



the almshouses Gazette

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Almshouses star on Channel 5 News and Radio 4 The Archers



Positive awareness of almshouses has been on a steady rise in recent years, running parallel with stories of combatting social isolation and the ongoing need for affordable, safe and comfortable housing for individuals facing housing challenges.

We were, therefore, delighted when Channel 5 News contacted us one chilly November morning for an interview with the Association's CEO, Nick Phillips, aiming to capture the experiences of residents living in almshouses. Plans



were swiftly made and a visit to Trinity Hospital, Greenwich put in motion. On a crisp and bright January morning, Nick Phillips, accompanied by Sarah Oliver, Almshouse Manager for The Worshipful Company of Mercers, met with Channel 5 presenter Natalia Jorquera and her film crew. The team not only had an opportunity to capture the picturesque architecture and gardens of the almshouses but were also able to delve into the lives of those who live in almshouses. Residents Geraldine and Terry shared their

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We are pleased to invite members to The Almshouse Association 73rd Annual General Meeting, to be held via Zoom, on Thursday 27 June 2024 at 11.00am. The meeting will be hosted by our Chairman, Willie Hartley Russell, in accordance with the requirements set out in our governing documents. Prior to the AGM, we request that one representative from each charity casts their vote on their acceptance of the 2023 AGM minutes, election of Board members, adoption of the 2023 Annual Report and Accounts, and appointment of the auditors. Voting will take place via our survey app, with the results announced at the AGM. To register for the Zoom and to vote, please visit our website at www.almshouses.org/news/agm-2024/ where you will also be able to access the invitation and agenda, the 2023 AGM minutes and the financial accounts. For those not familiar with the internet, please contact us via admin@almshouses.org and we will talk you through gaining access, or alternatively supply paper copies and voting cards.



The importance of using Letters of Appointment and not Assured Shorthold Tenancy Agreements for your almshouse residents

The Almshouse Association sometimes comes across almshouse charities that are issuing tenancy agreements to their residents instead of a 'Letter of Appointment'. If your almshouse charity is making this error, it may be that the trustees are not aware of the difference.

It is important to remember that residents of almshouses must qualify as beneficiaries within the terms of the trusts on which the almshouse charity is held and occupy the premises under what is commonly known as a 'Letter of Appointment'. This is essentially a licence as opposed to a contractual

agreement, and the relationship that exists between the resident and the charity is that of trustee and beneficiary, not landlord and tenant. This is supported by the fact that residents of almshouses pay a weekly maintenance contribution instead of rent. The occupation of an almshouse on this basis does not create any form of secure tenancy. It is, therefore, essential that our member almshouse charities ensure that all residents have been issued with and signed a 'Letter of Appointment'. Having taken legal advice, the Association provides a 'Letter of Appointment' template

and this may be downloaded from our website. Should Assured Shorthold Tenancy Agreements have been issued in error, potentially this has serious legal implications and the matter should be addressed as soon as possible. As always, please contact the Association for advice should this be necessary. The 'Letter of Appointment' is one of the pillars of the almshouse model. It shows respect for the resident as a beneficiary of the charity and enables almshouse charities to be protected by their special status. See our website at: www.almshouses.org/model-policies-and-templates/

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S COMMENT

Today, I received a note from a lady living in the USA who wanted to let me know she had such lovely memories of her grandparents living in an almshouse. She was sharing her memories of the small village, the happy neighbours and the times she spent with the people of the almshouse community.

This is a privilege of the job and I love to hear these stories. It is a sense of the 'magic' that has lived on in memory and I expect those same memories are being made today.

In January, we held the first Almshouse Research Conference in London and many thanks to The Mercers' Livery Company and the Dunhill Medical Trust for supporting us in pulling this event together.

If we think interest in the almshouse model is limited to us few - we need to think again. The researchers who attended to help us review where our research should go, included the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, Cardiff, Delft, Lichtenstein and many others. We identified key aspects of the almshouse model: the impact of community and a reduction in loneliness, the local strong governance and personal responsibility of trustees, and the fact that residents can live longer in the almshouse community.

So where do we go next? How can we use this research to help us all make better-informed decisions and share it with the wider housing sector?

The level of debate was, as you would expect, very well-informed. The group felt that the value and impact of the



above: Field trip to Hopton's Almshouses, Southwark with some of the research group.

historic buildings on the residents is under-investigated, as is the effect upon residents' health, but the key point is that everyone agreed we needed to hear more from the residents themselves (see page 5).

Our mission is to see almshouses recognised as the exemplar form of community housing and, with growing interest from academics in the UK and overseas, we may be at the foothills of where we need to be. Some of you

will be reading this and saying - "yes thanks, but while you wax lyrical, we are aware of some charities that are struggling with buildings, with independent living and with finding the right trustees!"

I know and I am very conscious that we still have a lot of work to do to help those charities. The 'Almshouse Resilient Communities for the Future' research project is well underway and an update will be announced shortly.

Thanks go to all those charities who have contributed so generously to that research and the research team who have so enthusiastically undertaken the work.

Nick Phillips, Chief Executive

Sir Simon Day

The Almshouse Association was saddened to learn of the recent death of Sir Simon Day who was a respected Ambassador and Vice Patron of the Association for a number of years.

Sir Simon was a wonderful support to us in our fundraising efforts and achieved a great deal for which we will always be extremely grateful.

He will be very sadly missed and our thoughts are with his family and friends.



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Almshouses star on TV and radio

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perspectives on almshouse living and Geraldine even proudly provided Natalia with a guided tour of her home. In his interview, Nick Phillips addressed the growing demand for almshouses and underscored the essential need for increased philanthropic support. Channel 5 News broadcast the interview a few days later and we were thrilled with the coverage, considering Channel 5's status as the fifth most consistently watched channel in the UK.

Almshouses in The Archers

Boasting a loyal audience of over five million listeners, *The Archers* stands as an iconic Radio 4 programme with a rich history spanning over 70 years. Needless to say, on discovering the inclusion of almshouses in multiple episodes during December 2023, we were overjoyed. The specific episodes highlighted a family finding solace in the prospect of moving to an almshouse after losing their home. Social media was buzzing with activity as discussions gained momentum, highlighting the positive coverage and interest this type of media attention creates.

We have been developing our relationship with *The Archers* over several years and will be actively maintaining communication with Radio 4 in the future, listening with great interest to see how the narrative unfolds. Such prominent coverage not only amplifies awareness of almshouses but also contributes to their recognition throughout the UK.

We look forward to the next mention of almshouses and, you never know, maybe Ambridge will build its own almshouse community in the not too distant future!

Obtaining Homes England funding without being a registered provider

Homes England provides funding for remodelling grants as well as new build projects. In the case of **new build projects**, it is necessary for charities to become Registered Providers.

However, for those undertaking **remodelling projects**, registration may not be necessary. In both cases funding is made available from Homes England via the Almshouse Consortium Ltd. Homes England has announced that they are continuing to make their funding available, for which almshouse charities may apply.

So, what is remodelling?

This is where the work carried out involves making a material change to the accommodation, perhaps by reorganising or making additional

structures, leading to an overall improvement in the property.

One example would be turning six bedsits into four larger flats, or in another example, converting eight cottages into six larger units more easily occupied.

