

Farewell to John Toomey



John Toomey, a former Origin Housing board member, tenant, and one time councillor,

sadly passed away in October this year, aged 84. Described as "a pillar" in Camden, John was much loved by friends and family and leaves behind his wife of 58 years, Mary Paul, and four daughters.

To mark John's significant contribution to Origin over the past

30 years, we set up the John Toomey Heritage fund earlier this year to support community projects and initiatives that promote Origin's rich and varied heritage. £5,000 from the fund will be made available as small grants each year to individual or group projects that meet the criteria.

Applications for this round are open until 28 February 2011, and any Origin resident or staff can apply. For more information, please contact our Community Development Manager, Esther Archer, on 020 7209 9334 or email esther.archer@originhousing.org.uk.

In The Know

Great homes, positive people, strong communities

Winter Edition 2010

All wrapped up!



Balloons in the red, black and yellow of Watford FC

were released at a launch party in October to mark the official opening of 'The Wrap', Origin's latest development in Watford. The scheme is literally wrapped around the south stand of the football stadium and has 164 homes for rent. Attendees included Watford Mayor, Dorothy Thornhill, and Sir Bob Kerlake, Chief Executive of the Homes & Communities Agency, who said this was "a terrific and bold scheme" and one of the best and most interesting he had ever come across!

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- ...and much more!

What's moving where?

Update on Origin property transfers

We are coming to the end of our two-year project to transfer properties outside our core areas of North London and Hertfordshire to more local landlords. These transfers were necessary because as a Housing Association of our size, we were working in too many areas which made it difficult to provide services to the standards you want.

We have already transferred properties in South West London, Hillingdon, Ealing, Hounslow, Surrey and Kent. Our last transfers will take place in December and January when the management of Dawn House, Peverall House and Cobbs

Place in Chelmsford, Essex, will transfer to Colne Housing in December 2010. Our retirement housing and general needs flats at Normanhurst in Cambridge will transfer to Cambridge-based landlord, Hundred Houses Society in January 2011.

We have had a series of consultation meetings with the tenants involved, as well as with tenant representatives who scrutinised the performance and proposals of the new landlords in key areas of concern.

This has been a major project for Origin and we are very pleased to have completed this successfully.

Origin on the web!

Did you know you can do the following online...?

- Report a repair;
- Apply to transfer or move home;
- View latest job vacancies in Origin;
- Keep up to date with the latest Origin news and developments as they happen.

Log on to www.originhousing.org.uk to try it today!

Origin welcomes complaints



Thanks to the customer feedback we received through surveys and focus groups, we have made a number of changes to improve the way we handle complaints at Origin.

If something has gone wrong for you, we want to hear about it! Even if you don't want to make a formal complaint, we would love to hear your "grumbles" in areas where you feel let down by our staff or service. You can complain to any member of staff or you can:

- Write to: Complaints, Origin Housing, Freepost NW3744, London NW1 2YQ;
- Call: 0800 040 7989;
- Email: enquiries@originhousing.org.uk;
- Text: 07500 798 227;
- Fax: 020 7209 9223;

- Leave a voice message: 020 7209 9333;
- Visit our website: www.originhousing.org.uk
- Request a complaints leaflet

How did we do last year?

Between April 2009 and March 2010 we received 230 complaints – nearly 20% more than the previous year! We see this as a good thing because we welcome complaints and have made the process a lot easier.

The highest number of complaints (46%) were about our repairs service, which is the biggest service we provide. This was followed by complaints about our neighbourhood management (20%), care and support services (14%), home ownership and intermediate rent services (10%), lettings and income

management (3%), and other areas (4%).

87% of all complaints we received between January and March 2010 were responded to within our ten working days target. Of these:

- 38% were resolved in favour of the complainant (upheld);
- 17% were partially upheld;
- 35% were not upheld.

Overall, only 34% of the ninety customers we surveyed during this time were satisfied with how their complaint was handled.

We have used complaints to make changes to our services. Recent changes include making information about Fair Rents clearer on our website; improving the way we calculate and communicate information about service charges; working to make our procedure for applying for grants more customer-friendly.

