

Projects News.

Summer Edition 2017

Karbon with a 'K'!

In April this year, our three organisations – Isos Housing, Cestria Community Housing and Derwentside Homes - became one and we are now Karbon Homes.

Now, I imagine a lot of you might be thinking "why"? Why 'carbon' and why with a 'K'? Well, here's why...

Carbon is an essential element and, like a home, it is an essential ingredient for life. It is present in coal, which is a powerful northern symbol and one which captures an era of unrivalled northern strength. Coal was the foundation for the region's development and we believe that Karbon reflects those days of strong community spirit, respect, brotherhood (and sisterhood!) and independence.

Now here's where the 'K' comes in because we see Karbon as being very much about the future. The three organisations merging to form Karbon were each successful in their own right, while united by

a common view that the housing sector needs to respond positively to the changing landscape it operates in.

Karbon Homes is one of the largest housing associations in the North East. We own and manage 24,000 homes across the region, from Berwick in the north to Stockton in the south and across to the Cumbrian border in the west.

There is still a lot of work to do before we are fully operating as one organisation, such as combining our telephone and computer systems and changing our brand. We are also restructuring our teams so that we are better placed to deliver services to where they are needed and in the most efficient way.

For the time being, our email addresses haven't yet changed and you may still see our existing brands on our signs, vans, ID badges, etc. We're gradually getting there but in the meantime, please continue to contact us in the usual way.



Our purpose
to provide a strong foundation for life;

Our promise
the possibility to develop the life you want;

Our characteristics
a strong business head and a strong social heart.

A tenant's view - Christopher at Willow Court

This is Christopher - he was the first tenant at Willow Court, our recently completed Concierge Plus scheme for people with a learning disability.

Prior to his move, Christopher lived in private rented accommodation in the west end of Newcastle. His home was in disrepair which was affecting his physical and mental health. Christopher maintained his tenancy there for nine years with some support from family before being put forward as a suitable candidate for Willow Court. The prospect of a new home close to his parents was very exciting for both him and them. As Christopher lived locally, he was able to watch the progress of his new home being built before being given his move-in date.

Christopher takes pride in his new flat which is beautifully decorated and he likes to spend lots of

his time on his large balcony area which overlooks the extensive communal garden. He likes the social aspects of Willow Court such as taking part in resident activities, takeaway nights and karaoke. He is liked by all his neighbours at the scheme and has made some good friends. Away from Willow Court, Christopher is the main volunteer at Scope in Jarrow and also spends lots of time socialising with family and friends.

Concierge staff have said Christopher has fitted in so well to his new home and is the life and soul of the place. He is always looking after his neighbours and loves entertaining everyone. It is obvious that his physical and mental health have both improved since moving to Willow Court in April this year.

Christopher says he loves his new home and would recommend this style of accommodation to everyone.



Calories for Charity

Here at Karbon Homes we have a tuck box run by the Supported Housing Projects team which is accessible to all staff members. We sell all sorts of confectionary and savoury snacks for when staff need a little treat. So far, all profits made from our tuck box have been donated to local charities.

Most recently we used the money to fund a BBQ for Sherringham House and gardening equipment for Willow Court (pictured) our newest concierge plus schemes for adults with learning disabilities. We are hoping the residents at Sherringham House will enjoy using their BBQ for a scheme social day/evening and the gardening equipment for Willow Court will encourage some residents to get green fingers.

A tenant's view - Angela at Sherringham House



Angela is one of fifteen new tenants at Sherringham House and surprised her family when she told them she would like to move out of her family home and lead a more independent lifestyle. Angela, who has just turned 30 years old, could see all her friends moving on in different ways with their lives and felt it was her time to make a change. After lots of discussions with her social worker, support staff and parents it was decided that Concierge Plus would be perfect for Angela's needs and enable her to live the independent lifestyle she desperately wanted.

Angela was excited when she was put forward for Sherringham House as it was close to family members and to her work place. She was looking forward to having her own space although some aspects like being alone and cooking meals every day were slightly daunting.

Since moving in, Angela has proved she is more than capable dealing with most daily tasks and as a result her support hours have been reduced which has been a massive confidence boost for Angela.

Angela says she is so pleased she took the risk of trying something new and has never looked back. She hopes she can stay in Sherringham House forever and says, "The best thing about living at Sherringham House is having my own space, making new friends and having the option to do things with other people without having to leave the building."

A Parents View

It's always a worrying time for a parent when their 'child' leaves home for the first time. Add to the mix a vulnerability such as a learning disability and the worries increase.

This is Alan and Margaret who were shocked at first when their daughter Angela announced that she wanted to move into independent living. Angela is 30, has a learning disability and has always lived in the family home. Her parents were understandably apprehensive and worried about Angela's ability to manage a property.

