

new charter news



Tenants show the blooming way

You may be aware Tameside has been very successful in national and regional floral contests. But did you know New Charter tenants have been the backbone of this success?

New Charter's own garden contest produced a supreme champion, who then went on to be crowned champion gardener of Tameside. Irvin Chappell of Chester Avenue, Dukinfield achieved a unique double with his amazing garden.

This was the fifth year of our competition, with entries increasing each year. Judges found our green-fingered great from 123 entries. The quality has also increased, with the added excitement of mystery nominations made by New Charter's staff. But it is the first year we have presented a perpetual trophy - the Barry Engledow Cup, named in memory of a popular member of our staff who died suddenly in 2006.

His widow, Sue Engledow travelled from Rossendale to present Irvin with the engraved trophy. She was very impressed with the winning garden. Of the new trophy, Sue said: "I think it's just such a wonderful way to remember Barry. He worked hard to improve the environment of many of New Charter's neighbourhoods, but was especially proud when tenants showed they cared too."

Irvin Chappell was typically modest about his winning entry but said: "Unlike the rain which everyone will remember in 2007, my garden hasn't just dropped from the sky! It has taken most of my spare time and money and I'm still improving it. Over the years, I've been able to extend it by renting more land from New Charter."

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Able to speak about disability?

We invite any tenants with a disability to take part in a focus group to develop our Disability Strategy. We want to provide the right service to those with disabilities. But we need your views to identify any issues we should consider when writing and developing our plans.

A focus group is an informal way of people saying how things are for them and what New Charter could do to make life easier. It will take place on Tuesday 29th January 2008, at our headquarters, Cavendish 249, Cavendish Street, Ashton-under-Lyne.

We will provide refreshments and a light buffet from 6pm, and the focus group will start at 6.30pm. If you need transport, just let us know on the number below.

This is an opportunity to have your say and shape the future services we provide to this specific user group.

If you are interested in joining in, please contact our Tenant Participation Team on 0161 331 2400.

Smoke danger increases?

The ban on smoking in public places in England from July last year was the single biggest improvement in public health for a generation.

Under the legislation, smoking was banned in shops, offices, factories, pubs, cafes, restaurants, membership clubs, and public transport.

If you're a smoker, you may decide to smoke at home more. You'll know about the health risks. But what about the fire risks? Smoking is the single biggest cause of fires in the home. More than 500 people a year die in the UK in house fires.

Most people who die in house fires are killed because someone has been careless with smoking materials, like cigarettes, matches and lighters. And most of them don't have a working smoke alarm.

For less than the price of a packet of cigarettes, you can buy a smoke alarm and battery. If you have a fire in your home, the alarm will buy you valuable time...time to put your escape plan into action...time to get your family to safety

A month's free shopping!

That's the opportunity tenants who are *thancs!* cardholders get every three months. All are automatically entered into our quarterly prize draw, and the top prize is £250 of supermarket gift vouchers.

We've been to Morrisons to provide three customers with fantastic free shopping – and all just for being good customers of New Charter. Their names were drawn from 8,000 customers who've enrolled in *thancs!*

Our lucky prize winners are:

1st prize - £250 – Mr J McDermott, Buttermere Road, Ashton

2nd prize - £150 – Mr & Mrs J McKeon, Bangor Street, Ashton

3rd prize - £100 – Mr A Stenton, Huddersfield Road, Stalybridge



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

Tenants show the blooming way (continued from page 1)

We have four other category winners, to reward excellent gardeners across our homes.

- Best planter or container garden – Mrs Joan Powell, Chambers Court, Mottram
- Best garden suggested by our neighbourhood staff - Mrs B Phillips, Springs Lane Stalybridge
- Best shared garden – residents of Garden Walk, Ashton-under-Lyne
- Best garden in sheltered housing scheme – Mr and Mrs Brian Schonhut, Rufford Avenue, Hyde

All our winners automatically went through to the Tameside Champion of Champions, part of the Council's Britain in Bloom entry. This event is run by us, Tameside Council and seven other partner housing organisations with homes in Tameside. And to his surprise - but not ours - Mr Chappell was announced as the Champion Gardener. The Mayor, Councillor Michael Smith made a special trip to present the award and see for himself what a fantastic garden it is.

And that's not all. Residents on Central estate in Dukinfield yet again helped Tameside's success. They collected a Neighbourhood Award at the Royal Horticultural Society's presentation at Manchester Town Hall. And two of our tenants from Robinson Street collected awards from Stalybridge District Assembly for their stunning floral displays.

So we hope this inspires many of you to start planning your entry in our 2008 contest!

You said, we did - Your town

This issue we introduce a new feature. It's a response to your views in our newsletter survey, where you told us you'd like to see more local stories. The Tenants Editorial Panel discussed this and agreed we don't have the space to feature EVERY street! So we will choose a different town each issue and first up – it's **Denton**.

Paying back

One area of Denton is being spruced up by ex-offenders. The Community Payback is a venture by ourselves and the probation service. The principle is simple – offenders do real work to improve the neighbourhoods where they had previously committed crimes.