Look out for more news on how we have used your feedback in future editions of In the Know or on our website – www.originhousing.org.uk.

Message from the Executive Team

By Cathy McCarthy, Director of People Services



There has been a lot of news about the cuts that the government is making to public expenditure to reduce the country's debt. These cuts include a reduction in benefits, expenditure on public services, and investment in major projects. It is clear that cuts of this size will result in significant job losses – both from the public sector and from private firms who work with the public sector.

What will this mean for Origin customers and will Origin have to make any changes?

- There have been major changes announced to the type of tenancy and rent levels that new tenants will experience. It is not yet clear when this will start and as far as we know at the

moment, there will be no changes for existing tenants.

- There are major changes to welfare benefits, including housing benefit, which are likely to impact most on our unemployed customers (see page 7 for more information).
- All the Local Authorities we work with are looking to make significant savings as a result of having funding cuts of up to 27% over the next four years. This will mean reductions in a wide range of local services. We are already discussing cuts to the funding of our Care & Support Services which will inevitably result in cuts to the services we provide.

Origin is fortunately well-placed to weather the

coming storm as we are financially strong and therefore have the ability to respond flexibly to the challenges we will face. However, it is clear that difficult choices may have to be made over the coming year as our resources are not limitless. We want you to be involved in making these choices so that we can, as far as possible, seek to protect your priorities (see page 6 for ways you can get involved).

We remain committed to improving the quality of services we offer to you and this is demonstrated by the significantly increased maintenance programme we have planned for the next few years. 2011 is likely to be a difficult year for all of us but we are confident that Origin is well-placed to face the challenges ahead.

Christmas office hours

Our main offices in Camden (110 Eversholt Street and 8 Nora Leverton Court, Randolph Street), Enfield (1a Watermill Lane), and Stevenage (Lister Hospital, Coreys Mill Lane) will be opening and closing over Christmas and the New Year as follows:

- Friday 24 December - closed
- Monday 27 December - closed
- Tuesday 28 December - open
- Wednesday 29 December - open
- Thursday 30 December - open
- Friday 31 December - closed
- Monday 3 January 2011 - closed
- Tuesday 4 January onwards - open as normal

The Contact Centre is open from 8am to 6pm every day. If you need to report an emergency repair when the office is closed, please call 0800 783 7903, 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Happy Christmas!

Basil, SPH and me

From running after St Pancras Housing (SPH) founder Father Basil Jellicoe, to working for SPH as a painter and decorator, William Morris knows more about Origin Housing's early years than most. *Mildred Talabi* accompanied Housing Support Officer, Muhammed Choudhury, to our Mora Burnet property in Swiss Cottage where the lively 92-year-old has just moved in...



William with Origin's Muhammed

MT: You used to work for SPH before it became Origin; how did you make the connection between the two?

WM: I came in to view this place and as we were talking he (Muhammed) happened to mention St Pancras. I said 'That's funny, I used to work for St Pancras Society', and then he mentioned Father Jellicoe and I said 'Oh yes, I did know him!' I used to go round and visit the flats Father Jellicoe helped to build around Somers Town and decorate them up; I worked for SPH for 21 years until I retired.

MT: What were some of the memories you had of Basil Jellicoe and Somers Town?

WM: Somers Town was very rough in those days - the place where the ladies

hospital (Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital) was at the time, they used to call it 'little hell'. You daren't go 'cos it was hell down there, a real rough neighbourhood. We used to play out in the streets and all of a sudden someone would say "Ooh, Father Jellicoe's coming!" and we would get up and run after him. I remember there was a coal cart in Wellington Street owned by a man called "Tetchel" or something like that. He'd be standing up on the coal cart and Father Jellicoe would get up beside him and speak to a crowd of people around him. What he was talking about I couldn't tell you 'cos I was a child at the time, about seven or eight years old. I was just amazed to see him 'cos he was a bit of a local hero.

Hall for hire!

