

Origin News

The newsletter for Origin Housing stakeholders

Strategic change to boost efficiency and customer service

Stock transfer

Origin Housing is making big changes to get closer to its customers and build stronger local partnerships by transferring a significant proportion of stock and exiting from residential and high care schemes.

To concentrate and operate more effectively in north London and Hertfordshire, six per cent of stock (342 homes) has already been transferred with more to follow, to other housing associations.

“We want to be a truly community-based organisation that understands its customers and helps neighbourhoods thrive,” says Karen Wilson, Origin Chief Executive. “But to do this, and to deliver services efficiently, we need to work only in areas where we have a significant number of homes.”

The transfer is half completed. Homes have been transferred so far to three local and specialist housing associations: Central & Cecil Housing Trust in Kingston, Merton and Hillingdon; Catalyst Communities Housing Association in Hounslow and Ealing; and Mount Green Housing Association in Surrey.

Origin is also at an advanced stage of transferring properties in Kent and has one sheltered scheme in Cambridge and two in Chelmsford that are still on the market.

A single organisation

Origin is about to rationalise its overall company structure in a bid to become more efficient. In April this year SPH



Staff discussion of strategy was an important part of Origin's staff event

Housing, Griffin Homes, and Origin Group will become one organisation - Origin Housing Ltd.

The single organisation will improve effectiveness by reducing administrative costs, and streamlining the management of multi-tenure estates.

All parts of the group have been trading under the name Origin Housing since November last year.

Top marks for quality

An independent assessment of the service it provides its customers has resulted in Origin achieving Assured Excellence Certification from QHS (Quality Housing Services), an organisation that works closely with the Tenants' Services Authority.

The year-long assessment included

mystery shopping and on-site inspections. QHS staff posed as customers, undertook resident surveys and visited offices to gauge quality in areas including how accessible services were, estate management, information available to customers, procedures for rent payments and Origin's approach to equality and diversity.

Origin achieved 'enhanced certification' in nine areas including estate management; dealing with people seeking housing; diversity and equality.



Service scoops first London Quality Mark

Origin is the first London housing association to be awarded the Foundation's Quality Mark following a rigorous assessment of its Care and Repair service (Foundations is the national body for home improvement agencies in England).

The assessors looked at all aspects of the service including the provision of aids and adaptations to keep people mobile in their own homes, Origin's 'handyperson service' and its 'home from hospital scheme', which helps vulnerable people manage the transition from hospital back to home.

"The assessment was pretty tough but it was a positive experience as it made us look in depth at our working practices and procedures," said Care and Repair Team Manager Amanda Clarke.



Money management help for residents

Knowing how to make the most of your cash can make all the difference when you are on a low income. So Origin has produced a new financial inclusion pack which has tips on how to open a basic bank account, what to do if you are struggling to pay your rent, understanding the real cost of doorstep loans and where to go for debt and benefits advice. The pack, which includes a DVD and is funded by Santander bank, is to be sent to all Origin residents.

Origin has also teamed up with debt and housing specialists CHAS, whom the housing association is funding to provide debt advice to residents who need extra help. In addition Origin is working closely with credit unions in both London and Hertfordshire to enable residents to access affordable credit.

Paxton Court opens in Islington



Origin is drawing on its extensive expertise and experience in working with vulnerable people to provide support services at Paxton Court, a new housing scheme developed by Family Mosaic housing association. Tenants with learning disabilities and other needs, including mental health, drug and alcohol problems, will be helped to live more independent lives.

New forum gives residents a stronger voice

Origin's Residents' Forum, which got under way last year, has grown in size and influence and looks set to help residents have a bigger say in how important decisions are made and implemented.

The forum which meets monthly has grown from eight to twenty members and elected its first chair and vice chair in September – both chair and vice chair attend Origin board meetings.

Gulshan Sangha who lead's Origin's resident involvement programme says:

"The exciting thing about the new forum, is that residents are involved in the process of policy and decision making from the very beginning."

Forum members comprise residents from across the geographical areas where Origin works and seeks to reflect the diversity of our customers.

The forum has been involved in setting the organisation's priorities for the year ahead and agreeing rent and service charge policy and increases.

Success leads to growth of Floating Support Service

Origin's Hertfordshire Floating Support Service, which offers short term help to households in financial crisis and at risk of becoming homeless, is growing fast as it helps hundreds of people avoid eviction and hold on to their homes.

The original team of four support staff has expanded to 16 in less than a year and the service has helped 220 people avoid losing the property they own or rent.

The support staff are skilled in providing debt and benefits advice in crisis situations, as well as offering advice on housing law and representation in court. In the past year the service has represented 60 people in court who were facing eviction or repossession, with a successful outcome in over 90% of cases.

By helping people stay in their own homes, the service is saving local authorities the huge costs that can arise when families and individuals become homeless.

Origin's Community Development team plans to work with twelve football teams, funding training for coaches who want to gain a coaching qualification, and helping teams find facilities where they can meet and play.

The 4 Kix project is funded by the Football Foundation, a charity which supports grass roots football.

MP Frank Dobson launches the 4 Kix Camden and Enfield football and community initiative

Investment in amateur football helps young people succeed

Football is an important way of engaging young people, building their confidence and encouraging them to contribute to their communities. That is why the new 4 Kix project was launched by Origin at the end of last year in Camden and Enfield.

Young residents are encouraged to undertake voluntary activity or training in their community through schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh and

Youth Achievement Awards. Already four members of Origin Football Club in Camden have gained a football coaching qualification, and two more have achieved a qualification in youth work.

In return the young people and their football teams, which sometimes struggle to survive, gain vital financial and practical support.



New homes that stand out from the crowd

Origin relishes complex and innovative housing projects. For instance, in January it completed ninety two homes at Regent's Place, a prestigious high density development in **Camden**, bringing more affordable homes to one of London's most expensive areas. In **Watford**, in the first scheme of its kind, Origin is building 164 new homes directly on to the south end of the football ground, which feature white and anthracite exteriors, with 'Watford red' metal mesh-encased balconies. The development will provide vital accommodation for key workers at Watford General Hospital next-door and in the surrounding area. The hospital is also being redeveloped, so these combined building projects will kick-start the wider regeneration of the west Watford area.



Regent's Place, Camden



What the finished affordable homes at Watford stadium will look like

Financially strong and ready to grow

A strong asset base and low levels of debt have left Origin Housing in a healthy financial position despite the credit crunch – in 2008/09 the group enjoyed a surplus of £1.4 million and Origin is forecast to remain in surplus in subsequent years.

This financial strength, combined with a new £50m loan facility from its new financial partner Santander, means Origin can continue the steady development of urgently needed new homes. The housing association has set itself the target of building 400 properties every year across north London and Hertfordshire.



Santander chair Lord Burns (right) visiting Regent's Place with Origin chair Colin Sherriff