The first payback is repainting communal fencing at Tarran Grove and Portal Grove, at the top of Mill Lane. Neighbourhood Management Officer Lyndon Pugh identified the work. The cost of this would usually fall on us, so it's good news for all tenants. The ex-offenders of all ages work under supervision, and are also encouraged to follow City and Guilds courses to get qualifications.

Singing for charity

Scheme coordinator Miriam Harlow of Pendle House sheltered housing on Pendle Road organised a charity concert and raised more than £1000! Miriam was inspired by cancer sufferer Gary John, whose fight against the disease has been featured in the local papers. She split the proceeds three ways, with Willow Wood Hospice and Macmillan nurses also benefiting.



Miriam (left) passes on the donations

Praise indeed

Neighbourhood Management Officer Dolores Lewis received praise and thanks from high places. Andrew Gwynne MP wrote to commend her managing some problems on the Rose Hill estate. He said: "You have done a brilliant job and ought to be rightly proud of the achievements". Councillor Brenda Warrington added: "You have made the estate a much safer and happier place for your tenants and my constituents to live. You have made a real difference". Well done, Dolores – that's what New Charter is about...

A Rolls-Royce job?

Environmental improvements are underway in Bentley Road. Resident consultation shaped our plans. Our environmental surveyor Geoff Marland had to split the job in two to manage the work. The upgrade is being done by local contractor St Peters Partnership. It involves building new brick pillars and feature fencing, and landscaping to create seating areas for residents at Holford Court. Work is on schedule to finish in February.

Bentley Road under construction



MiNT Residents Focus Group

Financial exclusion is a phrase used a lot these days. It refers to people who cannot use financial products that others take for granted - for example, a bank account and bank-related products like cheap loans and insurance. Usually, such people lack confidence and knowledge of financial products. Not knowing alternatives means using the same arrangements year after year, often costing a lot more.



MiNT (Money information Network Tameside) was set up by organisations including New Charter, other Housing Associations, Tameside MBC, Citizens Advice Bureau, Surestart,

Groundwork and Cashbox credit union. It examines the issues surrounding financial exclusion and tries to counter them. We appointed David Burdis as Financial Inclusion Manager to co-ordinate the work of MiNT and move it on.

As part of MiNT's future work, we propose setting up a residents focus group which would provide a residents voice in the work we do. Most of the work MiNT has done has been based on what local experts see as the issues. But it needs residents to help with their experiences if MiNT is to reflect the important issues for people living in Tameside.

Ideally the focus group will meet four times a year and comprise up to 10 residents, with two being part of the MiNT Steering Group. We pay travelling expenses where appropriate.

This is your opportunity to have a say in a local initiative that is in the national spotlight.

If you are interested, please contact David Burdis on 0161 331 2000.

Complain away!

Our complaints policy is due for review. We're on the lookout for tenants who can help us do this. No special skills are necessary, but we want to attract people who can look at things from a tenant's point of view.

If you're interested, you'd join a small group of staff and Board members. There'd be a bit of reading to do, and a couple of meetings to attend and put your views. And you'd have the satisfaction of helping us improve further. Please contact Jan Crowder on 0161 331 2000 if you want to volunteer.

And if you have a complaint, a compliment or just simply want to comment on our services, pick up a leaflet from any of our shops or complete online.

Damage and distress

Police in Tameside, with New Charter, other registered landlords in the area and the local authority are working together to tackle criminal damage.

We share reports of criminal damage among all the agencies involved. A sergeant from each neighbourhood policing team will review all reports of damage, and fully investigate them. We will take all opportunities to target offenders.



Criminal damage is not just a serious offence, which can result in an £80 penalty order for disorder, an ASBO or even a prison sentence and criminal record for offenders. It is a crime that affects the quality of life for residents.

It can cause distress and inconvenience to local communities. Because of this, it is now a top priority for Tameside.

At every opportunity, the agencies will seek compensation orders, which mean the offenders must pay to repair the damage as part of their punishment.

At the same time, we will crack down on false reports of criminal damage. If anyone is found to be falsely claiming, they too will face prosecution.

Survey starts

Our annual tenant survey starts this month. 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!



Getting to know you

We know many of you read and enjoy our newsletters. But have you ever thought about how difficult it might be for those customers who can't see? Or who might struggle with small print? Or whose first language isn't English?

We are currently asking tenants if we can communicate better. We've always had an audiotape version of the newsletter, but we produce and send out much more information than newsletters. So don't be surprised if you're asked how we might best get in touch with you. It's part of our wish to improve and understand your needs better.

Caught in court

We enclose a special newsletter with this issue which concentrates on the work we're doing on promoting good neighbours and tackling anti social behaviour. We aim to produce this every six months and it replaces our regular column on our court successes.

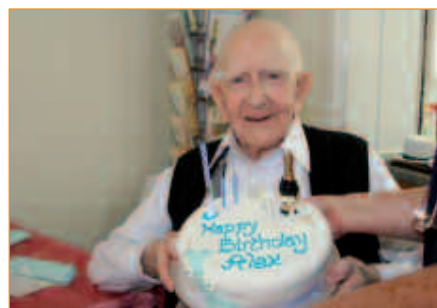
Closing shortly

We thank all those tenants who contacted us following our request for information on missed timber or single glazed windows. Most have now been done, or have been measured and are awaiting manufacture. We think we will complete ALL window replacement in the next few months, more than two years ahead of schedule.

