



HRH Duke of Gloucester visits Association award winner The Poland Trust

On 10 September 2024, our Royal Vice Patron, HRH The Duke of Gloucester visited Poland Meadows, The Poland Trust's new almshouse development in Brockham, Surrey. Built on land generously donated by local landowners, the almshouses have been specifically designated as homes for young people and families in the area. A magical part of the day was when the Duke was presented with a collection of artworks drawn by the children of Poland Meadow. *Full story on page 5.*

Association CEO Nick Phillips meets with MP Priti Patel

MP for Witham, Priti Patel meets with The Almshouse Association CEO, Nick Phillips, PR and Engagement Manager, Gerry Harmon and local business Witlet, representing Witham United Charities, to discuss the role of almshouses in providing charity-led housing in the local area. *Full story on page 4.*



MEMBERS DAY 2025

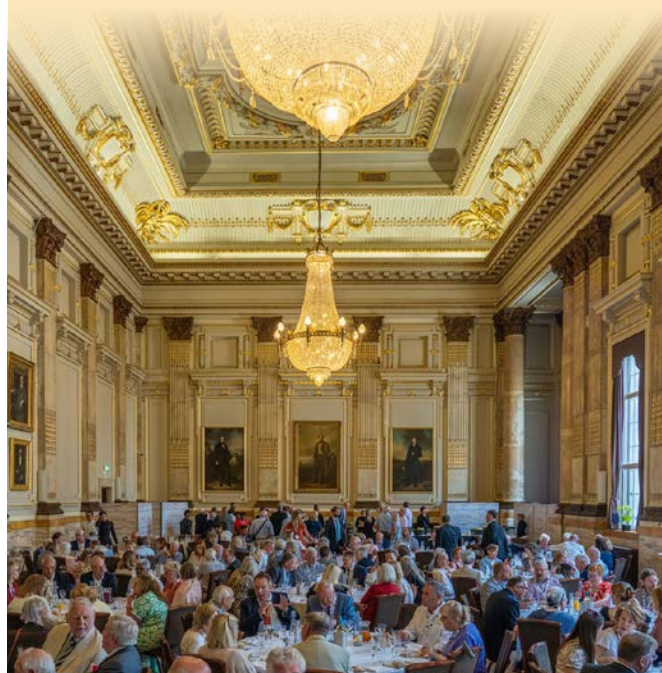
**19 June, One Great George Street,
Westminster, London SW1**

We are delighted to be holding Members Day 2025 at the prestigious 'One Great George Street' venue on Thursday 19 June 2025.

'Creating Homes and Communities'

Members will be able to hear from an exciting variety of guest speakers including TV presenter Penny Smith, architect and generational philanthropist, George Courtauld, a senior representative from the Charity Commission, specialists from the housing world and inspiring individuals involved in philanthropic work. Members will be able to put questions to our onsite panel of experts and there will be lots of opportunity to network.

Full information on how to purchase tickets can be found on our Members Day 2025 flyer and website. Visit www.almshouses.org/news/members-day-2025



Members Day is kindly sponsored by

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S COMMENT

I have previously written about a phrase we often use in the office, that our key objective is “to make the life of the clerk and trustee as easy as possible”.

We understand how challenging it can be to serve as a trustee or clerk, juggling a wide range of responsibilities – maintaining buildings, fostering community engagement, staying current with policies and legislation, conducting annual inspections, managing charity finances, and more. Yet, at the heart of these duties lies one fundamental priority: the welfare of residents. It's clear that this must always come first, but the real question is, how do we ensure it remains at the forefront?

How do we generate a culture of keeping residents safe and well?

I was recently given an article on housing management that articulated a very powerful message. It included a model of thinking that is used in some sectors that I thought may be helpful to share with you.

The report identified what they call “a permanent state of unease”. Not a phrase that should normally be aspirational(!), but the background to this is based on the following:

Encourage:

- worry about Health and Safety (H&S)
- vigilance – awareness of risk and a genuine reflection of any near miss.
- uncomplacent behaviour – a good report on Health and Safety once a year is not ‘job done’. The feeling that H&S is on the agenda should be an everyday task.
- imagination – to visualise what could happen if we get it wrong.

That is it – a model of behaviour that drives a permanent awareness of risk and action to mitigate.

How do we develop a culture within the charity sector while keeping our trustees motivated and enjoying their role?

One way of helping is to use our Charity Health Check to regularly review your policies and make sure they are live documents. Test near misses against policies and amend if needed.

The article also outlined six key points you may find helpful:

1. Remember the Board holds ultimate responsibility
2. A culture of “concern” and “curiosity” is the organisation's strength
3. Good data helps spot clusters of issues
4. Damp, mould and gas safety should be treated as equally important priorities for H&S
5. Safety of employees and residents should be top priority
6. Risk assessment should go beyond a mere paper exercise; it should serve as a tool for understanding and evaluating the almshouse environment.

I hate the idea of trustees being additionally stressed but feel there is value in the culture of thinking that the worst can happen.

The latest version of *The Almshouse Association Standards of Almshouse Management* guidance manual is available to download from our website and we are currently working on a simple online check list to enable trustees to have confidence that the key issues are being addressed. This will be uploaded to our website shortly. Plus, of course, our team at the Association is here and happy to help with any issues.

I hope to see as many of you as possible at Members Day 2025. We have a great lineup planned and it's such a good networking experience. Tickets can be ordered using the Members Day flyers or via our website at www.almshouses.org/news/members-day-2025/

Nick Phillips, Chief Executive

CORRECTION

In Gazette Issue 276 we published an article detailing that Girton Town Charity built the first Passivhaus certified almshouses. At least one Passivhaus almshouse development was built prior to the Girton Town Development.



Almshouses! Camera! Action!

In September 2024, The Almshouse Association was pleased to be asked by the BBC to appear in a BBC Morning Live piece on ‘Retired and Renting’.

The BBC interview addressed a growing concern that many older, retired individuals can no longer afford the rising rent costs to stay in their homes. During filming, we heard from a couple who had found life-changing refuge in the Nantwich almshouses having become homeless when they could not keep up with rent hikes.

