



Farewell
Neighbourhood
Life

Neighbourhood Life

Spring 2019



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Hello

and welcome to this final edition of Neighbourhood Life as you know it!

We're making the move to a digital newsletter so you'll get your next edition straight to your inbox.

We've decided to go digital for a number of reasons. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly it will save us over £30,000 a year on postage costs! We can put these savings towards improving our wider services to you. Secondly it will allow us to provide you with more timely and meaningful news and information. And thirdly, it's very much linked to our strategic objective of delivering a first class customer service.

Our investment in digital goes beyond the newsletter. We're making significant investments in all our IT systems so we can deliver a better and modernised service that's more in line with how you expect to access the other important services in your life, like banking and shopping. It will allow us to be more responsive and help us to communicate more effectively with you.

Keeping up with changes in technology is not the only thing we need to be ready to respond to. Government policy changes also have an impact on the way we work. Recently we decided to look into the effects of government policy and the current economic climate on housing associations' ability to build social rented housing. A common argument runs that associations have become too commercial, building too many homes for sale, making excessive surpluses, paying their executives

too much, and failing to focus on their original social purpose of providing homes for people who cannot afford the market. We wanted to set the record straight.

You can read a summary of the findings on page three but the thing that stood out most for me was that our average cost to build each home has increased 42% or by £85,000 to £285,000 per home in less than ten years. A decade ago we received over 51% of the cost of each home we built in government grant, compared to less than 12% today. No wonder housing associations have had to be more creative in funding their social objectives.

Ultimately though, we're pleased to see housing moving up the government's agenda recently and especially that they're beginning to invest more in building new social rented homes.

We're determined to keep playing a more prominent role in the housing debate, building our influence and doing all we can to meet the housing crisis in London and the Home Counties over the coming years.

I hope you enjoy reading this final edition of the printed newsletter, and that you'll get even more out of the digital edition.

Best wishes

Helen Evans
Chief Executive

Audio, Braille, large print and translation services

We can provide any section of this document to you on audio CD, in Braille or in large print. Sometimes, we can also help with translations into other languages. If you require these services please contact Customer Services on **0300 373 3000**.

Staff sleep outside to raise nearly £2,000 for the homeless

Eight Network staff took part in the Big Sleep Out at Hillingdon Athletics Track in November to raise nearly £2,000 for homelessness charities.

They joined over 300 people, including DJ Brandon Block, to take part in the event to experience what street homelessness might be like. Flat-pack boxes, flasks and layers of clothes were all they had to protect themselves from the elements as they spent a night under the stars.



The cash raised will go to the charity Slough Homeless Our Concern (SHOC) and Hillingdon based Trinity Homelessness Projects which provide services to help tackle homelessness in their surrounding areas.



Why are housing associations not building more social rented homes?

It's a question that gets asked a lot in the public debate around housing. So we decided to look into it more closely and put the record straight on a number of myths that housing associations have become too commercial, make excessive surpluses, and are failing to deliver adequately on their social purpose.

It's true that in the past, housing association didn't make the large surpluses they do today and most of the homes they built were for social rent. But it's important to look at how changes in government priorities have had an impact.

Grant cuts

Until relatively recently, new social housing was largely funded by central government grant – as much as 75% of the total cost of building each home in the 1990s.

Fast forward to 2010 when the coalition government was elected with a clear mandate to tackle the deficit, and grant was slashed by 60%. This left housing associations with as little as 15% of the total cost of building a new home. But even this was only available for the new affordable rent product introduced by government (a maximum of 80% of market rent), rather than traditional social rent homes (which are around 50% of market rents).

What's more, the little grant that was available could only be received once a project was completed.

Tough choices

The impacts of this were far reaching and forced housing associations to make some tough choices. How do we best deliver on our social purpose when money is limited?

Clearly we would need to find creative ways to carry on providing affordable homes, which is why many associations took a more commercial approach – developing new homes for sale and using the profits to subsidise the cost of affordable rented homes, to continue delivering our social objectives.

