

Regeneration

Neilston-'The First Renaissance Town in Scotland'



Ministerial visits



The Arts



Promoting Health

Assistance, ranging from advice through to the provision of services



Developments



Wider Role Projects



Environmental Employability

ISSUE NO 1

FLAIR review 2009

Federation of Local Housing Associations

Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire

Welcome to the first ever FLAIR Review!

There are six members of FLAIR (Federation of Local Housing Associations in Renfrewshire). The current membership emerged, when the three original community-based housing associations in Renfrewshire, Williamsburgh, Paisley South and Barrhead who had an established tradition of collaborative working, were joined by Ferguslie, Bridgewater and Linstone approximately 10 years ago.

There are a host of benefits to be derived through being part of FLAIR, but the most gratifying aspect, is the increased opportunity it provides to improve the facilities and enhance the opportunities for our collective residents and the support it offers in the regeneration of our communities.

Gordon Williamson,
Director of Williamsburgh Housing Association

Inside News....



Health Activities

We run a range of free programmes and courses to help people of all ages enjoy a healthier life.



Committee Training

Through our training programme, committee and staff are awarded with SVQ certificates.



BASIS

A wider role book project produced by the community for the community.

Members

While we are all separate, independent organisations, as housing associations, we have similar goals and objectives, as reflected in our mission statements. These generally consist of a commitment:

- to provide an excellent service to our customers
- to provide good quality housing, at affordable rents for people in housing need
- to work effectively with our partners (in the main the Scottish Government, Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire Councils)
- to engage local residents, in the regeneration of their communities, and
- to enhance the quality of life, social wellbeing and economic position of our residents.

Achievements

We jointly own over 6,500 properties and provide a factoring service to a further 1746 owners:

- over 2000 homes have been comprehensively improved through co-ordinated tenement refurbishment
- a significant contribution has been made towards area regeneration, through new house building and addressing management issues
- more balanced communities have been created through the provision of mixed house sizes and types
- resident involvement has been promoted and high levels of customer satisfaction achieved
- environmental improvements have also been carried out and
- economic and social regeneration promoted through our wider role strategy.

While each FLAIR member has been successful in their own right, as FLAIR, we benefit collectively, in that we:

- share good practice
- regularly benchmark the performance of group members
- offer assistance, ranging from advice through to the provision of services
- promote local training for both staff and committee members
- share the workload in, for example, our wider role activity with individual associations taking the lead in delivering the service to all members, and
- enjoy economic benefits, in areas such as the joint procurement of maintenance services or the commissioning of consultants to undertake resident satisfaction surveys.

We believe the long-established partnership working which exists between the FLAIR members has been hugely beneficial not just for the member organisations and their service users, but to the local communities which have enjoyed substantial investment, through our active participation in delivering the local housing strategy, the strategic housing investment plan and wider role strategy.



I FLAIR Members

All members meeting to share ideas and resources.

Community Links Scotland

The FLAIR organisations have had a long association with an organisation called Community Links Scotland. FLAIR has received financial backing from the Scottish Government, as well as using its own resources to commission Community Links Scotland to provide support which allows the associations to become involved in activities other than simply providing and managing housing. This has meant the FLAIR associations have taken the lead in a number of innovative projects which have enhanced our housing management services and provided valuable additional services to our tenants and the wider communities in which we are active. This annual review contains details about a number of these projects.

The Scottish Government continues to provide financial support for these activities and the associations are grateful that our tenants can benefit from the wider work we do.

Street Links

This project is led by Bridgewater Housing Association. It is a youth engagement initiative and is designed to first of all "map" where young people "hang out" within our communities and to do some outreach work which will hopefully encourage them to engage with services available within the areas in which they live. The scheme has been successfully piloted within Erskine and is currently rolled out to other areas within FLAIR. Again the Scottish Government has supported the project financially.

Haven

Haven Products was formed in 1946 in Scotland with the aim of providing meaningful employment and development opportunities for all its staff, both disabled and able bodied. It does this through offering products and services from its operational locations to a range of customers in different market sectors with a strong emphasis on quality and meeting customers expectations.

