

Sign up to our new management agreement

Our relationship with independent co-operatives is important, and we have recently updated the management agreement that spells out our responsibilities, how we will carry them out, and how much the co-operative has to pay.

The most obvious change is that we have simplified the language in the document. However, it is a legal contract, and sometimes 'legal-speak' is hard to avoid. Please let us know if we can make things even easier.

More importantly, in the past some co-operatives have asked us to provide services not covered by their existing agreement. This meant that we were giving them more of our time than we were giving others – who were effectively subsidising them.

To be fair to all our client co-operatives, we would like to be able to negotiate additional fees for such services.

Other changes include clarifying our role in cases of harassment

and anti-social behaviour; what happens when a co-operative fails to govern itself; training; passive smoking; membership of the Confederation of Co-operative Housing; data protection and diversity.

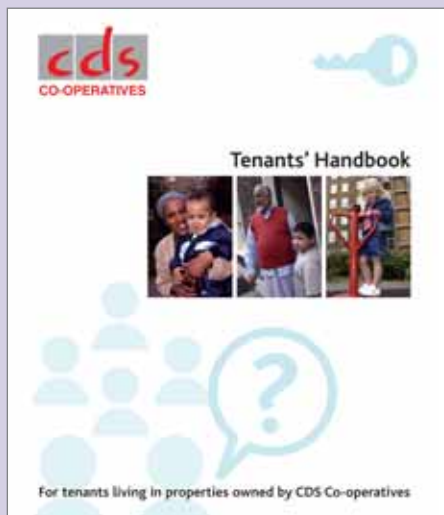
We would like all our client co-operatives to tell us what they think of these changes, especially if there are parts that aren't clear or need amending. Do let us know. A copy of the draft agreement is on the CDS website.

Over the years, the agreement has evolved, so not all co-operatives have the same contract with us. We urge all our independent client co-operatives to consider signing the new one when it is available.

Read all about it

If you haven't already had your copy of the tenants' handbook you will be able to pick up a copy by contacting your co-operative support officer. This is packed with vital information about your property and tenancy, in an easy-to-keep loose-leaf folder, so you can also easily add your own notes to it. You should also find it easy to read – the Crystal Mark on the inside cover shows it has been approved by the Plain English Campaign.

The tenants' handbook is for CDS Co-operatives's tenants only.



Send us any suggestions for improving the next edition. Call our Help Desk on 0845 450 8545 or email helpdesk@cds.coop.

Keep us posted

Do you know anyone or anything other readers might want to hear about? We are always looking for interesting stories, news items or articles for this newsletter. Let us know of any events, community action or relevant projects in your area.

Send your contributions to:

The Editor,
CDS Co-operatives News,
3 Marshalsea Road,
London SE1 1EP, or phone
020 7397 5737 or e-mail
chisanga.passwell@cds.coop

Help us inspect our services

We are still looking for someone to help us inspect the services we provide. The sort of work this person will do includes phoning tenants to find out how they feel about, for example, the maintenance service from CDS Co-operatives, or interviewing tenants in person about our services. You could also be doing what is called 'mystery shopping' – this is where you may test how we provide the service by pretending to be someone who is using our service. You do this over the phone, by e-mail by letter or in person. It's really to make sure we are doing what we are supposed to be doing.

We are looking for someone with common sense, who is persistent, enjoys solving problems, and is willing to probe deeply to get to the bottom of things. We will give you training if necessary. You will only need between 7 to 10 hours a week to do this job and we will pay you £7.50 per hour. We will call you a Tenant Auditor. Please phone us for an informal chat if you are interested.

This job is not open to anyone on our board of management or housing services sub-committee. If you are in rent arrears or are currently in dispute with us, you are also excluded from this post.

If you are claiming welfare benefit, please be aware that taking up this post may affect your entitlement.

For further details please contact:
Maria McCarron
Housing Services Manager
on 020 7397 5750 or e-mail
maria.mccarron@cds.coop

Printed on Evolution Satin 75% recycled paper.

If you would like more information in your own language, please contact us at the address or telephone number shown on this document.

إذا رغبت في الحصول على المزيد من المعلومات بلغة الأم، يرجى مراسلتنا على لغون المذكور في هذه النشرة.

यदि आपनाम निज भाषा अदरा क्वालि श्चेर तान करे व्हा करे एहे लेखक वेव्हा टिकनामय आग्रामेव्हा सत्रे वेव्हावेव्हा करुन ।

如果您想索取以你的語言寫的更多的資訊，請按照本文件所示的地址和我們取得聯繫。

જો આપને આપની પોતાની ભાષામાં વિશેષ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય તો આ દસ્તાવેજમાં જણાવેલ સરનામે અમારો સંપર્ક કરશોજી.

यदि आप अपनी भाषामें अधिक जानकारी चाहते हैं तो कृपया इस दस्तावेज़ में लिखे हुए पते पर हम से संपर्क करें ।

日本語での詳しい情報は記載住所までご連絡下さい。

한국어로 된 정보가 더 필요하신 경우 이 문서에 있는 주소로 연락해 주십시오.