In the news feature, CEO Nick Phillips was able to highlight the invaluable role of almshouses, not only as providers of security and stability for people in housing need, but as a cost-effective solution to housing people in need that does not burden public finances.

Following the interview, we saw a dramatic spike in visitors to our website demonstrating both the pressing need for affordable homes and the public's interest in almshouses.

Trustee Recruitment Workshop now taking bookings!

Trustee recruitment is a hot topic right now and we are thrilled to announce that our new Trustee Recruitment Workshop has received CPD accreditation. With this endorsement, we're excited to open bookings!

The workshop is designed to actively engage delegates in a structured process aimed at strengthening your trustee recruitment efforts. It offers valuable resources such as templates and practical connections, alongside guidance on advertising opportunities and statutory requirements. Additionally, it encourages honest reflection on whether your charity board truly represents the communities you serve.

You will take home a recruitment handbook that includes the materials you create during the workshop, ready for immediate use by your charity upon your return.

Now is the time to connect with potential trustees and diversify your board by incorporating a broader range of skills, knowledge and life experiences.

To learn how, book your place at this workshop by visiting The Almshouse Association Members Area of the website. Under [Training and Events](#), click on [Trustees Recruitment Workshop](#), or contact Member Services on 01344 452 922.



Using your Member logo

As a member of The Almshouse Association, you are invited to proudly display The Almshouse Association Member logo on your website, social media and any promotional materials or stationery.

The Almshouse Association Member logo represents a shared sense of community connecting all members. It reflects your commitment as an almshouse charity to excellence and embodies the pride we take in our collective mission:

Creating affordable, warm and safe homes in friendly communities for people in housing need, preserving the

legacies of the almshouse movement and protecting our national heritage.

To access the logos and instructions on use, please log into the Members area of our website and go to www.almshouses.org/logo-downloads/

Should you encounter any issues, please do not hesitate to contact karenmorris@almshouses.org who will be more than happy to assist.



WHY BRANDING IS IMPORTANT

Our visual identity is the graphic expression of who we are and what we represent. Our brand encompasses everything our members, the public, the Government, donors and almshouse residents think, feel, say, hear, read, watch, imagine, hope and associate with The Almshouse Association and its members.

A strong cohesive identity fosters instant and lasting recognition of our national brand across our diverse range of audiences. With the almshouse movement experiencing a renaissance and gaining significant media attention, we encourage members to fully leverage our member logo to enhance their charity's visibility and impact.

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AGM 2025

Association advances MP engagement strategy

Continued from front page.

In November 2024, the MP for Witham, Priti Patel, met with CEO, Nick Phillips and PR & Engagement Manager, Gerry Harmon of The Almshouse Association and local business Witlet, representing Witham United Charities, to discuss the role of almshouses in providing charitable housing in the local area.

Witham United Charities owns 17 almshouse properties within the curtilage of the Church Street/ Chalks Road Conservation Area, housing local people (often elderly) of limited financial means. Discussions included some of the current issues that prevent further growth of almshouses and their ability to provide affordable social housing options in local communities. The current definition of affordable housing in the National Planning Policy Framework excludes almshouses, and instead only recognises regulated housing providers. This limits almshouse charities' access to section 106 support, unless they undergo an extensive process of becoming regulated (a process which is typically designed for housing associations with over 1,000 units). Most almshouses have less than 20 units, and 80% are not regulated by the Social Housing Regulator.

Priti said after the meeting: "I would like to thank Witlet, Witham United Charities and The Almshouse Association for meeting with me to



Pippa Heyling MP (left) for South Cambridgeshire visits Cherry Hinton Almshouses. The MP has written in support of our case to have almshouses recognised as affordable housing in the NPPF in her weekly newsletter. Photo with Karin Voth Harman

discuss the vital role they are playing in providing affordable housing in the constituency. Almshouses face a unique set of challenges particularly when it comes to funding and recognition to support those most in need of housing. I will work with our local businesses and charities on this matter so that we can expand the affordable housing options they are able to provide."



Will Forster, Liberal Democrat MP for Woking, spoke in support of almshouses in the House of Commons

MP ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN OCT AND DECEMBER 2024

- Victoria Atkins
- Kemi Badenoch
- Lee Barron
- Danny Beales
- Ellie Chowns
- Victoria Collins
- Chris Curtis
- Neil Duncan-Jordan
- Will Forster
- Sarah Green
- Pippa Heyling
- Chris Hinchliff
- Jonathan Hinder
- Clive Jones
- Neil O'Brian
- Priti Patel
- Manuela Pertequella
- Richard Quigley
- Sarah Smith
- Mel Stride
- Baroness Taylor of Stevenage
- Martin Vickers
- Mohammad Yasin
- Daniel Zeichner

New homes for young families

Continued from front page – The Duke visits Poland Trust.

In September 2024, our Royal Vice Patron, HRH The Duke of Gloucester, who is a keen architect himself, showed great interest in the architectural plans during his visit to Poland Meadows, The Poland Trust's new almshouse development in Brockham, Surrey.

CEO Martin Smith, trustee Tim Kenny and architect, Chris Tizzard provided insights into the design and logistics of the project and the Duke was treated to a live demonstration of the flood water deterrent system!

Poland Meadow addresses a pressing local need for affordable housing, especially for younger residents, as well as balancing financial, health and community needs. Working with Mole Valley and Surrey District Councils, The Poland Trust identified suitable land through a housing survey and partnered with local landowners to secure greenfield land under the Rural Exception Scheme. The project's unique self-build approach ensured that these self-build homes, protected by a covenant, would remain affordable at 80% of market value for future sales.

Along with the trustees of the Poland Trust, the Duke was introduced to Simon and Juliet Dumas, the generous land donors for the almshouses. A tour of several of the new homes followed, where he met residents, Rachel Smith and Will Harrow with their children, Jessica, Ella, Neve and new-born baby Oliver, and Rosemary Lawlor with her sons, Marc and Riley.