A stark reality

To shed a bit more light on the situations we took a close look at seven schemes we delivered ten years ago in London and Hertford, and seven schemes we're delivering now.

Here's what we found:

- ▶ Because of increases in land and construction costs, building a home costs £285,000 today compared to £200,495 ten years ago – a 42% increase. RPI inflation over the same period was 27%.
- ▶ Grants for affordable homes built between 2008-2011 covered 51% of the cost of each home. Today grants cover 12%.
- ▶ We need to find on average around £250,000 per affordable home ourselves. We do this through a mix of borrowing, drawing on our reserves, and selling homes.
- ▶ It would cost £500m to convert the 3,000 homes we're planning to build over the next few years to social rent.

That last point is worth repeating. To convert all the homes we're planning to build to social rent, it would cost us half a billion pounds.

With no sales revenue to help, most of this would have to come from new loans. But housing associations can only increase borrowing within

the limits agreed with lenders. Borrowing so much, so fast would test those limits to the extreme. The Regulator of Social Housing would also ask serious questions.

Why we make surpluses

In the last three years we've made surpluses of £251m. We've already reinvested £232m of it back into new homes. The rest will be spent on services for you, maintaining our existing homes, upgrading IT infrastructure, and building more new homes in future. We've also already increased our borrowings since 2014 by 29% to more than £800m.

So in reality it's not possible for us to turn on the social rent taps at volume without huge additional government investment. And given the big increases in the costs of building – like land and construction prices – even significant extra grant funding would struggle to do the job on its own.

So what are the options?

We believe housing associations need to get more creative in financing development, including making better use of partnerships with each other and local authorities.

And government needs to look closely at land. If we want our rents – and house prices – to be more affordable, housing associations need access to land at a much lower cost.

Our report has kick started a big debate in the sector and we hope it will be at the heart of future government policy on housing.

Want to read more? Download the full report 'Why aren't housing associations building more social rented homes' at www.networkhomes.org.uk.

Bircherley Court residents raise money to help send aspiring basketball player to the World Para Athletics Grand Prix 2019

Residents at Bircherley Court in Hertford decided to do something exceptional for one of their special cooks, Adam. They held a fundraising cake sale to raise nearly £300 to help get him to the World Para Athletics Grand Prix in Dubai so he could compete with his team mates in the basketball competition.

Adam is a member of the Special Cooks Club. This is a group of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities who visit Bircherley Court, one of our Flexicare schemes, once a week to cook residents a two-course lunch for as little as £4 per person. Not only do residents get a healthy, nutritious meal, but the young people get the opportunity to improve their social skills, learn new practical skills and

develop their independence.

During their lunches, residents get to know the cooks. They were especially intrigued to hear about Adam's passion for basketball and determination to compete at a professional level. As competitors have to raise their own funds to participate in the tournament, residents were keen to help Adam reach the required £2,500 target. They decided to hold a cake sale with some residents going one step further and pledging a donation directly to the fund. Annie Vaughan, Flexicare Manager, said: "It was nice to see them work together to raise funds for this fantastic cause. They're so proud they were able to make a difference by helping him achieve his goal."

The Special Cooks Club went on to hold further fundraising events that helped raise the full amount needed to send Adam to the competition. **Well done Adam!**



Breakfast with friends at Beldanes Lodge



Every week, residents at Beldanes Lodge and Pavitt Court in Willesden, London, come together to enjoy a hearty meal and morning activities at their very own breakfast club.

This tenant led club, which is held on Wednesdays from 9am to 12.30pm at Beldanes Lodge, is a great opportunity for the residents to socialise with their neighbours, friends and family.

The breakfast club was initially set up three years ago with one resident doing all of the cooking, but in the last 18 months, more people have been attending. They now have three dedicated cooks who serve the food and clear up afterwards. Residents get to

enjoy a traditional full English or continental breakfast and on special occasions they get to try something different. For example, at Christmas and Easter the menu opens up to include eggs benedict and ackee and saltfish (a traditional Jamaican breakfast dish).