They consulted with social services who developed a support plan for Angela and advised Alan and Margaret that a Concierge Plus scheme could be the best option. This housing option would enable Angela to keep her current support with the addition of the 24-hour concierge service to ensure security and to help her manage her tenancy.

At that time, Karbon Homes were on site with two new Concierge Plus schemes, one in Benwell and one in Kenton. At first the scheme in Benwell was suggested for Angela, but at the home visit with housing officer Vicki Campbell, it was identified that Angela has a part time job in Gosforth. It was therefore agreed that the new scheme in Kenton would be the best option as it was closer to family and work. Alan and Margaret were delighted but still felt guilty about letting go. However, as part of the allocation process, housing officer Jan Blair arranged for Angela to meet some of the other residents who were moving into Sherringham House. Angela got on really well with Gail and a friendship was forged.

The family viewed the property and Angela loved the flat. They gathered together furniture and other things for her new home and the family home became rather crowded. However, after a few weeks,

the flat was ready and Angela moved in. Alan and Margaret were glad to get some space back in their own house and were excited for Angela but still felt concerned about her ability to manage living in her own home. They worried that Angela was struggling when she first moved in but Jan spoke to the support staff at St Cuthbert's Care who assured her that Angela was doing really well.

As appointees for Angela, Alan and Margaret are responsible for Angela's finances, including sorting out the housing benefit claim. Jan arranged for one of our financial and social inclusion team to help with the paperwork. Alan and Margaret have said how grateful they were for this help as they wouldn't have been able to manage alone.

Although Angela goes home to her parents most weekends, Margaret says she is always ready to return "home" by Monday morning. Margaret and Alan have noticed a marked difference in Angela since she moved into her flat. They can see how much more capable and independent she is compared to when she lived with them.

They feel that they have now regained their independence as well as Angela getting hers. They are really grateful for the support and guidance received from Karbon Homes throughout the whole process and feel that they can call anytime for advice.



Green Fingers at Welbeck Close

This scheme has now been open for a year and one of the residents is showing signs of being a really good gardener.

Dylan has planted out the raised bed with carrots, potatoes, onions and beetroot. (Dylan wanted his work to be on the photo rather than him!) The vegetables are thriving and he has already been able to give other residents some of the produce. Dylan has big plans for the garden area and he would like to deck an area for other residents to enjoy. The support staff have spoken to him about fundraising and are working with the residents to achieve this. Now the greenhouse is functional, he will be able to grow things from seed and then replant in the raised bed.

Dylan is currently cutting the grass for the tenants and the support staff and he has produced a business card promoting that he does grass cutting for £5.00. He has called himself "Dylan's Gardens".

Artwork unveiling at Sherringham House

A wonderful afternoon was had at the unveiling of the artwork at our new Concierge Plus scheme at Sherringham House, Kenton. The tenants and support staff from St Cuthbert's Care gave a warm welcome to the teachers and students from Kenton School, representatives from Gus Robinson and Karbon Homes staff.

Kenton School was commissioned by Gus Robinson, the contractor, to produce a piece of artwork to be displayed at Sherringham House. When the school was approached by Gus Robinson they felt that this was a wonderful opportunity for the students who are all at the start of their GCSE Graphic Communications Course.

The students used different techniques for the artwork to include collage, some annotations and photography to reflect architectural styles within the piece.

The afternoon started off with the unveiling of the artwork by Jo Ray, Executive Director and Michael Farr, Director of Development at Karbon Homes.

Adnan Khan, 14, was one of the students behind the artwork. He said: "We had been learning about artists like Kim Schoenstadt and Patricia Kane in school, and we had workshops with Gus Robinson, and that all led to us collaborating on this piece of work.

Sheila Errington, Director of Care Services for St Cuthbert's Care, said: "Everyone at Sherringham House was thrilled to be presented with this unique artwork and we would like to thank everyone involved for giving our residents such a warm welcome to their new homes."

After the unveiling, the tenants at Sherringham had prepared refreshments for everyone to enjoy and this gave everyone the opportunity to get to know each other over a cup of tea.

Karbon Homes developed the Concierge Plus scheme at Sherringham House, Kenton in partnership with Newcastle City Council. This scheme is one of two new Concierge Plus Schemes, the other being Willow Court in Benwell. Sherringham House contains ten two bed and five one bed apartments. The scheme has been built to enable people with a learning disability to live independently with the benefit of having support on site as and when needed. The support at Sherringham is provided by St Cuthbert's Care and the Supported Housing Projects team at Karbon Homes is responsible for the housing management of all the tenancies.



Local Housing Allowance

Those of us working in the supported housing world can't fail to know about the government's intention to impose Local Housing Allowance (LHA) limits to all supported housing claims from April 2019. The original announcement in September 2016 was met with dismay but there followed a joint DWP / CLG select committee inquiry which was completed in spring this year. This included comprehensive consultation with National Housing Federation members and stakeholders and the joint select committee report included many of the NHF recommendations.