If you are interested in exploring the option of remodelling, please email the Almshouse Consortium Ltd.

Enquiries can be sent to the ACL Administrator, Sue Holden by email: actlabitha@gmail.com

Other funding may also be available. Please visit: www.almshouses.org/loans-grants-funding



Not receiving e-bulletins? - check your spam!

Every month, The Almshouse Association sends out an email to all members that have consented to receive our e-bulletins. The e-bulletin updates recipients on all the latest governance news, new and updated model policies and templates, seminars, webinars, training, forum topics, member stories, current issues and much more!

Our aim is to ensure that members are always kept up-to-date with all the latest information to support them in successfully running their almshouse charities.

Are you missing out?

Have you signed up but not received any emails? They could be sitting in your spam (or junk) folder. Please check and notify your email administrator that you want to receive these emails if this is the case.

Has your charity's main contact changed?

Please do let us know if there are any changes to your main contact details so that we can make sure our records are up-to-date and important information is not going astray. Email Member Services at admin@almshouses.org or write to us at The Almshouse Association.

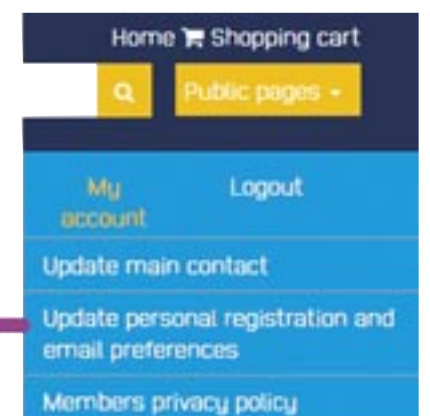
Not signed up yet?

● please log into the members area of our website

● go to 'My account' and click on the 'Update personal registration and email preferences'

● this will take you through to the 'Personal details' page where you will find a button called 'Manage Consent Preferences'. Click on this and tick the applicable field.

Any problems, please do not hesitate to contact Member Services on 01344 452922.



HM The Queen visits Bath to celebrate the 850th anniversary of St John's Foundation

In February 2024, Her Majesty The Queen visited St John's Foundation in Bath to mark their 850th anniversary. Established in 1174, St John's Foundation is the oldest charity in Bath and the 11th oldest in England. For 850 years, St John's Foundation has been changing people's lives for good and as one of the UK's oldest charities they are proud to serve Bath and the surrounding area.

HM Queen Camilla began her visit by meeting with St John's almshouse residents for tea and cake in the charity's chapel, St Michael's Within. She then made her way through the city centre to arrive at Bath Abbey where she was greeted in the courtyard by over 600 children from five of the local schools that St John's works with.

In the Abbey, over 600 guests gathered for a Service of Celebration that paid tribute to the history and impactful legacy of St John's Foundation over the last eight and a half centuries. They included many of the charity's direct beneficiaries, including older adults living in the charity's almshouses and schoolchildren supported by its initiatives.

To see more photos and read more about the day, please visit: <https://www.almshouses.org/news/st-johns-foundation-celebrates-850-years-of-service/>



photos: Anna Barclay

The Association holds its first Research Conference

At the inaugural Research Conference in January, hosted by Almshouse Association CEO, Nick Phillips, 25 prominent researchers, funders, architects and almshouse managers from across the UK and Europe gathered at Mercers' Hall, London. The event opened with a review of the significant studies undertaken in the field so far, with attendees presenting their research focus and findings. The discussions that followed explored forthcoming priorities and building awareness of the almshouse movement.

In the last decade, interest in almshouses has surged, prompting researchers to delve into a better understanding of the almshouse model while gauging the positive impact almshouses have on their residents.

Past research has probed social housing, private rented housing, co-housing, and living in historic buildings, while incorporating elements of the almshouse model. The primary focus of this conference, however, was the assessment of the model itself, extending the focus to identify pivotal factors contributing to the impact of almshouses on residents and the community. These factors included

"It was a really insightful day and fantastic to meet other academics and share findings ..."

architecture, community scale, governance and societal changes. The insights gained will serve to prioritise areas for future research, potentially steering the almshouse model and similar models towards enhanced community housing solutions. Special tours took place on the second day of the conference. Firstly, to Hopton's Almshouses, one of the most iconic almshouse dwellings belonging to Association members, United

neighbourliness and compassion, all of which are integral aspects of their heritage which spans a millennium. Post-tour, the group exchanged experiences from each almshouse and contemplated how these insights could positively shape the future of almshouse development.



St Saviours Charity, then onto Appleby Blue, its polar opposite and the Southwark charity's most recent innovative almshouse development. These tours aimed to underscore the striking parallels between the old and the new, firmly rooted in the timeless architectural design principles of almshouses - emphasising community,

"As interest grows in past research and recognition of the success of the model develops, it is more important than ever that we understand the human and 'built environment' aspects that make the greatest difference. It was a pleasure to see such interest from the UK and Dutch leading universities."

Nick Phillips, CEO
The Almshouse Association

Independent living is a term which can be blurred in ambiguity ...

"Independent Living" is a much-used term within the almshouse movement. We all have a broad idea as to what it means to be able to live independently. However, the phrase has different connotations for different people and this can create confusion when it comes to housing the senior members of our society.

One definition of "independent living" is that it describes an older person who is still living in their own home and in the majority of cases does not require assistance of any kind. Such individuals are able to maintain their home, deal with their financial affairs and need no help with their personal daily activities such as bathing, dressing, eating and so on. A family member or friend might assist with one or two matters.

An alternative interpretation of "independent living" is being used when an individual is not living in a nursing home but is living in their own

home with the help of support services. In many cases the services required are relatively minor, perhaps involving no more than help with preparing meals or managing medication. This is the type of help that would also be provided if living in an assisted living community. One thing is for sure, in a wide sense the term is blurred in ambiguity, yet in the case of almshouse charities it is generally believed that the first definition applies.

There are some broad parameters that may be applied to determine whether someone is capable of living independently and, therefore, suitable for living in an almshouse community. Very few almshouse charities provide meals, nursing and other support services for those not able to live fully independently. The objects of a limited number may include extra-care provision or facilities but they are very much in the minority and traditionally almshouses

are for those who are able to provide for themselves in their day-to-day living. This is not to say that there are residents of almshouses who do not receive support packages which essentially enable them to continue to live independently in their homes. There are also cases of adaptations to assist residents day-to-day. The key point applying to almshouse charities (with the exception of a few), is that they do not provide nursing care. This point should be made abundantly clear to applicants, residents, their families and external agencies. The ability of a person to live independently may be affected by the nature of the accommodation the charity offers. Suitability of access for those with limited mobility, the difference between living in a first floor flat or on a ground floor, for example, are relevant factors to consider. It is important that almshouse charities have a clear policy setting out what the trustees consider



above: Nick Phillips, CEO of The Almshouse Association, chats with a resident of Ann Edwards Almshouses.
photo: Charity of Ann Edwards

... clear policy guidance is recommended

to be independent living and the process that will be followed if a resident is considered no longer able to live independently. The latter is usually based on circumstances in which the individual is considered to be a danger to themselves and/or others. It is for this reason that The Almshouse Association strongly recommends that charities seek an authority to discuss concerns about an individual's health and ability to live independently, with their GP. Obtaining next of kin details is also strongly advised or, failing this, someone who may be contacted in case of need. Ideally, a Lasting Power of Attorney will be in place. The two core elements of independent living from the charity's perspective are the trustees' duty of care and having an Independent Living Policy in place, a template for

which, together with guidance, may be downloaded from the Association's website at www.almshouses.org/model-policies-and-templates/. Whilst what has been described might leave the impression that residents are required to fend entirely for themselves, this, of course, in reality is far from the truth. Essentially, residents live in unique almshouse communities where, despite living independently, there is help and support that may be called upon in the background. The Association has endless examples of trustees and clerks acting as a 'good neighbour', highlighting the special relationship between trustees and residents and it is this that signifies the special nature of almshouses, their uniqueness and the value they bring. These qualities are what make almshouses so special and make them stand out as extraordinary providers of homes for those in need.