آگرسین این زبان مزید معلومات حاصل کرنا چاہتے ہو تو مہربانی سے نال ایسٹ آف ٹیکے ہیوٹل پتے تے رابطہ کرو۔

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਆਪਣੀ ਖੋਲੀ ਵਿਚ ਹੋਰ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਤੇ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਪਤੇ ਤੇ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

உங்கள் மொழியில் மேற்கொண்ட தகவல்களைப் பெறவிரும்பினால் எம்முடன் இப்பத்திரத்தல் தரப்பட்டிருக்கும் விவரத்தைத் தயவுசெய்து தொடர்பு கொள்ளவும்.

آگرسین این زبان میں مزید معلومات حاصل کرنا چاہتے ہیں تو دیکھیں گے پتے پر ہم سے رابطہ قائم کریں۔

Information is also available in large print, braille and tape.

CDS Co-operatives
3 Marshalsea Road
London SE1 1EP
Help Desk 0845 450 8545

Season's greetings

From all at CDS Co-operatives.

Please note that our office closes on Friday 23rd December 2005, re-opening on Tuesday 3rd January 2006. We will send you details of our emergency services over the holiday period. During the holiday period please telephone the Help Desk local number 0845 450 8545 if you have an emergency repair.



Tenants have their say

The conference we held at the Thistle Hotel, Westminster, turned out to be a very productive and enjoyable day. Delegates came from as far afield as Milton Keynes, and included both our tenants and tenants of our client co-operatives.

As Maureen Stables, the chair of our board of management, told delegates, the conference was part of CDS Co-operatives's strategy for involving its tenants and client co-operatives in decisions about its services.

There were three sets of workshops covering: repairs and

maintenance, dealing with rent arrears, services for leaseholders, management of your estate, the new management agreement, working with co-operative committees, customer service standards and how to get involved. Each was led by a member of CDS Co-operatives's staff, and delegates were invited to say whatever they liked, leading to a frank exchange of views. The day finished with a plenary session at which delegates were asked to suggest priorities for delivering services. A full report will be presented to the board and published on our website.

Our plan was to get views from as many people as we could gather. Thanks to all the delegates who shared their opinions with us.



Apology

We would like to apologise for any difficulties you may have experienced contacting the office by telephone during October. Our voicemail system broke down affecting calls to the main switchboard number and to staff members' direct dial numbers. As a result, the Help Desk staff had to deal with a greater volume of calls to the 0845 450 8545 number. We have now upgraded the system, and sorted the problem.



This newsletter and other documents can be made available in other languages or in large print or audio tape. Please phone the Help Desk for more information on 0845 450 8545.

Getting tough on rent arrears

We need all your rent money – without it, we cannot pay for repairs and maintenance, replacing old fittings, building new homes or renovating existing ones. In July 2003, we reviewed our approach on rent arrears, and decided we needed to be much firmer in collecting rent.

At the same time, the last thing we want is for anyone to face eviction due to rent arrears. We want you to stay in your home.

The message we want to get across is that **paying the rent is not an option but an obligation, and a condition of your tenancy.** We expect tenants to pay the rent rather than just hope that they do.

A five-point plan

1 Prevention We explain to every new tenant the consequences of not paying their rent on time. To make things easier for them, we are looking into more ways to pay – by direct debit, switch or debit cards, for example – and whether it is feasible to arrange for local shops to accept payments through PayPoint.

2 Control We check every rent account once a month to make sure that we have received the correct amount and that the council has paid any housing benefit the tenant is entitled to.

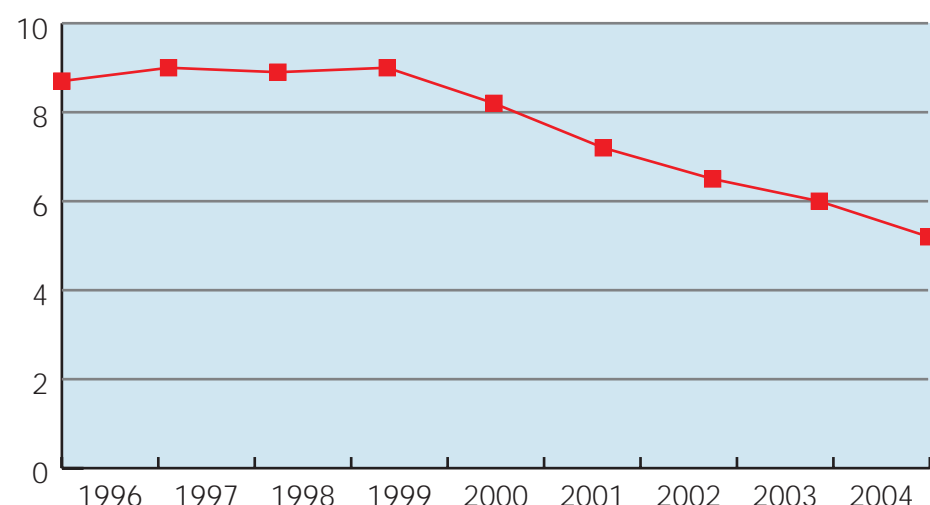
3 Early action If a tenant misses a payment, we aim to contact him/her within 14 days to discuss the problem.