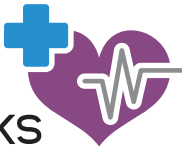
The visit concluded with tea and cake and a commemorative plaque unveiling. In a heart-warming gesture, the children of the residents presented His Royal Highness with a special book, 'Artwork by the Children of Poland Meadow' featuring their hand-painted depictions of their new homes.

"We are deeply honoured by His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester's visit to Poland Meadows. This remarkable site, partially funded through self-build homes, harmonises beautifully with the surrounding landscape. We owe our gratitude to Simon and Juliet Dumas for their generous land donation and to Mole Valley Council for their collaborative efforts with The Poland Trust in making this project a reality." – Nick Phillips

More from the day can be viewed on our website at www.almshouses.org/news/a-royal-visit-to-poland-trust-almshouses/



Charity health checks



We thank all members who have already completed and returned their Charity Health Checks to the Association.

We have received positive feedback on the documents which assures us they are serving the purpose for which they were intended: **To enable charities to gauge their performance in the varying aspects of governance and almshouse management.**

For those who are new to the Charity Health Checks, here are some help notes:

- The form can be downloaded from our website with guidance notes.
- It is divided into sections covering governance, the trustee body, the buildings, Health & Safety policies, residents and finances.
- There is provision for charities to mark whether the respective items have been either met, partly met or not met which leads to an overall score.

The Charity Health Check is not an inspection; it is designed to assist member charities evaluate the extent to which they are meeting compliance expectations, highlighting areas where action is necessary to comply with required standards.

From Charity Health Checks completed to date, a pattern has emerged indicating three particular areas that, in some cases, need extra attention:

- Legionella Checks
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Trustee Succession Planning

The Association's website contains information on these various topics as well as many other relevant subjects. As always, our Member Services Team is available to give guidance and assistance wherever possible either over the telephone or by email.

Useful links

www.almshouses.org/model-policies-and-templates

www.almshouses.org/charity-health-checks/

www.almshouses.org/trustee-recruitment/

www.almshouses.org/faqs-2/

If you have not done so already, we encourage all our member charities to complete and return a Charity Health Check.

Setting Weekly Maintenance Contributions

One of the primary responsibilities and standard practices of trustees of almshouse charities is to

charge residents a weekly maintenance contribution (WMC) towards the cost of maintaining the almshouses, thus ensuring the on-going viability of the charity. This is irrespective of whether the charity is able to rely upon endowment or investment income.

The contributions should be set at a level which is economic and realistic and does not cause greater hardship to residents. Those who live in almshouses are essentially beneficiaries of the charity residing by way of a licence commonly known as a 'Letter of Appointment' and it is most important from a legal perspective that the WMC is never referred to as 'rent'.

It is important that the trustees of almshouse charities review the WMCs their charity sets for their residents on an annual basis.

Broadly, calculation of the WMC is

based upon completion of a budget, as well as obtaining the equivalent fair rent (EFR) of the properties from the Valuation Office Agency. This is *non-statutory advice of the maximum fair rent*, excluding service charges, that a 'landlord' could charge if the almshouse was eligible for rent registration. Ideally, WMC should be set at a level below the EFR plus any service charge in order to protect the long-term viability of the charity. If the WMC includes a service charge, this may be covered by Housing Benefit if the resident has to pay the charge as a condition of occupancy.

The Charity Commission has agreed that the cost of water and sewerage charges may be met from endowment income. If the charity does not have sufficient funds or endowment income is limited, these charges can be re-charged to residents in addition to the WMC.

Many almshouse residents will be in receipt of Housing

Benefit (Local Housing Allowance) and therefore charities should consider setting the WMC at the same level as the benefit paid. Trustees are also recommended to consider what service charges may be claimed as part of housing benefit, a list of which is included in 'The Almshouse Association Standards of Almshouse Management' (SAM). There are cases of almshouse charities that have been able to increase income quite substantially as a result.

NOTE: Charities whose governing documents state that the amount of WMC charged needs to be approved by the Charity Commission no longer need to abide by this. The requirement was removed by statute in 1992.

Member charities who are Registered Providers of Social Housing are obliged to abide by the rent formula set by the Regulator of Social Housing, i.e. CPI plus 1%. The CPI figure for September 2024 was 1.7% and hence the maximum WMC increase for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 is 2.7%.

To assist members in setting WMCs, the Association has produced a Specimen Outline Budget. Detailed guidance for calculating the WMC can also be found in 'SAM'. Both can be downloaded from the members pages of our website.

The Association recommends that, wherever possible, members increase their WMC in a way which is sympathetic to the needs of the charity and its residents.

Communication of increases to residents should be handled with care so that residents can understand the rationale for any increases made. Increases are best communicated at an early meeting when the reasons may be fully explained and set out in writing. One-to-one meetings with residents should also be offered.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact the Association for further guidance if needed.

Announcing our new photo competition!

Spring has sprung and we are thrilled to launch our latest photography competition which will celebrate Community and Good Neighbours.

We are looking to capture the essence of our shared lives using one (or all!) of the following themes:

- Over the Garden Fence
- Tea with Neighbours
- Friendship
- Garden Days
- Community Spirit

Once you have taken your photo (always ask permission to both take and share), simply select a suitable theme from the above and email your entry to us at:

gerryharmon@almshouses.org

*Terms and Conditions apply. See our website for more details here:

www.almshouses.org/news/photo-competition-community-and-good-neighbours/



Both members and residents are warmly invited to participate!

Our winner and runner-up will be selected by a panel of judges, which includes a professional photographer. The competition closes on **29 August 2025** and winners will be announced on **22 September, 2025**. Prizes include an afternoon tea voucher and framed commemorative certificate for the winner, and the runner-up will receive an M&S voucher and a framed certificate.*

So, get snapping! We can't wait to see your photos!

