

Bengali

ইংরেজী যদি আপনার মাতৃভাষা না হয় এবং আপনার একটি অনুবাদের প্রয়োজন হয় তবে আমরা আপনার জন্য তা সরবরাহ করতে পারবো।

Chinese

如果你主要说用的语言不是英语而需要翻译服务，我们能够给你安排。

Hindi

यदि अंग्रेज़ी आपकी प्रथम भाषा नहीं है और आपको अनुवाद चाहिये, तो हम आपके लिए ला सकते हैं।

Italian

Se l'inglese non è la vostra lingua e avete bisogno di una traduzione, possiamo procurarvene una.

Polish

Osobom nie znającym języka angielskiego możemy zapewnić tłumaczenie.

Somali

Haddii aanu af Ingiriisigu ahayn luqad-daada kowaad oo aad u baahan-tahay turjumid, anaga ayaa mid kuu heli karayna.

Spanish

Si el Ingles no es tu lengua materna y necesitas una traduccion, nosotros te lo podemos traducir.

Thai

หากภาษาอังกฤษไม่ใช่ภาษาแรกของท่านพูดและท่านต้องการให้แปล เป็นภาษาอื่น เราสามารถจัดบริการให้ท่านได้

Urdu

اگر انگریزی آپ کی زبان نہیں ہے اور آپ کو ترجمہ درکار ہے تو ہم آپ کے لیے اس کا بندوبست کریں گے۔



Please get in touch...

Do you have any questions or comments about these changes? Please get in touch by email or phone (see above), or by sending this tear-off slip back to us using the freepost address above.

Your comments: _____

If you would like a reply, please leave your name and a way that we can contact you:

First name: _____ Last name: _____ Mr Mrs Ms Other: _____

Address (including post code): _____

Email: _____ Telephone: _____