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£3.2 million boost for poorer communities

The government has recognised the efforts of the council and its partners to improve life for Birmingham’s poorer communities with a £3.2 million Neighbourhood Renewal Fund boost. The money will be spent on narrowing the gap between the poorest neighbourhoods and the average across Birmingham, concentrating on housing, health and people without work.

The department of communities and local government had withheld the money until the city’s strategic partnership had demonstrated how it is improving its performance in helping deprived areas.

Decent homes work beats all targets

Work to improve Birmingham’s council housing has exceeded all targets in the last financial year. In April 2005, 37.1 per cent of council housing met the decent homes standard. Our target was to raise this to 48 per cent of homes by the end of 2005/6.

We have passed this target and now 48.74 per cent of council housing meets the standard.

The provisional figures show that £73 million has been spent, compared to the original budget of £69.1 million. The extra money came from savings made elsewhere in the capital programme and allowed us to increase the number of central heating systems and replacement windows we could install in the year.

Our target was to provide 3,900 new central heating systems and 5,100 double-glazed window installations. We out-performed these targets by some distance, with the final numbers for 2005/6 being 4,970 central heating systems and 9,361 double-glazed window installations – a tremendous achievement.

A report summarising the housing sector’s recent progress in meeting the decent homes standard will be published shortly – for details see the end of this article.

Linking resources to improve neighbourhoods

Tenants and front line council staff recognise the effect of combining programmes to make a bigger impact on an area. A large programme of complementary priority environmental and security work was delivered in 2005/06 to provide further ‘kerb appeal and estate lift’. Schemes were agreed by tenants and local housing officers, and include:

- door entry system improvements to many low-rise blocks of flats
- creating better access for disabled residents
- security fencing and lighting
- renewing bin store areas
- communal decorations
- creating new landscaped communal and individual garden spaces.

The work was funded by linking a range of resources from, for example, Housing Liaison Boards and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF). NRF is an allocation from central government to help local strategic partnerships close the gap between the most deprived 10 per cent and the rest of the population.

In total, £676,709 NRF was spent on initiatives directly linked to housing. Whilst this is just 3 per cent of renewal activity from the city’s overall NRF allocation of £22 million, it sits alongside the community safety
spend of £6,758,032 (29 per cent) and liveability spend of £4,892,509 (21 per cent), as both of these have a direct impact on improving the quality of life for residents on mixed-tenure estates.

The money can help in several ways. For example:

- in Edgbaston’s Waterworks estate, residents were suffering large-scale antisocial behaviour with vandalism, drug misuse and prostitution. A combination of funds was used to install alleyway gating and bollard schemes, cutting both access and opportunity for nuisance behaviour.

- NRF supported a front garden make-over scheme to help Nechells residents who were unable to maintain theirs. This has resulted in an environmental ‘uplift’, with residents taking renewed interest in their front gardens. The neighbourhood also won a prestigious award in the Britain In Bloom competition.

Feedback from the NRF satisfaction questionnaire shows that tenants are pleased with the range of work they’ve received. To find out how to access NRF funding, contact vanessa.cusack@birmingham.gov.uk

These achievements will form part of the council’s response in the forthcoming Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of council services. Elaine Elkington, director of housing at the council, talked about the CPA with Birmingham Social Housing Partnership’s (BSHP) executive on 11 July. Simon Kimberley said: “I am sure that all BSHP members will agree with me in hoping that our existing strong partnership working will be reflected in the final CPA rating. We all recognise the work the city is doing to provide good services and we strongly support them.”

**Annual report**

The annual report that provides detail of these achievements is produced by a cross-tenure group (the housing theme panel), which is responsible for overseeing the sector’s allocation of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. Jonathon Driffill of fch Housing and Care is chair of the panel.

Housing associations will automatically be sent a printed copy, and council staff will be able to access it online. If you would like a copy please contact the partnershipssteam@birmingham.gov.uk

**Green light for city housing partnership**

A new partnership, with a sharper focus, has been given the go-ahead. The formal announcement of the partnership will be made at the end of July, with a launch in October.

Elaine Elkington, the council’s director of housing, has been asked to chair the new partnership. She said: “I am delighted with this step forward. My personal mission is to broaden the partnership. I want to make housing accessible to colleagues in health and the private sector, so they too can contribute to the challenges and exciting opportunities facing housing of all tenures across the city.”

**Newsflash – heading for green on neighbourhood renewal**

In another boost for Birmingham’s housing sector, the Government Office announced on 12 July that we have improved our performance over the last year.