Residents, staff and locals alike celebrated the re-opening of a community space in Kentish Town with a combined fun day and roadshow in August. Athlone Hall is available for community use and can be hired from just £10 an

hour. The Basil Jellicoe hall in Camden is also available for hire at very reasonable rates. For more information or for help in developing community-based ideas at either hall, please call Trevor Willoughby on 020 7209 9208.



Fun and games at Athlone Hall's opening

New developments at Origin



Over the next few years we are committed to building great homes and strong communities in our areas of operation. Here are just some of the new developments we have coming up:

Camden

- Winchester Road (Belsize Park) – 25 rental properties – completed June 2010;
- Whitfield Street (Bloomsbury) – 9 rental properties, 2 Rent to HomeBuy – completed November 2010;
- Unison on Euston Road (St Pancras) – 14 rental properties, 3 Rent to HomeBuy – to be completed January 2011;
- Goldington Buildings on Royal College Street (Regents Park) – 30 rental properties – to be completed August 2011;
- Kilburn High Road (Kilburn) – 14 rental properties, 6 Rent to HomeBuy – to be completed November 2011;
- Loudoun Road (South Hampstead) – 9 rental properties, 27 Shared Ownership, 6 private sale – to be completed July 2012.

Enfield

- Waverly Road (Enfield Chase) – 12 rental properties – to be completed January 2011;
- Weirhall Avenue (Edmonton) – 4 rental properties – to be completed January 2011;
- Green Lanes (Palmer's Green) – 18 rental properties, 12 Rent to HomeBuy – to be completed October 2011;
- Watermill Lane (North Middlesex Hospital, Edmonton) – 65 rental properties, 128

keyworkers – to be completed December 2011 (phase 1), August 2014 (all);

- Gilbert Street (Bullsmoor) – 22 rental properties, 12 Shared Ownership, 28 private sale – to be completed February 2012.

Other areas

- Haringey: former Hornsey Hospital (Crouch End) – 9 rental properties, 11 Right to Buy – to be completed November 2011;
- Islington: Corsica Street (Highbury) – 9 rental properties, 21 Shared Ownership – to be completed February 2012;
- Watford: Tagger site, Aldenham Road (Oxhey) – 18 rental properties, 6 Shared Ownership – to be completed March 2012;
- Barnet: Great North Way (Hendon) – 24 rental properties, 4 Right to Buy – to be completed March 2012.

For more information please contact our Development team on 020 7209 9204 or visit the "Rent a Property" and "Buy a Home" sections of our website at www.originhousing.org.uk.



Winchester Road, Camden

Four of the flats at Winchester Road are designated flats for people with learning disabilities. All units are one bedroom, self-contained modern flats and one has a balcony. Visits took place while the flats were still being completed with tenants signing up within weeks of the opening.

Do you want to get involved with Origin?

There are many ways you can get involved with what we do at Origin to help us improve the services we offer you. We currently have vacancies for volunteers in the following areas:

Origin Housing Residents' Forum

Members play a key role in strategic decisions at Origin with direct access to Chief Executive, Karen Wilson, and links to the Origin Board.

Meeting: Every first Wednesday evening of the month for two hours at our Eversholt Street office.

Contact: Customer services on 0800 040 7989 or email enquiries@originhousing.org.uk.

Youth Forum

The Forum includes our young residents – aged 14 to 21 – from Camden, Enfield and Hertfordshire.

Meeting: Four times a year at various locations.

Contact: Mark Lee on 07917 343 671 or email mark.lee@originhousing.org.uk.

Retired Residents' Forum

Members live in any of our retirement housing schemes and meet to discuss issues

surrounding retirement housing at Origin.

Meeting: Once every two months.

Contact: Customer services on 0800 040 7989 or email enquiries@originhousing.org.uk.

Reading Panel

The Panel reads the content of In the Know, our annual review and other draft publications, before we go to print – just to make sure we are communicating in a way that is clear and easy to understand.

Meeting: Very infrequent – most communication carried out by phone and email.

Contact: Mildred Talabi on 020 7209 3685 or email mildred.talabi@originhousing.org.uk.

