

Christmas greetings from all at CHISEL



Have a lovely time, and keep warm

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IMPORTANT

Benefit changes coming in April 2013

These may affect you!

See leaflet with this newsletter

CHISEL will be CLOSED 22 Dec to 1 Jan
See back page for emergency numbers

Picture competition!

We need a great Xmas picture for next year's December issue **£25 gift voucher** for the best photo of a CHISEL home at Xmas..use your imagination!
 Email the photo to cto@chisel.org.uk by 31 January 2013.

Prize Draw winner

Hilary Condie was the winner of the September prize draw for tenants. She won £150 for having a clear rent account for the previous 4 weeks. Rent Officer Flos took Hilary a cheque - Hilary plans a new carpet.



Tenants evening, website launch party and Annual General Meeting

The annual Tenants Evening and AGM included a celebration of our new website. It was held on the 27th Sept in the Terrace Room at the impressive new Deptford Lounge public library... great building, great food and great company!

It was great to see so many people there taking the opportunity to talk with each other, Board members and staff, over some delicious food and a glass or two of wine!



Many tenants brought children and grandchildren, who were entertained by Paul the juggler and decorated by Board member Jill Gettrup.



And the adults learnt to juggle too!

Tenants signed up to get more involved in CHISEL's work: Some applied to be shareholders whilst others offered to join the **CHISEL Consultative Group – the CC Group!** (For more details about getting involved contact Mark)



Board Member Gloria Biggs talked to tenants about the options for getting involved



CHISEL's Chair Wendy Newell answered questions from tenants

Karen, Managing Director of CHISEL, gave her **vision for CHISEL** and outlined some of the key challenges ahead - see below. If you want to talk to Karen about CHISEL's future and tenants' priorities, please contact her on director@chisel.org.uk or by phoning 020 8692 5258

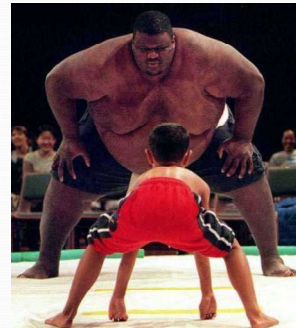
Key Challenges for Chisel

- HB cuts – The Bedroom tax
- Welfare Reform – Universal Credit
- Delivering more for less – VFM
- Maintaining viability and INDEPENDENCE



Key Challenges for Chisel

- Pressure to merge – constant need to justify independence



So...

- Chisel – unique selling point
- Being the best we can be
- Putting tenants at the heart of the business
- The Question is HOW??



What am I going to do?

- Listen to Tenants
- Continue to build on Chisels strengths
- Focus on improving performance
- Focus on increasing tenant satisfaction
- Increase opportunities for engagement
- Maintain Value for Money and viability
- Explore opportunities for growth
- Work in partnership with tenants and staff to secure the future

Anti-social behaviour: a tenant's experience

I've been a Chisel tenant for 20 years and I've had a number of neighbour changes during that time, unfortunately one of them caused much upset and distress through anti-social activity. Despite all my efforts I couldn't manage the problem and appealed to Chisel to intervene. I found to my relief that **I was offered support immediately.** It's my



experience that neighbour problems can make one anxious, suffer sleep problems and cause much unhappiness leading to health problems and depression, so it's right that allegations are taken seriously. In my case the problems were of such magnitude that solicitors took the case to court. This is a very protracted process and very costly - it costs not only Chisel but all tenants as demands on Chisel's finances have to be picked up by tenants through rent increases. Eventually **this particular tenant was evicted for their anti-social behaviour.**

I wished to write about my experience for the newsletter to encourage other tenants having neighbour problems, to refer them to Chisel as soon as possible so the problem can be assessed by their experienced and understanding staff. They can offer impartial help, advice and support including arranging preventative strategies such as mediation. Where there are clear and substantiated indications of breaches of the tenancy agreement, they will **implement a legal process** against the offending neighbour. It is comforting to know when you are on the receiving end of anti-social behaviour, that problems can be addressed and resolved through Chisel's intervention - **Chisel can and will help.**



This has been my experience. Really I cannot praise Chisel's staff highly enough for their support throughout my ordeal - I'm sure you would find this likewise - but hopefully you have decent neighbours and won't need to be seeking Chisel's support any time soon!



If you are experiencing anti-social behaviour and have been unable to resolve it with your neighbours please contact Clare at the office. Eviction is always the last resort and our aim is always to change the behaviour; however in very serious cases (as above) and where we have enough evidence we will take legal action to evict tenants causing ASB.

Beating racial harassment - the story of Nubia Way

Nubia Way is a close of 13 wooden houses in Downham, built in the 1990's by Fusions Jameen, a black self-build housing co-op. They faced and overcame severe anti-social behaviour and racial harassment.

Errol Hall tells his story:

I first came to Nubia Way when a friend rang me and asked me to bring over some food - he was on a self-build site and could not leave, because there had been a lot of vandalism and stealing.. I got some food and went down to Downham - I had never been there before and it was like going back to the 50's, in more ways than one, as we were to discover.



I was looking for a home for my new-born son and myself, so I joined the co-op. I had to do a month's trial to see if I was serious. I was still working fulltime, and seeing my son, and I somehow managed to fit in many hours a week building - plus 16 hours per week on security.

I came in at the first really difficult period. The group was down to about half a dozen members, building 13 houses. We had a

horrible little old wooden caravan, the site was a quagmire – wooden duckboards running down the site, lots of rubble. The last foundations went in and then we were putting up the frames, which was almost impossible with so few people. When we did get the first house shape up it was a great moment. We worked in snow and rain, really determined. It was so hard that I thought about leaving – but I tend to see things through, and there was a dream and a vision that kept me going.

