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Around the Houses

November 2013

'Around the Houses' is published monthly to showcase the excellent work members are doing in a wide variety of different areas. If you have any stories you'd like to include in the next edition, please send them to bethan-samuel@chcymru.org.uk.

Royal approval for Doiran Jones OBE

Doiran Jones (Melin's former Chair and Board Member) was recently awarded an OBE for his services to housing. The Officer of the British Empire award was presented by Prince William at Buckingham Palace. Doiran is passionate about his role with Melin, and about housing in general and has been a board member and involved in the sector in a variety of roles for 31 years. As well as being Vice Chair of CHC and Vice Chair of Care & Repair Cymru, he has also been a local magistrate for over 20 years. In an interview Doiran gave his reaction to receiving what he described to be an 'overwhelming honour' for his services in housing, which he feels is 'a privilege to have been involved in for the past 31 years'. He said: 'Melin is one of the leading Housing Associations in Wales (and is about) making sure that everyone has a safe and affordable home to live in.' On his return from the Palace Doiran said: 'It was great to meet Prince William and he seemed very well informed on the issues facing the housing sector today.' Melin Homes' Chief Executive, Mark Gardner, said: 'It's wonderful to see that Doiran's passion and tireless work for the housing sector and for our residents has been marked in this way. It's been a privilege to work with him and he continues to be a valued member of our Board.'



Taff becomes a Living Wage Employer

As part of this year's Living Wage Week, Citizen Cymru Wales visited Taff HA to unveil a plaque in recognition of Taff becoming a Living Wage Employer. Taff is one of only 15 organisations in Wales who are accredited Living Wage Employers. To become Living Wage accredited, employers must demonstrate a commitment to pay a minimum hourly rate of pay to all staff. The rate, which is higher than the national minimum wage, is set independently and calculated annually according to the basic cost of living in the UK. It ensures a decent rate of pay for individuals to be able to provide for themselves and their families. Elaine Ballard said 'At Taff we value our entire workforce – they are the ones who deliver the business. In addition to the range of benefits that we provide for our staff, we also ensure that all receive a competitive market rate of pay for their job. Where this market rate falls below the amount recommended by the Living Wage Foundation, at Taff we made the decision to upwardly adjust the pay to that of a Living Wage. We felt that it made good business sense, in line with our core values, and underpins our mission to be Employer of Choice.'

Launch event for new homes at historic Caerphilly hospital site

The much-anticipated launch of the new homes being built by Lovell and United Welsh at the historic former Caerphilly Miners' Hospital site drew more than 200 visitors. The opening event for the new development, The Beeches Village, in the heart of Caerphilly saw Lovell opening the doors of its two show homes and releasing the first properties for sale. 'The site is obviously of huge interest locally and holds a very special place in the community because of its past,' says Lovell field sales manager Julie Bowen. 'Residents have played an integral part in the shaping of the new development and it was great to see so many people at the launch. The response we had to the new housing was overwhelmingly favourable... As a place to live, The Beeches Village obviously has a massive amount to offer, not least a truly fantastic location. This is a lovely part of Caerphilly just minutes from the town centre and with brilliant transport links.' In addition to the homes being sold by Lovell, United Welsh will sell 20 homes through the Homes within Reach low-cost home ownership scheme. To find out more, please contact 029 2085 8165 or visit www.unitedwelsh.com



Afon Youth feature in new report

Bron Afon's Youth Forum features as a case study in a national report on how public services can be delivered differently. The Carnegie UK Trust investigated how communities are being given more control in a move away from 'top down' services. Maria Jones, senior involvement officer at Bron Afon, said: 'Our forum members have chosen the important things they want to do and simply gone ahead and done them. They were worried about young people who were homeless and moving into their first home so they set up the Own2Feet project. This gives new young tenants support through starter packs containing cutlery and tea bags. It also runs workshops on eating on a budget and finding a job. The forum is also involved in a project to convert a building into one-bedroom flats for young people. The refurbishment will give jobs to local unemployed people. All of this work is led by the forum.'