More recently it has been extending the employment options it provides to people with disabilities through the opportunity for Haven staff to work with partner organisations in the local community and in their premises. FLAIR became a partner of Haven a couple of years ago and we currently have five trainees working in four different associations who are increasing their skills and confidence to improve their opportunities in non supported workplaces. This has been a hugely successful project in terms of the confidence of the trainees and it has also helped the associations to have a better understanding of people with learning difficulties in the workplace. The Scottish Government is currently supporting this project and we hope will continue to support it for the next two years.



Legal Advisors

FLAIR continues to benefit from our appointment of Harper Macleod to provide legal advice to the group and offer a pro-active service in terms of ensuring our compliance with relevant legislation. A reduced annual fee for FLAIR members provides access to their 'housing retainer scheme' (free telephone advice, privileged rates in relation to more complex matters, quarterly client briefing workshops and an annual compliance 'health check') and six half-day training sessions.

Benchmarking and what does this mean?

The FLAIR associations share information on how we perform and we compare our results with one another and across other housing association providers. By doing this we can learn from one another where someone performed particularly well and we can highlight concerns from poor performance and where there is a need make improvements. We all want to do better and continually improve and considering such information will help us all create better services for our tenants. Comparing and discussing our performance also helps to identify trends in performance which again can result in sharing good practice or correcting/assessing poor statistics.

It is also worth noting that the Scottish Housing Regulator expects us to benchmark with one another and some of our lenders also compare how well we perform individually across the housing association sector.

Training

Committee Training

A well established programme of training for FLAIR committee members has continued to run successfully throughout the year. These locally-based training evenings involve monthly sessions covering a range of topics including:

- using the media
- assertiveness skills
- factoring

Evaluation of feedback received from participants continues to indicate high levels of satisfaction both in respect of the topics covered and the quality of the trainers. We continue to monitor feedback and attendance at these training events.

Staff Training

Staff training is held on a regular basis and is available to all FLAIR members. A programme of topics for 2009 featured:

- health and safety
- staff recruitment and selection
- supervisory skills

As with committee training, the feedback from participants has been extremely positive and joint staff training is now established as a regular feature.

The administration of FLAIR training events has now been transferred from Williamsburgh HA to Barrhead HA.

Digital Inclusion

Computer training, available to residents through the University of the West of Scotland continues and 14 students have successfully completed their studies. They have achieved certificates in 'First and Second Steps in IT' and 'European Computer Driving Licence'. This has resulted in each of them qualifying for the award of a PC, from Williamsburgh HA, for home use. Williamsburgh HA continues to publicise the availability of the scheme to its residents.

"It's important that people support their community in any way they can. Being a new Committee member allows me to do just that and I hope that being involved makes a difference, no matter how small"

Karen McMillan, Committee Member
Williamsburgh Housing Association

Key Performance Indicators

	Barrhead	Bridgewater	Ferguslie Park	Linstone	Paisley South	Williamsburgh
Key Performance Indicators	08/09	08/09	08/09	08/09	08/09	08/09
Void rent loss	0.52%	1.25%	0.60%	1.26%	0.83%	0.98%
Current rent arrears	3.90%	1.9%	4.75%	5.09%	4.73%	3.35%
Former tenant rent arrears	3.25%	0.42%	2.39%	2.60%	5.01%	2.03%
Housing Benefit:						
full	31%	52.73%	54.97%	45.43%	41.50%	41%
partial	22.40%	14.30%	25.25%	17.46%	15.66%	13%
% Turnover of stock	9.54%	10.55%	8.72%	11.4%	15.5%	7.9%
No. of repairs processed/year	2836	2973	4537	4009	4642	5159
Response times:						
emerg.	97.8%	99.8%	100%	100%	93.2%	100%
urgent	94.3%	96.7%	100%	96.8%	87.7%	100%
routine	95.2%	95.2%	99%	93.0%	92.3%	97%
% Stock meeting SHQS	97%	32%	100%	58.8%	55.8%	97.3%
% With valid gas certificate	100%	99.9%	100%	100%	98.9%	96.79%
% of working days lost through staff illness	5.1%	4%	3.75%	3.43%	2.42%	3.15%