Repairs panel

Started in April 2010 and has two sides – Responsive Repairs (which deals with the day-to-day) and Large Works (which deals with planned maintenance).

Meetings: Separate meetings for each are held every three months on a Wednesday or Thursday evening.

Contact: Justine Leslie on 020 7209 9246 or email

Justine.Leslie@originhousing.org.uk.

Income Management panel



The Income Management Panel with Origin staff members

Set up in July 2010 to review Income Management (IM) policies and processes, develop new ideas, agree service standards, and monitor the IM service. The panel is open to all Origin residents, including Leaseholder and Shared owners.

Meetings: Once a month from 5pm to 7pm at Eversholt Street.

Contact: Mildred Bongo on 0800 040 7989 or email mildred.bongo@originhousing.org.uk.

Getting involved brings lots of rewards – you can meet new people, learn new skills, boost your CV and help to improve the services your local community receives. We look forward to welcoming you on board!

Changes to housing benefits are coming...



The government has made proposals to cut the rising cost of housing benefit to reduce Britain's huge national debt. Exactly what the changes are and when they will be introduced have not yet been confirmed, however, we thought it would be helpful for you to understand what they are likely to be so you can be prepared in advance. Here are some key questions and answers:

How are the changes likely to affect me?

There are lots of proposals, but here are three that are most likely to affect you directly:

1. If you are a non-dependant* aged 18 years old or older, or you have

someone of that age or over living with you who is not in full-time education, you may get less housing benefit as the government assume that non-dependants contribute to the household. There are already deductions in place but these will increase.

2. If you have been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for over a year and also get housing benefit, you will lose 10% of your housing benefit.

3. If you are of working age (over 18 years old) and claim housing benefit, you will only receive housing benefit for the size of living space you are assessed to need.

*(A non-dependant is someone who lives with the housing benefit claimant such as an adult son, daughter, relative or friend.)

For more information please read the 'Changes to Housing

Benefit from April 2011 and October 2011' on the Department for Work and Pensions website (www.dwp.gov.uk).

When are these changes likely to take place?

Point 1 above is likely to start in April 2011, while points 2 and 3 can only happen once the Welfare Reform Bill becomes law, so April 2013 is likely.

If these proposals go ahead I will struggle to pay my rent?

It is better to contact us BEFORE you get into any money problems. Origin sent a booklet and DVD about money management to all tenants earlier this year, which we hope was helpful. Our Staying Put Services can help you if you have money problems or are at risk of losing your home. Please call 020 8996 8900 for more information or visit our website – www.originhousing.org.uk.

Next year's rent and service charges

Rent

• If you are an assured social housing tenant you should have received your quarterly (three-monthly) rent statement last month. In February 2011 you

will receive another letter telling you about the yearly changes in rent which happens from April.

The level of your rent is set by a calculation* based on the national Retail Price Index (RPI).

So if, for example, your rent is £80 a week and you live in a two-bedroom home, then your rent will increase to £84.08, plus or minus £2 depending on the location and size of your home.

• If you are a secure tenant your rent is set for two years.

• If you are a secure or assured tenant your rent statements are sent out every three months. Your next ones are due to be

sent to you in January, April, July, October and December 2011.

*The calculation is based on September's RPI of 4.6% + 0.5% + or - £2.

Service charges

This month (December) you will receive a draft

letter listing your service charges for 2011. This is for you to check and to let us know if it is wrong; contact details will be on the letter.

Service charges are for gardening, general maintenance, lighting

for communal areas and other costs for the upkeep of your home and its surroundings. We will send you another letter in February.

Reaching out in Westminster

Pictured - Ana Carolina Cuentro - Outreach team leader



Origin's Outreach Service provides help and support for vulnerable adults with learning disabilities living in the borough of Westminster. We aim to help people maintain and develop their independence within their home and community by providing access to local facilities and support in their own homes.

Some of the ways we do this include:

- help in reading through post;
- support in sorting benefits and ensuring bills are paid correctly and on time;
- assistance in contacting landlord for repairs;
- support in resolving issues over the phone;
- assistance in grocery shopping.

