

# new charter news

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## Survey starts

Our annual tenants survey starts this week. Once again, we've asked an independent specialist company to contact 1000 tenants by telephone to ask your opinion of our services and your satisfaction with New Charter. We don't know individually what you say, but we do act on the results which we publish. If you're contacted, please spare a few minutes to help us improve!



*Dancers from Oldham-based dance troupe, Nrtya Jyoti, provided a colourful spectacle as they helped mark Aksa Housing Association joining our Group.*



## 50,000th Improvement

That's the staggering number of individual improvements we've made to your homes since we formed in 2000. We originally planned our investment programme to take a decade to complete, but we're well ahead of schedule.

We reached 50,000 by completing new heating on the Tame Street estate in Denton.

When we consulted tenants, you told us you wanted us to improve all homes in stages rather than modernising each home. This was because no one wanted to wait until the end of our ten-year programme to get those much needed improvements – to windows, doors, central heating, kitchens, bathrooms and the rest.

As well as 50,000 improvements, we've also made much progress on other neighbourhood issues you have told us are important – from new fencing and planting through action to tackle anti-social behaviour, to building new homes for rent.

While this is a milestone for us, we know the job is not yet done. There are still many more kitchens and bathrooms to install and heating to upgrade. And New Charter won't be stopping there – we'll be starting work this year to plan home improvements from 2010 onwards!

## Home ownership - the real costs

The Government requires us to provide you with certain information about home ownership. New Charter has published a leaflet setting out all the required information relating to buying your home under the statutory preserved right to buy or right to acquire schemes.

A copy is enclosed with this newsletter and further copies are available in the shops, or on our website



## One on 2

Happy New Year from all at New Charter! We may have completed 50,000 improvements, but we intend 2006 to be a year we delight even more customers.

The last year had many highlights for us including the Housing Minister opening our Homeless Persons Reception Centre, winning Ashton Building of the Year for Wellington Court, launching our *thancs!* scheme and the arrival of Aksa Housing Association into the Group.

One recent initiative you may have seen covered in the local newspapers is our Board's decision to sponsor a new school – an Academy – for Tameside. We are the first Housing Association to sponsor a school. The investment will pay dividends for this area, increasing opportunities for the sons and daughters of many of our tenants. It's yet another example of being iN business for neighbourhoods.

A couple of features this issue are from tenant suggestions. If you've an idea for a feature, please let me know and I'll do the best I can to include it.

David Rigby, Editor

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## New faces

We've had some changes to our Board members since we last featured this in issue 16. You'll be aware from recent issues we advertised to fill vacancies from you, our tenants. We've already been able to appoint Marie Clegg from Ashton as a tenant Director of the Board of New Charter Housing (North) following interviews. She has been joined by Ashton Waterloo Councillor Maria Bailey who was nominated by Tameside Council.



We're still in the midst of interviewing for a new tenant Director for the Board of New Charter Housing (South). To fill a vacancy for Council Board members, Tameside has nominated Newton Councillor Joe Fitzpatrick to join the South Board.

And there are some changes to the Board of New Charter Housing Trust Limited. Following the arrival of Aksa Housing Association into the Group, we're delighted to welcome Aslam Khan and Abdul Quayum (both successful professionals) as Aksa's nominees.

## thancs! winners

Tenants who are *thancs!* cardholders are automatically entered into our quarterly prize draw. And three lucky customers will find shopping so much cheaper in the New Year as their names were drawn from over 8,000 customers who've now enrolled in *thancs!*

You've told us that supermarket gift vouchers are great prizes for young and old. So we've gone to Morrisons, who have stores in Dukinfield, Denton and Hyde, to provide fantastic free shopping – and all just for being good customers of New Charter.