We have moved from ‘red’ straight to ‘amber/green’ for neighbourhood renewal. This means that the government office has more confidence in our ability to tackle housing issues across the city in all tenures.
Tim Sewell of Family housing association is the vice-chair of the new City Housing Partnership. He said: “This recognises the tremendous amount of work that a range of partners has contributed over the last year, including the colleagues who are part of our local area agreement.

“It also shows that we know what the issues are and how they need to be tackled. A key objective for our new City Housing Partnership is to make sure we in the housing sector play our part in delivering neighbourhood renewal.”

If you would like to see a copy of the plan (the Floor Target Action Plan), please contact partnershipsteam@birmingham.gov.uk

Option approved

A staggering 20,959 council tenants and leaseholders, citywide, responded to the Option Appraisal consultation, which was completed in May. The result clearly tells the council that an overwhelming majority of customers, in all districts, want the Housing Department to stay as their housing service provider (positive retention).

The council’s Cabinet has received reports on all the districts recommending positive retention and has supported the views of tenants by making the decision to retain council housing.

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<tr>
<th>DISTRICT</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
<th>% OF TENANTED PROPERTIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hodge Hill</td>
<td>1,991</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selly Oak</td>
<td>1,455</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutton Coldfield</td>
<td>771</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northfield</td>
<td>2,087</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladywood</td>
<td>3,439</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgbaston</td>
<td>2,762</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erdington</td>
<td>2,344</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall Green</td>
<td>1,650</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perry Barr</td>
<td>1,048</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sparkbrook</td>
<td>1,520</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yardley</td>
<td>1,892</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>20,959</strong></td>
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The department was required by government to carry out the consultation to evaluate the options for raising money to bring council homes up to the government’s Decent Homes Standard by 2010. To meet this standard many homes need improvements such as window replacements and central heating.

The options were:

- **Positive retention** – The council continues to own the housing stock and manage the housing service.
- **Private finance initiative (PFI)** – The council remains the landlord but contracts-out the housing service provision to a private sector company.
- **Partial stock transfer** – The council transfers ownership of the homes to a housing association.
- **Arms length management organisations (ALMO)** – This is a company owned and set-up by the council to manage housing stock.

In Birmingham we did Option Appraisal district by district. The first five districts: Hodge Hill, Ladywood, Northfield, Selly Oak and Sutton Coldfield, were completed last year. The remaining districts: Edgbaston, Erdington, Hall Green, Perry Barr, Sparkbrook and Yardley were completed in May.

Customers received information about the options through newsletters and events and were then asked to complete a survey. The surveys were sent out to all tenants and leaseholders in the post and they were also contacted by telephone, door-knocking and at further events.

**Next steps – what does positive retention mean for council tenants?**

In the final newsletter to tenants there is a commitment from director of housing, Elaine Elkington and cabinet member for housing, Councillor John Lines, saying:

- council homes will continue to be owned and managed by the council
- the department will deliver the improvements we have promised to bring all homes up to the decent homes standard by 2010
- the department will continue to explore ways to fund the improvements that tenants want in addition to the decent homes work, for example, replacement kitchens and bathrooms
- the housing department will continue to improve services to deliver the standard of services our tenants expect and deserve
- the department will work with tenants to develop representative district tenant groups and continue to encourage more tenants to get involved in housing.

If you would like further information please contact the option appraisal team by email: at HOUOURHOMES@Birmingham.gov.uk or visit www.birmingham.gov.uk/option appraisal

**Good practice: Mercian goes local**

Job and training advice, help with managing money, coping with young children, and tips on healthy living were just some of the things on offer from the professionals at Mercian housing association’s community events for its Erdington/ Stockland and Sparkhill residents. Designed in response to residents’ requests for support and advice, the two events gave local people the chance to quiz a range of organisations, including Job Centre Plus, Connexions, Pertemps, Credit Unions, Homestart and primary care trusts.
Anyone interested in becoming a homeowner could find out more from Mercian’s staff. Erdington’s ward support officers were on hand to encourage community engagement and Mercian offered residents the chance to apply for its own job vacancies as well as looking for resident volunteers to become ‘Community Champions’.

Altogether, almost 100 people attended the events.

For more information contact Jody Barton at jbarton@mercian.org.uk or on 0121 377 8899.