We also help individuals develop interaction with others in the community through finding paid or voluntary work. In addition,

all service users are allocated weekly support sessions with one of our Support Workers and have access to a 24-hour emergency on call support service.

The Outreach Service is funded by Westminster Learning Disabilities Partnership and is therefore only available to individuals living in this borough. If you think you might benefit from this type of support, please call Joy-Margaret Samaroo on 020 7284 5488 for more details.

Floating support in Herts

Pictured - Jane Llewellyn - Floating Support team leader



We offer a free service for tenants or owner occupiers, aged 25 and above, living in Hertfordshire who may be experiencing housing problems. The service is a flexible way of supporting people in their own homes with the aim of preventing tenancy breakdown which may be caused by delayed rent payments or rented properties left empty.

We can help with:

- rent payment problems or pending evictions;
- advice around claiming benefits, bills and budgeting;

- referrals to community support services in Hertfordshire;
- settling into a new home;
- moving on and contacting housing providers;
- neighbourhood disputes and harassment;
- general advice on a range of housing issues.

Support levels are negotiated and gradually withdrawn once the client's needs are achieved.

Who can apply for floating support?

Anyone living in Hertfordshire can refer themselves for the service, including council, Housing Association and private tenants.

We also welcome referrals from friends and family, council housing officers and re-housing teams, Social Care services, GPs and health services, support providers and housing association staff.

If you wish to find out more about the service or would like to discuss making a referral, please contact our Floating Support Team on 01438 357 187; email floating.support@originhousing.org.uk; or write to: Gateway Co-ordinator (Referrals), Origin Housing, 1 Blakeney House, Blakeney Road, Symonds Green, Stevenage, Herts SG1 2LH.

Our repairs commitment – update

Last issue, we introduced our new 'Property Services' team for repairs and renewed our repairs commitment to you in three key areas:

1. Customer service
2. Performance
3. Value for money

Here's what's happened so far:

Customer service

We measure customer satisfaction on a monthly basis and in September 2010 (at the time of going to print), 74% of customers reported being satisfied or very satisfied with our repairs service. We are addressing this drop in performance with our contractor partners.

Performance

Our gas team is working hard to have valid gas safety certificates in all our homes where there is a gas facility (such as a gas fire or boiler). Fumes from faulty gas appliances can kill; this is why we are keen to get access to your home once a year

to check the safety of your appliance. Please help us to help you by arranging for your annual gas service if you haven't had one already. You can call Justine Leslie on 020 7209 9246, or email Justine.Leslie@originhousing.org.uk.

Value for money

Our brand new repairs panels (more details on page 6) have met three times now and have been very clear in holding the Property Services team to account on how we spend your money. The panel will be actively involved in appointing new contractors for things like kitchens, bathrooms, and gas suppliers, so if they feel a contract does not represent good value for money, we do not sign – simple!

If you have any questions about any of the above, please contact our Director of Property Services, James Cooke, on 020 7209 9313 or 07733 103 278. Email: james.cooke@originhousing.org.uk



Winter tip – How to bleed your radiator

If your radiator is hotter at the bottom and cooler at the top, it may be because of trapped air. You can release this air by using a bleeding key (you can get these quite cheaply from hardware stores) as follows:

- 1) Locate the valve (square in shape) which is usually on the side of the radiator at the top;
- 2) Hold a small hand towel under the valve and turn the valve slowly – this should then start to release the trapped air (you will hear a hissing sound).
- 3) When a small amount of water appears, the air should have been released so turn the valve back to seal the radiator.

Preventing fires in your home

As well as making sure your home fire alarms are in good working order, we are also required by law* to carry out regular inspections of our properties to identify fire hazards and where you may be at risk.

We carry out these assessments on a regular basis and from our last inspections we are resolving the following issues:

- adding more fire exit signs where necessary;

- clearing obstructed escape routes;
- organising additional emergency lighting;
- adjusting access for better means of escape.