What's also great about the club is the activities they put on for residents. They've had arts and crafts, baking and Young at Hearts choir rehearsals. Not everyone who attends may want breakfast but are welcome to come along to socialise with and meet other people or find out what's going on in their local area.

Long may breakfast club continue!

Pinehurst Estate gets a mini makeover



Things are looking good on Pinehurst Estate in Hertford, after residents got together to brighten up their community with a newly painted mural. The mural was installed and revealed at a launch event held last autumn.

Following a suggestion from a resident on the estate who wanted to improve their local community, our Hertford neighbourhood team set out to make something positive happen. They teamed up with Broxbourne & East Herts Community Voluntary Service and Courtyard Arts to hold a

consultation with the residents on the estate to find out what local improvements they would like to see. The consultation results showed an overall support for us to put up a new mural created by them.

Sue Morter from Courtyard Arts based in Hertford, created the design for the mural which has a golfing theme and recognises the street names on the Pinehurst Estate. She also included, in the design, parts of a photograph taken at the Queen's Silver Jubilee street party held on the estate in 1977.



Thanks to Cllr Andrew Stevenson, we received funding from the Locality Budget to do the project. Residents spent a week over the summer holiday painting the mural which was then installed by our local contractor MCP. Dione Somerville, Neighbourhood Team Leader, said: "This is a great example of collaboration with local agencies and residents in the local community to deliver something positive to brighten up our estates. Our thanks go to everyone who contributed in making this such a success."

Keep up to date and in the know

Did you know that Network Homes is on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram? If you want to receive all of the latest information from us, then it's time you start to follow us!

As you know, this is the last issue of Neighbourhood Life which we're replacing with the brand new email newsletter (see back page). You'll no longer receive a printed copy of the newsletter therefore it's even more important that you not only sign up to receive the email newsletter, but that you also follow us on social media. We regularly promote local

community events, ways you can get involved, job vacancies and information about our services on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Following us will ensure you don't miss out. You'll also find out about some of the fantastic work we do in the community such as our fundraising events for our chosen charity St Mungo's.

Don't forget, social media is also a great way for you to get in touch with us too. You can direct message us on Facebook and our dedicated customer service Twitter account, [asknetworkhomes](https://twitter.com/asknetworkhomes), which we

recently set up just for you. Of course, you can also contact us in the usual ways: by post, email and phone.

So what's stopping you? Don't be shy, follow us today and say hi!

 www.twitter.com/networkhomesuk

 Customer service - www.twitter.com/asknetworkhomes

 www.facebook.com/networkhomesuk

 www.instagram.com/networkhomes

Publishing Fire Risk Assessments

We've started to publish Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) for our high-rise buildings on our website.

What is an FRA?

An FRA is an inspection of our buildings with a communal area. The purpose of an FRA is to help us understand what the potential risks may be and to ensure that we can take the necessary actions to keep you safe in your home.

Why do we do an FRA? And why are we publishing them?

As a registered provider of social housing, it is a legal requirement

that we do an FRA to any building that has a communal area.

In 2018, the Hackitt Report was published looking into building regulations and fire safety following the Grenfell Tower fire. The Social Housing Green Paper was also published in 2018, which called for increased transparency in the social housing sector.

We're committing to making our business more transparent, so are publishing our FRAs. We've published these set of FRAs first due to the size of the building and we'll continue publishing more FRAs, on our website.

Who does the FRA?

We employ an experienced, qualified, independent specialist to carry out the inspections. They produce a report (the FRA) with the information they have gathered and a number of recommendations for us to do. We then create a plan to carry out the recommendations to improve the safety of your home.

Where can I find the FRAs?

You can view the FRAs at www.networkhomes.org.uk/ fireriskassessments.

Keeping you safe from fire

We take fire safety seriously and we regularly carry out risk assessments on our properties.

Over the next six months we're going to be replacing any fire doors that aren't fully compliant with the latest regulations.

If your door needs to be replaced, our specialist contractors will contact you. If you have any special requests like adaptations, we will consider these, but we may ask

you to provide an occupational therapist's report to make sure the right adjustment is made.