John Sayer Almshouses raises its profile to gain grants and donations

John Sayer Almshouses consist of four homes in a Grade II listed building on the High Street of Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire. They were built in 1684 as six almshouses and in 1965 were adapted to make four larger properties. The trustees approached The Almshouse Association for a £25,000 grant to support the repointing of the side and back walls, together with the replacement of the guttering. Innovative fundraising also supported the project, which in turn raised the profile of their almshouses.

Hilary Armstrong, Clerk for John Sayer Almshouses, takes up the story.

"The building materials that were used in the 1960s were not sympathetic to the needs of our Grade II listing building - gypsum plaster on the inside, cement pointing on the outside and some leaky gutters led to some very damp walls. One wall also contained cracks due to the weight of traffic using the road. To help resolve this problem our surveyor recommended repointing the side and back walls and fixing the gutters as a priority.

The support of The Almshouse Association enabled us to start the repointing work and, along with other funds, open days and a generous individual donation, we were also able to renew the guttering.

The repointing work was carried out over the summer of 2023 by Mathias

Restoration, specialists in historic brickwork. The cement was painstakingly chipped out by hand and then lime mortar was applied. Where the original lime mortar was sound, this remained in place. While the work was in progress people would often stop and ask what was happening. A poster explaining the process and asking for donations was displayed. There is less to see of a 'before and after' with the gutters, as with renovations to listed buildings much of the idea is that you don't see a difference but we do have a splendid new hopper!

We will probably need to wait until the end of this year to really see the impact of this project but the building feels drier and the dehumidifier which is running in our one vacant unit is collecting less water.

This project spurred us on to set up Instagram and Facebook accounts and a website at www.johnsayeralmshouses.org.uk/ to look at our engagement with the town.

A reporter also wrote an article in a local magazine about the almshouses. Over the summer we held two open days, welcoming 400 visitors and raising almost £2,000 in donations. Our residents were pleased to open their homes and to talk to members of the public about living in the almshouses."



The almshouses before (above) and after (below) showing attention to detail and emphasis on painstaking restoration.



When asked for one piece of advice for other almshouse charities, Hilary responded: "If you are facing multiple building projects totalling a significant sum, break them down into smaller individual projects and look for the funding for each. You are more likely to get several smaller amounts than one large amount. Also, if you start the process and complete some of the smaller projects, it demonstrates your ability to raise funds, giving other sources of funding more confidence in your capacity to get things done."

Evidence shows poor sense of smell may affect health in later life

Olfactory dysfunction (OD) describes a range of issues associated with the sense of smell, including the inability to smell (anosmia), a reduced sense of smell (hyposmia) and a distorted sense of smell (parosmia), where things smell differently to the way they should.

Pre-Covid European population studies suggested that persistent anosmia affects 1-5% of the population, with all forms of olfactory disorders affecting about 20%, increasing over the age of 60. Based on European estimates, anosmia is more prevalent in the UK than rates of profound hearing loss or blindness.

OD affects all age groups but particularly the older section of the population; many people will start to lose their sense of smell as part of the ageing process.

Based on European studies of OD and analysis of the UK population as of 2021, existing data shows that approximately:

- 3% of people between the ages of 60-69 (just under 1 million) may have OD

- 25% of people between the ages of 70-79 (around 1.5 million) may have OD
 - 55% of people over 80 (more than 1.8 million) may have OD
 - and of 4.2 million people over the age of 65 who live alone, more than 1 in 4 may have OD.
- The impact of OD on people's physical and mental health, well-being and safety is significant.

People can often experience poorer mental health by being unable to smell the familiar scent of their partner, children and loved ones, places they visit, or enjoy the flavours of their food and drink. Physical health can then suffer as people's diets change, which subsequently impacts nutrition. Safety and well-being at home is put at risk through being unable to smell gas, smoke or knowing when food has gone off and is unfit to eat. Fear and anxiety caused by being unable to smell these dangers exacerbates the toll on mental health.

There is growing evidence pointing to OD as a significant factor in poorer health in later life. Research has demonstrated links between a poor sense of smell and frailty as an early indicator of neurodegenerative disease and of increased risk of mortality.

People don't always realise they have a poor sense of smell, particularly if it deteriorates gradually. The fact that testing the sense of smell happens in a relatively small number of specialist clinics is a factor in this too.

There are things that can be done to help people live well with a smell disorder, starting with an awareness and understanding of the issue and how it can affect people's lives. This, together with food tips, safety advice, peer support and more, are all part of the information and services provided by Fifth Sense, the charity for people affected by smell and taste disorders.

contributed by Duncan Boak, Fifth Sense

Out and about with the Chairman

The Chairman of The Almshouse Association, Willie Hartley Russell (below centre), visited the Charity of Lionel Annesley Dorant for Almshouses in St Albans, where he met (from left) Brigid Brennan, trustee; Betty Hayward, Chair; Jo Hayward, Administrator; and Jane Singleton and Stephen Boffey, trustees.



He also visited the stunning Victorian almshouses (right) run by the Cambridge Royal Albert Homes, who are celebrating 165 years since the foundation of the almshouses later this year, an event The Almshouse Association Chairman is looking forward to attending.



New locations for The Almshouse Way training course

Over the last year, The Almshouse Association has been successfully running The Almshouse Way CPD training course throughout England. We've received positive feedback and almost all locations have been fully booked.

We know, however, that we have not covered as many parts of the country as we would like and so, with the help of members, this year we extended the list of locations to include Abergele, Bitteswell, Bury St Edmunds,

Greater London, Hartlepool, Halifax, Hull, Redruth and Spalding.

We hope to have enough interest to keep these venues on the list, so please book if these locations are of interest to you. It is a really worthwhile course.

To reach even more members, we are continuing our search and hope to find suitable venues in Kendal, Newport and Bournemouth. If you can assist with providing or sourcing a venue in or near these locations



graphic for illustration only

Filing accounts with the Charity Commission

The Almshouse Association is aware of the technical issues that a number of our members have experienced when trying to file their charity's Annual Accounts with the Charity Commission and we have, therefore, referred this to the Commission.