**East Birmingham: finding the solutions**

The priorities are emerging for future housing and related investment to restructure and regenerate east Birmingham over the next 25 years. This article explains how we have got to where we are today, the emerging priorities and what happens next.

**Building an understanding**
The Eastern Corridor, which covers the housing markets of East Birmingham and North Solihull, was identified as a priority for housing market restructuring in the Regional Housing Strategy that was launched in December 2005. The need for intervention in the Eastern Corridor was raised through research by the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies in 2003, which identified that economic and demographic change was impacting on future demand. The research suggested that the Eastern Corridor was not a low demand area, but had characteristics of market dysfunction that needed further investigation and subsequent interventions. In response to this, the Regional Housing Board asked Birmingham City Council and Solihull MBC to produce an evidenced-based prospectus for restructuring the Eastern Corridor’s housing markets.

Building the evidence base represents a considerable body of data and analysis, including bespoke research for the Eastern Corridor, particularly on understanding housing demand and the needs and aspirations of the growing black and minority ethnic communities. This will add value to the housing market intelligence for the Birmingham Solihull sub-region and the Central Housing Markets Area. It has been used to identify immediate funding priorities and to support the submission to government for new point growth funding (a government initiative to bring forward growth outside of the national growth areas) – with the Eastern Corridor identified as the first phase for growth (see next article for news on this).

As part of the dissemination of the evidence base, a number of sessions have been held to share intelligence and test the analysis. These events have included both councils, housing association partners and the Regeneration Zone, and have proved a valuable foundation for taking the development of the prospectus forward.

**Priorities and interventions**
The research and analysis stage is now drawing to a close and the prospectus will be launched in the autumn, following consultation with strategic stakeholders and partners. The prospectus is a strategic document, intended to:

- set the priorities for housing investment by the two councils and other agencies
- engage public and private sector funders
- influence wider economic and regeneration policies and programmes.
It proposes a 25-year strategy for housing market restructuring and growth, set out in a series of intervention plans to:

- add to the net housing supply and choice across all tenures
- maintain the existing stock and recognise its role in addressing long term housing needs
- help households access housing through ‘pathway’ interventions
- support neighbourhoods and promote community cohesion
- improve the built environment
- make the links with economic, social and physical interventions of other public agencies.

For more information, contact sharon.freedman@birmingham.gov.uk or the chair of the East Housing Market Area network Chris Handy at chrish@accord.co.uk

**Government ‘takes forward’ Birmingham and Solihull growth point status**

The government has announced that the Birmingham Solihull sub-region bid for growth point status for the Eastern Corridor is one of the bids being taken forward for more detailed discussions over the next few weeks.

The growth points scheme invites local partners to come forward with proposals for housing growth, linked into their wider strategies for economic growth, town centre renewal, regeneration and meeting local need for homes.

In October, the government will announce the schemes that will receive a share of an initial £40 million pilot funding for 2007/8 to support early site infrastructure projects, unlock sites for new housing and improve the environment. To give councils more freedom in how this funding is used, the government is proposing to include it in local area agreements that will give local partners extra flexibility in how they manage the programme.

**Birmingham leads the field in homeless action**

It may be news we are already familiar with, but it is worth repeating: St Basil’s and Midland Heart have won two Housing Corporation national gold awards for excellence for their pioneering work in reducing homelessness.

They scooped two of only three UK awards, making the city one of the most effective in the country for tackling homelessness. Both associations work in partnership with the Housing Department, which provides significant funding for homelessness services.

St Basil’s has provided accommodation and support for thousands of young people for many years. It has moved on to preventing homelessness in the first place through a range of innovative projects working with schools, families, youth services, neighbourhood offices and youth offending teams.

Midland Heart has a team of outreach workers funded by the council, finding people sleeping on the streets, building partnerships with them and eventually bringing them in from the cold. One of the most impressive achievements has been reducing the number of rough sleepers on the streets of Birmingham by over 80 per cent in a four-year period.
Jean Templeton, St Basil’s chief executive, said: “We are delighted to be selected as winners and look forward to sharing our expertise. St Basil’s provides quality accommodation and support for thousands of young people. We work alongside those working with young people, building strong partnerships, utilising our different experiences and resources. Homelessness should not be a part of growing up!”

Richard Clark OBE, chief executive officer of Midland Heart, commented: “We are absolutely delighted to win this highly-coveted award. It recognises the huge range of pioneering work that has been done over the last few years in helping homeless people. ”

Councillor John Lines, Cabinet Member for Housing, said: “This award is testament to the quality of the city’s approach to homelessness and I would like to congratulate all those involved in working with homeless people in Birmingham.”