But there's plenty of other improvement work in the future. We are now consulting on our plans for investment after our agreed programmes conclude in 2010.

Not just another birthday

Is the secret of long life a New Charter tenancy? You'd be forgiven for thinking so. We have several centenarians, and leading the way is May Swindells from Dukinfield (pictured with a celebration glass) who is 103. Close behind is our oldest man, 102 year-old Alex Cox, also of Dukinfield.



To this select group we welcome Nellie Lyne of Chartist House in Hyde who reached 100 in December. Friends, relations, other residents of the sheltered scheme and the Mayor of Tameside joined Nellie for a party to celebrate her notable day.

Your Choice, Your Move

We launched this scheme in April 2007 as a new way to let vacant New Charter homes.

Those looking for a home enrol as scheme members. Each week, we advertise our vacancies in the Tameside Advertiser, New Charter shops and www.newcharter.co.uk. Members can look at what is available and express an interest or 'bid' (online, by telephone, by post or by calling in to any of our shops) for any homes which appear to meet their needs. Members can bid for up to three properties from each advert. We accept bids from Thursday morning each week until Wednesday afternoon the following week. We find our telephones are very busy on Thursdays, but quieter on Fridays and Tuesdays. Members may find this information helpful when placing bids.

Since the scheme began we have advertised more than 600 homes. Predictably, the most popular are family houses which regularly attract more than 100 bids in the week they are advertised.

Feedback so far from our scheme members has been positive. They like being more involved in the process of selecting their new homes. And it's helping make settled neighbourhoods. Signs are that members' greater involvement in choosing means they value their home more - and are likely to stay longer.

It's Academic

In past issues we have told you of our plans to open a new kind of school in Ashton, the New Charter Academy.

New Charter is sponsoring the new school, using £2m of profitability won by our Building Company while working for other clients. Our sponsorship does not threaten our agreed housing investment plans; in fact, our aim is to further sustain the neighbourhoods and communities we are investing in.

The Academy will bring together Hartshead Sports College and Stamford Community High School. Originally set to open the year after, it will now open in September this year on the two existing school sites, following a poor Ofsted inspection at Hartshead Sports College which placed the school in special measures.

We've got extra funding from the Government to address the practicalities of opening the academy on two sites, and to pay for minor refurbishment to the existing buildings.

The New Charter Academy will open in new buildings at Broadoak in September 2010. It will be built as part of Tameside's Building Schools for the Future programme.

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 2007, the most recent available as we went to press.

Rents - Collection Rate	Group
Our Target	99.35%
Our Performance	99.94%
Relets - Average no. of Days Taken to Let Homes	
Our Target	28 days
Our Performance	43 days
Relets - Homes Let Each Month	
Our Target	95 homes
Our Performance	108 homes
Repairs - Emergencies - % Within 4-Hour Response	
Our Target	95%
Our Performance	100%
Repairs - Urgents - % Within 7-Day Response	
Our Target	90%
Our Performance	99.8%
Repairs - Routine % Within 28-Day Response	
Our Target	90%
Our Performance	97.2%

A year in our life

Each year, we produce an Annual Report, setting out how we have performed as a business. We send copies to those organisations and individuals we want to impress or just keep in touch with. If you'd like a free copy of our 2006/07 Report posted to you, simply ring our brochure answerphone 0161 331 2444 and leave your name, address and postcode.



Open to all tenants

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 following dates and if you can attend, or would like more information, please contact Laura Douthwaite on 0161 331 2000.

New Charter Housing (North) Ltd

Monday 21st January 2008 at 6pm

Monday 10th March 2008 at 6pm

New Charter Housing (South) Ltd

Wednesday 23rd January 2008 at 6pm

Wednesday 12th March 2008 at 6pm

New Charter Housing Trust Ltd

Tuesday 26th February 2008 at 6pm

Shops Opening Times

We've changed the opening hours at our four shops. We've looked at visitor patterns and Tuesday mornings are often quiet. So we open later, which allows time for staff training and updating. Also, our Stalybridge and Denton shops close daily for lunch between 12.30 and 1.30pm.

We may have changed our hours, but not our welcome! Call in and see us to get help with any of our services.

Monday	9.00am to 5.00pm
Tuesday	10.30am to 5.00pm (except after a bank holiday when we open at 9am)
Wednesday	9.00am to 5.00pm
Thursday	9.00am to 4.30pm
Friday	9.00am to 4.00pm



How to contact us

Main Switchboard: 0161 331 2000

Reporting Repairs: 0800 027 0828

We are open for your repair calls from 8am until 6pm. You can also report repairs at www.newcharter.co.uk

Lettings Enquiries: 0161 331 2345

Out of hours emergency telephone calls: 0800 027 0828

General Tenancy Enquiries: 0161 331 2400

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 later and are at:

2 Henrietta Street, Ashton

12 Clarendon Street, Hyde

9 Albert Street, Denton

63 Grosvenor Street, Stalybridge