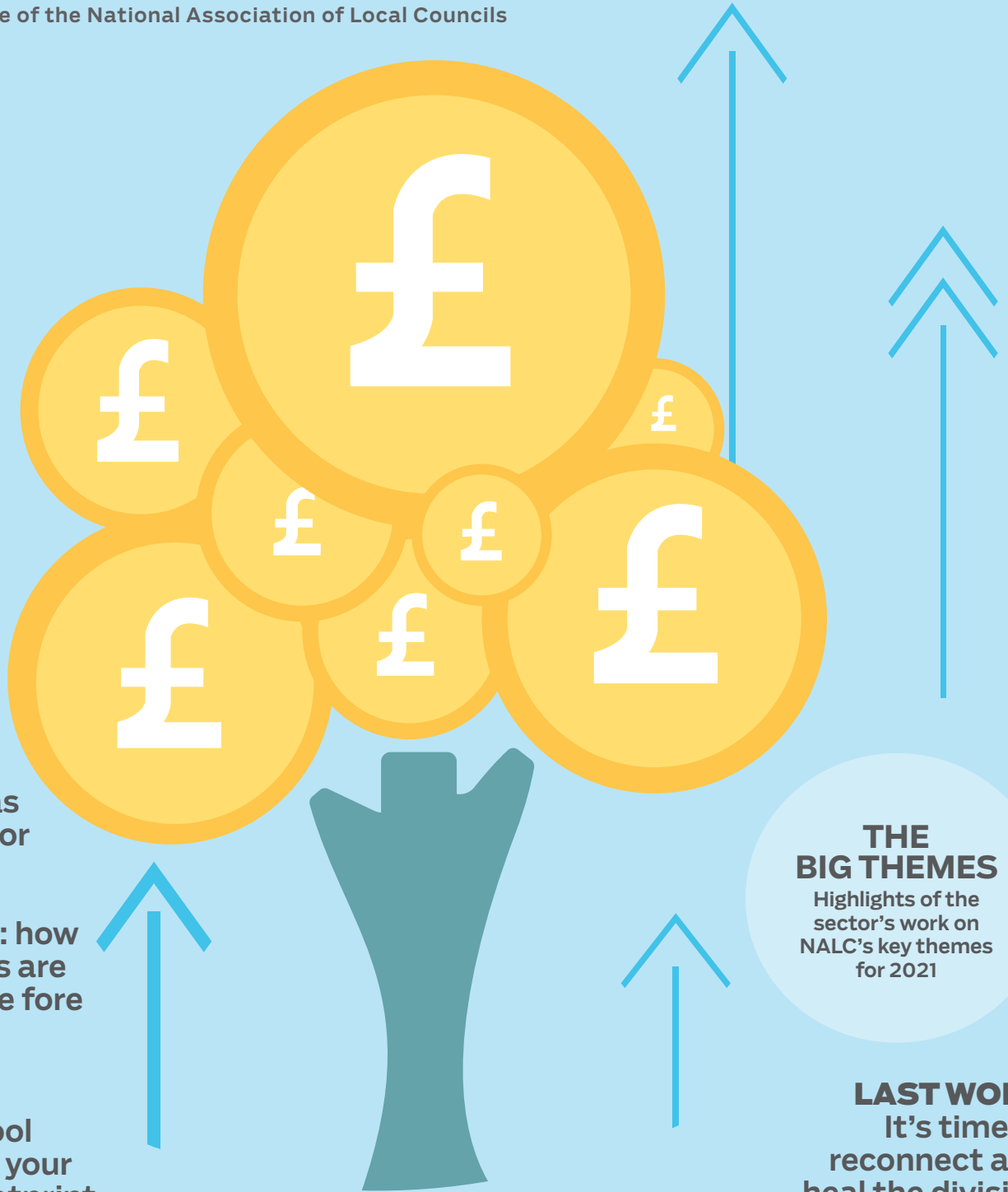


# ELCR

The official magazine of the National Association of Local Councils

Issue 2

2021



## FIRST WORD

Welcome to your new role as a local councillor

## NALC WORK

Civility agenda: how national bodies are putting it to the fore

## CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Discover the tool that measures your community footprint

## THE BIG THEMES

Highlights of the sector's work on NALC's key themes for 2021

## LAST WORD

It's time to reconnect and heal the division

# FUNDING SPECIAL

Key guidance to help you in your quest to raise funds



# Understanding almshouses

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With a national lack of affordable housing, Nick Phillips, chief executive officer at The Almshouse Association, says it is important that councillors understand and support the almshouse model, which can bring many benefits to their local communities



**A**lmshouses have existed across the country, providing homes to those most in need, for over 1,000 years. Yet, even with such a rich and varied history, this housing model is largely misunderstood by the public, government and wider housing sector. At The Almshouse Association, we believe that almshouses play a vital part in tackling our nation's housing crisis through incremental, small-scale expansion of the model.

Historically, almshouses were established in local councils by a local benefactor who sought to help the poor through housing provision. This charity continues to provide warm, secure and genuinely affordable homes to over 36,000 people today. But how does an almshouse work, and how is it different from any other form of social housing?

As of 2020, almshouses now have an officially recognised definition that outlines their unique legal status. Instead of rent, almshouses charge a Weekly Maintenance Contribution (WMC), which cannot create further hardship for the resident. These tend to be well below the government's 80% market rent definition of affordable, with the average much closer to Local Housing Allowances. Almshouses also benefit from an exemption from Right to Buy, which means that they ensure a provision of genuinely affordable housing to their community in perpetuity. The lack of truly affordable housing is an issue that many, particularly rural, communities will be well aware of.

We know that almshouses help to create their own micro-communities, which promote neighbourliness and independence. Independence comes through providing homes without the pressure of unaffordable rents. Neighbourliness through activities, and even the architecture enables greater interaction. Together these elements can bring significant benefits to the local area, such as savings to social care budgets by tackling loneliness and isolation. Beyond financial benefits, these homes can also bring the community together. Unlike a

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large housing association, almshouses are managed by a board of local trustees who want to help their town, parish or village thrive. As such, they bring together people with diverse backgrounds for the benefit of those in need. We know many boards up and down the country are filled with local councillors who help ensure that this model is supported and understood.

However, we must do more. As previously noted, almshouses are just not understood by the majority of people. In a recent YouGov survey commissioned

by The Almshouse Association, 68% said they had not heard of an almshouse. We spend a large amount of our time in discussion with various local councils explaining the basics of almshouses, with many authorities making simplistic assumptions of the model. Issues mainly arise over Section 106 Agreements which tend not to be tailored to the unique nature of almshouses and instead try to treat them on the same level as a large housing association. This leads to unnecessary delays in the development of genuinely affordable homes in those communities. We need the support of local councillors in all localities to come together and help understand the model and what it can provide. Only by taking the time to understand it will we ever overcome these hurdles and see a greater development of almshouses.

### Going further

Almshouses on their own will not solve the housing crisis. By 2030, we would like to see 5,000 new almshouse dwellings built and the establishment of ten new charities. This, to many more familiar with housing associations, will seem like small fry. But this small-scale solution can provide long-term affordability to your community and life-changing opportunities to your residents.

If you would like to know more, The Almshouse Association would be happy to talk. Alternatively, you may want to seek out your local almshouse and work directly with it.

## 5 EASY TAKEAWAYS

1. Almshouses provide genuinely affordable homes to 36,000 people.
2. There are plans to build 5,000 new almshouse dwellings by 2030.
3. Almshouses provide truly affordable housing in perpetuity.
4. Almshouses help build strong, safe communities.
5. Almshouses need greater support from local councils to help them expand. ■