Our lucky three prize winners are:

1st prize - £250 – Miss C Cooper, Rowley Street, Ashton-u-Lyne

2nd prize - £150 – Mrs J Parr, Fir Road, Denton

3rd prize - £100 – Miss J Turley, Pickmere Terrace, Dukinfield

Our *thancs!* scheme provides a mixture of rewards for individuals and neighbourhoods. Further details are on page 8. If you're not already a cardholder, you can apply by ringing us on 0161 331 2400.

## Monster bash for New Charter + Tenants' Federation

Over 200 adults and children packed out our headquarters on Cavendish Street, Ashton-under-Lyne at Halloween to celebrate the launch of the New Charter + Tenants' Federation.



The ghoulish theme was reflected by most of those attending in fancy dress. Local scary monsters, witches and vampires were so keen to come along that the attendance limit was reached two weeks before. Prizes were awarded by the Federation for best child and adult costumes and best pumpkin. Children were entertained by a clown, games and a disco. As well as 'ghastly' drinks and 'frightful' food, there was even - for those who dared - a chocolate fountain!

The launch celebrated the new tenants' organisation which aims to represent tenants aspirations and concerns, initially to us as the area's biggest landlord. But New Charter + has already been contacted by tenants of other landlords interested in affiliating. The Federation is recognised by New Charter for consultation, and plans to get more tenants involved, both formally and informally.

## Open to all tenants

New Charter Housing (North) Ltd  
Monday 6th March

New Charter Housing (South) Ltd  
Wednesday 8th March

New Charter Housing Trust Ltd  
Tuesday 14th February

Why not come along to a Board meeting at New Charter? They usually last no more than 2 hours and are held at Cavendish 249 in Ashton, starting at 6pm. You are not able to speak, but you can watch how the Board works, and you will have a set of papers to follow the proceedings.

Take a look at the dates and if you can attend, or would like more information, please contact Laura Douthwaite on 0161 331 2000.

## Radio On

Tameside is to have its own exclusive radio station. Ofcom, the radio regulator, has awarded a five-year broadcasting licence to Tameside Radio.

Serving the community of Tameside, the station's broadcasting philosophy is to create a unique sound that will engage the community, while using people with skills largely ignored by other radio services. The Tameside Radio team includes media professionals, social entrepreneurs and community members from Tameside including radio personality Andy Hoyle and local councillor Maria Bailey. Editor of 'New Charter News', David Rigby is another unpaid Director.

Simon Walker, Managing Director of the company (Tameside Community Radio) set up to run the station said "This is a new kind of radio, run by local people for local people. As well as playing great music, the station will be a community voice, championing local issues and providing opportunities for local community groups and businesses alike. We intend to make this truly local radio station an essential part of the Tameside community."

Tameside Radio is keen to attract a pool of volunteers to learn more about community radio and help provide the programmes. The station is particularly keen to attract involvement from women, black and minority ethnic communities and disadvantaged groups. Contact Sue Vickers from Volunteer Centre Tameside (95-97 Penny Meadow, Ashton-under-Lyne; 0161 339 2345) if you'd like to register for the first training sessions.

The station expects to be on air by late Spring 2006. You can find more information on the station and its successful licence application at [www.tcrfm.com](http://www.tcrfm.com).

## Award is Magic

There was no trickery involved in getting our latest award, but guests at the presentation of the Sheltered Housing Code of Practice were entertained by a professional magician.

James Purnell MP for Stalybridge and Hyde, and Minister for Creative Industries and Tourism at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport was on hand to present the award, the latest external endorsement for the quality of our services for tenants.

The Code of Practice from the Centre for Sheltered Housing Studies (CSHS) is recognised as the sector equivalent of a Charter Mark. New Charter is the only landlord in this area to get the prestigious award.

Mr Purnell took time to chat to some of the staff, tenants and Board members who had worked hard to get the award. He took the opportunity to praise the wider contribution to the local community which we have made since forming less than six years ago.

