

# Origin News

The newsletter for Origin Group, SPH Housing and Griffin Homes stakeholders

## Origin refocuses for stronger community base



*At Origin's annual staff event attendees discussed how the change of focus will affect customers, employees and the wider organisation.*

Origin and its group members SPH Housing and Griffin Homes are streamlining their operations and structure. Chief Executive Karen Wilson explains: "Our customers and local authority partners beyond north London and Hertfordshire are not getting the best deal from us. It is difficult to consistently provide high quality services so far from our office bases, or contribute effectively to local authority strategies, because activity is so spread out. We will therefore be transferring homes and services in the 10 more remote boroughs to local service providers.

"We see our future as a community-based housing association, providing high quality homes and services. We want to build on the work we do to improve quality of life in the neighbourhoods in which we work.

This means we see strong local authority partnerships, where we contribute to their place-shaping agenda, as a key part of the way we work. By focusing our activities in fewer areas and building stronger partnerships we are confident we can provide our customers with the high quality homes and tailored services they rightly expect."

To reinforce the strategy, Origin is taking steps to streamline the way it works. Karen Wilson explains: "We do not see a need to maintain a structure which separates our homeownership and key-worker activities provided by Griffin from the social housing and support services of SPH. This does not help us to deliver high quality homes and services in mixed communities. We believe we can be more efficient and customer focused by working as one organisation."

### Funding for the future

Origin has secured new funding and refinanced other loans with Barclays, which will save £300,000 a year and provide funding for new developments over the next three years.

Origin is committed to continuing to provide more affordable homes despite the economic downturn. Development Director Gareth Jones explains: "The fall in private sector demand means there are good opportunities to acquire quality land at reasonable prices.

"We want to take advantage of the current market, but also minimise our risk by changing the balance of our development programme. We will only be developing sites where the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) can provide sufficient grant to cover costs.

This means a higher level of grant because profits from sales are not available to subsidise rented units.

"We are changing the balance of our programme, so we develop fewer properties for sale and concentrate on meeting the need for social rented and intermediate rent homes."

Origin expects to complete 800 units over the next three years.



*Security trainees act out a potential situation during SPH's 'tackling worklessness' campaign.*

## Tackling worklessness in Camden

Residents' quality-of-life matters to Origin. In the current recession Origin has introduced the 'tackling worklessness' campaign in Camden, to give people new skills, confidence and opportunities through training and employment.

Over 30% of our Camden tenants are unemployed and this scheme will not only help people find jobs, but tackle obstacles that hold them back from getting work, such as dyslexia or lack of confidence.

"We had over 40 responses to the first round of publicity – which is very encouraging," said Nazrul Islam of One Housing Group, which is helping Origin run the campaign. "Everyone needs different kinds of help to get into work. It may be just a case of tweaking a CV, or require complete retraining."

If the scheme is a success, it will be rolled-out in other areas.

## Tenants in national conversation

SPH customers are taking part in a national conversation to find out what kind of services they expect from their landlord. The new government regulator for social housing, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), is hosting the information gathering events all over the country.

SPH has helped tenants get to the

TSA-staged events as well as publicising the initiative and encouraging responses to the questionnaires at ongoing Tenant Advisory Panels, Residents Forum and other meetings.

Tenants returning from the TSA events in London and Cambridge said the day was very worthwhile and glad they had the chance of attending.

## Community development work cuts antisocial behaviour

SPH community development work with youth in Leavesden, north Watford has helped push the number of reported criminal incidents in the area down by 19% in 12 months.

SPH community and youth workers have worked hard for the last two years with, local police and businesses, Riversmead housing association and Three Rivers council to reduce street

trouble and improve residents' quality of life.

A waste area has been cleared to create a football and play area, a local estate football team formed, a clean-up day removed lots of rubbish and a fun day attracted over 400 visitors. Plenty of future activities are planned including cycling courses, an environment project for young people and more fun days.