Community Projects

Creative Inclusion

Based on Barrhead's highly successful arts project, BASIS, this project secured further funding from the Scottish Government's Wider Role Fund to provide artist-led workshops. In partnership with East Renfrewshire Council, the association worked with the D'arts project and RAMH/Causeway to deliver jewellery making and digital photography workshops with artists Karen Kiehlmann and Janie Nicoll. The groups learned a variety of jewellery making skills including recycling old and broken jewellery. One workshop included a photographic session with local hairdressers, beauticians and participants modelling the jewellery. In another workshop, the participants learned basic digital photography techniques and printing options then created personalised mugs and t-shirts. The items were then exhibited for two weeks in June 2009 at Eastwood Park Theatre. The arts project is managed for the association by Edinburgh based, Art in Partnership consultants.

Big Lottery Young People's Art Project

In February 2008, Barrhead Housing Association was also awarded a £139,000 grant from the Young People's Fund, part of the Big Lottery. This project, awarded on the strength of the original BASIS arts project, is now into its second year having completed a wide variety of work in partnership with East Renfrewshire Council's Youth Services team and St Luke's High School. Three separate youth groups have delivered a varied portfolio of art techniques and materials including a variety of artwork, film making and media skills. All exhibits went on display for two weeks from Sunday 14th June 2009 in Eastwood Park Theatre. In addition, work has been completed with leading artistic duo, Grennan and Sperandio, and pupils from St Luke's High School. The project successfully delivered a book gifted to all households in Barrhead and Neilston which capsulated words of wisdom from local residents. The words were inserted into a 365-day almanac for people to share and keep. Year 2 will see two artists and young residents from Connor Road delivering creative recycling workshops initially for six months.



Community Learning Co-ordinator

This post has been funded since May 2007 through the Scottish Government's Wider Role Fund and is currently working in partnership with East Renfrewshire Council. Funding will run to March 2011. The post holder is responsible for promoting educational training courses within the Auchenback Resource Centre in liaison with Reid Kerr College and for rolling out similar events and training in Barrhead and Neilston. The focus of the project is on promoting learning and education within the environment. Working with ERC, the post holder will assist the council to deliver its employability strategy to deliver training and employment opportunities locally.

Neilston, "the first Renaissance town in Scotland"

Barrhead Housing Association with partners, East Renfrewshire Council, secured funding, some from Wider Role funding, to allow the local community to produce a new masterplan for Neilston. This was successfully delivered in May 2009 and involved input from a wide range of professional expertise including Neilston Development Trust, Architecture + Design Scotland, Urban Design skills, and the Macintosh school of art to name but a few. The masterplan or Charter has been produced to provide a vision of how Neilston can become a sustainable community over coming years through the locally empowered new Town Team structure. The Charter delivers an action plan for delivering lasting improvement to the village through the desire to make Neilston a successful place to live, invest in and visit. In the process Neilston has become the first Scottish Renaissance town.



Proposals for Main Street, Neilston

The association has also continued to support Neilston Development Trust and has secured funding to allow the Trust to progress its business plan and Big Lottery application for the future of the bank as a community asset for the village.

Cashback for Communities

Barrhead Housing Association was successful in its application for funding through the Cashback for Communities scheme, which allows proceeds from criminal activities to be reinvested in local areas. With a grant of £5,337, the association is delivering local youth work and events for young children within Dunterlie.



Healthy Lifestyles

Twilight Basketball

This project aims to use basketball to provide a pathway for young people in the areas where FLAIR operate. By learning about, experiencing and playing basketball, through coaching and physical training sessions and competitions, participants in the project will be able to make more informed lifestyle choices, thereby improving fitness levels, behavioural patterns and aspirations of the young people.