We have been informed that the technical issues have been resolved and that it is possible for charities to request that their Annual Accounts are 'backdated to show as compliant' once filed. If you are still experiencing problems in accessing the online service, it is necessary to complete an enquiry form, or alternatively call the Charity Commission's contact centre on 0300 066 9197 (Mon-Fri, 9 am-5 pm). To complete a Charity Commission enquiry form, go to: www.forms.charity-commission.gov.uk/my-charity-commission-account/ NOTE: Access to the Charity Commission's online services has

changed. From 31 July 2023 your previous shared charity login has no longer worked.

- You need to have set up your own 'My Charity Commission account', using an individual email address and password to access services on behalf of a charity: www.gov.uk/guidance/setting-up-my-charity-commission-account
- If you have already set up your new account with personal login information, you can sign in to submit your charity's annual return: www.my-charity-account.charitycommission.gov.uk/

You must submit your annual return within 10 months of the end of your financial year. Please visit: www.gov.uk/guidance/prepare-a-charity-annual-return

The type of accounts you need to prepare depends on the type of charity and its finances. For more information see: www.gov.uk/prepare-charitys-annual-accounts

please get in touch with us. Alternatively, you may have a venue in another area that we could use in the future - we'd love to hear from you.

The Almshouse Way Training Course is great value at £105 per delegate, which includes course material, refreshments and a light lunch. To learn more about the course and make a booking, visit: www.almshouses.org/the-almshouse-way-1-day-course

Courses fill up fast, so act now! The training course is intended for recently appointed trustees, clerks and CEOs, as well as members wishing to consolidate their knowledge.

It is CPD accredited and covers the following topics: almshouse history, what makes almshouses unique, The Almshouse Association and how we can support you, charity structures, charity regulators, the role of trustees and clerks/CEOs, personal liability and your residents.

Throughout the day we also discuss almshouse scenarios and case studies.

Preparing for flooding and extreme weather events

With warmer and wetter winters expected, together with extreme events such as heavy rainfall, the UK is experiencing more flooding events such as the recent Storm Henk in January. We would, therefore, urge members to review and update their Disaster Recovery Plan which includes an Emergency Plan, Evacuation Procedure and Recovery Plan. A template is available on The Almshouse Association website in Model Policies and Templates at: www.almshouses.org/model-policies-and-templates/

To help with this there are some recommended information websites for identifying flood risk areas; actions to take before, during and after flooding; and measures that could be taken to mitigate the impact of future floods.

- Government Flooding web section: www.gov.uk/browse/environment-countryside/flooding-extreme-weather
- Check if you are in a long-term flood risk area: www.gov.uk/check-long-term-flood-risk
- Sign up for Flood Warnings: www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings
- What to do before or during a flood: www.gov.uk/help-during-flood
- Environment Agency: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency
- National Flooding Forum: www.nationalfloodforum.org.uk/
- Protecting your Property: www.nationalfloodforum.org.uk/about-flooding/reducing-your-risk/protecting-your-property/
- The Flood Hub (covers North West England but has useful country-wide information in the knowledge hub): www.thefloodhub.co.uk/knowledge-hub/

If you are in a flood risk area, identify the lead Local Authority (usually Unitary or County Council) which you may need to contact.

- The Environment Agency is responsible for main rivers, reservoirs, estuaries and the sea
- The Canal & River Trust owns our canals and navigable rivers.

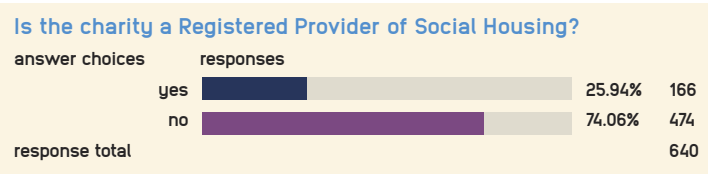
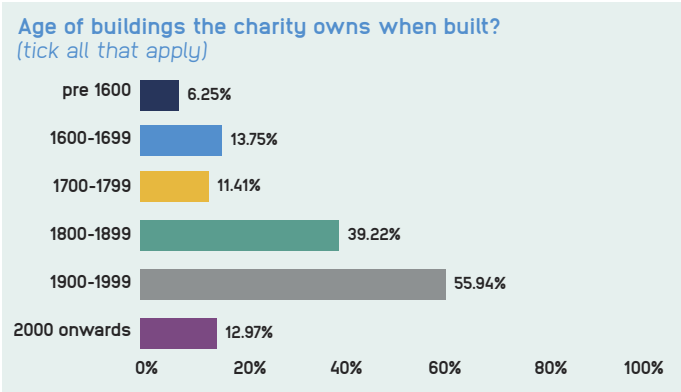


Making contact with local businesses, land-owners and community groups in affected areas is also sensible. Many communities at risk of flooding are advised to prepare a resilience plan, which could include vulnerable and older residents. Often the resilience plan has two settings, 'standby' and 'activation', as not all flood alerts lead to flooding but it allows residents to be prepared. Local authorities advise those at risk of flooding to take proactive steps to protect their property, such as flood protection measures or retaining a stock of sand/sandbags. It is also worth noting that if sandbags have been used in a flooded area, they may be contaminated by sewage so should not be retained after use. In addition to natural flood risks from rivers and the sea, members should also consider what to do in the event of flooding, even outside a flood risk area, as the result of a 'flash flood' or burst mains water pipe. Even small water pipes can cause serious damage and require evacuation of residents if left unattended. Please review and update your Disaster Recovery Plan to consider flooding.

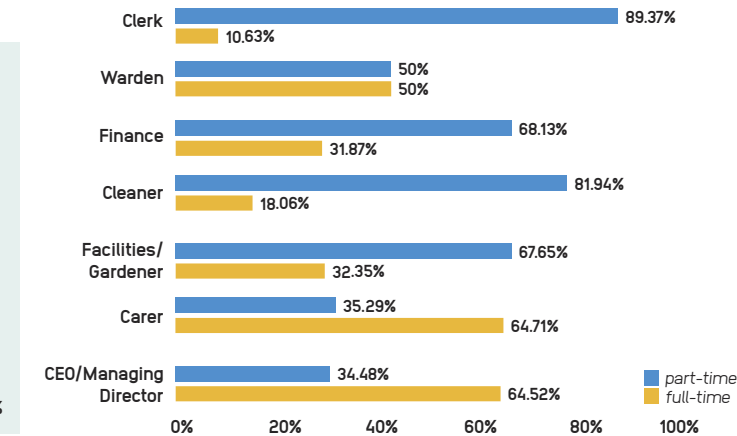
Early results from the 'first ever' great almshouse census

A huge thank you to all our members who have completed The Great Almshouse Census. At the time of writing, 640 member charities have submitted their census, just over 41% of our membership. This is an excellent response and we hope that, once analysis has taken place, we will be fully armed with enough statistics and trends to satisfy the most tenacious of interrogators.

There is, however, no doubt that we would be in an even stronger position if we are able to say the figures are based on over 50% of our membership. So, if you have not yet done so, please access the census at: www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/thegreatalmshousecensus/ If you have any problems accessing the census online, please do not hesitate to call or email us. We will happily send you a paper version, together with a stamped addressed envelope. In the meantime, here's a sneak peek at some of the results so far!



If the charity directly employs staff please complete the following by ticking all that apply (NB. This does not include the use of tradesmen and professionals for occasional duties).