Group Chief Executive of New Charter Ian Munro was delighted to get the standard, and to hear the MP's compliments. He said: "We know our customers of sheltered housing think we provide an excellent service from our independent survey results. Getting the Code of Practice confirms the high standards we believe we have for all our sheltered and supported housing. I am justifiably proud of the people we employ, especially our Care Services team who has achieved so much."

Afterwards, former Young Magician of the Year Nick Rushton's unique style of close-up magic astonished those attending.



## They won!

Congratulations to our two winners of helicopter trips which we offered to all *thancs!* card holders last issue.

We had a great response and – surprisingly – there was an even split between those of you who wanted to fly over United and those who wanted the City flight.

We asked the chair of New Charter Housing Trust Limited, Ged Cooney and chair of Aksa Housing Association, Aslam Khan to draw the winners. As they both confessed to being followers of Manchester United, Aslam drew out the United winner:

**Linda Thorpe of Forrest Road Denton**

And we made Ged an honorary 'Blue' for the evening...he drew out: **Stacey Leech of Harridge Avenue, Stalybridge**



## Can you see the wood for the trees?

*Thanks to one Dukinfield tenant who suggested we cover this in a future issue.*

What's your view? Do you think trees damage property? Are their leaves an annoyance in autumn? Do they somehow attract youths and nuisance? Is the wildlife attached to trees dangerous to the health of local residents?

Or perhaps you enjoy the natural beauty of trees, their essential role in maintaining the balance of our environment, and the enhancement they bring to our neighbourhoods.

At New Charter, we like trees. We believe we have a responsibility to manage, protect and improve this natural resource. Research identifies Britain to be one of the least wooded countries in Europe. Compared with tree cover in France (27%) and Spain (31%), our 10% cover suggests we do not value woodland. And in Tameside, tree cover is a little over 4.3%.

New Charter will not take down trees without good reason; only where trees present a danger or risk to

person or property. We try to manage our trees, and prune to encourage healthy and controlled growth.

We plant new trees and replace old specimens to increase tree cover; and we do this with regard for location, species and long-term effect.



We take a very positive view of trees in our neighbourhoods. As well as the atmospheric benefits, the aesthetic effect against hard urban landscape is good, bringing nature into the heart of our towns, providing diverse habitats and encouraging birds and other wildlife. So we encourage tree planting, and a planting scheme is a key part of all environmental schemes and estate improvements.

Semi-mature trees achieve instant effect, and reduce the risk of theft and damage to young saplings. The cost of semi-mature trees is high. So we plan to set aside some areas of land to plant our own saplings, and then transplant them in our neighbourhoods in five to ten years as semi-mature specimens.

## Better than the rest

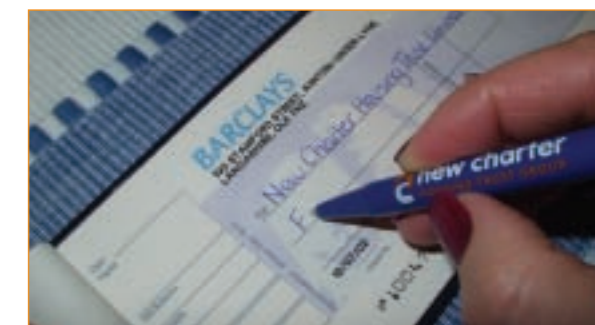
We believe we provide customers with a quality service at a fair price. In last year's survey, 77% of tenants told us the rent we charge is good value for money. We'll be testing that again soon.

Information released by the Housing Corporation last month showed we are around £6.50 a week CHEAPER than other rents in this area.

New Charter rent levels are based on rents inherited at the transfer of the stock from Tameside Council in 2000. Since then, rents have increased yearly by inflation + 1% in line with the Guarantee made to transferring tenants. Rents for new tenants are on average 13% higher.

The Government rent reforms means change. Over the period to 2012, we have to adjust our rents to be in line with a 'Target Rent' that reflects property value and affordability. In common with other landlords that have taken housing stock from Councils, our rents included a proportion for 'bricks and mortar' but also other services.

