



URHnews

ISSUE 1

WHAT IS AN ALMO?

An ALMO is one of the options available to local councils to bring their homes up to the government's Decent Homes standard. The government has said that every local council has to bring its housing up to this standard by 2010.

For councils that don't have enough money, there are three options:

- Transferring council estates to a housing association
- Setting up a Private Finance Initiative for an estate or a neighbourhood
- Setting up an ALMO

Many local councils across the country have chosen to set up ALMOs after consulting residents as they decided that this would be the best way of getting the funding needed to improve council housing. The ALMOs then deal with day-to-day housing management, maintenance, repair and investment functions through an agreement with the council, while the council retains responsibility for strategic housing matters. ■

WHY DO WE NEED AN ALMO?

Through the Housing Investment Commission, Lambeth Council looked at how it could bring council housing across the borough up to scratch. This process showed that a combination of options would work best.

Residents on some estates are being consulted on whether to transfer their homes to a housing association while other estates and street properties will stay in the council's ownership and management. On the Myatts Field North estate, the council is setting up a Private Finance Initiative.

Some of the resident managed estates in Lambeth decided that working together through an ALMO would be the best way to get the money needed to bring homes up to the Decent Homes standard. Over the last 12 months, these resident management organisations have been working together and with the council to set up URH. ■

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT URH?

Unlike any other ALMO, United Residents Housing is being formed by a group of resident-managed estates from across the borough. These estates are managed by resident-led organisations with their own staff and own management Boards.

As a member of URH, these resident-management organisations will continue to manage their own estates, employ their own staff and be led by their own management Boards. Being part of URH will provide access to extra government funding to improve tenants' homes and make sure they are brought up to the Decent Homes Standard. In addition, membership of URH will bring each organisation the benefits of sharing best practice and improving services to residents. ■



If you would like more information about United Residents Housing and how we will work with you and your resident management organisation, you can contact:

- Your estate manager
- United Residents Housing
Pete Redman or 'Ronke Ayoola
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- PPCR
your independent residents advisers
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URH NEWS - THE NEWSLETTER FROM UNITED RESIDENTS HOUSING

Welcome to our first issue! URH is a brand new organisation in Lambeth, bringing together resident-managed estates across the borough to improve homes and services. Please take the time to read this newsletter and find out about URH and what it means for you.

IN THIS ISSUE

- What improvements will URH bring?
- Who is in charge of URH?
- What is an ALMO and why do we need one?



WHAT IS URH?

URH is an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO), set up to help bring council-owned homes on estates in Lambeth up to the government's Decent Homes standard. We are a unique and exciting new organisation that could make a real difference to you and your quality of life.

Five resident-managed estates from across the borough are currently members of URH including your estate.

The five estates are:

- Blenheim Gardens Resident Management Organisation
- Cowley Estate Management Board
- Loughborough Estate Management Board
- Roupell Park Resident Management Co-operative
- Waltham Resident Management Organisation

Each estate has a representative from its Management Board on the URH Board. ■

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

There will be no change in control of the estates involved. All of the estates will continue to be managed locally by their resident management organisations and the local staff teams will be maintained.

URH will bring in **additional government funding** to invest in modernising the homes on each estate. This substantial investment will make sure that the homes come up to the Decent Homes standard. We plan to set an even higher standard that will include the local environment – a Decent Estates standard.

Membership of URH will give support and back up services for each resident management organisation. We will be a specialist and dedicated service accountable to the member organisations.

The resident organisations that make up URH are already **working together to improve the services you receive**. We are aiming for a two-star rating from the Government's Housing Inspectors – in other words, delivering a 'good' housing service that is likely to improve further.

Residents will remain tenants and leaseholders of the council and their homes and estates will continue to be managed by their resident management organisation. Rents will be set and will rise in the same way as they do now. Rents will not change because URH is being set up.

Tenancy agreements and leaseholders' leases will remain the same. ■



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Telephone: 0207 926 4237

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

The government has accepted URH's application to be set up as an ALMO and there is now a lot of work to be done during the rest of this year to get URH ready for a government inspection.

Like any other ALMO, the Government's Housing Inspectors must inspect URH and award it two stars before the government will release the funding it has agreed to provide. URH will be inspected at the beginning of 2007.

An improvement plan is being developed to make sure that URH gets up to the standard needed to get a two star rating and the Shadow Board will oversee the implementation of this plan.

Once a successful inspection has taken place, the government will release the funding and in the case of URH, this comes to approximately an extra £25 million. This money will be used to modernise homes on each of the estates. We are planning the improvement programme now and will consult with you and residents on each of the estates to find out exactly what your local priorities are.

This extra money will not be available if we do not set up URH as an ALMO. This cannot happen without the support of the residents of the estates involved.

Through a survey to be carried out by the Independent Resident Advisers PPCR, you will be asked about your views on URH and whether you think setting up an ALMO to get the investment we need is a good idea. ■

WHO RUNS URH?

Like other ALMOs, URH is being established as a company limited by guarantee with its own Management Board. A Shadow Board has been set up for URH, and includes representatives from each of the estates involved as well as independent members and council nominees.

The make-up of the Shadow Board is as follows:

- 5 Resident Board Members (one from each of the resident-managed estates)
- 4 Council Board Members (two council officers and 2 councillors)
- 4 Independent Board Members

This means that each resident-managed estate has direct input into how URH is being set up and how it will provide services to each of its members. Residents' best interests and priorities are at the heart of what URH is and what it does.

The Shadow Board is now overseeing consultation and communication with residents on each of the estates as well as the setting up of URH's structure. The Board is looking at how URH will operate and how it will work with each of the resident-managed estates and the council. URH has to be independent of the council and has to show the government that it is independent.

In future issues of this newsletter we will feature members of the Shadow Board. ■

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS WILL URH MAKE?

Once we have been awarded a two-star rating (see page 2), the government will then provide the money we need to invest in your home and your estate.

Using information from the council and each of the resident management organisations, URH is now looking at what improvements are actually needed. We will also consult you about your local priorities.

But our main aim must be to bring every home on the estates up to the Decent Homes standard.

The government says that a home is 'Decent' if it:

1. Meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing
2. Is in a reasonable state of repair
3. Is wind and weather tight
4. Has reasonably modern facilities and services, such as kitchens and bathrooms (for tenants' homes)

IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMMES

There will be different improvement programmes on each of the estates, based on each estate's specific needs. Generally, the improvement programme will include:

- Installing new kitchens and bathrooms when they need replacing
- Replacement of windows and external doors as required
- Repairing or replacing roofs and roof insulation as necessary
- Installing new gas boilers and heating systems when they need replacing
- Electrical rewiring where required

HOW MUCH MONEY WILL BE SPENT ON EACH ESTATE?

We are still carrying out work and consultation to find out exactly what improvements each estate needs but we already know roughly how much money each estate needs.

The table below shows the **minimum** amount of money that URH aims to provide to each estate. This money is on top of any money normally spent on planned maintenance.

| Estate | Investment |
|------------------|-------------|
| Blenheim Gardens | £4 million |
| Cowley | £2 million |
| Loughborough | £10 million |
| Roupell Park | £5 million |
| Waltham | £2 million |