The second year of this project was successfully completed in March 2009.

The Wider Role Team has confirmed that the third and fourth years of the project are to be treated as a "continuation" project for 2009 / 10 and 2010 / 11. It has been made clear, however, that match funding, amounting to 50% of the project costs, is required to enable Wider Role Grant to be made available.

Accordingly, approaches have been made to Renfrewshire Council and the National Lottery. "In principle" funding of £3,000 has been obtained from the Council's Safer Renfrewshire Partnership Fund and the formal application to this fund has been submitted. In addition, an application has been submitted in the name of Linstone HA to the National Lottery Awards for All Fund (£2,000), has also been successful. The Wider Role Offer of Grant has also been received.

There are two FLAIR members participating this year, Linstone HA and Williamsburgh HA, with each having committed to make a contribution of £1,000, towards the cost of delivering the project.

The 2009 / 10 programme commences in January 2010 and will run for 3 months, targeting 100 young people and seeking to refer 25% of those attending to other agencies and support groups.

It is planned to attempt to secure all funding for 2010 / 11, at least in principle, by 31st March 2010. This would enable next year's programme to commence significantly earlier in the year, with taster sessions commencing towards the end of the school holiday period.

Landscape & Employability Training

The 2008/2009 FLAIR Landscape Training & Employability Project has now successfully completed. The project provided supported employment and training for seven unemployed residents within the Renfrewshire area. The projects delivered improvements to the quality of the environment and amenities in participating housing association areas. The project was a partnership of four of the FLAIR associations (Paisley South HA, Ferguslie Park HA, Linstone HA and Williamsburgh HA) and the Wise Group which delivered the training and landscaping elements. The project responded to four separately identified community projects, each of which focused on an area of land which was derelict or under used and detracted from the overall quality of the neighbourhood. Outcomes for the trainees were:-

- Three achieved full SVQ General Building Operative Level 2
- Two achieved part SVQ GBO Level 2
- One achieved no qualification

This equates to 83% achieving a qualification.

Paisley South is again the lead association for an environmental training project building on the success of the 2008/2009 FLAIR Landscape Training & Employability Project. This second phase will commence on site from March 2010 and run until March 2011. It will aim to offer training to up to 10 locally based unemployed residents, through experience in landscaping work with a view to preparing them for the workplace. Regeneration Division have agreed, in principle, to contribute funding to the project subject to FLAIR reducing the costs of the project, particularly through negotiation with the preferred training provider, and also subject to an increased level of housing association contributions towards material and plant hire costs. Five of the FLAIR associations have identified suitable sites for the project and confirmed in principle their level of match funding towards costs. The five participating housing associations included in this year's bid will be: Paisley South, Williamsburgh, Linstone, Barrhead and Bridgewater. An application for funding has been finalised by Community Links Scotland in negotiation with The Wise Group and was submitted in November 2009.



MSP Alex Neil, joins FLAIR on bus tour

On 5th October 2009, Linstone Housing Association and FLAIR associations welcomed the Scottish Government's Housing and Communities Minister, Alex Neil, on a tour of housing in the Linwood, Johnstone and Paisley areas.

Alex Neil joined around 50 guests, including Councillors, Flair associations and tenants' organisations, on a visit round the areas at the invitation of Linstone HA.

The tour included a visit to a project being developed by Kibble in Richmond Drive, Linwood, where there are plans to redevelop five empty properties as family homes. This Youth Build project would see young people leaving care receiving training and supervision from experienced tradesmen throughout the project.

Adele Fraser, Chief Executive of Linstone Housing Association, showed the Housing Minister an empty block of flats in Maple Drive, Johnstone Castle, which the association hopes to bring back into use for the benefit of the community.

The tour also visited the Arnott Gardens Very Sheltered Housing complex, one of the association's new build projects. The tour also visited the Paisley West End area and guests were able to see the council's plans to demolish empty

boarded up stock which is considered in low demand and too costly to upgrade. The study tour was also advised of plans to refurbish two empty closes, subject to plans being agreed.