The latest policy, governance and political engagement news from The Almshouse Association

1. Budget News

On 30 October 2024, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves delivered her first budget. The Chancellor announced a number of spending promises covering health, education, housing and infrastructure investment projects, together with a number of tax-raising plans. Some of these budget measures will now be incorporated in the Finance Bill 2024-25 whilst other changes, such as the increase in Employers National Insurance contributions, will be legislated separately. Subject to UK parliament passing the budget related legislation, some of the key points affecting almshouse charities are:

- Increase in the rates of the **National Living Wage** for over 21-year-olds from £11.44 per hour to £12.21 from 1 April 2025. Higher increases were announced in respect of under 21-year-olds and details can be found at: www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates
- The Government has announced changes to **Employers National Insurance**, effective 6 April 2025. The threshold above which contributions are payable will decrease from £9,100 to £5,000 and could especially affect those almshouse charities who employ part-time staff.

In addition, the rate of Employers National Insurance will increase from 13.8% to 15%. However, for many smaller almshouse charities who employ just a few employees, the effect of this increase will be mitigated by the increase in the Employment Allowance credit, which

allows smaller entities to reduce their national insurance liabilities. This has increased from £5,000 to £10,500.

Further details on the changes to National Insurance are included in chapter 2 of [HMRC's Autumn Budget 2024: overview of the tax legislation and rates](#).

2. Competency and Conduct Qualification

The Social Housing Act 2023 Act requires all clerks or those who carry out clerking work to become qualified to degree level in a Chartered Institute of Housing Qualification and for directors to take a more strategic based housing qualification.

Association CEO, Nick Phillips spent time with the development team at The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government reviewing the Competency and Conduct qualification. Firstly, the team confirmed that the need to start or even be in a position to start by April 2025 had been dropped. They are not able to confirm that our proposals for exemption for trustees and clerks of small almshouse charities would be adopted for the scheme, but they were keen to discuss again the impact of the qualification on the part-time clerks for almshouses. Nick made a strong case for a "de minimis" scale, or for the part-time clerk role to stand outside the scope of the current proposed qualification requirements.

We will keep you updated but for now there is no panic in terms of the April 2025 trigger.

3. Renters' Rights Bill

Changes are on the horizon for the rental market with the **Renters' Rights Bill**, introduced by the Labour Government on **11 September 2024**.

The Bill, as drafted, does not reference 'Licences' so almshouse charities that are not Registered Providers should not be affected. Registered Providers will already be aware of some of the requirements impacting them, such as:

- under the new rules, landlords can only increase the 'rent' once a year, which must align with market rates. The idea is to provide 'tenants' with more stability and prevent unfair 'rent' hikes.
- 'tenants' will have the right to request to keep pets in their homes, and 'landlords' will need a good reason if they refuse. You can still ask 'tenants' to take out pet insurance to cover potential damage, but blanket "no pets" policies will be a thing of the past.

The Association will watch the progress of the Bill and keep you updated.

4. The Decent Homes Standard

Following the consultation in 2022, the Government relaunched its review of the Decent Homes Standard in June 2023, committing to extend the standard to the private rented sector, as well as considering a range of changes that will be implemented in the near future, setting the minimum standard for the condition of social homes.

These considerations include:

- an updated list of items that must be kept in a

reasonable state of repair for a home to be considered 'decent'

- an updated list of services and facilities that every property must have to better reflect modern expectations for a 'decent' home
- whether the current Decent Homes Standard sets the right standard on damp and mould to keep tenants safe
- updates as to how the condition of building components, such as roofs and walls, are measured, ensuring that buildings which are not fit for use cannot pass the standard
- the introduction of a Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard for the social rented sector.

These measures will enforce strict timelines for landlords to address hazards like damp and mould. (Awaab's law)

QUESTION: If almshouses are not included in the Decent Home Standard legislation, why are we notifying you?

- In the future, almshouses may well be included, so you can be assured that The Almshouse Association will be watching out for this on your behalf
- The Bills sweep into Regulated Housing, so Registered Providers may be affected. Note, however, that most of the legislation is already captured in the Social Housing Act, apart from the tenancy/eviction rules
- **If your charity has accidentally issued a Lease rather than a Licence please get in touch with us as soon as possible.**

Earl of Southampton Trust

The Earl of Southampton Trust received a loan of £100,000 from The Almshouse Association to convert an existing building containing an office and meeting room into a new almshouse fit for the 21st Century

Background

As a charity, The Earl of Southampton Trust can trace its roots back to 1579. The Trust is an amalgamation of five charities, the oldest of which was called 'Godfrey's Charity' and the largest of which was called 'The Earl of Southampton Trust'. The Trust provides almshouses in the ancient parish of Titchfield, between Southampton and Portsmouth on the South Coast in Hampshire.

The Trust had a mixed stock of 19 almshouses, ranging from one-bedroom houses to three-bedroom family homes, some modern and some more than 400 years old, listed and within a conservation area.

Until the pandemic, 24 The Square was a ground floor converted building, housing a kitchen and washroom, together with the Trust's office and a living room sized meeting room which operated as a day room for the elderly in the parish. The day room was temporarily closed due to social distancing rules and following a consultation, the Trust redirected funds to support the elderly in lunch



Opening day

clubs in the parish and looked to convert the property to a new almshouse.

The Trust knew the conversion would need to be sympathetic to retain listed features whilst providing safe, modern, warm and eco-friendly facilities. To achieve this the Trust worked with the local planning department, listed buildings officer and local tradesmen.

Applying for a loan

Following the guidance provided by the Association, the Trust found the application process to be straightforward, and were notified that their application had been successful within two weeks of applying.

The works

The Trust is thrilled with what has been achieved with the assistance of the loan. It's trusty team of local tradesmen worked hard to ensure that the property met all the strict requirements of the local authority, retaining and restoring old beams, windows and other features whilst installing an accessible kitchen and bathroom, together with a spacious bedroom and living room overlooking Titchfield Square.

Galvanised by the loan for 24 The Square, the Trust also renovated its market rent flat above at 24A The Square, creating a second new almshouse and increasing its almshouse stock by 10% to 21 in just one year.

The new almshouses were named Hockley Cottages after a recently retired, long-standing trustee and the Trust celebrated with an official opening ceremony on 22 September 2024.