It's important you let our contractors carry out this work to keep you safe from fire. As a last resort we may take legal action if you don't let us replace your fire door.

Please contact our Fire Safety Team on **0300 373 3000** if you have any questions.



Look out for your annual rent change letter

From 1 April, your rent and service charge will change. We have sent you a letter about this so it's important you read it.

As you may remember the Government announced that registered providers of social housing in England had to reduce social housing rents by 1% a year for four years from 1 April 2016. Although this does not apply to service charge, and some tenancy types were excluded, it's important to check what your new rent charge will be as you may need to pay more or less than you currently do.

What to do if the amount you have to pay has changed?

If you receive:

- ▶ **Housing benefit** - It's your responsibility to let your local authority's housing benefit team know about your new rent and service charge. Please report the changes as soon as possible as your housing benefit team can only back date your claim for one month.
- ▶ **Universal Credit** - You'll need to report that your rent and service charge has changed using your online Universal Credit account. Please report the changes as soon as possible as your claim can only be back dated by one month.

If you pay your rent by:

- ▶ **Direct Debit** - We'll adjust your Direct Debit to take account of any rent and service charge increase or decrease.
- ▶ **Standing order** - You'll need to amend your standing order with your bank.

What to do if you have not received a letter?

If you have not received the letter from us about your rent and service charge by 31 March 2019, please contact our Income Team on **0300 373 3000** or send us an email to **income@networkhomes.org.uk**.

The latest updates about Universal Credit

Universal Credit has been in the news again recently with a number of changes and updates. We've listed some key changes below:

- ▶ Anyone who currently receives a Severe Disability Premium (SDP) within their current benefits can no longer make a new claim for Universal Credit. People with an SDP will move to Universal Credit as part of a managed migration process. This is to ensure people who receive an SDP are not worse off on Universal Credit and can benefit from transitional protection payments.
- ▶ A plan to extend the 'two child limit' has been scrapped but it still impacts any third or subsequent child born after April 2017 as it currently does under Child Tax Credit. Since 1 February 2019, families with more than two children who make new claims for Universal Credit can no longer claim Child Tax Credit instead.
- ▶ The phased introduction of Universal Credit has been pushed back again. The rolling out of the full digital service of Universal Credit to all areas of the country was completed on 12 December 2018 for new claims or for people having to make a new claim due to a change of circumstance. The plan is to start transferring some people from the existing benefits or tax credits onto Universal Credit from July 2019.
- ▶ From 16 May, couples where one partner is aged above Pension Credit age and the other is aged under Pension Credit age will no longer be able to make a new

claim for Pension Credit. Instead they will have to claim Universal Credit. Mixed aged couples on Pension Credit can continue to remain on Pension Credit as long as they continue to satisfy the Pension Credit rules.

If you have any questions about Universal Credit or any other benefits, please contact our Welfare Benefits Advice team on **0300 373 3000** or email them at **customerservice@networkhomes.org.uk**.

UC Universal Credit

Don't forget there are 53 rent weeks in 2019

There will be 53 rent weeks for the rent year 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 which is one week more than usual.

If you pay your rent weekly, there will be 53 Mondays. If you're on Universal Credit this does not mean you'll receive more money. You'll receive the usual number of payments every calendar month. It's important you ensure you're in advance with your rent to prevent you getting into any arrears. If you're unsure about how much to pay or would like to request a rent statement, please contact us on **0300 373 3000** or email us at **customerservice@networkhomes.org.uk**.

Reporting a data breach

We're making it easier for you to report a data protection breach to us. We'll always handle your information confidentially and securely but it's important we're made aware if there's been a data breach so we can resolve it quickly.

We'll be adding a new page to our website about data breach reporting. It will have information on what a data breach is and when it gets reported to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) - the Data Protection regulators for the UK. We'll have an online form for you to complete if you think there's been a breach of data use. This form will go directly to our Data Protection Officer for review. You can find this page in the 'Privacy Statement' section on our website at **www.networkhomes.org.uk**.

