United borrowing power

United Welsh has borrowed £50m from M&G Investments, a leading international investment manager, in a long-term financing deal. The 33-year private placement enables United Welsh to build 600 properties over the next two years in order to meet the growing demand for affordable properties. This deal follows a £30m loan United Welsh borrowed from M&G last year, through the Welsh Housing Finance Grant, when M&G worked with 17 Welsh HAs to provide £156m in loans. Anthony Whittaker, United Welsh Chief Executive, said: “We are delighted that we have been able to negotiate this excellent loan package which will allow us to continue expanding our housing stock across South Wales. There is a real need for high quality affordable housing in South Wales and this funding package means we will be able to provide hundreds of new homes. United Welsh prides itself on providing sustainable, high quality homes as well as creating fantastic communities where people are proud to live. This funding will help us continue to make a real difference to people’s lives.” Mark Davie, Head of Social Housing, M&G Investments, said: “We are pleased to further our relationship with United Welsh as they continue to play an integral role in the community by providing local people with much needed housing. M&G has now invested over £5bn in UK social housing through property transactions, public bonds and private placements and we’re keen to do more. Our pension fund clients continue to seek cash flows over the long-term which are secured against residential property.”

Older People’s Commissioner praises Hafod Extra Care Scheme

Hafod Care Association recently welcomed Sarah Rochira, Older People’s Commissioner for Wales, to its new Extra Care scheme. Located in the centre of Barry, the £7.2m Golau Caredig development provides affordable independent living accommodation for older people in the form of 42 purpose-built one and two-bedroom flats. Individual care and support is provided for the tenants via an in-house domiciliary care and tenant support service. The Commissioner said: “It was wonderful to visit the Golau Caredig extra care facility and meet with the tenants. The independent living accommodation in Barry has a restaurant, hairdressers, launderette and several communal areas, and provides support that allows the residents to stay healthy, active and independent. As well as giving older people the opportunity to make new friends as part of this new community, it also allows them to go shopping, attend appointments and meet existing friends and family in nearby Barry town centre, reducing the risks of them becoming lonely and isolated. Many of the residents have now been living at the site for over five months, and it was great to chat with them about how they have settled in and the many benefits of living in such a great environment.” The scheme benefited from over £5m from Welsh Government’s Social Housing Grant Programme and created up to 50 jobs.
New lease of life for historic Rhyl building

One of the oldest surviving buildings in Rhyl has been given a new lease of life. When acquired by North Wales Housing, the Grade II listed building was in a semi derelict condition, and listed as ‘at risk’ by Denbighshire County Council. Paul Diggory, Chief Executive of North Wales Housing said: “Plas Penyddewglawdd sat in a prominent position within the town and slowly become an eyesore as it fell further and further into a state of disrepair, attracting vandals and anti-social behaviour. Empty properties can have a negative effect on people’s perception of an area and the refurbishment and reoccupation of the property should have a positive impact on this part of Rhyl.” The redevelopment programme started in 2014 as part of Denbighshire County Council’s Empty Homes Project. Pure Residential and Commercial Ltd worked with Council Conservation Officers to re-develop and repair the building using traditional construction methods and materials. The end result is three two-bed houses and three two-bed bungalows. Original character features remain where possible but energy efficient fittings have been incorporated. Paul added: “This scheme is an important part of Denbighshire County Council and North Wales Housing’s Empty Homes Strategy, bringing empty homes back to life. It is a significant listed building in Rhyl, once at risk, and now successfully conserved, creating quality homes for local people.”

Double fundraising boost for Shelter Cymru

Phillipa Knowles (Director of Central Services at the CHC Group) and Clair Houston (Agency Performance and Funding Administrator at Care & Repair Cymru) will be running the London Marathon in April to raise money for Shelter Cymru. As well as training hard for the marathon, Phillipa is also currently cycling from Cardiff to Paris to raise funds for Shelter Cymru. You can sponsor Phillipa and Clair here: http://bit.ly/1ILHpR4
FAST reaction at CCG

Throughout February, Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd (CCG) staff members are being asked to react FAST as they attend stroke awareness workshops by the national Stroke Association. Around 250 CCG staff will participate in the workshops to help them recognise the symptoms of stroke and how best to respond. The workshops have been arranged after a member of CCG staff suffered a stroke at work. It was thanks to the quick reaction of his two colleagues that he is now on his way to a full recovery. After this incident the company was eager for all staff to be aware of the symptoms so they could also react quickly within the ‘golden hour’ if they saw someone either in or outside of work having a stroke. Delyth Williams, Assistant Director – People at CCG said: “Workshops will be held in a number of our offices including Bangor, Dolgellau and Pwllheli. It’s great that everyone at CCG is attending these workshops after what happened to their colleague. As a lot of our staff work out in the field in very rural parts of Gwynedd, it’s essential they are aware of the symptoms so that they can react and receive treatment quickly.”