Setting up personal emergency evacuation plans



Almshouses require special consideration regarding emergency procedures to ensure the safety of all residents, particularly those who might require additional assistance. To help identify the safety processes required and to fulfil legal obligations to look after residents, Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPS) need to be developed.

Understanding PEEPs

PEEPs are critical in fulfilling legal obligations in several regulations. They ensure that in the event of an emergency, such as a fire or flooding, all individuals, including those with disabilities or impairments, can evacuate safely and efficiently or be adequately protected until rescue arrives.

Key components of a PEEP in almshouses

1. Evacuation routes:

Some properties with unique layouts and historical features necessitate clearly identified and accessible evacuation routes. These should be regularly reviewed to consider any structural changes or resident needs.

2. Refuge areas and evacuation procedures:

Designated refuge areas should be established, easily accessible, and well-known to all residents. These areas function as safe zones while awaiting assistance during an evacuation.

3. Specialist equipment:

Equipment like evac-chairs may be crucial where traditional stairs and

narrow corridors are common. Ensuring these tools are available and in working order is vital.

4. Staff responsibilities:

Staff play a pivotal role in executing PEEPs. Their responsibilities range from aiding residents during evacuations to regular maintenance checks of safety equipment.

5. Training requirements:

Regular training for staff and residents is essential to familiarise everyone with the evacuation procedures. This training should be tailored to address the unique challenges.

6. Building adaptations:

Given the historic nature of some properties, necessary adaptations might be required to enhance safety. This could include installing ramps, widening doorways, or upgrading fire alarm systems to cater for residents with hearing impairments.

Personalisation of plans

It is crucial to remember that PEEPs are not 'one-size-fits-all'. Each resident's needs and abilities must be considered. For example, individuals with mobility impairments might need different evacuation routes or equipment compared to those with cognitive impairments.

Implementing and maintaining PEEPs

Implementing effective PEEPs involves several key strategies:

- Collaboration with local emergency services is essential for ensuring that the plans are realistic and effective.

- Regular reviews and updates of the PEEPs are necessary to accommodate any changes in the residents' needs or in the physical layout of the property.
- Engaging residents in the planning process helps to raise awareness and ensures that they are comfortable with the plans.

Maintaining a resident register for emergency situations

It is crucial to maintain an up-to-date register that clearly distinguishes between residents who can evacuate independently and those who should 'stay put' and wait for assistance, and ensure this information is readily accessible to fire and rescue services for an efficient emergency response. Consider data protection and what information may be openly available to anybody else.

Final thoughts

Developing and implementing effective PEEPs is not just a legal requirement but a moral imperative to safeguard the well-being of all residents. By considering the unique aspects of almshouse living and the diverse needs of its residents, a robust and inclusive emergency evacuation strategy can be established, ensuring peace of mind for everyone involved.

contributed by Association Panel Consultant, Mark Dollan, Health and Safety Consultant, Integral Safety Ltd <https://integralsafetyltd.co.uk>

A change in the law may affect keeping pets in almshouses

The Renters (Reform) Bill 2022-23, introduced to parliament on 17 May 2023, contains measures to amend the Housing Act 1988 to make it an implied



term of an assured tenancy (with some exceptions) that a tenant may keep a pet with the landlord's consent unless the landlord reasonably refuses. The landlord will be required to give or refuse consent in writing within 42 days of receiving a written request. As a condition of giving consent, landlords will be able to require tenants to have insurance covering the risk of pet damage or require the tenant to pay the landlord's reasonable costs of maintaining pet damage insurance. The Bill will have to complete its

parliamentary stages and gain Royal Assent before the Secretary of State can decide when the changes come into force. As a result of this, many charities have been asking whether new legislation means they are obliged to accept pets. The short answer is 'no' but considerations apply. Although animals such as cats and dogs can be invaluable companions for residents, it may be that for various reasons it is not possible for an almshouse charity to allow pets, leading them to have a 'no pets' policy. However, The Renters (Reform) Bill ensures that when a 'tenant' asks to have a pet in their home, a 'landlord' cannot unreasonably withhold consent and is required to fully consider all requests on a case-by-case basis. While the legislation refers specifically to situations concerning landlords and tenants, it is recommended that almshouse charities abide by these requirements. If declining a request to keep a pet, charities need to be clear as to the reasons.

Pets may help older people combat loneliness and studies have shown that pets can bring therapeutic benefits for physical and mental health. However, before permitting residents to have a pet, consideration should be given to the impact on other residents. The layout of the almshouses will dictate the variety and size of pets that can be sensibly allowed. Trustees should develop a clear policy stating whether pets are permitted and, if allowed, the conditions that apply and include this in the Terms of Appointment. Trustees are obliged to accommodate service animals that are trained to perform tasks that help alleviate their owner's disabilities. Such animals could include guide dogs and hearing dogs for deaf people. At present, emotional support and therapy animals are not required to be permitted. See our guidance in Standards of Almshouse Management 10.19, at: www.almshouses.org/standards-of-almshouse-management-2023/

Self-assessment health checks for Association members

Trustees and clerks interested in measuring the performance of their charities, from day-to-day running and the longer term, can now download a Member Health Check template from our website. The Health Check covers all aspects of running an almshouse charity, including governance, the trustee

body, health and safety, buildings and finances and, most importantly, residents. It has been designed in order that trustees and clerks may self-certificate and is based on a score system, accompanied by comprehensive guidance notes. The Health Check is not an inspection

and see it as an important part of their overall governance review. Once completed (and if you want to) please email the Member Health Check in Word format to: admin@almshouses.org. Our Member Services team will be happy to provide feedback. Visit: www.almshouses.org/charity-health-checks to download.

but has been created to enable trustees and clerks to identify areas which need addressing and, as always, the Association will be ready to provide guidance on best practice wherever necessary. Our goal is for all members to complete the check

Comprehensive guide to Legionella assessment for charities

Legionella, the bacterium responsible for Legionnaires' disease, poses a significant public health risk, particularly in water systems. Charities must respond appropriately to mitigate this risk and ensure the safety of their beneficiaries, staff and visitors.

A Legionella risk assessment identifies any potential risks of Legionella bacteria and is required whenever a charity has water systems, including taps, showers and water tanks. Any renovations or installations require a new assessment.

Key components of a Legionella risk assessment

1. The first step is to identify and document all water systems within the property, including tanks, pipes, taps, showers, etc.
2. Evaluate the conditions that could promote the growth of legionella bacteria. These include water temperatures between 20-45°C, stagnant water, presence of nutrients such as rust, sludge, scale and organic matter, and potential for creating water droplets.
3. Determine if there are individuals within the property who are more susceptible to Legionnaires' disease, such as older people, smokers, or those with weakened immune systems.
4. Maintain comprehensive records of the risk assessment, including details of the water systems, potential risk factors, existing control measures and any recommendations for improvement.
5. Based on the findings of the risk assessment, develop a control scheme outlining the measures required, including details on regular monitoring, cleaning and maintenance activities.
6. Implement the recommended control measures and establish a schedule for regular review of the risk assessment to ensure its continued effectiveness. Charities are required to conduct regular Legionella checks to comply with health and safety regulations. The frequency of these checks depends on the results of a risk assessment. While there is no fixed interval mandated by law, it is generally recommended to perform checks at least annually.