4 Advice We can offer advice on managing debt and claiming benefits. We can also give details of sources of specialist help, if needed.

5 Legal action If a tenant persistently fails to pay his/her rent we will take legal action to end the tenancy. We can now present cases at court without the assistance of solicitors or barristers, which means we can take legal action quickly and cheaply.

We are already seeing good results from this approach. The latest figures show that the amount of money owed through arrears has fallen from 6.1% in March 2003 to only 4% in October 2005. Over the next few years, we aim to reduce this debt even

Arrears (as % of annual rent due)



further – ideally to no more than 2.7% of the whole rent income.

Collecting arrears for client co-operatives

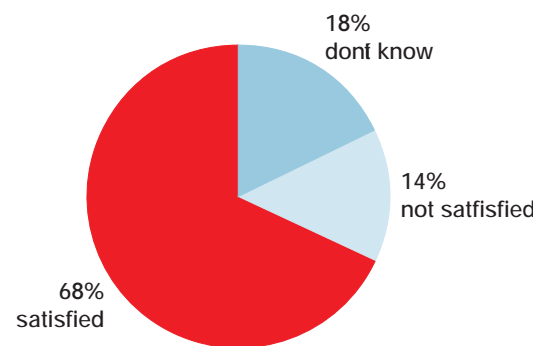
Independent co-operatives have their own policies for dealing with rent arrears, but often call us in to deal with their arrears. We would like them to consider adopting our approach.

At the moment, for some co-operatives, we have to obtain their approval before we take a case to court, which can cause delays, especially if the co-operative does not meet regularly. We think that we could recover more money for such co-operatives if we had the authority to refer cases to court without waiting for approval. The co-operative could give us strict guidelines on when court action should be taken, and details of all cases taken to court would be

given to the co-operative committee at their next meeting for ratification.

We are not trying to diminish the responsibility or authority of the co-operatives – simply to increase the effectiveness and reduce delay in recovering arrears. Rents are the main source of income for co-operatives and essential to pay

Arrears control: what co-operative committees think



Down your way

CDS Co-operatives's teams are being sent out to all CDS estates to talk to tenants about the issues that are important to them, to ask how we could improve our services, and to pass on information. It's all part of our strategy to involve stakeholders.

We have already held road shows on estates in Milton

Keynes, Welwyn Garden City, Hemel Hempstead and others. We found them very useful and tenants said they appreciated the fact that we had come out to see them.

When it's time to visit your estate, we will give you plenty of warning. We look forward to seeing you.

for repairs and maintenance, renovations and new housing.

We asked members of co-operative committees how they felt about the arrears control service. The results are shown in the chart on

the left. Most were satisfied, but many feel that we need to improve – particularly on action we took in arrears recovery cases and regarding the information we gave them in cases of rent arrears.

The Inspectors Call

Everyone knows that schools have Ofsted inspections, but did you know that registered social landlords like us also have regular inspections? Our turn will be in January 2006, when the Audit Commission carries out a formal inspection of CDS Co-operatives.

The main focus of the inspection will be on our ability to deliver core services – estate management, allocations and lettings, repairs and maintenance, and rent collection – as well as whether we offer value for money, and how effectively we meet the

needs of our tenants and co-operatives. It will also look at the prospects for improving our services over the next few years.

The inspectors will look at our policies and procedures; interview staff and board members; review performance data; and carry out 'mystery shopping' exercises to see how well we treat our customers. They will also contact a number of tenants and co-operative committee members before and during the inspection (which begins on January 16th and will last about a week).

Customers' views on services are very important, so if you do hear from the inspectors be as frank as you like – your comments will be strictly confidential. But please be fair too by telling them where you think we provide a good service.

The full text of the Audit Commission's report will be made available on its website, www.audit-commission.gov.uk in March 2006. Key points will also be published in the next edition of this newsletter.

Two new faces at CDS Co-operatives



Glenda Cummings



Angela Millard



Planting bulbs at Blenheim Housing Co-operative, Folkestone

CDS Co-operatives has appointed its first home-based co-operative support officer. Because **Angela Millard** (pictured) lives near the schemes she works with, she will have more time to visit tenants. If this pilot project is a success, we could see more home-based officers.

She is responsible for co-operatives in Folkestone, Deal, Rochester, Minster and Ashford. "I have already begun to know some of the people in the co-operatives and we are getting on very well," she says, "I think they like the fact

that they can get hold of me almost anytime they want."

Angela has worked for the English Churches Housing Group, Housing 21 and Broomleigh Housing Association, both in general needs and supported housing. Her last job specifically involved anti-social behaviour issues.

Angela recently organised bulb planting at Blenheim Housing Co-operative. Tenants and their children helped plant 300 bulbs (donated by B&Q). Blenheim will be blooming in spring.

The other new face is **Glenda Cummings** (pictured), who has been appointed as Assistant Housing Services Manager. She has worked in housing for more than 15 years. She was previously an area manager for Southern Housing Group and also worked for Paddington Churches Housing Association for more than 10 years. Glenda is looking forward to meeting residents and co-operative committees. We wish them both all the best in their new roles.