In addition, there are a number of things you can do to help us keep your homes safe from fire such as:

- keeping communal walkways and staircases free of bikes or items of furniture;
- keeping fire doors shut at all times;

- regularly test your smoke detector and report any problems with it (let us know if you do not have one);
- put out cigarettes completely if you are a smoker;
- keep an eye on your frying pan when you're cooking!

If you have any concerns about your safety, please contact our customer service team on 0800 040 7989.

*The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (2006)

You said, We did – Neighbourhood Roadshows

During August our neighbourhood team organised roadshows in Watford, Enfield, Camden and Brent to get face-to-face feedback on what you think of our services. As a result of last year's roadshows, we were able to make some changes to the way we did things this year and we look forward to doing the same for next year's roadshows.



You Said

You wanted to attend the daytime roadshows but were unable to due to work commitments;

You wanted to be more involved in planning and organising the roadshows;

Residents of Cherwell Drive, Stevenage wanted more activities for adults as they felt that last year's roadshows were mainly fun activities for children;

From our tenancy audits many residents said their properties did not have working smoke alarms;

Hertfordshire residents expressed difficulties at this year's roadshow in transferring accommodation due to low availability of housing.

We Did

This year we held the roadshows in the late afternoon and evening so all residents could attend. Next year we will look at moving them from weekdays to a Saturday to accommodate more people.

Many residents of Griffin Close (Brent) helped to organise the roadshow there and contributed to the food and entertainment. This group are now planning to set up a Residents Association.

This year as well as the usual fun for children, we had barbeques for adults and also arranged for our repairs contractors to attend and carry out on the spot repairs and inspections.

We arranged for the Fire Service to attend the Larman's Road roadshow in Enfield and fit free smoke alarms in many homes. We will look at rolling this out to other areas next year.

We offered advice and support on alternative options to find suitable accommodation, including applying to other housing providers with more properties.

If you would like more information on the roadshows or you would like to be involved with planning and organising it next year, please call our customer service team on 0800 040 7989.

Need to adapt?

If you are an Origin Housing tenant who has a disability or health problem, or you have a child with a disability, we can help you make adaptations to your home.

Adaptations are equipment or modifications to your home that help you carry out your daily activities so you can stay living more independently. There are two types:

- Minor adaptations – such as grab or hand rails, lever taps (easier to turn taps on and off), door entry systems or flashing doorbells (for hard of hearing);
- Major adaptations – such as walk-in showers, hoists, ramps, stairlifts or widening doors.

We have a dedicated Adaptations Coordinator, Richard Johnson (pictured), whose job is to get your adaptations done quickly and to a high standard.

If you need minor adaptations call Richard on 0207 284 5487 or email richard.johnson@

originhousing.org.uk and he will visit you to assess how you would benefit. If you qualify, your adaptation will be fitted within 14 working days at no cost to you.

If you need major adaptations, you will need to be assessed by an Occupational Therapist (Councils have these). Richard can help you get in touch with one and if the OT recommends an adaptation for you, we will talk to the Council on your behalf, help you fill out funding applications, obtain quotes for the works, oversee the contractors and answer any queries you have. We will get your works completed within eight months of the date you first contacted us.

Some facts and figures!

- Between April 2009 and March 2010, we installed 58 minor adaptations and 63 major adaptations for our tenants;
- 64% were fitted for tenants aged 60 years and over;



- The total expenditure was £169,890, a lot of which was claimed back from the Council through grants;
- Our survey carried out between April and June this year reported 100% satisfaction with our minor adaptations service, 75% on major adaptations.

You may remember that we collected a lot of customer profile information over the past year to get to know our tenants some more. Part of the way we have used this information is to target tenants who were previously under-represented in receiving the adaptations service. We visited these tenants, mostly aged 75 and above, and as a result we have had an 80% take-up on the service this year.

Give us a call!

We recently upgraded our phone systems to allow us to handle your calls better. Some of the improvements you'll notice when you call include:

- music while you're on hold;
- callback for times when you can't hold;

- easier access to staff by diverting calls to mobile phones when they are out of the office;
- a friendly greeting when you call from your usual number as we'll know who you are.

So give us a call today on 0800 040 7989 – we'd love to hear from you!