Ensuring we have your consent to keep your data

We're now using a new system hosted by One Trust, privacy management specialist, to store and manage any consent you give us for using your information and data.

When we ask you for consent to process and use your information or data, we'll record it in One Trust. The system will then send you an email to confirm you have given us consent and keep a record of it in your preference centre. The email you receive will have a link to access your preference centre. When you first access it, you'll have to create an account using your email address and a new password. You'll be able to access your preference centre at any time using the login details you created.

If you've completed a printed or online consent form, for example when you attend an event, we'll still record it in One Trust and the system will send you an email to acknowledge your consent.

You'll be able to easily withdraw your consent at anytime using the preference centre.

If you receive an email from One Trust and are unsure about its authenticity or would like more information, please contact our Data Protection Officer on **0300 373 3000** or email **dpo@networkhomes.org.uk**.

Improving how we resolve complaints

From 1 April, we'll be cutting the time it takes to investigate complaints by reducing the number of stages in our complaints process.

We always aim to resolve your complaint immediately at stage one of our complaints procedure but if you're dissatisfied with the outcome you can currently take your complaint further to stages two and three before it can go to the Housing Ombudsman. We've decided to no longer include stage three (holding a complaints panel) as this adds eight weeks to the complaints procedure therefore taking longer for us to provide a decision on your complaint.

Our new complaints procedure will be:

- ▶ **Stage one** – complaint investigated by one of our managers and you'll receive a response to your complaint within ten working days.
- ▶ **Stage two** – complaint investigated by our Central Complaints Team under the direction of an Executive Director who will make the final decision on your complaint. You will receive a response to your complaint within 20 working days.

At any part of the complaints process, you'll be able to discuss the complaint with the investigator. For more information about making a complaint, please visit our website, **networkhomes.org.uk/complaint**.

Coming soon

My Network Homes – Your new online account

We'll be launching My Network Homes in the coming months so look out for information about it, including details on how to set up an account.

Tenancy Fraud: It's a crime!

We're working hard to root out those who unlawfully sublet our properties.

The illegal subletting of Social Housing properties became a criminal offence under the Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013 carrying a maximum sentence of 2 years imprisonment and/or a £5,000 fine.

Why is it important that we do this?

There are over one million people on the waiting list for social housing in the UK. And for every person who sublets their property, that's taking a much-needed home away from a person or family who really need it.

Case study:

During a routine visit, our Neighbourhood team became aware of one of our properties being unlawfully sublet. Further checks identified that the tenant had unlawfully sublet the whole of his property for the last five years while he lived with his family at a property he owned in Nottinghamshire.

During an interview with our officers, the tenant denied subletting his Network Homes property despite being presented with a wealth of evidence. Mr X was then made aware of legal action under the implications of the Fraud Act 2006 and Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013 but maintained his innocence.

Two weeks later, the tenant made contact with Network Homes and agreed to hand back the keys. It later came to light that the tenant had intended to purchase the Network Homes property fraudulently under the Right to Buy scheme where he would have qualified for the maximum discount.

The property has now been recovered and we're looking forward to re-letting it to a family in need of a home.

During times of strained housing resources, it's unacceptable for an individual to make money from unlawfully subletting social housing property while living elsewhere. We will continue to actively engage with the relevant authorities in the fight against tenancy fraud.



Hertford – Ridgeway, Sele Farm

Improving your local community – a snapshot of our regeneration work

We're working on improving a number of communities through major regeneration projects across London and Hertford. Here, we give you a quick look at how we're progressing with them.

London – Stockwell

Our transformation of the 1,400 home Stockwell Park Estate in Lambeth is taking shape as we work on the final stage of the project. We completed Park Heights in 2016, a 20-storey tower of 159 high quality homes and refurbished the community centre which reopened in 2017. Read on for an overview of the refurbishment and development work we're currently working on and the ones to come.

Tyler House

We started refurbishing all 48 flats at Tyler House at the end of 2017 and are adding an extra 13 new shared ownership homes onto the roof. All residents living at Tyler House will be able to use the new landscaped communal garden, as well as enjoy the improvements we've made to the communal areas including fresh carpets, mailboxes and doors. We're on schedule to complete the work in January 2020 after which all residents who have been temporarily rehomed will return.