Community Centre reopens thanks to successful youth renovation project

The Bunker Community Centre on Charter Housing's Barrackwood estate in Newport recently reopened its doors with a celebration to thank the young people and trade mentors, part of the highly successful VIY – Volunteer It Yourself project, for all their hard work in renovating the invaluable community facility. Fourteen young people, supported by Charter Housing's Youth team and 3 tradesman mentors from Bron Afon Community Housing and the local community, renovated The Bunker which included fitting a new internal porch, integrated cupboard space, retiling the bathroom, as well as plastering the walls and repainting. A new baby changing facility for the mother and toddler's group who use the centre has now also been provided. The aim was to create a multi use space for all the community to enjoy, and that is exactly what has been achieved! The young people involved gained valuable skills and qualifications in carpentry, tiling, plastering and painting and decorating whilst at the same time making essential repairs to a valuable community resource. Sam Gerrard, Youth Projects Development Manager said 'We are also very grateful to the trade mentors; Kevin Howells, Ben Quigg and Daniel Hurley of Underfoot Solutions, who volunteered their time to mentor the young people. Their careful and expert nurturing has helped the young people to build their confidence, enabling them to carry out all the renovations themselves. They really were an inspiration to the young people and as a result amazing working relationships were formed'. This project was made possible from the support of London Youth and their VIY - Volunteer It Yourself project, funded by The Big Lottery. Other partners included in VIY are the City and Guilds, Cospa and Wickes. Wickes kindly supplied all the materials that have been used. The project has enabled 7 young people to achieve a City and Guilds Basic Construction qualification. Five young people have gone on to further learning and gained their CSCS cards and one young person has achieved an apprenticeship.

Residents welcome return to Hightown flats

Residents are enjoying settling into their new homes in a £15m ground-breaking affordable housing development in Hightown, Wrexham. Wales & West Housing have been building 147 good quality, energy efficient affordable homes across two sites on Kingsmills Road and neighbouring Rivulet Road, bringing an estimated boost of £50m to the local economy as well as providing training and work opportunities for local people. They have been working with Wrexham Borough Council with funding from the Welsh Government. Residents have now started to settle into their new apartments which replace five blocks of five-storey flats. Returning resident Tina Devlin, 50, said: 'I'm over the moon with my new apartment and will never move!' Anne Hinchey, Chief Executive of Wales & West Housing said: 'I'm delighted to welcome the residents back to their flats along with new tenants who have found a home here. This development provides an answer to the need for affordable housing in Wrexham.' Councillor Mark Pritchard, Wrexham Council's Lead Member for Housing and Planning said: 'This development is a great example of how, by working in partnership, we can produce good quality, affordable homes for the people of Wrexham.'



NPT Homes staff wear it pink

Last month, NPT Homes' staff supported Breast Cancer Campaign's biggest and pinkest fundraising event, Wear it Pink. Staff wore items of clothing in all shades of pink, organised a bake sale and took part in competitions. Overall, £177 was raised which will help to fund vital lifesaving research into Breast Cancer. NPT Homes Chief Executive Linda Whittaker said: 'Our Wear it Pink day was a huge success and we are proud to have been able to support the Breast Cancer Campaign for another year. We all thoroughly enjoyed becoming pink heroes for the day and buying cakes. We hope that next year we will be even pinker!'