Adele Fraser said: "I am very pleased that Alex Neil was able to come on the tour. The Minister took a genuine interest in our area and the work we are doing. He also showed a good appreciation of the issues we are working with. It was a very constructive event. I am very pleased with the number of people who joined us and hope it will lead to further discussions with the council and other partners about initiatives in the area."

Iain Wilson, Linstone HA Chair, said: "I am delighted by the turnout. I found the Minister was very interested in what we are doing and sympathetic to local housing needs."

Housing and Communities Minister Alex Neil said: "I am delighted with the work that is being put in by Linstone Housing Association to engage with local people and the council on affordable housing."

Councillor Brian Lawson, Housing Convenor at Renfrewshire Council, added: "This has been a worthwhile exercise. It is good for the Housing Minister to see housing on the ground and engage with housing associations and councils."

Tenancy Sustainment

Tenancy Sustainment Officers: led by Ferguslie Park HA, this project employs two officers to assist tenants to sustain their tenancies and to maintain them in good condition. The two officers work with all FLAIR associations taking referrals from housing staff. They provide a hands-on role to ensure tenants are suitably linked into a range of service providers and sources of support that will address the underlying factors which lead to difficulties in them sustaining their tenancies. Funding is in place until March 2011.

I am proud to be a member of FLAIR as our mission is making communities a place where tenants and residents want to live. This is achieved through enhancing their environment, welcoming the vulnerable into workplaces, helping the youth to put their leisure time to good use.

Nanette Reid, Vice Chair of Linstone Housing Association

I-FLAIR

This group is exploring potential joint working between FLAIR and locally-based associations in Greenock. Their aim is to establish a process by which economies of scale might be delivered through the joint procurement of development programmes.

Regular meetings have taken place over a year, with directors considering matters of strategy and structure. Development staff have also met to progress practical matters and technical issues.

Progress has been made, with the production of a joint design guide, technical specification, a common components schedule and a pre-qualification questionnaire for use in selecting consultants and contractors.

Discussions with contractors have identified that standardisation and continuity of work are more likely to achieve efficiencies than simply procuring at greater volumes. This has resulted in consideration of some standard house types and discussions are ongoing about how best to develop these.

The main focus of late has been the development of an I-FLAIR response to the Government's consultation document 'Investing in Affordable Housing'. The group has also been working with a consultant, in identifying and appraising the options available for structuring the potential consortia.

However, further work is also being progressed in the joint procurement of our major repairs programmes.



Financial Advice Project

Since January 2007 Linstone Housing Association has employed two Welfare Rights Officers who work throughout the six FLAIR associations providing information, advice and assistance to residents and staff. The main aspects of the posts are to work with new tenants, high arrears cases and cases where there are housing benefit issues in order to reduce rent arrears and maximise residents benefit entitlement.



Welfare Rights Officer meeting a tenant.

During the financial year 2008/09 there were 596 referrals with 375 becoming actual caseload for the Welfare Rights Officers.

During 2008/09 a benefit gain of approximately £300,000 was achieved for the clients of the Welfare Rights Officers.

At the end of April 2009 one of the Welfare Rights Officers left FLAIR to take up a new employment opportunity. For a spell there was only one person in post covering the six associations, however towards the end of May 2009, we employed a new Welfare Rights Officer, Richard Thompson. Over the course of 2008/09 the Welfare Rights Officers managed to attract over £40,000 of backdated Housing Benefit and approximately £40,000 of other benefit gains to the clients. In context this meant that over the following 52 weeks clients would receive approximately £300,000 of anticipated additional benefits.

Following discussions with the Scottish Government they have agreed to part fund this project for a further two years with them contributing around £115,000 to the project with the FLAIR associations (with the exception of Ferguslie Park HA who have withdrawn from the project) contributing £75,000 over the two year period.

The two Welfare Rights Officer posts will remain until March 2011, although one staff member is about to leave take up alternative employment.

Members of
FLAIR
Federation of Local Housing Associations
Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire

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