St Basil’s and Midland Heart each receive £50,000 with their awards, which will be used to develop Birmingham further as a ‘centre of excellence’ in homelessness prevention. The gold awards mean that Birmingham’s collaborative approach to homelessness is nationally recognised as a model of good practice.

**Landmark domestic abuse judgement**

The courts have granted a five-year injunction against a Birmingham man who subjected his partner to years of abuse – without the victim having to give evidence in court.

In April, District Judge Wall granted a full injunction under housing law. This means that the perpetrator is now:

1. prevented from threatening or harassing his former partner or anyone living with her

2. excluded from parts of Yardley district

3. prevented from making direct contact with his former partner and her children (other than through a court order, a solicitor and the council’s adults and communities directorate).

The man may be sent to prison if he breaks any part of the injunction. Council officers and the police gave evidence in court of a history of violent, abusive and threatening behaviour, earlier assaults on the victim and call outs to domestic incidents.

This is the first successful legal action from Yardley district’s campaign against domestic abuse, ‘Today’s domestic, tomorrow’s murder?’ and a first for the new approach of using housing law to tackle domestic abuse. The campaign’s focus is on stopping perpetrators and raising awareness through media events and other activities.

William Carter, district housing manager said, “This landmark judgment is a significant achievement, reflecting the joint work of the council and police in Yardley district in tackling domestic abuse. It should give people experiencing abuse the confidence that the council and our partners will take action to stop it.”

Superintendent Jon Hesketh from West Midlands police added, “In most cases, the domestic abuse victim has to give evidence in court. The success of this case demonstrates the benefit of our joint work to find ways of bringing cases to court and protecting victims without them having to go to court.”
“The result is the victim need not abandon her home, the partner agencies all know the perpetrator’s identity and the police can arrest him if he breaks the injunction. Now Yardley has shown what can be achieved by taking this legal action, we would urge the rest of the city to follow our example.”

The Yardley partnership has produced a dvd, aimed at providing information for agencies and/or volunteers who counsel victims. It gives an overview of the support available from a range of partner agencies and the workings of the criminal justice system, and includes a dramatisation of what happens at the domestic violence courts.

If you would like more details please contact William Carter at william.carter@birmingham.gov.uk

**Sustainability update**

**Consultation for Birmingham’s climate change strategy**
Birmingham Strategic Partnership (BSP) is launching the consultation for Birmingham’s climate change strategy. Transport and houses are the main cause of carbon dioxide emissions in the UK, so, as housing practitioners and key agents in the delivery of low carbon solutions, your views on the strategy matter. BSP welcomes ideas on how the strategy might be improved and feedback on the proposed targets for preparing our city to cope with climate change. To find out more please contact Cynthia.cupido@birmingham.gov.uk, or on 0121 303 5149 or Phil Beardmore at Birmingham Sustainable Energy Partnership on 0121 262 6408 or at phil.beardmore@hestiaservices.co.uk

**Government launches new energy ratings**
As part of the forthcoming Code for Sustainable Homes, energy ratings similar to consumer-friendly fridge and washing machine ratings will have to be produced for every home bought and sold in England and Wales from June 2007 onwards.

An Energy Performance Certificate will be an essential part of the Home Information Pack. The certificates will give home buyers and sellers an A to G rating for their home’s energy efficiency and carbon emissions, and tell them current average costs for heating, hot water and lighting in their homes, as well as how to cut costs with energy efficiency measures.

Qualified home inspectors will prepare the reports and advise consumers on which energy measures, for example thicker loft insulation and solar panels, could cut carbon emissions from their home and improve their energy rating. For more information visit the Department of Communities and Local Government on www.communities.gov.uk

**Low Carbon Buildings Programme**
The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) launched the Low Carbon Buildings programme in April 2006. It’s a £10.5 million fund to support the installation of small scale renewable energy technologies in homes and buildings. This replaces the DTI’s former Clear Skies and Solar PV grant programme, and will run over three years to demonstrate how energy efficiency and microgeneration can work hand in hand to create low carbon buildings. It is open to householders, public, not for profit and commercial organisations across the UK and will fund a range of microgeneration technologies including:

- Solar water heaters
- Wind turbines
- Small hydro
- Solar thermal hot water
- Ground/water/air sources heat pumps
- Bio-energy
- Renewable CHP (combined heat and power)
- MicroCHP (combined heat and power)
- Fuel cells.