Modern retirement living launches in Llanharan

Residents of Llanharan can look forward to growing old in style as the doors of the village's newly renovated and modernised flats for over 60s open for viewings this month. With modern kitchens, smart fittings, the latest energy efficiency measures, landscaped gardens and a stylish exterior, RCT Homes' Park View Close in Llanharan is retirement living at its best. The newly modernised one and two bedroom homes have been converted from old fashioned bedsits into large, contemporary flats with light living rooms, large kitchens and modern bathrooms with walk-in showers. In addition, RCT Homes has added the little extras that people have come to expect from the housing organisation. As well as a popular communal lounge with opportunities for a full and active social life, Park View Close also features a laundry, hairdressing facilities and shared maintained gardens. There is an on-site manager to assist tenants as well as the reassurance of a 24-hour emergency call system. For those with mobility issues, Park View Close has a lift to all floors and the building has been designed to RNIB standards meaning it is accessible even for those with failing eyesight. Located in Llanharan, with great public transport links and a real community feel, many homes have been allocated and some tenants have already moved in. With RCT Homes guaranteeing that tenants can be in by Christmas it is anticipated that the remaining flats at Park View Close will soon be snapped up. All homes are eligible for housing benefit. RCT Homes recently hosted an open day at Park View Close where visitors could take a tour of the new facilities and speak to staff from RCT Homes about life at Park View Close. Visitors also had the chance to reserve a home on the day. For more information about retirement living at RCT Homes, simply contact RCT Homes on 08453 014141 and ask to speak to the housing team.



Seren Group win Welsh CIPR PRide Award

Seren Group is delighted to have been named gold winner of the Best Event Category in the 2013 Welsh Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) PRide Awards for their 'StaffFest' staff conference. A move away from a traditional staff conference to a staff 'festival', loosely emulating Glastonbury, StaffFest was Seren's first staff conference in over a decade, having gone through a significant period of growth which saw Seren grow from one company to a Group of four housing and support businesses. Nicola James, Group PA said 'We haven't done anything quite like StaffFest before and to win such a prestigious award is testament to the dedication and commitment of everybody involved, and an excellent example of what we can achieve working together across our Group.' The judging process for the PRide Awards is rigorous with a panel of industry experts assessing the entries and choosing the winners. The judges felt that StaffFest was 'highly innovative and brought staff together in a fun and engaging way, leaving Seren with a legacy of positive staff engagement'.



Monmouthshire Housing win double at 2013 CIPR Cymru PRide Awards

Monmouthshire Housing Association (MHA) has won two awards at the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) Cymru PRide Awards. MHA received Gold in the Best Internal Publication category for its staff newsletter Ebuzz. They went on to achieve Silver in the Best External Communication category for tenant newsletter Money Matters. The newsletter informs tenants about money saving matters which is important in light of welfare reform. The judges commented that the staff newsletter was an excellent publication with its staff involved in the content and design and represented incredible value for money. John Keegan, Chief Executive of MHA said 'We are very proud to have been awarded both Gold and Silver awards at the CIPR Cymru PRide Awards. An incredible amount of work goes in to these publications and for them to be recognised outside of the housing sector as some of the best examples of PR work in Wales is a great achievement.'

Jobs boost for North Wales Housing as maintenance team grows

The in-house maintenance team at North Wales Housing has boosted its team with a further 10 recruits as services expand to include planned maintenance. The in-house approach has been welcomed by tenants who have offered positive feedback and support to the growing team, encouraging the organisation to develop the team further. The new team will deliver planned works including the installation of new bathrooms and kitchens. North Wales Housing launched its in-house maintenance team three years ago following the demise of construction company Rok. A team of eight Rok employees were taken on to launch the team, a figure which has now grown to 26. Mike Bernard, Assistant Director (Homes) said: 'Our in-house maintenance operation has been a huge success story for North Wales Housing. The tenants have really embraced the Maintenance team and feedback has been brilliant. This marks the next step in the journey for us and we're pleased to welcome some incredibly skilled and knowledgeable tradespeople to North Wales Housing.'



Ground Control team helps out at community allotments

Landscape maintenance specialists Ground Control have helped out at Clwyd Alyn HA's community allotments in Deeside, spraying weeds to make sure one of the plots could be brought back to tip-top condition. 'The allotment holders do a fantastic job of looking after their plots, but occasionally some are handed back to us in an overgrown state,' said Louise Blackwell, Community Development Officer for Clwyd Alyn. 'Following on from a multi-agency activity day at the end of the summer where a number of the plots were cleared we identified one which needed further work to eradicate the weeds. Fortunately 'Ground Control' offered to help out... as a result of their assistance we will now be able to re-lease the plot back to another resident.'