The Trust was so proud of its achievements that with the assistance of the Clerk's family, it produced a video of the day demonstrating the high-quality nature of the conversions.



Inside the new kitchen

Check it out at:

www.facebook.com/earlofsouthamptontrust/videos/1066823331505137?locale=en_GB

The Trust write that they will be forever thankful to The Almshouse Association for the loan, to its clerk and trustees for acting as project managers and, of course, to the workmen who were dedicated, skilful and hardworking.

New almshouse development gets underway in Birmingham

In August 2024, The James Charities marked the start of their significant redevelopment project with a breaking ground ceremony.

The charity, which has been providing almshouse accommodation for over 55s at its site on Stuart Street in Nechells, inner-city Birmingham for over 150 years, is transforming its communal building on the historic site of the old St Clement's Church into ten new almshouses and updated communal facilities. The redevelopment has been part-funded by Homes England and the Justham Trust, with the support of The Almshouse Association and Charity Bank. The two main façades of the original Victorian building will be carefully retained and integrated into the new development. The project also includes environmental aspects that will improve biodiversity in the area.

Read more at: www.almshouses.org/news/the-james-charities-new-almshouse-development-gets-under-way/



Building destined for demolition transformed into new almshouses

On 6 November 2024, Mrs Jane Corrigan, Chairman of the Nicholas Chamberlaine's Hospital & Sermon Charity welcomed everyone to the opening of the Chapel Street Cottages. She was delighted to announce that the Bedworth Almshouses had been extended for the first time in almost 200 years. The Charity had successfully bid on a brick built public convenience (due for demolition) in the centre of town which they renovated and extended. There are now two cottages in Chapel Street that will provide modern, warm and comfortable homes for local residents.

One of the prospective residents said at the opening, "I absolutely love my new flat. It has a beautifully fitted kitchen and shower room and is just a short walk away from all the facilities in the town. I am looking forward to being part of the almshouse community."

To read the story in full, please visit our website at: www.almshouses.org/news/from-demolition-to-renewal



Matthew White, Clerk; Darren Williams, Builder; Jane Corrigan, Chairman; Cllr Bill Hancox, Mayor of Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council; Sheila Hancox, Lady Mayoress; Jason Brooks, Vaggia & Holmes Architects

Wycombe Almshouses celebrate historic event

On Thursday 24 October 2024, the Mayor of High Wycombe, Cllr Nathan Thomas officially opened two new almshouses at Chichester Close.

In her speech, Chairman of Wycombe Almshouses Cllr Lesley Clarke OBE said, "On behalf of the trustees we are delighted to be able to add to the Wycombe Almshouses stock. Wycombe Almshouses started way back in the 15th century, and we welcome our two new residents to the almshouses and hope they will be very happy in their new homes".

The building was designed by Richard Clark, architect, also one of the trustees of Wycombe Almshouses. The quality of the build is exceptional and includes solar panels and underfloor heating. The Almshouse Manager, Paul Turner said "the contractor, DBC Contracting Ltd of Watford has done an amazing job and has given us and our future



Chairman Cllr Lesley Clarke OBE; Cllr Nathan Thomas Mayor of High Wycombe, Almshouse Association trustee Simon Ling with the trustees, Manager, Bookkeeper and residents of the Wycombe Almshouses.

residents homes to be proud of".

Wycombe Almshouses Charity has been in High Wycombe for several centuries. The current site was established in 1971 after the previous

almshouses in Easton Street were demolished. One of the earliest memorial stones dated 1686 was carefully moved and re-laid during the building works.



Welcome Jenny, our new research and archive volunteer

We are thrilled to introduce Jenny Pannell, our new research and archive volunteer who will be using her expertise to develop a comprehensive history of The Almshouse Association. Jenny's extensive research and consultancy experience with almshouse charities, her career in housing

management and university research will be invaluable to this project.

Stay tuned for some fascinating articles from Jenny in upcoming issues of the Gazette where she will share a captivating narrative of the Association's journey since 1946.

Lasting Powers of Attorney

Article contributed by Naomi McFadden of Nelsons Law

At a recent Almshouse Association seminar, the topic of 'next of kin details' was raised, specifically the legality of speaking to next of kin about a beneficiary, should the need arise.

The issue with relying on next of kin details is that a beneficiary can state anyone as their 'next of kin', without appreciating if that person is legally considered to be the next of kin. A next of kin is usually the closest living relative to a person, however, there are many reasons why someone might prefer to entrust a close friend instead.

Although a beneficiary has nominated a next of kin, if they have not been appointed as Power of Attorney, this person is only to be used as a contact – they will not have legal authority to make decisions about the beneficiary's financial affairs or welfare.

The only way for trustees and wardens to be certain that they are speaking to the legally appointed person is to obtain a copy of the beneficiary's Lasting Powers of Attorney, or the old-style Enduring Power of Attorney.

Lasting Powers of Attorney are legal agreements where a donor appoints an attorney to act on their behalf. There are two types: one for property

and financial affairs and the other for health and welfare decisions.

- **Lasting Powers of Attorney for property and financial** affairs can be used by the attorney whilst the donor has mental capacity and allows them to assist with the donor's financial affairs, their property, bills and overall assets.
- **A Lasting Power of Attorney for health and welfare** can only be used by attorneys when the donor has lost mental capacity. This is a safeguarding measure to protect the donor who should make all of their own decisions regarding their health and welfare, wherever possible. Health and welfare attorneys can make decisions about where the donor lives, their day-to-day care and access medical records.

Anyone can make a Lasting Power of Attorney while they have mental capacity as they must be able to understand the power they are granting to the attorney(s) and enter into the legal agreement.

Both types of Lasting Powers of Attorney cease to be effective when the donor dies.

At that time, the charity should not accept authority from an attorney but speak with the executors appointed



under the Will or, if there is no Will in place, the relevant family members will be entitled to act as Personal Representatives of the estate.

Note: The beneficiary might have made an **Enduring Power of Attorney before 2007 which is the old-style LPA document**. Enduring Powers of Attorney remain valid legal documents and can be accepted and kept on file. This document only provides authority in relation to financial affairs and does not give welfare decision making.