Thrayle House

We're currently working on redeveloping the 1960s tower block which we're replacing with 178 new homes including 41 for social rent, 40 for older people and 96 for private sale. We've also included new retail and community space.

We're progressing well on the build of the four blocks and houses



that make up Thrayle house as we remove the scaffolding on the first block and begin to put in the kitchens. We've given residents of the former homes on the estate the right to return to the new homes if they wish to and aim to have the building completed for them to return in 2020.

SW9 Graffiti Pen

The graffiti pen, also known as Stockwell Park Hall of Fame, is progressing very well. It's a great open space for residents to use and was recently mentioned in Trip Advisor as the seventh (out of 10) 'Off the beaten path things to do



in London.' We gave residents in Stockwell the opportunity to see and feedback on various designs for the pen which helped shape the final plans. The new facility will support a range of activities in a safe and welcoming environment, such as sport, art, exercise classes, outdoor markets and more. We've almost completed the work, with plans to launch the new look graffiti pen at the end of spring this year.

Stockwell Day Centre

Since June 2017, we've been working on redeveloping the site that had the former Stockwell Park Day Centre. We're replacing it with 18 one and two bed affordable rented homes which will also include new landscaping and bike racks. Once we've completed the development this summer, we'll be working with SW9 Community Housing, the management

company for Stockwell Park Estate, and Lambeth Council to nominate local authority residents to be rehomed here.

Aytoun Road

We've put in for planning permission to replace run down buildings with 31 affordable homes including 11 for rent and 20 for shared ownership. We're expecting to receive planning approval in the next few months and are aiming to start work this spring /summer.

London - Rectory Park, Ealing

Our regeneration of Rectory Park began in 2011 after extensive consultation with residents, support for the changes from Ealing Council and securing GLA funding. Once completed, we will have created 449 new homes which includes affordable rent, social rent and shared ownership. This is an additional 179 homes than what was previously built there in 1950s and 1970s.

We also built a Community Centre which is up and running and has a Network Homes office for residents to come and speak to us in person.

We're now in the final phase of the project and are due to complete 80 homes in 2019 and the remaining 115 homes by summer 2020.



Hertford – Ridgeway, Sele Farm

We've almost completed the development of new homes on The Ridgeway Estate. Our improvements for the estate include demolishing and replacing the poor-quality ageing buildings with 120 new affordable, modern, mixed tenure homes. This will provide residents in the community with 70 new homes for affordable rent and 50 new homes for shared ownership. We've also created new roads, outdoor space and a play area for children.



The first set of homes, completed in January this year, was in high demand with all of the shared ownership homes reserved and offers made and accepted for the rented homes. We aim to have the last remaining properties completed by May this year.

If you would like to be kept updated about these improvements to your local community, make sure you sign up to our new resident email newsletter. You can do this at www.networkhomes.org.uk/newslettersignup.

Time to make a difference and join your local panel

Do you have great ideas for improving your local community or the services you receive and need a way of sharing this with others? Well we have something just for you. We're currently looking for Network Homes residents to join our Local Panels as either a panel member or the chair.

How to decide between being a panel member or a chair

As a panel member you'll be the informed voice of our customers

where you'll get the opportunity to work in partnership with Network Homes staff to help us to continually improve service delivery and make recommendations for organisation wide scrutiny.

As chair of the panel you'll do everything panel members do and more. You'll also get to chair meetings, lead the panel to provide constructive feedback on strategic decisions and represent residents at the Customer Services Committee.

Both roles are great opportunities and we'll give you the training you need to be successful in them.

Interested?

If you're interested in being on one of our local panels then you can find out more information about them and apply online at www.networkhomes.org.uk/localpanels. If you have any questions about being on the panel or about the recruitment process, you can contact us at get-involved@networkhomes.org.uk.

Helping you get online, and so much more!

It can be daunting when you decide to take that first step to learn something new but having the confidence in yourself and the courage to try can be very rewarding.