The government intended to respond to the report following the election. However, final decisions

have not yet been made and we're now into the House of Commons recess until early September. Organisations such as the National Housing Federation and the Chartered Institute of Housing are asking that the application of LHA is therefore deferred until 2020.

The detail is yet to be decided on but there have been assurances that supported housing costs will be met. However, it has also been made clear that savings must be made from the welfare bill. We therefore need to be realistic and to start thinking about where the cuts are likely to be made.

It's generally thought that an obvious hit will be (amongst others) communal household items such as replacement of communal furniture, redecoration, white goods and, almost definitely, communal gas and electricity charges within shared houses. If these items (and possibly others) become

ineligible for Housing Benefit / Universal Credit then they will become personal charges and tenants will have to be prepared to cover the costs themselves. Clearly, this will have to be managed within each household. The situation will be clarified in due course but we need to stress the importance of being prepared for inevitable cuts to HB claims / eligible items.

An important part of this is to be able to evidence expenditure against income and we have a process in place for quarterly monitoring where these service charges are in place. As a starting point for 2017/18 we have asked support providers to confirm the balances as at the end of March 2017 and we will be closely monitoring the spend for each household.

Please ensure that quarterly monitoring forms are returned as per the timetable.

Fire Safety Update

Following the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower in London, our deepest sympathies go out to all those families affected.

We understand that many of our residents may have concerns or questions about fire safety at this time and our staff are available to discuss these with you.

We want to reassure you that, as a landlord, we take the safety of all our residents very seriously and already undertake a number of regular fire safety checks across all of our homes and buildings. These include fire risk assessments, regular fire

alarm system checks and testing, and ensuring clear access to escape routes for all buildings with communal areas.

Fire risk assessments are renewed every two years. In the light of recent events, as an added precaution, we are currently reviewing all our fire risk assessments with the Fire Service to ensure our fire safety measures are robust and adequate. As part of this review, we are looking at our 'stay put or evacuate' guidelines and the processes for fire safety checks in our independent supported living schemes for people with a learning disability. It is important for us to ensure that regular checks are carried out. The review will include us working with our support providers to make sure our fire safety contractors are able to gain access to carry out those safety checks.

There has been a lot of speculation in the press and media about the type of cladding used on the high rise blocks like Grenfell Tower. We have checked all our properties and we can confirm that none are cladded with the type of materials used in the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower.

We will of course be considering carefully the full findings outlined in the ongoing investigation report and implementing any necessary government recommendations when published.

If you do have any further questions or concerns, please contact Karbon Homes on 0300 300 1505, email info@karbon.co.uk or speak to a member of the Supported Housing Projects team.

Managing Agent - Quarterly returns

As part of the Performance Framework, housing associations are required to monitor the performance of managing agents. To allow us to complete this work, we request that you submit management information on a quarterly basis. Outlined below is the timetable for 2017/18. We will send you an email requesting the data and give a deadline of two weeks. Please contact Elayne Bristow on **0300 300 1505** or email elayne.bristow@isoshousing.co.uk with any queries regarding returns.

Keeping us informed

To help us keep in touch with you, we'd be really grateful if you could let one of our team know as soon as possible if there are any changes to your contact details i.e. email address or telephone number. You can email Elayne, Jan or Vicki anytime.

Date for your diary:

We have arranged a drama based event for our learning disabled tenants, their support staff, parents and external partners on the afternoon of Thursday 5th October 2017 in partnership with the Twisting Ducks Theatre Company. The theme this year is to raise awareness of radicalisation, hate crime and social isolation and how people with a learning disability may be targeted. As everyone will be aware, this is highly topical at the moment and the workshop should prove to be popular. Invites will be coming out early in September so watch your inbox. The event will be held at the Twisting Ducks Studio at Westgate College but spaces may still be limited so.... first come first served!

Quarterly performance returns (QPR)

	Sent out by	Returned by
Jul – Sept 2017	02.10.17	16.10.17
Oct - Dec 2017	08.01.18	22.01.18
Jan - Mar 2018	09.04.18	23.04.18

Agent's service charge monitoring timetable

This relates to the service charge monitoring spreadsheets from providers who manage a service charge in the shared houses.

We should already have received returns for April to June 2017. If you have not yet completed and returned yours, please do so as soon as possible. Please contact Elayne Bristow if you need any help.

Timetable:

July to September 2017	to be returned by end of Oct 2017
October to December 2017	to be returned by end of Jan 2018
January to March 2018	to be returned by end of April 2018

Do you have...

... any good news stories from your organisation that you would like to see in the next edition of this newsletter? Perhaps your organisation has won an award or has received recognition for their work? If so, please email elayne.bristow@isoshousing.co.uk

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