The Energy Saving Trust manages this programme and two streams of grants are available:

**Stream one:** for householders and community organisations.

**Stream two:** for medium and large microgeneration projects by public, not for profit and commercial organisations.

For more information visit: [www.lowcarbonbuildings.org.uk](http://www.lowcarbonbuildings.org.uk)

**New interactive website launched for Building Regs Part L**

[www.playtheregs.com](http://www.playtheregs.com) is the National Home Energy Rating’s new website for people in the construction industry. It allows visitors to see what combination of measures will pass or fail the new Building Regulations (England and Wales) Part L.

**Blue Peter and local school children film the first domestic wind turbine in Birmingham**

Climate change is high on everyone's agenda at the moment and the news that a local housing association has converted one of their Ladywood properties into their first ever eco home made national TV.

The council's Housing Education Initiative works in the Ladywood area, involving local school pupils in regeneration and community involvement projects that are linked to the national curriculum and bring together all ages and generations. Its work includes a video news project called TNT News (The News Team): here, children research, film, edit and present a regular news programme which is shown in local schools, at residents' meetings and at community venues across Ladywood.

TNT News’ recent report about Family housing association’s ‘eco house’ was featured on BBC’s Blue Peter programme. It shows the installation of a wind turbine in the house, with energy saving tips for all households.

Project funding from Clear Skies and Urban Living made it possible for Family to demonstrate that social landlords can take the lead in promoting energy efficiency and reducing the impact on climate change when renovating older properties.

Family converted a Victorian property on Summerfield Crescent back to a large family house, and used the opportunity to introduce a number of innovative low carbon features, including a domestic wind turbine and solar water heating panels, high levels of insulation, energy efficient lighting and a kitchen made from recycled materials.

Family owns 300 rented properties in Ladywood, which is one mile from the city centre and in the top 10 per cent of the most deprived wards in the country. Over the past 18 months, Family has been working very closely with Birmingham City Council, local residents and Urban Living (the housing market renewal pathfinder for Birmingham and Sandwell), to deliver a range of social and physical improvements in the area.
Creating affordable housing in Birmingham

House price inflation has resulted in many people being unable to afford to buy a home on the open market or to pay full market rent. These households need ‘affordable housing’ where the cost is subsidised below market levels. The main types of affordable housing are:

- Social rent (rented from the council or from a housing association)
- Intermediate rent (where the rent is set at a level lower than market rates, but higher than social rents)
- Shared ownership (where the occupier owns a share in the property and pays a subsidised rent on the unowned part)
- Discount sale (where the purchase price is reduced and this subsidy is available to another household whenever the property is sold).

Here, we take a look at what the council and our partners are doing to meet this need.

National Affordable Housing Programme

The Housing Corporation’s main funding programme is the National Affordable Housing Programme (NAHP), which gives social housing grant to housing associations to develop affordable housing. (This used be called the approved development programme).

The council’s partnership delivery team works with the Housing Corporation and housing associations to secure NAHP funding and monitor progress on schemes.

Birmingham’s housing associations have secured NAHP funding to build 1,027 affordable homes between 2006 and 2008.

In the 2004/6 NAHP, 1,347 affordable homes started on site. Of these, 867 were social rented homes and 480 were built for shared ownership. Between 2004 and 2006, 965 affordable homes were built and became available: 774 for social renting and 191 for shared ownership.

Section 106 agreements

The partnership delivery team also negotiates affordable housing through the planning system (without public subsidy). These new homes are specified in legal documents (known as S106 agreements), which are part of the planning permission for new developments. They are often managed by housing associations for social rent, shared ownership or intermediate rent. Properties for discount sale are also negotiated in some developments.

In 2005/6, 767 affordable homes were secured in S106 agreements. Figures for the number of S106 affordable homes that were completed in 2005/6 will be available soon.

For more information, please contact Denise Sproson or Dan Jackson on 0121 303 3787 or email denise.sproson@birmingham.gov.uk or dan.jackson@birmingham.gov.uk.
Kick Start update

West Midlands Kick Start Partnership’s two-year pilot has been a regional and national success, showing how councils can use new powers (from the 2002 Regulatory Reform Order) to help vulnerable homeowners invest in essential repairs and improvements.

The partnership is made up of seven West Midlands councils including Birmingham, which manages the pilot. Eleven demonstration projects, three in Birmingham, have evaluated loan based assistance and around 1,000 vulnerable homeowners have used new services and carried out essential work on their homes.