It is best practice to prompt beneficiaries to seek legal advice and make Lasting Powers of Attorney to ensure they have legally appointed attorneys in place.

Further guidance on Lasting Powers of Attorney can be sought via Naomi.mcfadden@nelsonslaw.co.uk.

Other companies offer this service. Please visit www.almshouses.org/panel-of-consultants/



The Almshouse Association Board of Trustees, along with CEO, Nick Phillips (left), EA to CEO Angela Waters (centre) and Head of Finance, Mike Drake (right), convened for the annual strategic review, focusing on the factors shaping the almshouse movement.

After thoroughly assessing the challenges, opportunities, services and research impacting the sector, the Board resolved to allocate additional resources to enhance support for members recruiting trustees and to conduct a comprehensive review of almshouse engagement and sector positioning.

It was acknowledged that the Association needed to adopt a long-term perspective and seek volunteers with specialised expertise when necessary. A dedicated group of trustees will concentrate on heritage support and strategic planning, while others will focus on implementing a targeted approach to trustee recruitment.

Nick said: "It was a great pleasure to have a day to focus on the challenges ahead for our members and the Association. The Board has such a breadth of experience and skills and I am confident that these annual reviews significantly strengthen our strategy."

It was concluded that both the almshouse model and the Association remain in strong form, with the almshouse concept deemed more relevant and valuable than ever.

Evaluating the effectiveness of your charity

It is good practice at trustee board meetings to plan time for some of those bigger, more strategic questions on charity governance, finance and resilience.



These questions can often take second place to more pressing agenda items such as a poorly resident, a leaking roof or WMC, but including them in your agenda (or organising a bespoke Away Day) will help you build resilience for the future, as well as decide on what needs to be prioritised. The Charity Commission has guidance on **15 questions trustees should ask** which provide a useful measure when considering the various aspects of running a charity:

1. What effect is the current economic climate having on our charity and its activities?
2. Are we financially strong enough to continue to provide services for our beneficiaries?
3. Do we know what impact the social and/or economic climate is having on our donors and support for our charity?
4. What is our policy on reserves?
5. Are we satisfied with our banking arrangements and our current and future investment policy?
6. Have we reviewed our contractual commitments?
7. Have we reviewed any contracts to deliver public services?
8. If we have a pension scheme, have we reviewed it recently?
9. How can we make best use of any permanent endowment investments we hold?
10. Are we an effective trustee body?
11. Do we have adequate safeguards in place to prevent fraud?
12. Are we making the best use of the financial benefits we have as a charity?
13. Are we making the most use of our staff and volunteers?
14. Have we considered collaborating with other charities?
15. Are we making the best use we can of our property?

Answering the above questions on at least an annual basis will help you:

- structure discussions about what your charity does and how it does it
- make sure your charity is financially secure, even in tougher economic times
- develop plans and timetables for action, and
- demonstrate you are responding appropriately to change.

While not all of the questions will be relevant and almshouse charities' circumstances vary from one to another, nevertheless they can prove helpful to trustees when reviewing the effectiveness of their charity's overall performance.

Further guidance: www.gov.uk/government/publications/charity-trustee-meetings-15-questions-you-should-ask/

Staying in touch with residents

When was the last time you had a chat with one of your residents?

Most almshouse residents live independently and do not need help from trustees and clerks or wish to be constantly checked up on, but there is always a balance. Total silence can, on occasions, worry residents or leave them feeling isolated or insecure about the security of their home.

Effective communication is essential. Charities can share updates while giving residents the opportunity to talk about any issues or challenges, or simply enjoy a friendly chat.

Our members have shared their approaches:

- **Popping down to the almshouses** to read a meter or check on new planting, the chances are you will bump into a resident. They will appreciate you taking the time to stop for a chat and you might find out about things that may be bothering them that can be sorted out very quickly before they escalate.
- **Social events.** Maybe a summer tea party or Christmas meal? Perhaps a coffee and games morning or a bingo or quiz afternoon or a group trip. Encourage both staff and trustees to join in and send paper invitations to the

residents – we all still love to receive 'real invitations'!

- **Resident meetings.** Perhaps one of the residents would enjoy taking on that role, giving them a sense of ownership.
- **Scheduling a formal visit to each resident's home every six months (or at least annually).** Use these visits to check on their well-being, listen to concerns, share key updates and assess the condition of the property. Look for signs of illness, decline, hoarding, or other property-related issues that need attention. If such visits are not yet a standard practice, consider formalising this process in the Letter of Appointment.
- **Emails and letters.** Reserve these for essential communications, such as formalising the annual WMC, notifying residents of significant changes, or upcoming maintenance and building works. Provide as much advance notice as possible – nobody appreciates finding out last minute that a builder will arriving at 8am tomorrow! Keep messages clear and unambiguous with



straightforward instructions. Allow residents ample time to ask questions or seek clarification.

- **Telephone:** A quick call can often be more efficient and personal than an email or text message.
- **Newsletters:** Larger charities often produce newsletters featuring articles from residents, trustees, local community members and organisations. Alternatively, you might consider using a notice board to display important information and event news.

Together, let's ensure no one in an almshouse feels lonely.

TIPS

- Respond to residents promptly, providing a clear and realistic timeline for when they can expect to hear back and from whom. Avoid making promises you may not be able to fulfil.
- Take the time to explain processes, e.g., some requests may need to be discussed at the next trustee meeting.
- Ensure a complaints procedure is in place and follow it when needed.
- Maintain professional boundaries between residents, trustees and staff. While being helpful and friendly is important, avoid actions that could be interpreted as overfamiliar, showing favouritism, or being intrusive.



LEAP are lucky recipients of anniversary donation

Legacy East Almshouse Partnership (LEAP) were the recipients of a donation of £1,500 from John Fowlers Solicitors of Colchester in commemoration of John Fowlers' 150-year anniversary.

To mark the milestone, the solicitors were giving £1,500 every month of 2024 to a local Charity and LEAP was a lucky enough to be the nominee for September 2024!