*Face painting kids at the Leavesden fun day.*

Visitors to the fun day said: "I've had a great time" and "thanks for everything you are doing, the kids really enjoyed it."

# Partners work together to get value-for-money from procurement

Origin and its 'Connected' partners Octavia Housing and Shepherds Bush Housing Group have employed procurement and value-for-money specialist 'Plan2do' to find more efficient ways of procuring products and services over the next three years. Potential savings of up to £500,000 have been identified for Origin alone, and the first £30,000 from this has already been saved

on stationery and other office products. Next year, we expect to make major savings by changing how we manage the procurement process and how we source recruitment, telephones and computer/office equipment.

Origin's project manager Kevin Hider said: "We are looking for best value-for-money procurement arrangements amongst ourselves, but will look wider in



many cases to make sure we get the efficiencies we need."

Procurement is the latest collaboration in the Connected partnership. The three associations already share a host of practices and resources including a multimillion pound grant development programme.

## Finished on site

- **Hemstall Corner**, Camden (see photo) has three houses of four bedrooms and three flats of three beds. A new occupant said: "Our new home will make a huge difference to all our lives. We have had a tough few years but things are turning around for us now."
- **Moretons Court** in Harrow has 14 one and two bedroom homes for social housing, targeting under-occupying tenants.
- **Alder Court** in Haringey has 14 one and two bed homes.
- The first homeowners are taking advantage of the **rent-to-buy** at recently completed **Narev Court** in Enfield. The scheme has been introduced to encourage potential homeowners to rent first and buy later.



*Recently finished Hemstall Corner, Camden.*



*Griffin Homes' homeowner Lucy Mungo is one of the first residents to take advantage of the 'rent-to-buy' scheme, that allows buyers to rent first and part-buy later.*

# Comprehensive survey shows service quality improving

SPH has received valuable feedback from tenants on what they think about the services they receive and where improvements can be made. The results from the 2008 Status survey enable SPH to benchmark itself against other social housing providers.

72% of tenants were satisfied with the service they received from Origin and SPH, which is 5% above the peer group average and a 6% increase on previous results. In nearly all service areas SPH scored better than three years ago, and results were as good as or better than the peer group average.

Tenant satisfaction on all the following has improved: the overall quality of their homes, the condition of their properties, rent as value-for-money, repairs and maintenance services, their neighbourhoods and how SPH takes their views into account.

Kate Farley, Director of Housing Services said: "It is very satisfying to know that we are increasingly meeting tenants expectations. However, our goal is to be amongst the best, so we are not complacent. We will be working very closely with residents and concentrating on addressing their priorities for a better repairs and maintenance service, improved customer care and meeting their priorities for improving their homes and neighbourhood."

## Tenants help choose new responsive repairs service

Tenants have been central in selecting Origin's new responsive repairs contract, which starts in April 09. The new service with Mitie has been shaped by feedback from a wide cross-section of customers. Regular ongoing service improvement workshops will ensure the service meets tenants' expectations.



## Herts team grows

SPH's new service providing short-term support to people in Hertfordshire is going from strength-to-strength. In less than 12 months the team has expanded to 200 clients, with more on the waiting list. Clients are from a wide range of backgrounds, but share the same problems – the threat or reality of eviction, dire money problems and other life problems.

Mark Janes, Head of Strategic Commissioning in Adult Care Services for Hertfordshire County Council, said: "This is a valuable service for people in vulnerable situations. We are pleased with the way it has developed."

## New Islington supported housing scheme

SPH Housing has won a contract to support 11 tenants with learning disabilities, substance abuse and mental health issues at an Islington scheme. SPH's team of seven will work with the landlord Family Mosaic housing association.

"We have an effective team providing learning disability services in London and Hertfordshire, so this new scheme is a very good fit," said head of the service Campbell Ward.

The new scheme supplements SPH's other support services in the borough, such as 'Home From Hospital'.