A 'competent person' should conduct the Legionella check, someone with the necessary experience to carry out the task effectively. This could be an in-house staff member, provided they have received adequate training, or an external consultant.

Key components of a Legionella check

- Hot water should be stored at 60°C or higher and distributed at 50°C or higher to mitigate the risk of Legionella growth. These temperatures should be checked regularly, with the frequency determined by the risk assessment.
 - To prevent water stagnation in vacant properties, regular flushing of the system, maintaining appropriate temperatures, and conducting periodic checks are essential.
 - Shower heads and hoses are potential hotspots for Legionella. They should be cleaned and descaled at least quarterly, or more frequently if indicated by the risk assessment. Follow the guidance set out by the risk assessment, also consider changing the shower head and hose at every void turnover.
 - Water tanks should be inspected at least annually to ensure they are clean and free from debris.
 - Charities should maintain records of all Legionella checks and actions taken. Clear procedures for reporting potential issues and an initiative-taking approach to water system maintenance are all recommended to uphold the highest standards of safety. By conducting regular checks, maintaining appropriate water temperatures and ensuring competent personnel are responsible for these tasks, charities can protect their communities and uphold their duty of care.
- Contributed by panel consultant, John Lewis of Integral Safety. Also available on our website as a FAQ at: www.almshouses.org/faqs-2/



Working together to develop affordable housing

The Rural Community Council (RCC) is a network of support charities operating under Action Within Communities in Rural England - ACRE. They are a resource for many rural community projects, including village halls and village agents, who are a team supporting older people in rural areas. They have been very involved in the identification of Rural Exception Scheme sites for small-scale developments and have methods for obtaining planning permission for small scale projects in rural, often Green Belt, locations. The RCCs work with different types of community housing including almshouses.

Small-scale development

Specific recommendations cannot be made but in your approach to small-scale developments you may find it useful to engage your local RCC for their input. Most rural areas have a RCC who can help with affordable housing planning.

If you are looking to develop in the Green Belt outside Gloucester, Cara Loukes will be able to put you in touch with the right person.

Here, she outlines the type of services available: "On behalf of Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC), I'd like



to introduce our enabling services to members of The Almshouse Association. Gloucestershire, like much of England and Wales, is in the midst of a rural housing crisis - affordability, accessibility, availability, disrepair and overcrowding are but a few key words you may regularly come across in your respective communities.

"Almshouses have an illustrious heritage as the forebears of modern social housing and GRCC would be interested in working with almshouses, with some interest in development, to realise the potential and scope of ambition. Development and planning can be a minefield, dependent on risk, capacity, funding and the skill of an organisation. In our centenary year, GRCC is proud to have successfully collaborated with many community-based organisations to promote an inclusive and localised approach to community development and affordable housing. GRCC has expertise in working with the charity sector in their organisational development and have historically worked with almshouses to support trustees in governance related matters.

"As Affordable Housing Manager for GRCC, I also facilitate the Gloucestershire Rural Housing Partnership with members from the four rural councils (Forest of Dean, Tewkesbury, Cotswold, and Stroud) as well as Registered Providers, to promote Rural Exceptions Sites and 100% affordable sites. GRCC operates on principles of collaboration, consultation and consensus-building, to further both a progressive political agenda as well as practical housing delivery. We are community-led and community-focused.

Providing for local residents

"Almshouses are excellently placed to provide affordable housing in perpetuity for those in local housing need.

As housing associations expand, certain communities still look for close integration between housing provider, residents and the wider parish.

"If you are an almshouse charity operating in a rural area then please do not hesitate to contact your local RCC through their member body ACRE at www.acre.org.uk/ and in Gloucestershire, please contact me, Cara Loukes at the GRCC, should you wish to discuss opportunities in greater detail."

Cara Loukes, Affordable Housing Manager, GRCC, CaraL@grcc.org.uk

Safety first when using lithium rechargeable batteries

Lithium batteries are generally safe and unlikely to fail but only when there are no defects and the batteries are not damaged. When lithium batteries fail to operate safely or are damaged, they may present a fire and/or explosion hazard. Lithium batteries have found themselves in the news recently - for both good and bad reasons. The increasing use of lithium-ion batteries is due to their ability to store and provide much more energy than other battery types, allowing for longer usage. This has led to a transport revolution, with many people using e-bikes and e-scooters as a greener and more economical form of transportation. Unfortunately, it has also resulted in a frightening increase in particularly dangerous fires. If overheated through damage, flawed design, or the use of substandard chargers, lithium-ion batteries can create fierce fires that are not only difficult to extinguish but also release toxic gas. These

fires can occur when just one cell of the battery overheats, creating a domino effect or "thermal runaway", with a fire developing within seconds that can reach a temperature exceeding 600°C. Steve Sitch, Chief Executive of Exeter Homes Trust,

has kindly shared with the Association their Fire Safety Bulletin on the topic of lithium batteries. Top safety tips can be found here and for the full document, please visit: www.almshouses.org/news/lithium-batteries/

- Keep batteries in a cool, dry place away from flammable materials and direct sunlight
- Recycle damaged or swollen batteries at designated recycling points
- Always use the charger supplied with the device or recommended by the manufacturer
- Avoid overcharging - use a charger with automatic shutoff or a timer to prevent overcharging
- Never leave batteries unattended while charging and do not charge overnight
- If a battery shows signs of swelling, overheating or emitting smoke, safely remove it and report the incident to the appropriate authorities

Trustees and clerks may want to share similar advice with their residents

Mineworkers’ homes recreated for open-air museum

Durham Aged Mineworkers’ Homes Association (DAMHA) sent us this wonderful news story about how their almshouses have become a part of the North East’s most visited tourist attraction.

Millions of people will now get to see our aged miners’ homes which have been faithfully replicated at the North East’s most visited tourist attraction. Before they were officially opened to the public at the beginning of October last year, residents who live in the original homes were treated to a VIP sneak preview. Beamish Museum selected our Marsden Road aged miners’ homes in South Shields to feature in its new 1950s town. Two of the four homes which have been replicated show



Beamish visitors what life was like for retired miners in the 1950s. The other half of the terrace provides a space for the award-winning work of Beamish’s health and well-being team. DAMHA has been working closely with Beamish to ensure the homes were recreated as faithfully as possible and we left final judgement about this to residents from the original Marsden Road cottages during their private tour (photo left). They were joined by residents from our Bulmer House and Rutherford House sheltered housing schemes.

The original mineworkers’ homes are faithfully replicated inside and out at Beamish open-air museum (photo right).

Carol Davidson’s home was one of those selected when Beamish chose the cottages for their themed town almost ten years ago and detailed measurements were taken throughout the house so that it could be accurately recreated. After visiting the replica homes, she said: “I can’t believe how alike they are from the outside and when I looked inside, the way they have been so accurately furnished and decorated brought back many happy memories of when I used to visit my aunt’s home in the late 1950s”. Another resident, Betty Sparks, said: “The attention to detail in the homes is incredible; it was lovely to get the chance to see them”. DAMHA Chief Executive, Paul Mullis said: “We are delighted to have been involved in this amazing project which has seen our aged miners’ homes in Marsden Road being so faithfully replicated. Our residents at Marsden Road were fully involved from the initial inception and they, like everyone at DAMHA, agree on how sympathetically they have been recreated both inside and out. We would like to thank Beamish Museum for enabling us to be part of this project and for their work in ensuring our historic homes will be seen by many more people now and in the future.”