During 2005 we identified these elements, and informed tenants how much of the total you currently pay is for the 'bricks and mortar', and how much for additional services. From October 2005, rent cards make this split clear.



## Turning a corner

Preventing homelessness is one of our key aims, and we provide the housing advice services on behalf of Tameside Council.

The service runs from Warrington Street in Ashton, in premises far from satisfactory. A new building on the corner of Old Street and Booth Street in the town is under construction. We aim to have all Housing Options services up and running before Easter.



Our Director of Tenancy Services, Tony Powell invited Councillor John Taylor, the Council's Cabinet Deputy for Personal Services to join him on site to see how work was going. The new building will be the first point of contact for any resident of the borough with housing problems.

## Dear Editor



Q. Do I always get two rent-free weeks around Christmas and New Year?

*Mrs B J, Dukinfield*

A. We base your rent on 50 payment weeks a year. This is included in your tenancy agreement, so for all those tenants whose accounts are clear, the answer is yes. But if you get into arrears, we expect you to pay during those two weeks.

## The old get their say

When a landlord has almost half of all homes occupied by a head of household over retirement age, it has to listen carefully to those tenants.

We're supplementing our resident involvement by providing a dedicated Elderly Persons Forum which gives older customers a direct voice on all matters affecting their tenancies.

In November, we held the first meeting of our Forum, and were delighted that nearly 40 elderly residents, mainly from our Sheltered Schemes, came to Cavendish 249, our headquarters. The Forum is in addition to our annual tenant satisfaction surveys, service measurement, and the consultation with residents about their own sheltered scheme.



We're proud of our current satisfaction rating but focused on continual improvement. Residents were not slow to give us their views (!), but were as quick to praise what they liked about our services and performance. This will be the first of regular meetings, and tenants have set the agenda for future gatherings.

## Spend at shops

This year we earmarked £180,000 to improve and invest in the shops we own and rent out on estates. This means we have been able to tackle long-standing problems with the fabric of many of our shops.

For instance we start work in the New Year at Crowhill Road in Ashton, reroofing the shops there. We'll also be solving the long-term problems with water penetration affecting the shops at Hazlehurst Road and Gorse Lane.

We also put some of the money aside to carry out environmental work to make the parades of shops more attractive. We are concentrating first on neighbourhoods where we have already carried out extensive environmental improvements to homes. We will replace old and worn-out shop fronts, and where possible plan to remove or design out features which have led to anti-social behaviour.

Tameside Council's new CCTV network will shortly cover some parades. We expect this will also go a long way towards making these shops a safer and more pleasant environment to visit.

## Performance update

We record and report on our performance to our Boards and to our Tenants' Federation, New Charter +. Our latest performance statistics are from the end of November 2005, the most recent available as we went to press.

<b>Rents - Collection Rate</b>	<b>Group</b>
Our Target	99.3%
Our Performance	97.3%
<b>Relets - Average no. of Days Taken to Let Homes</b>	
Our Target	28 days
Our Performance	52 days
<b>Relets - Homes Let Each Month</b>	
Our Target	95 homes
Our Performance	151 homes
<b>Repairs - Emergencies - % Within 4-Hour Response</b>	
Our Target	95%
Our Performance	100%
<b>Repairs - Urgents - % Within 7-Day Response</b>	
Our Target	90%
Our Performance	100%
<b>Repairs - Routine % Within 28-Day Response</b>	
Our Target	90%
Our Performance	99.1%

## Wrong to buy

A cautionary tale from the Courts: Tenants of New Charter Housing (South) Mr & Mrs H. applied to buy their home on Stockport Rd, Denton.

They'd been tenants since 1996, so stood to get a sizeable discount. But something wasn't quite right with their application, and we suspected they weren't actually living there.

After some careful investigation, we presented our evidence to the Courts. Although Mr & Mrs H said they would contest, they gave in and failed to defend.