L-R: Clare Heyes, Clerk to LEAP; Michael Kennedy of John Fowlers; Peter Hill, Chair of LEAP; Chris Andrews of John Fowlers; trustees Manda O'Connell, Ian Dudley, Diana Hoy and Fay De Brick of John Fowlers.

Gardening for wellbeing

How one almshouse charity is using nature to improve residents' wellbeing

Hammersmith United Charities has two almshouses – Sycamore House and John Betts House. Both have large courtyard gardens, which bring year-round pleasure to the residents.

As one resident, Pilar, shares, "My flat is by a lovely point of the garden where I can see the different flowers and plants changing colour and forms. I can also see my neighbours and talk to them and enjoy their plants and produce in their pots, like chillies and small tomatoes."

The gardens are cared for by a team of three community gardeners, and many of the residents enjoy helping out. Some residents are actively involved in the upkeep of the communal areas, for example sanding down and painting benches, clearing up and composting leaves, weeding or watering. Others prefer gentler tasks such as deadheading or taking part in a seed sowing workshop in the spring and a seed cleaning one in the winter.

This year, a group of residents filled bags with lavender harvested from the garden, which were sold at the Macmillan Coffee Morning to raise money. Activities such as this are useful to exercise fine motor skills and to enjoy the benefits of sensory stimulation. They're also an enjoyable social activity.

Some residents keep their own allotment plots or tend to pots on their balconies or small areas outside their door. This

helps to ensure that the outside space feels as much like home as inside their flat.

India White, community gardener, says "There's a lot of evidence that being able to enjoy green space can help certain health conditions and increase life expectancy. I definitely believe having nature in our lives is good for wellbeing, even if you're just walking through it, sitting outside or seeing it from your window. And the fact that residents know they can be involved in the space and take part in activities, is so good for them."

The residents were delighted when their hard work was recently recognised and the almshouse gardens won prizes in the London Gardens Society's annual competition. Sycamore House was awarded Gold in the Large Community Garden category and John Betts House was awarded Silver in the Small Community Garden category. One of the residents, Gunilla, was awarded Bronze for her balcony. Gunilla and



The London Garden Society Prize Ceremony

two fellow resident gardeners, Sarah and Clodagh, joined India and the rest of the team at the prize ceremony.

Whether residents are life-long gardeners or never so much as planted a seed before, having the opportunity to spend time in nature, learn new skills and interact with other people brings huge benefits for both physical and mental wellbeing.

As Ann, a resident at John Betts House, says, "It's a marvellous setup really – a wonderful oasis in the middle of a busy city."



Residents raise money for Macmillan Cancer Charity

Coventry Church (Municipal) Charities generously presented a cheque to the Macmillan Cancer Charity for the sum of £5,000 which was raised by residents at the Coffee Morning held on Thursday 24 October 2024.



Matthew White, CEO, Patsy Koegh (principal fundraiser), Heather from Macmillan and Mrs Gina Rigby Chairman of Coventry Church (Municipal) Charities.

Nottingham's High Sheriff visits Abel Collin Homes

The High Sheriff always has an extremely busy year, so Abel Collin Homes Charity were delighted when an invitation was accepted to visit them on 20 September 2024.

Nick and Suzan Rubins – the High Sheriff and Lady Consort – received a warm welcome and joined the regular Friday 'tea and toast' morning. Residents asked lots of questions about his term of office and where he had visited. Staff members, Charlotte Hughes (Administrator) and Stella Collishaw (Independent Living Co-ordinator) were there to answer the many questions asked by the visiting dignitaries about the homes.

They were then taken to see two properties currently undergoing refurbishments – one traditional home built in the 1930s and one of the eco-homes built in 2010. Both offer vastly different accommodation, but are equally popular, particularly for couples. The guests were extremely impressed with the quality and standard of the refurbishments and commented on how well maintained the whole site appeared. Nick Rubins later wrote:

"It was absolutely heartening to see what a wonderful, safe space this charity provides for older people within our county. What a wonderful charity!"



750th anniversary celebration for The Hospital of St Bartholomew

On 24 August 2024, which was St Bartholomew's Day, the trustees of The Hospital of St Bartholomew's Hospital at Hythe in Kent held a celebration to mark 750 years since the first known recorded mention of the almshouse being in this ancient Cinque Port town in 1274.

This earliest date was only recently discovered from the Kilwardby Survey of manorial accounts properties of The Archbishop of Canterbury which showed a payment of "Statutory Alms" of seventeen shillings and four pence to St Bartholomew's Hospital in that year. The two

earliest documents in the Hospitals' Archives of 1,200 items are the 1336 and 1348 charters by The Bishop of Rochester, re-founding the Almshouse.

The anniversary was marked with a Service of Thanksgiving in the Parish Church attended by over a hundred people, followed by a delicious lunch, a well attended exhibition of the Hospitals' archives in the Town Hall and the unveiling of a commemorative plaque on the remaining almshouse by Lady Colgrain, Lord Lieutenant of Kent.

The building was then blessed by the present Bishop of Rochester, whose predecessor had re-founded St Bartholomew's Hospital all those years ago.

To read more about their fascinating history, please visit: www.almshouses.org/news/celebration-of-750-years-at-the-hospital-of-st-bartholomew/





Happy 100th birthday Phil!

We joined Municipal Charities of Stratford upon Avon in congratulating Phil Sweet on his 100th birthday.

D-Day veteran, Phil celebrated his birthday with a party on 25 October 2024 at the local town hall. His family was joined by almshouse residents, trustees and staff and members of the Stratford URC. The Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire Tim Cox, who had the pleasure of presenting Phil with his 100th birthday card signed by the King and Queen, was joined by the Deputy Lieutenant Simon Miesegaes and the Mayor of Stratford Jason Fotjik.



Long Service Award for Maggie McDowall

Chair of Trustees for Gallards Almshouses, Nick Powell sent in this great photo of Maggie Dowall who has just completed 20 years' service with the charity, commenting that she was "a very committed, caring and loyal manager."