As part of our Worksmart programme, We R Digital recently delivered two computer training courses in London and Hertford for our residents. At the end of the six week programme our residents received laptops, donated by Henry Construction, to help them continue using the new skills they had learnt. Here's what two of our residents had to say about their experience.

Sam, 65, said: "I used to use computers at work but I've been retired for a year now. It's very good to come back and learn new ways, to use them. I understand people

who are afraid of using computers, especially in my age group but the trainers are more than helpful and very knowledgeable.

"I enjoyed the course and I'm sorry it's over. I'd like to see another course run for slightly more advanced students but this one was a joyful experience and I learnt a lot. So to anyone interested in taking part next time, don't be afraid to attend. Give it your all and you will learn."

Patricia, 62, said: "I was in two minds about coming on the training course because I've always been afraid of computers as I didn't know what to press and how to operate them. When I saw the invitation, I thought this might be an opportunity just for me to have that little opening session into the life with a computer.

"On the first day, I was a bit nervous but luckily William [the trainer] made me feel at home and instantly relaxed. I'm not great at it yet, but it's definitely opened my eyes and given me a bit of confidence to go further and learn more. And it's great to have the laptop at home now so every day I can practice a little bit of what I've learnt."

If you're looking to take your profession to the next level or you think you could benefit from some training, then our Worksmart programme can help you. We'll help you to find new employment or gain new skills. We partner with various companies and our contractors to bring you free support. For more information call us on **0300 373 3000** or email Worksmart@networkhomes.org.uk.

Smart Works did just the job for Network's Community Engagement Officer, Dionne Johnson



Dionne Johnson, Community Engagement Officer, successfully secured her position at Network Homes thanks to Smart Works. She was looking for a new career and after a few unsuccessful interviews she was introduced to Smart Works.

Smart Works is a charity that provides high quality interview clothes and interview training to unemployed women in need. They harness the power of clothes and confidence to allow a woman to be her best at a crucial moment in her life, giving her the confidence, the self-belief and the practical tools required to succeed at interview and transform her life.

Dionne said: "I had the most wonderful experience. I was given a personal stylist who kitted me out to be ready for interview. I then sat down with an HR specialist and we went through competency based questions. I felt really confident after the meeting and absolutely ready for my interview."

"I then got an interview with Network Homes and got the job in November 2018. My confidence was certainly boosted from wearing an outfit that I would not normally wear and having a one to one with the HR specialist at Smart Works."

If you're a woman and would like to be referred to Smart Works then you can either email buildingfutures@networkhomes.org.uk or call Kamara Jackson, Employment and Training Adviser, on **0300 373 3000**.

Get trained up with Network Homes' Building Futures Grant

Are you interested in a career in construction? Network Homes is offering residents access to a range of training courses run by Able Skills at their centre in Dartford. The courses will be fully funded by the Building Futures Grant and will cover the cost of the course, travel expenses and personal protection equipment.

There are a number of courses available in carpentry, bricklaying, plumbing and more. You can also choose different award levels from an NVQ, Diploma, Level 2 Award and a City & Guilds qualification. You'll be required to attend all classroom and practical sessions at the Dartford Centre and expected to complete the course.

After completing your course, we will help you find work experience with a contractor.

If this sounds right for you, just register your interest online and we'll be in touch with you to discuss suitable courses. We'll also complete the Building Futures Grant application with you so you'll receive the funding to attend the course.

For more information and to register your interest, visit www.networkhomes.org.uk/BFG or email buildingfutures@networkhomes.org.uk.



Turning away from gambling addiction



For resident Egidijus Papievis, his gambling addiction had taken over his life. With help from Network Homes' Income team he's been able to turn things around.

His life had become a nightmare with his mind constantly on gambling and winning big money. All his income was being spent on his betting habit with the bills piling up. He had got himself into rent arrears and at one stage he was facing court action and potentially losing his home.

Egidijus said: "Time by time I just kept borrowing money to fund my gambling habit. I didn't want to eat or sleep as the only thing I wanted to do was place a bet and win lots of money. I thought there was no way out."