At the hearing, the judge considered our evidence and ordered them to give up the tenancy of the home immediately. So from planning to buy, they have ended up without the tenancy.

We felt greed had persuaded them to try and buy at a discount, let temporarily and then sell on to make a profit. Our message is simple – fraud will be found out.

## Email bulletin

Are you interested in receiving news from New Charter by e-mail? We launched our free e-bulletin, iNterCom, some time ago. It contained lots of information and items about New Charter; housing, community group grants, events and links to websites of interest.

But subscribers have fallen to just a few. We want to know if it's worth continuing. So here's a final call for you to find out more about what's going on by registering with us. Simply send an e-mail with the word **subscribe** in the subject box to [newsletter@newcharter.co.uk](mailto:newsletter@newcharter.co.uk). Join our e-community now!

## To become a *thancs!* cardholder

You must apply to New Charter.

You must be a tenant of a New Charter home.

You must have a clear rent account.

You must not have breached your tenancy conditions:

i.e. behaviour which has caused annoyance or nuisance to your neighbours;

- damage to New Charter property;
- threatening behaviour towards New Charter staff;
- actual bodily harm to New Charter staff;
- failure to keep your home and garden in an acceptable manner.

New tenants must have satisfactorily completed their probationary period.

Tenants who are employees of New Charter are ineligible for individual benefits and prizes.

## Rechargeable Repairs

Most repairs are our responsibility. But to deter damage to our property and encourage tenants to prevent negligence and abuse to their homes, we do recharge the cost of some repairs. It is unfair to the majority of tenants that they shoulder the cost of some tenants' misuse.

Our tenancy agreement with you, and your tenants' handbook, sets out responsibility for repairs to your home. We may require you to pay for the repair if the damage is caused by you, people who live with you or visitors to your home.

This applies regardless of whether the damage is caused deliberately, because of neglect or by accident. For example:

*windows and other glass broken because of an accident or wilful damage by you, members of your household or visitors*

*lock changes necessary because of lost keys*

*repairs needed because of wilful damage or neglect by you, members of your household or visitors*

*repairs needed because of improvements carried out by you*

*blocked drains, gullies or other waste pipes caused by neglect or misuse; for example, a sink blocked by you pouring fat down it.*

If you ask us to carry out this type of repair for you, it becomes a rechargeable repair. We will tell you when you report a repair if it is rechargeable and usually, what the cost will be, before we undertake the work. We expect full payment for rechargeable repairs. In exceptional circumstances (financial hardship), we may agree you can pay by installments.

Where a rechargeable repair is not an emergency or an urgent repair, you may seek consent to carry out the work at your expense.

In cases of vandalism or damage caused by others outside family and friends, you must report the incident to the Police and get a crime reference number before any repair will be considered. In these circumstances, you will not be recharged, although we may wish to look into further and may impose a charge if it is reasonable to do so.

If you are unhappy with any response or service from us about a rechargeable repair, please use our Complaints procedure. You can do this by visiting one of our shops or contacting our Customer Liaison Officer on 0161 331 2000.

## How to contact us

Our normal working hours are:

Mon to Wed **8.30am to 5pm**  
Thursday **8.30am to 4.30pm**  
Friday **8.30am to 4pm**

Please note our shops open at 9am Monday to Friday and are located at: 2 Henrietta Street, Ashton-under-Lyne; 9 Albert Street, Denton; 12 Clarendon Street, Hyde; 63 Grosvenor Street, Stalybridge.

**Main Switchboard: 0161 331 2000**  
**Reporting Repairs: 0161 331 2424**

We are open for your repair calls from 8am until 6pm. You can also report repairs online at [www.newcharter.co.uk](http://www.newcharter.co.uk)

Lettings General Enquiries:  
**0161 331 2345**

Out of hours emergency telephone calls:  
**0161 342 2222**

General Tenancy Enquiries:  
**0161 331 2400**