Our Friends Tour of Morden College reveals a rich tapestry of history

On a crisp October morning in Blackheath, final touches were being made as we prepared to welcome our Friends of The Almshouse Association for an exclusive tour of Morden College. Steaming pots of tea and freshly brewed coffee were being organised, awaiting the arrival of our special guests.

Founded in 1695 by Sir John Morden on 11 acres of Wricklemarsh Manor, Morden College was established to support struggling traders with board, lodgings and pensions. Morden, a successful international trader and member of both the Levant and East India Companies, returned to London in 1660, amassing wealth and purchasing the Blackheath estate in 1669. Sir John, who passed away aged 86, is buried in the chapel crypt and statues of John and his wife, Dame Susan, still grace the western front of the College, added in 1717.

Under the terms of John Morden's Will, college trustees are drawn from the Aldermen of the City of London, who have provided the Charity's trustees since 1884. A centenary plaque installed in the main entrance in 1984 commemorates the Aldermen's Association.

Over the years, Morden College has expanded, most recently with the addition of the John Morden Centre – a vibrant community hub with a medical centre, restaurant, and workshops.

"It was a fantastic day and it was wonderful learning about the history of such an iconic almshouse."

Our friends enjoyed an immersive tour through the College's storied history, revealing its intricate layers and celebrating the lasting legacy of Sir John Morden. If you would like to join our Friends of The Almshouse Association club, please do visit our website at www.almshouses.org/friends-of-the-almshouse-association/

We are already working on our next exclusive behind-the-scenes almshouse tour so watch this space for details!



A garden room for Hedger's Almshouses

Hedger's Almshouses (founded in 1797) have been in Merrow, Surrey since 1963. Until very recently, they had not had a permanent communal space where residents can socialise together, however, with the generous help from **Your Fund Surrey Small Community Projects, Guildford Poyle Charities, Guildford Lions Club and The Mercers' Company**, the charity was delighted to be able to provide residents with a beautiful new garden room.

The official opening, on Saturday 24 August 2024, was attended by residents and their guests, trustees old and new, funders, local dignitaries and friends of the charity. Despite the wet weather they were able to celebrate this exciting new chapter in their story. Chair, Edward Martineau, welcomed everyone and after his short speech, handed over to Cllr George Potter, whose support was instrumental to the project, to say a few words. Simon Ling, Treasurer of The Almshouse Association cut the ribbon to formally open the new garden room. Guests enjoyed a delicious buffet prepared by one of the trustees.

They are still exploring all the uses the room might be put to, but primarily it is somewhere for residents to relax and where friends and family can join them.

To find out more about how the trustees got funding and pulled the project together, please visit our website at:

www.almshouses.org/news/garden-room-for-hedgers-residents.

Thank you party for esteemed trustees

In September 2024, Old Cleeve Memorial Cottages almshouses held a special tea party to honour the combined 53 years of service of two exceptional local community members, Tim Webb and Jeanne Webb.

Jeanne became a trustee in 1980 when her own father, The Rev. Brimson stepped down, serving on the committee for 15 years then becoming Chair for another 15, until 2010 when Tim became Chair until 2022, having served a total of 22 years as a trustee.

All the committee and Dave Webber, representing the residents, attended the party and Clerk, Philippa Harper, read out a note of thanks from Nick Phillips, The Almshouse Association CEO.

Deputy Chair, David Tucker praised their exceptional service over many years, their hard work for the cottages

and many other community groups, including the Old Cleeve Parish Council,



the Church, the Community Hall, the Gardening Club and the Community Orchard Committee, whereby Jeanne had succeeded in arranging a visit from then Prince Charles in 1996.

He thanked them for their "incredible length of service and dedication.... always acting in a positive, unassuming way with an overriding desire to do things right and improve the lives of the residents. It has been a real pleasure and privilege for all of us to have worked alongside you.... You have made such a difference to our community and to all our lives."

The Chair of the Committee, Dr John Bailey, presented the Webbs with a handmade bouquet of wildflowers made in the village, a plaque commemorating their 53 years of service and a box of chocolates.



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What's all that buzzing?

Along with the bees, residents and staff of Uxbridge United Welfare Trust in West London have been incredibly busy producing their very first honey harvest!

Ossulton Court is a new almshouse development with a Founders Orchard of trees dedicated to current and past residents. Dominic Gilham, CEO of the Trust thought the bees would help pollenate all the fruit trees, so early in the year a beehive was installed under the expert tutelage of member of staff, Debbie Ewan who is an apiarist.

It soon became clear after just two months that the colony had outgrown the one hive and a second hive was



needed. In August, the very first crop of over 60lbs of honey was produced and all the residents lent a hand.

Ron Pettit, one of the residents said, "It's such a great thing for us, to work alongside the bees and create a fantastic product. My family and friends all wanted to get their hands on a jar!"

Christmas Legacy Fund keeps on giving

The Almshouse Association was so happy to be able to send Christmas gifts to 693 almshouse residents aged over 90 last Christmas.

The fund is not only a testament to how a gift in a Will, invested well, keeps on giving, but also to the benefits of almshouse living with an ever-increasing number of residents in their 90s and 100s living longer happy lives!

Check out our website for the heartwarming photos of residents receiving their Christmas vouchers.



We are pleased to invite members to The Almshouse Association 74th Annual General Meeting which will be held on Thursday 19 June 2025 at One Great George Street, London, SW1P 3AA between 09:30 and 10.30, prior to the start of Members Day 2025.

The Meeting will be hosted by our Chairman, Willie Hartley Russell in accordance with the requirements set out in our governing documents.

The AGM is open to all members. In May, the agenda and associated papers will be available to download from our website via www.almshouses.org/news/agm-2025.

On the day, one person from each voting member charity will receive paper copies and voting cards. Please note that only one representative per charity is permitted to vote.

If you are not attending the Members Day, but wish to attend the AGM, please email admin@almshouses.org. If you are not able to attend the AGM, but wish to make a proxy vote, please request a proxy voting paper by emailing admin@almshouses.org.