The adverse effects of alcohol

Older people can be more prone to the adverse effects of alcohol than younger people. They may also be affected to a greater degree by both prescription and non-prescription drugs and may be generally prone to complications with medication, a particular risk being an adverse reaction to a mix of medication and alcohol. As we age, alcohol has a stronger and more prolonged effect on the body. If residents are found to be having accidents such as falling, suffering memory loss, confusion and shaking limbs, whilst this is in most cases due to old age, it is also possible that these may be signs of alcohol dependence. Feelings of isolation or experiencing other problems such as depression can lead people to drink to relieve stress which can potentially harm their health.

Drinking too much alcohol has specific health implications for older people including:

- Stomach upsets, sickness and indigestion
- Liver problems - the liver becomes less efficient with age
- Hypothermia - drinking speeds up loss of body heat
- Alcohol affects appetite and digestion. Extra vitamins may be needed for someone who is not eating properly
- Risk of having an accident such as a fall
- Dehydration due to the diuretic effects of alcohol
- Disturbed sleep patterns
- Diseases of the liver, heart, stomach, chest, kidneys and throat
- Danger from mixing alcohol with prescription drugs.



Dependence on alcohol can be difficult to detect. People can be secretive about their drinking but some of the signs are:

- Impaired control over alcohol use. Not being able to control how long a drinking session is, how much alcohol is consumed and how frequently. Being unable to stop drinking once started, or drinking on inappropriate occasions or at inappropriate places
- Giving increased priority to alcohol. Giving precedence to drinking over other daily activities, drinking being more important than looking after one’s health, or continuing to drink despite negative consequences
- Making alcohol the most important item of shopping
- Unwanted physical or mental effects from drinking. Signs of increased tolerance to alcohol (having to drink more for the same effect), experiencing withdrawal symptoms, or using alcohol to prevent or alleviate withdrawal symptoms.

It can be difficult to know how best to help someone who is showing signs of alcohol dependence. We tend to feel worried for them, frightened for them or even frightened by them. The best thing is to talk honestly and try to persuade them to see a doctor. Often those dependent on alcohol find it difficult to admit they have a problem but being supportive and non-judgemental can be of enormous help. There are services that can help to support the person concerned and your local GP surgery can often provide a signpost to relevant organisations.

NATIONAL NEWS INSIGHT

Regulator of Social Housing (RSL) rent cap set at 7.7%

In January, the RSL published its annual rent limit guidance document. This latest Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing applies to 2024/25 increases and confirms a maximum 7.7% for social housing rent increases (ie. the September CPI (6.7%) + 1% = 7.7%) from April 2024. Whilst almshouse charities do not charge rent, government guidance does apply to Registered Providers’ weekly maintenance charges and non-registered provider almshouse charities may want to use the information for guidance purposes. Please also see our guidance at: www.almshouses.org/news/wmc-specimen-outline-budget-2024

Local Housing Allowances (LHA) increased

The LHA increased with effect from April 2024 and the new rates can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-housing-allowance-lha-rates-applicable-from-april-2024-to-march-2025

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF was updated on 20 December 2023. This includes new references to *community led developments* which, we believe, is partly due to our influence, however, it does not go far enough and does not specifically reference charities. Visit: www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework-2 see para.70.(b) for small and medium sized sites, para.73 for sites that would otherwise not be defined at rural exception sites and para.82 for rural housing; Annex 2 provides a full glossary. We continue to work with partners on breaking this narrow definition which is being used by local government with members often finding themselves ‘locked out’ of local planning benefits that they should be able to access. Interestingly, the legislation for the Infrastructure Levy, a fund held by local authorities for wide-ranging support for communities - from roads, roundabouts and bus stops to some affordable housing - is drafted in such a way that allows for charities to be exempted from payment of the levy and could, potentially, allow charities to apply for funds from the levy. Please contact Nick Phillips regarding new almshouse developments. nickphillips@almshouses.org

Regulator of Social Housing (RSH)

At the time of writing, the RSH has three consultations affecting registered social housing providers (RPs). The Almshouse Association has met various partners to discuss the implications of the planned interventions; our members, the National Housing Federation (NHF), the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Charity Commission.

- Consumer Standards Code of Practice holds challenges for the role of trustees carrying out their duty under charity law. The Mutual Exchange concept and the Tenure and Tenancy Standards are drafted with positive intent for setting an even playing field, however, the structure of charities makes it challenging to layer on some of these requirements. We are liaising with The Charity Commission and DLUHC directly and will respond accordingly.
- The Social Housing and Regeneration Act consultation focuses on the requirement for those acting in the housing sector to obtain a qualification. In each organisation there must be a strategic and managerial qualification obtained, representing the responsibilities of the role; a Grade 5 and Grade 4 level (year one and foundation degree level in Social Housing). We have made strong representation to Government to exempt trustees of almshouse charities from this requirement and this is identified in the consultation. It remains a requirement for clerks and service providers to be qualified. The impact on charities would be significant and, in our view, disproportionate. Having discussed with members, we are addressing this with the DLUHC team and proposing that scale is a factor to being able to afford the impact of staff training, to gain a qualification, that is largely inappropriate to the work of a clerk in a charity. We are in discussions and will keep all informed.
- ‘Awaab’s Law’ the response times required by ‘landlords’ regarding hazards such as damp and mould is a further live consultation. Our members have responded clearly to some of the challenging timings and the open ended proposal to offer

The Almshouse Association regularly publishes Policy and Governance updates on its website. Blue text denotes a web link specific to the document or report. See: www.almshouses.org/latest-news/

new premises for those affected (possibly hotel accommodation). The detail of this Act will be problematic for members - we feel there is too much emphasis on reporting process - however the spirit of the act is supported.

Please visit our website at www.almshouses.org/news/what-is-condensation/ for a detailed article on dealing with condensation covering: ● causes - cold wall surfaces, indoor high humidity ● diagnosing condensation problems - temperature and humidity measurements, the differences between the absolute and relative humidity ● solving condensation

Charity Commission

On 1 January 2024, the Government published notification of the latest set of changes being introduced by the Charities Act 2022 (the Act), which amends the Charities Act 2011. Changes that came into force on 7 March 2024 include:

- provisions relating to disposals by liquidators, provisional liquidators, receivers, mortgagees or administrators
- provisions relating to the taking out of mortgages by liquidators, provisional liquidators, receivers, mortgagees or administrators
- changes about what must be included in statements and certificates for both disposals and mortgages.

