

Improvements – Co-operation saves



Craymill



Whitworth

With the help of CDS Co-operatives, several independent co-ops (including Lewisham Family, May Day, Aquinas and Mulberry Housing Co-operatives) have successfully applied for improvement grants from the Housing Corporation.

Two of the co-ops, Craymill and Whitworth, are taking co-operation further. As neighbouring co-ops in Crayford, Kent, both built in the early 1980s, they decided to work together and employ the same contractor to resurface their car parks, install new kitchens and

rewire properties. According to Howard Goss, the project consultant, this will reduce costs by avoiding duplication.

CDS's development manager, Rachael Greenlees, says close working relationships between co-ops saves money and improves performance. 'All the benefits are passed on to residents. If this project is a success, we will encourage other co-ops to combine their works programmes.'

Work started in December and should be finished in June 2007. We will hold occasional site meetings to ensure the programme stays on track and we will keep residents informed of progress.

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Hazel – reconstruction begins

Good news for the families affected by the disastrous lightning strike that devastated six houses at Hazel Housing Co-operative in Bexley in August. Now that the insurers have given

the go-ahead, builders have moved onto the site and the reconstruction work has started. The displaced families should have newly refurbished homes to move into before next summer.

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.

Take the pain out of payments

We know many residents hate having to queue up at the post office or send off a cheque to pay their rent. They have told us so in every survey we have carried out over the past two years. Even standing orders can be a hassle – if you don't update them in time you could find yourself in arrears. So, early next year we will be introducing a direct debit system for tenants and homeowners to pay their rent and services charges.

How does direct debit work?

When you complete a direct debit mandate, you give CDS Co-operatives the authority to ask your bank or building society to pay an agreed amount each month from your account. This will normally be the monthly rent and/or service charge, but it can be more if

you are paying off arrears, for example.

Direct debits are better than standing orders because you don't have to do anything when your rent or service charge changes – we can increase the amount automatically. We, however, have to tell you in advance how much we are taking, and the date(s) we will

be taking it, so you won't have any unpleasant surprises. And you can cancel whenever you want – although then you will have to make other arrangements to pay your rent.

Another advantage is that direct debits reduce administration costs, so we can use the money to improve other services. The more residents use this quick and simple payment method, the better for all of us.

Money back when you move home

Moving is expensive, and not just for the departing tenants. Every year, CDS Co-operatives spends thousands of pounds clearing away furniture, clothes and general rubbish left behind when people move, and thousands more on cleaning and repairs. New tenants can't move in straight away, so the co-op loses rent, too.

So, we are piloting a scheme to give departing tenants up to £150 cash. All they have to do is give one month's written notice, agree to show potential tenants around, return keys on time, and leave the property the way they would like to find it, clean and clear off junk.

Just contact us when you give notice or accept a transfer offer, and we will send a co-operative

Please don't forget your rent



Drawing by Max Middleton-Farrow, aged 10, of Minster Housing Co-operative

Christmas is a time when some people may find themselves under financial pressure. Nevertheless, missing even one month's rent will leave a debt that may be hard to pay back. It also makes things harder for your housing co-op, because rent arrears lead to cash-flow problems and less money to fund repairs and improvements.

Don't risk your home by joining the minority of tenants who spend their rent on presents or entertainment. Put 'paying the rent' on the top of your Christmas shopping list this year.

Testing times

Last year our tenant auditor, Maxine Ruddock, went 'mystery shopping' – anonymously testing our services to see if we are meeting our published customer service standards. This is what she found:

Mystery shopping list		😊 Satisfactory	😊 Very satisfactory
What was tested	Who was tested	The result	
Office reception	Help desk	Staff were quick to help and polite.	😊
Time taken to pick up telephone	Help desk	Phones were always answered within four rings.	😊
Telephone manner	All departments	Generally okay but some staff forgot to introduce themselves.	😊
Time taken to respond to voicemail messages	All departments	Generally okay but calls were not always returned within 24 hours.	😊
Time taken to respond to emails	All departments	Not always quickly enough.	😊
Time taken to respond to letters	All departments	Not always quickly enough.	😊
Estate management	Housing services	The estates are generally in good condition and well maintained.	😊

(Money back continued)

support officer to inspect your home and say what, if anything, you need to do to qualify. You will have to repair any damage you have done to the property, for example.

If the pilot is a success, the scheme will be extended and we will also recommend to our client co-ops that they should consider introducing it.

Please note: the incentive is not available to any tenant who has been served with a notice to leave because of antisocial behaviour or other breach of tenancy.

We have now reminded our staff to introduce themselves when answering the phone, and we are developing a system for monitoring responses to letters and emails. From 2007, we will tell you, every year, how successful we have been in meeting all our standards.

Unfortunately, due to other commitments, Maxine is unable to continue as our tenant auditor. We would like to thank her for her hard work in developing this important role. We all wish her well for the future.

Could you keep us on our toes?

We are currently looking for a new tenant auditor.

You will be paid for your time and no previous experience is necessary (training will be provided). However, you must be a tenant of CDS Co-operatives, a homeowner living on an estate managed by CDS Co-operatives or a member of an independent housing co-operative.

Interested? Ring our housing services manager, Maria McCarron, on 0845 450 8545 for an informal chat.

CDS People

Farewell to Danny

Last month, Darent Housing Co-operative lost one of its founder members, when Danny Rourke, who helped set up the co-op at Sutton-at-Hone near Dartford in 1985, died after a short illness.

Danny was secretary of his co-op for nine years, represented the Dartford area on our housing services sub-committee for many years, and was also elected to the board of management, ultimately becoming honorary vice president.