The building was not the only hard part. When I first went around the local area the hairs went up on the back of my neck, I could feel looks from people and I knew there were a lot of racists about. There was a National Front HQ round the corner, and a black teacher had been beaten up in a school nearby. I felt angry because this black self-build group had been plonked down here, no-one had told us what we were getting into and we had no protection. There was a lot of resentment in the community, and jealousy because people thought we were asylum seekers having the houses built for us. One day two guys came round with a petrol can and the self-builder who was on site told them to get lost - they thought about it for a bit and then went away.



Beating racial harassment - the story of Nubia Way (continued))

We got to the point of having a test house, with windows in – **a real house**. Our dream was taking shape.

Then it all changed – **there was an arson attack**. The most complete house was completely destroyed and the adjacent houses were badly damaged. We were sleeping on site to act as security, on our own because we had so few people in the scheme - but something went wrong that night. We felt under siege and it focused minds. It felt like 1950's America. **It made me angry** and I thought: I'm not going to be burnt out, this is where I was born, this is my country, I've lived here all my life. The burnt houses were a setback – but we got some insurance money and **we got the burnt house rebuilt quickly**.



Then there was **a second arson attack**. I started to wonder, did I want my son to live here, what will it be like? Is it all too much?

A plan was developed that allowed some of us to take a break in return for paying a higher rent when we did move in. Meanwhile some of the self-builders carried on, with contractors, and a lot of help from students from a local college, supervised by our brilliant site manager Tony Edwards.

Then right near the end when I was back on the scheme and we were decorating the houses, there was **a third arson attack** – some petrol bombs came

over the fence. The member who was on site called the fire brigade and it was dealt with. We doubled up on security from then on, put in a laser intruder alarm, and made it safely to the end of the building process.

When we finished, I wondered what it was going to be like living with each other. The stress had put a lot of strain on relationships inside the group but **living at Nubia Way was fantastic!** There was mutual respect, almost everyone got a new job or qualification; one started a new business.



The burnt houses restored

Surviving this difficult time had given people confidence and the belief we could do things. The **sweetest thing for me was the dads seeing their kids again** – the key was housing. When couples split up the kids tend to go with the mother and the father might just have a bedsit or move back with parents. Figures show that within 2 years half of separated fathers lose all contact with their kids. At Nubia Way, within a year all of the single fathers on the site were back having regular contact with their kids – because they had bedrooms, gardens, safe places to play, friends locally – including my own son. There were two single women and a couple, so we had lots of kids about the place.

We were popping into each other's houses, helping each other out, a real community. That first year I started some volunteering at the local CAB, and I ended up managing a Bureau and becoming involved in community organisation.



I have seen this area completely transformed. I used to advise people seeking housing; Black and Asian people would avoid Downham – but that has totally changed and the area is very mixed. Friends have told me that some of the hard-core racists have moved away because they don't like it here any more. I think these changes were massively to do with us, and that is amazing when you think about it.



We did a “Hearts and Minds” campaign: we leafleted the area, we invited local

people to come on site and meet us for barbecues and to help with frame raisings – and some came. We could understand their point of view, seeing these people apparently parachuted in and having houses built for them – so we explained that we were building ourselves. People were curious – they would wander past or drive down the site road and we would take time to talk to them, be friendly, and show we were normal people. The police were helpful and put on extra patrols.

I feel secure here now. Downham is a lot quieter than the late 90's – many fewer exploding cars and police chases! We still take an interest in who comes down the road – someone will come out and talk to strangers. There are still occasional problems with kids, graffiti, nicking stuff, but just one burglary in 15 years. New residents who have moved in since the houses were built love it here – they say how great it is and how welcome they feel – because **it is a little community**.



NOTICE BOARD



Clare's Winter Alert

It is feeling colder and winter is on its way. If snow comes it will be

much harder for contractors to get to you, and we may have emergencies that need to be dealt with first.

So if you know you have an outstanding repair or maintenance issue, that is likely to get worse with the weather, please let us know **now** so that it can be dealt with before it becomes an emergency.

Do you know where your stop cock is?

If the weather gets very cold and you are planning to go away, please take some precautions to stop your water pipes getting frozen, which can cause all sorts of maintenance problems.

Either:

- * leave your central heating on very low (there is usually a frost setting); **OR**
- * turn your water off at the stop cock and then run the taps for a bit to empty out the remaining water in the pipes, so it doesn't freeze.



Christmas Opening Hours

CHISEL's office will close on Friday 21 December at 1pm, and reopen on Wednesday 2 January 2012 at 9.30am.

If you have an **emergency** over the Christmas period, 22 Dec to 1 Jan (inclusive), please call the normal emergency number: **020 8338 8433**.

Chisel Opening Hours

CHISEL's office is normally open Monday to Thursday 9-5pm (closed on Fridays)

You can call us on the following numbers:

For General Enquiries: 020 8692 5258

To Report a Repair: 020 8692 9294

WHO'S WHO IN CHISEL:

Managing Director:	Karen Cooper (3 days pw: various)	director@chisel.org.uk
Housing Manager	Clare Canning (4 days pw: Monday to Thursday)	housing@chisel.org.uk
Rents Officer	Flos Marriott (2 days pw: Tuesday & Thursday)	rents@chisel.org.uk
Maintenance Officer	Christopher Hatcher (4 days pw: Monday to Thursday)	maintenance@chisel.org.uk
Co-ops & Tenants Officer	Mark Allan (2 days pw: Monday & Thursday)	cto@chisel.org.uk
Finance Manager	Jane Brennan (1 day pw: Thursday)	mgrfin@chisel.org.uk
Finance Officer	Shuk-Ling Hou (2 days pw: Wednesday & Thursday)	finance@chisel.org.uk