Other amendments include making changes to governing documents, charity mergers and further enabling the Commission’s involvement in some trustee related scenarios. For short summaries of the changes visit: www.gov.uk/guidance/charities-act-2022-guidance-for-charities An overview of the full changes can be found at: www.gov.uk/guidance/charities-act-2022-implementation-plan#provisions-of-the-act-expected-to-come-into-force-autumn-2022

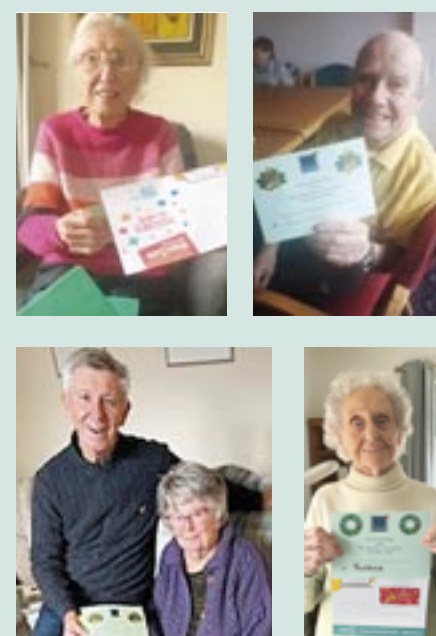
Charity Commission announces next Chief Executive with effect from 1 July 2024

David Holdsworth has been appointed the next Chief Executive of the Charity Commission for England and Wales, replacing on 1 July 2024 Helen Stephenson who has been in charge for seven years.

We mentioned in our Winter Gazette the great pleasure we get every year from sending out Christmas gift vouchers to almshouse residents who are 90 or over years young and even greater smiles are brought to our faces when the photos start coming in. A total of 679 gift presentations were made last Christmas and it is wonderful to be a part of this joyous occasion. Thank you to all the trustees and clerks for capturing and sharing these moments. Receiving these photos is always very special for the team at the Association.

Happy residents, Happy Almshouse Association

Christmas gift voucher celebrations



Greville Almshouses Chairman retires

Residents and trustees at Greville Almshouses in Easry, Kent organised a party for their chairman John Waring, who has retired after 35 years service with the trust, the last 16 years as chairman.

John writes: "There have been three very efficient and helpful clerks, all long-serving, who have helped me enjoy my time with the trust: Mr. Ron Hopper, Mrs. Margaret Craven, and the current clerk, Mrs. Sarah Wells, who is proving to be a godsend to the residents and trustees. One of the most rewarding experiences has been offering places to new residents and seeing the joy on their faces when receiving the keys. I thank them all for keeping their properties in very good order. The trustees are all very caring people and have made many helpful



John and his wife Cynthia (seated centre) with residents, trustees and partners at his retirement party with the new Chair of Trustees, Susan Cook (back row, fifth from left).

contributions to the proper running of the trust. I also wish to thank them all and their partners, who have had to put up with them spending valuable family time away at our meetings. Finally, my best wishes to Susan Cook, who for several years supported me as vice-chairman and will no doubt be an excellent chairman.



Thank you to all the volunteers, staff and residents from: John Henry Keen Memorial Homes, Lench's Trust, Maldon Housing Association, Walton Charity, Foresters Homes Trust, Le Personne Almshouses, Jesus Hospital, Cople and Eastcotts Charity, Goodly Dale Cottages, Lovibond Charity, Bridport Charities Magdalen House, Municipal Charities of Stratford-upon-Avon and Thomas Christie Almshouses. Full details can be seen on our website at:

www.almshouses.org/news/christmas-comes-early-for-679-almshouse-residents

The Almshouse Way

The Almshouse Way 1-day training course is being held at venues throughout the year, throughout the country.

Visit our website for the latest details: www.almshouses.org/the-almshouse-way-1-day-course

2024 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May	2	Wardens & Scheme Manager Seminar	Leicester
June	27	The Almshouse Association AGM	via Zoom
July	11	Trustees & Clerks Seminar	Leeds
Sept	4	Trustees & Clerks Seminar	Shrewsbury
October	10	Trustees & Clerks Seminar	Tunbridge Wells

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Grant aid for Warm Hub winter project

Municipal Charities of Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire received a grant of £9,998.50 from the National Grid Electricity Distribution Community Matters Fund to support the running of their Warm Hub and Winter Support Project.



William Clemmey, Chief Executive of Municipal Charities, said: "We are so grateful for the grant from the National Grid's Community Matters Fund which we used to support the running of our Warm Hub in Stratford-upon-Avon. We offered a range of craft sessions and visits to other warm hubs as well as the usual coffee, tea and refreshments. "We also purchased 350 warm packs to distribute to those facing the cold this winter. Finally, we will be using the grant to help to draught proof our 46 almshouses to ensure that almshouse residents keep warm when it's cold."

photo: Rosemary Green from Salford Priors Warm Hub receiving a warm pack from Nigel Thornton of Municipal Charities.

Charity marks ancient custom of giving

In September last year, Northam Charities in Devon celebrated 600 years of a custom that has been part of its legacy for centuries when bread and cheese was given to local residents. Following Sunday celebrations and service, presided over by Rev Jules Harris, the Northam Charities recreated the ancient medieval custom of handing out 'doles'. This consisted of bread from the Appledore Bakery, Bideford; Curworthy cheese from Okehampton; and ale from the local Kingsley Inn in Northam, which was given to local parishioners as part of the celebrations.

Research finds Elizabethan link

Historian David Carter, who is secretary and vice-chairman of the Northam Charities Board, said that he recently found a reference to the custom in an old Elizabethan document. According to his research, the first recorded bequest of land was made on the "Wensdaie next, after the feast of St Gregorie the Pope, in the seconde yere of the Raigne of King Henry the Syxthe". When converted to modern date notation, this turned out to be September 8, 1423. Rev Jules Harris also blessed two large slate 'charity plaques' which were recently re-sited into a more prominent position in the entrance lobby to the church. She said: "These plaques are believed to be some of the best in the country but until recently they were hidden away in the cleaner's cupboard. They

were brought out from there about two and a half years ago and erected in the church entrance but then Covid hit and we were unable to get any publicity about this at the time. Now they are on prominent public display for the first time in living memory." An explanation about the history of these two plaques, which were made in 1839, is also on display in the church. Northam Charities Chairman, Cllr Jane Whittaker said: "Not many people will have heard of us because we don't do



fundraising, we just quietly exist to run the Northam Parish Almshouse and to hand out money to groups and individuals connected to Northam parish who may be needing a bit of financial assistance for whatever reason. "This Community Aid fund is open for anyone to apply. It's a great feel-good

Welcome

The Almshouse Association welcomes two new member charities:

- The Charity of Lucy Derbyshire for Memorial Homes in the City and County of Nottingham
- The Dawes Homes Trust, Chesham, Buckinghamshire

Three new businesses have joined The Almshouse Association Panel of Consultants:

- Darv Ltd - Property Maintenance and Repairs
- Brown & Co LLP - Architects, Property Consultancy
- Mole Architects Ltd - low energy buildings, certified Passivhaus designers

We are looking forward to working with you all!

The Almshouse Association's Panel of Consultants offers professional advice and services to our members. Each panel member has worked with and been recommended by at least one of our member charities. It is important that members satisfy themselves that the services, qualifications and relevant membership of professional bodies meet their particular needs. The Almshouse Association makes every effort to ensure that details of the Panel are accurate and up to date.

photos: Martin Shepherd.

charity to be part of, which just exists to help people. When we found out we had a milestone anniversary, it seemed a good opportunity not just to celebrate but to tell everyone what we do." For further information about the Charity, its work and the custom, visit: www.almshouses.org/news/northam-charities-mark-600-years-of-giving/