David Rodgers, the executive director of CDS Co-operatives, attended his funeral. 'I knew Danny for a long time,' he says. 'I remember his enthusiasm about co-ops in general and his energy to work tirelessly for his co-op. As a man who also fought bravely for his country in the Second World War (he was one of the few sergeant pilots to fly a Spitfire), he was truly a hero.'

'He was always full of life,' says Pat Constable, Darent's current secretary. 'He had time for everyone, too, and was one of



Danny George Rourke, 1920–2006

the few people who would say "thank you" for things our committee does. He was a kind man, a gentleman.'

The board and staff of CDS Co-operatives offer their condolences to Danny's family, his friends and his neighbours at Darent Housing Co-operative. Danny was a true co-operator, and brought to the board a spirit of innovation, courage and compassion. His contribution has been invaluable. We will all miss him.

A civilised Act

Twelve months ago, the government introduced legislation to allow civil partnerships for same-sex couples and in the first nine months more than 15,000 couples took advantage of this right. As a result, gay and lesbian tenants who have registered a civil partnership now have the same rights to pass on their home as married tenants – a right fully supported by CDS Co-operatives.

Stephen Brown, the administration manager and company secretary of CDS Co-operatives, and his partner, Michael Dover, had been in a relationship for more than thirteen



Stephen and Michael's wedding bus

years when they registered their partnership in July. 'From a day-to-day perspective things may be no different for us now than

before,' says Stephen, 'but we both feel strongly that the legal recognition of our relationship is important and offers us protection for the future.'

The new Act also recognises civil partners as having parental responsibility and as each other's next of kin, and it can affect their tax status. It also means that lesbian and gay people who live together are jointly assessed for welfare benefits.

For information about registering a civil partnership, see the register office's website, www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/civil-partnerships. Housing advice for same-sex couples can be found at www.stonewallhousing.org

Summer fun

The new playground

There was a great turn-out for the opening of a new play park in Slade Green next to Hollymeadow Housing Co-operative, with facilities for all ages and an area for ball games. Bexley council provided much of the funding, and the mayor, Cllr Brian Beckwith (pictured), opened the park. The ceremony coincided with the Fun Day organised with CDS Co-operatives and other social landlords working in the Slade Green area. Sponsors arranged a bouncy castle, a magic show, quizzes, face painting and refreshments.



Cllr Brian Beckwith, the mayor of Bexley



Are you ready for digital TV?

Depending on where you live, between 2008 and 2012, the traditional analogue television signal in your area will be switched off. This means that to watch television, you will either have to buy a digital TV, take out a contract with a satellite or cable TV company or buy a *Freeview* box. You may also need to buy a new aerial.

Any of these systems will give you access to the five main TV channels plus many more such

as BBC Three, ITV2 and E4. You also get a range of radio stations.

If you have your own TV aerial, it is your responsibility to upgrade your equipment. If CDS Co-operatives provides a communal aerial system, paid for through your service charges, we will consult you over whether we should upgrade it to accept the new digital signal or whether you would prefer to make your own arrangements.

CDS Co-operatives will be writing to tenants with access to a communal aerial to ask you what you think we should do. It is important that you tell us your views. Don't let others make the decision for you!

Independent co-ops will go through a similar process before deciding what to do. Co-op members should speak to the committee to find out more about plans for their estate.

Opening hours at Christmas and New Year

CDS Co-operatives will be closed from 5.30pm on Friday, 22 December, reopening at 9am on Tuesday, 2 January 2007.

In an emergency

If you are a tenant of CDS Co-operatives or of a housing co-operative that uses CDS Co-operatives to provide a repairs service and you need an emergency repair during the holiday period, call the Help desk on 0845 450 8545. You will be put through to our emergency repairs contractor.

If your housing co-operative provides its own repairs service, you should contact your maintenance officer or other member of the committee as normal, unless alternative arrangements have been made.

Keep us posted

Do tell us about any community or social events in your area. Please e-mail news items and photographs to enquiries@cds.coop, post to The Newsletter Editor, CDS Co-operatives, 3 Marshalsea Road, London SE1 1EP, or simply telephone the editor, Chisanga Passwell, on 0845 450 8545.



Season's greetings

The board of management and staff at CDS Co-operatives would like to wish you a peaceful and happy festive season.

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 بلغتك الأم، يرجى مرسلتنا على العنوان المذكور في هذه النشرة.

যদি আপনার নিজ ভাষায় আরা তথ্যাদি পেতে চান তবে দয়া করে এই লেখাতে দেওয়া ঠিকানায়ায় আমাদের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করুন।

如果您想索取以你的语言写的更多的资讯，请按照本文件所示的地址和我们取得联系。

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

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 필요하시 경우 이 문서에 있는 주소로 연락해 주십시오.

اگر کسی اپنی زبان میں مزید معلومات حاصل کرنا چاہتا ہے تو ہم سے رابطہ کرے۔

नेकर तुहाँ आपनी बेली दिच हेंर साहकारी चाहीसी है, उं बिपा बरवे इस समझदेस उं दिंउे पउे उं साडे नाल संपरक बरे।

உங்கள் மொழியில் மேற்கொண்ட தகவல்களைப் பெறவிரும்பினால் எம்முடன் இப்பத்திரத்தில் தரப்பட்டிருக்கும் விவரத்தில் தயவுசெய்து தொடர்பு கொள்ளவும்.

اگر آپ اپنی زبان میں مزید معلومات حاصل کرنا چاہتے ہیں تو دیکھیں گے پتہ 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

Complaints

It is very important that if you are dissatisfied in any way, with our services, you must let us know. Your complaints show us where we are falling down and what we have to do to rectify it. So we do need them!

You can make a complaint by writing to us at **3 Marshalsea Road, London SE1 1EP**

telephoning on **0845 450 8545**

or emailing enquiries@cds.coop.