Independent research asked owners what they thought about the new services:

“The improvements make a real difference to the owner’s quality of life. The ability to know what is needed without the worry of directly managing builders makes it much easier to make decisions and get work underway.”

“Affordable finance, including equity loans is welcomed. Most owners have no other option and want to use loans to get on with much needed work.”

Kick Start is waiting to hear the regional housing board’s verdict on its five-year plan. For more information email Susan.simmons@birmingham.gov.uk or christineh.wood@birmingham.gov.uk

Local area agreement given thumbs up

Since the last Bulletin the government office for the West Midlands has endorsed Birmingham’s local area agreement submission. Local area agreements are a government tool to improve local service delivery by strengthening common links between the agencies involved in delivering services, such as neighbourhood renewal and community safety.

We’ll bring you an update on progress in October’s bulletin.

To read an executive summary of the local area agreement, visit the Birmingham strategic partnership’s website at www.bhamsp.org.uk

Health and housing officer

Lucy Lloyd is the council’s new health and housing officer – chronic illness and HIV.

She’ll provide a much needed link between the voluntary sector, adult and communities directorate and the housing department. Lucy said, “I hope to improve access to housing and housing services for people living with chronic illnesses and HIV. I act as a point of contact for voluntary sector agencies who need advice on the best and quickest way to access these services.”

As well as providing support for council staff, Lucy has a collaborative role. She has set up a health and housing group made up of representatives from the voluntary sector, health service and council. The group meets each month to discuss service improvements and identify the housing needs of different client groups.
The job was created as a joint initiative between the council’s housing department, adults and communities directorate, and Freshwinds (a charity that provides a wide range of therapies for people with life threatening illnesses). At the moment there is only enough funding to pay for Lucy’s post until September 2006.

If you would like more information about housing services for people living with chronic illnesses and HIV, or if you would like to join the health and housing group, please contact lucyelloyd@birmingham.gov.uk.

**Refugee awareness – a new partnership**

Director of housing Elaine Elkington has launched a groundbreaking joint training programme on refugee awareness for council and housing association staff. Participants spent four half days at Family Housing in Bordesley Green sharing their experiences of working with refugees and learning how it feels for members of our newest communities to deal with their housing problems. Perceptions and assumptions about refugees were challenged and participants gained a new awareness of refugee needs and the barriers facing incomer communities.

The training was organised and delivered by B:Rap (Birmingham Race Action Partnership) and monitored by the University of Birmingham, which gave the course a glowing report. Participants said that they really enjoyed working with colleagues from a range of housing organisations and that the training will help them with their work.

We’re planning to make this training available to a wider group of council, housing association and voluntary sector staff in the coming months.

For more information contact kevin.wright@birmingham.gov.uk or call 0121 464 6320.

**£12 million boost for Urban Living**

The government is giving up to £12 million to the Urban Living housing market renewal pathfinder. This extra money will support Urban Living to continue its good work over the next six months in a range of schemes designed to revitalise local housing markets in north west Birmingham and Sandwell. It follows the £50 million originally allocated to Urban Living up until March 2006.

The money will also support the pathfinder to revise and develop its strategy for 2006/08. Urban Living has developed its housing market evidence base significantly since the start of the pathfinder programme. The government has asked Urban Living to look again at its proposals for the next two years to respond more fully to this evidence base, and to take account of comments from the government and recommendations from the Audit Commission.

The government will assess Urban Living’s revised proposals this summer and should then be able to allocate further funding to the pathfinder for 2006/8.
Midlands United campaign launched

The National Housing Federation and Chartered Institute of Housing have launched the Midlands United campaign. Designed to influence the opinion formers who will determine the shape of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review, it argues for more investment in housing in the Midlands and also shows what the Midlands has to offer:

- high quality affordable homes delivered with excellent value for money
- a high level of available land, including plentiful brownfield sites
- great economic potential
- an economic hub between North and South
- successful community cohesion
- a track record of delivery.

The campaign has commissioned research to gather more evidence to support these six offers. This will be published in September and help Midlands United lobby parliament for extra investment in the Midlands.

Support is growing for the campaign. If you wish to get involved please ring Gina King at the National Housing Federation on 0870 153 9426.

If you would like to share some good practice, or raise awareness of your work with other organisations that are interested in housing, please email partnershipsteam@birmingham.gov.uk

We will send you details of future deadlines and a template for your article.