Tai Calon achieves White Ribbon status

Tai Calon is the first housing association in the UK to win White Ribbon status. The White Ribbon campaign raises awareness about the issue of violence against women. Its Director, Chris Green, said: "Every Welsh council and Welsh Government has been awarded the status. It is vital that the message is spread through the housing sector, which is why I am so pleased by Tai Calon’s achievement. I expect the organisation to become a pioneer not just across England and Wales but for the whole of Europe.” The housing provider is determined to raise awareness and to help anyone affected by domestic abuse. Gill Barnett, Anti Social Behaviour Specialist with Tai Calon said: “We would urge anyone who knows someone who is, or is themselves, a victim of domestic abuse to seek help. We already work with a number of organisations, including Gwent Police, to safeguard anyone affected.” Since being awarded White Ribbon status, Tai Calon has been implementing its plan to combat domestic abuse. Male members of staff have also volunteered to become ambassadors, championing the White Ribbon pledge to “never condone, commit or remain silent to any violence against women”. It’s a message that Tai Calon is also promoting to the wider community. Kate Evans, Anti Social Behaviour specialist explained: “We were delighted when so many of our male colleagues signed the pledge and volunteered to become ambassadors. Where domestic abuse affects our tenants and members of their households, we will do whatever is necessary to protect them.” To mark White Ribbon Day recently, male members of staff swapped their work boots for high heels to “walk a mile” in women’s shoes.

Award for Merthyr's young people

Members of staff at Merthyr Tydfil HA have received an award on behalf of the young people of Merthyr for Innovative funding. The group were given the Wales-wide Third Sector award from WCVA for the innovative way they raised funds for their residential to Llangrannog in 2014 including climbing Pen-y-Fan, carrying out a car wash, bag packing and arranging a theatre performance. Bethan Thomas, Merthyr Housing’s youth inclusion worker, stressed that this award shows that young people in Merthyr are more than capable of helping themselves if given help instead of being written off due to the area stereotype. The group has already started fundraising for their annual residential in 2015 with more innovative ways of raising funds. Jason Mohammed, hosting the event, stated how nice it was to hear of a good news story out of Merthyr regarding its young people.
House proud at RCT Homes

The Royal National Institute for the Blind has recently awarded RCT Homes’ Dyllas Court the Gold standard for the Visibly Better Accreditation. This accreditation is aimed at meeting the needs of older people with sight problems who live in sheltered accommodation. The accolade of being shortlisted in the RICS Wales Awards recognises the scale of the work that has been completed to create a beautiful and accessible home for older people in the valleys. The project has been shortlisted in the ‘Residential’ category. Lily Quill, aged 70, has lived at Dyllas Court for eight years. She moved out of the property for the duration of the build. Lily said: “The building looks lovely from the outside – it feels like a hotel when you walk in through the main door. I don’t ever want to leave here!”

Three stars for Linc!

Linc Cymru is the first housing association in Wales to be awarded with a three star accreditation (the highest award possible) from the Centre for Housing and Support for its services in extra care, sheltered housing and housing related support for older people. The CHS Service Excellence Standard is a prestigious award specifically designed to test and score the quality of services delivered to vulnerable people. Accreditation demonstrates the association’s commitment to delivering significant and positive outcomes to improve the quality of life of its tenants and has been judged to be an outstanding service. An independent Assessor carried out a thorough review of the services, speaking to staff, tenants and key stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the service and how this is viewed by the people that receive it. Christine Walker, Director at the CHS said, “We are delighted to award Linc Cymru with 3 Stars; this achievement provides their service with real kudos and is tangible evidence of their commitment to serving their tenants in the best way possible, listening and responding to their views and needs, and importantly achieving positive outcomes.” David Chinnick, Senior Extra Care Manager, who facilitated the compilation of evidence said: “This recognition reinforces the positive feedback from tenants”. Anne Thomas, Executive Director at Linc Care, said: “This new Service Excellence Standard demonstrates our commitment to improving tenant services and experiences in Linc. We are delighted to be recognised by CHS for working with tenants, staff and commissioners to achieve this top award”.

NPT Homes Becomes Official Supporter of Chwarae Teg

NPT Homes has become the second social landlord in Wales to become an official supporter of Chwarae Teg. By becoming a supporter, NPT Homes will be able to sustain gender equality in its workplace and influence its suppliers and other stakeholders to follow suit through advice and expertise from the charity. NPT Homes has always been committed to implementing workplace practices that enable both men and women to achieve their full potential at work. This was recognised last year when NPT Homes was awarded Exemplar Employer status by Chwarae Teg for its approach to equality and flexible working. NPT Homes employs around 500 members of staff who all receive equality and diversity training and have access to flexible working or similar arrangements. In addition, the organisation has formed an Equality and Diversity Champions Group which includes staff, tenants and a board member. Members of the group act as equality and diversity champions throughout the workplace and in the community.