Janet Peacock, Income Officer at Network Homes, got in touch with Egidijus to discuss his situation. She worked with him to look at what he could do that would help him stop gambling and seek advice from groups like Gamblers Anonymous.

Janet said: "He told us the full extent of his addiction and that he had disconnected the internet in an attempt to stop gambling and he was referred to our Tenancy Sustainment Officer."

It was a rocky road though and at a couple of points Egidijus started gambling again. So every week when he received his wage, Janet would call him to ensure he paid his rent.

He said: "Janet gave me the chance to sort my life out. Without the support I've had from her and her colleagues I wouldn't be in the place I am now."

It's still early days but for Egidijus things are looking up for him. He has a full-time job, is learning to drive, and is following his long-held dream of starting his own home improvement business.

Janet said: "He invited me and a colleague to his flat to see the improvements he has made and how he has turned his life around.

We are very pleased at the progress that he's made."

Egidijus's advice to people whose gambling has got out of hand is to seek help straight away. "The deeper you go the harder it can be to get out, so seek help as soon as you can."

Need gambling advice?

Treatment and support groups are available for people who want to stop gambling including GamCare. It offers free information, support and counselling for problem gamblers. GamCare runs the National Gambling Helpline (0808 8020 133) and also offers face-to-face counselling. You can check out their website www.gamcare.org.uk.

Local services for you when you need them

We recognise the benefit of working with local partners to provide you with a range of different services. This is why we continue to work in partnership with and contribute funding to Future Living, so they can provide you with good quality support services when you need it.

Future Living is a volunteer led, dynamic and innovative FREE service, offering therapeutic programmes for people in recovery from addictions, domestic abuse and trauma.

The programmes include:

- ▶ Three times weekly addictions recovery group
- ▶ Once weekly therapeutic domestic abuse group (one for males and one for females)
- ▶ Friends & Families group supporting those in recovery from addictions



One to one counselling room

- ▶ Personal one to one counselling for every client
- ▶ Training and volunteering opportunities.

Future Living also work in partnership with other local organisations to offer services such as a Job Club, CV writing, GCSE study, and other training opportunities, in a supported environment.

You can refer yourself to the programme or an agency can refer you. Once you've been referred to Future Living, they'll aim to see you within 48 hours of receiving your referral. For further details about their services visit www.futurelivinghertford.co.uk Please note, the services provided by Future Living are available to residents living in Hertfordshire only.

Sign up to keep receiving a paper newsletter

We're making our newsletter digital, but if you struggle to read or access online services, we don't want you to miss out.

You need to let us know if you need a paper copy of our new digital newsletter. So then you'll still get updates about what we're doing at Network Homes and what's going on in your area.

Who might this be for?

- ▶ Someone who doesn't have an email address
- ▶ Someone who doesn't have access to a phone, tablet or computer where they can check their emails
- ▶ Someone who struggles with reading online
- ▶ Someone who struggles to use online services.

How to sign up

You need to contact us for a paper version of our newsletter. You can call us on **0300 373 3000**, email us on marcomms@networkhomes.org.uk or write to us at Marcomms team, Olympic Office Centre, 8 Fulton Road, Wembley, HA9 0NU.

Please note, we will have printed copies of the digital newsletter available for residents in our older persons' schemes.

▶ Have you signed up?

This spring, we're launching a brand new resident email newsletter just for you. It'll replace Neighbourhood Life, which we'll no longer produce, but it will be more regular, fun and have up to date information and news.

The new email newsletter will have:

- ▶ Details about our events
- ▶ Information about support services we provide
- ▶ Latest news from Network Homes
- ▶ Advice and top tips
- ▶ Information about our involvement opportunities
- ▶ Much more.

You'll need to sign up if you want to receive the newsletter. So, don't miss out! Sign up today at www.networkhomes.org.uk/newslettersignup.



Keep in touch

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Registered office: Network Homes, Olympic Office Centre, 8 Fulton Road, Wembley, HA9 0NU.

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