



## Transforming almshouses for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Almshouses have existed for a thousand years, but their role is not well-understood outside the almshouse movement. This Housing Learning and Improvement Network (LIN) paper argues that almshouse charities have much to offer their local communities in meeting housing need.

Almshouse charities face challenges and opportunities in delivering specialist accommodation and improvements to existing housing: the paper gives examples of successful developments, and governance and management initiatives that have helped transform almshouse provision to meet housing need and complement local strategies for housing, care and support.

This paper is set out in three sections and provides local authorities, commissioners and other housing providers with ideas on working with almshouse charities; namely:

Section A explains the distinctive characteristics of almshouses and what they can offer;

Section B shows how progressive almshouse charities are adapting to enable them to offer appropriate housing (and sometimes care and support) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Section C develops ideas for the future for the almshouse movement and for organisations with whom they can work in partnership, including local authorities, housing associations, the National Housing Federation, the Housing LIN, Elderly Accommodation Counsel / FirstStop, the Homes and Communities Agency and national and local charities (eg Age UK).

And lastly, the paper is one of a series of resources published by the Housing LIN looking at different housing options for older people. The others include community-led and cohousing opportunities and a forthcoming paper with the Chartered Institute of Housing on refreshing sheltered housing.

Written for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network by  
**Jenny Pannell**, independent consultant

June 2013

# Contents

<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>2</b>
1.1 What are almshouses? .....	2
1.2 What can almshouse charities offer their local communities? .....	3
1.3 Transforming almshouses for the 21st century: risks and challenges .....	4
1.4 Structure of the report. ....	4
<b>2 SECTION A: KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF ALMSHOUSE CHARITIES</b> .....	<b>6</b>
2.1 What makes almshouse charities different from other social housing? .....	6
2.2 What are the barriers to almshouse charities offering more to their local communities? .....	9
<b>3 SECTION B: EXAMPLES OF PROGRESSIVE ALMSHOUSE CHARITIES</b> .....	<b>11</b>
3.1 Almshouse charities providing housing with care. ....	11
3.2 Almshouses for younger people, families and people with disabilities .....	13
3.3 Accessing public funding to upgrade almshouses or develop new-build on existing sites: grant funding, the Almshouse Consortium and new money for almshouses .....	14
3.4 Governance and housing management .....	15
<b>4 SECTION C: IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Appendix 1 .....	24
Acknowledgements .....	25
About the Housing LIN .....	25



Greenway Gardens & John Greenway Close, Tiverton. Images courtesy Tiverton Almshouse Trust.



William Lench Court, Birmingham. Images courtesy Lench's Trust.

*“We need to be imaginative in looking at ways to strengthen the almshouse movement, and ensure its relevance for the 21st century ... the almshouse model can be adapted to reflect the needs of the contemporary world.”*

Chairman’s message, The Almshouse Association Annual Report 2011

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 What are almshouses?**

There is significant interest within the almshouse movement about how best to adapt the model for the 21st century. Almshouse charities are developing their networks, both within the almshouse movement and with outside bodies.

This paper:

- explores how almshouse charities can meet the housing needs of older people, and also - in some cases - provide housing for families and younger/disabled people;
- outlines the extent and characteristics of almshouse provision across England;
- gives examples of progressive almshouse charities working in partnership with their local communities;
- shows how almshouse buildings that have become hard-to-let or outdated can be modernised, or replaced with new housing; and
- explains the distinctive features of almshouses compared with other not-for-profit housing.

The paper is a personal view from a housing researcher whose interest in almshouses dates back over 30 years. It was commissioned in response to almshouse charities who contacted the Housing LIN, expressing interest in how to position themselves to better respond to local housing and older people strategies following the publication of the SHOP (Strategic Housing for Older People) guide in 2011 ([www.housinglin.org.uk/SHOP](http://www.housinglin.org.uk/SHOP)). It also reflects interest from other LIN members in working more closely with almshouse charities.

The paper draws on visits and meetings with almshouse charities and the Almshouse Association, published information and previous research. Responses to a Housing LIN call for information showed that a number of almshouse charities are already members of the Housing LIN. Some respondents provided examples of innovative practice and new developments, whilst others were seeking advice and information to help them deal with problems such as outdated or hard-to-let accommodation.

For those Housing LIN members who have heard about almshouses but are not sure what they are, it is worth noting that there are over 30,000 almshouse dwellings in cities, towns and villages all over England. This is more than many people think - and more than the accommodation provided by the largest individual specialist housing associations such as Anchor, Hanover and Housing 21 (see Table 1 on p.6).

There are over 1,500 almshouse charities with over 2,500 groups of almshouses, ranging from a few cottages to larger sheltered and extra-care schemes. Their main purpose, reflecting and updating the intentions of their original benefactors for the 21st century, is to provide low-cost housing for local people in need.

Progressive almshouse charities are run professionally in a similar way to the best small housing associations. Most larger almshouse charities employ staff to manage their housing,

support (and sometimes care) as well as the charity itself. Smaller charities often contract with another agency: this may be another almshouse charity or housing association, or a local solicitor or property management business. Over 400 almshouse developments still provide at least one on-site full- or part-time staff member (e.g. warden/scheme manager).

The national body, The Almshouse Association, 'promotes the welfare of aged, disabled and needy people through the provision and maintenance of almshouses by its members', provides support to member charities and 'represents its members to government and other organisations' (The Almshouse Association Annual Report 2011).<sup>1</sup>

## **1.2 What can almshouse charities offer their local communities?**

Almshouse charities fit well with the current policy climate of localism.

Many almshouses make an important contribution to the attractiveness of their locations. Over 30% of almshouse charities occupy listed buildings. Other almshouses are in conservation areas (even if not listed). Restrictions on changes to external appearance (and to internal design for the highest categories of listed buildings) can make modernisation difficult. Yet, as shown in the photos on p.1, many almshouses are modern, purpose-built developments rather than the typical image of a historic building round a courtyard, or a few pretty cottages.

In some localities, almshouse charities are major providers of housing for older people (e.g. Hull and the East Riding; north-east England, see p.18). Elsewhere, what almshouses offer local people is not so much the number of dwellings (compared with other affordable housing) but their convenient location. Examples include almshouses in expensive areas (e.g. central London); in town centres (near shops and transport); and in villages where there is little or no affordable housing to rent. In such areas, almshouses can provide an additional and affordable housing option, enabling local people to maintain links with neighbourhood, family and friends, as in some of our examples set out in Sections A and B below.

Almshouse charities can provide development opportunities to complement local authority housing and older people strategies, but they need to be well-networked locally and linked to a range of national advice and information sources, if they are to maximise opportunities for successful partnerships:

- They may own additional land, and/or contribute charitable resources to make limited public funding go further.
- Some almshouse charities have successfully redeveloped existing sites to provide modern housing (including extra care housing, and shared ownership).
- Others have sold off valuable but unsuitable or poorly located buildings, and built new almshouses elsewhere.
- Some almshouse charities have merged to make better use of resources (land, buildings, governance arrangements).
- Many existing almshouses have been modernised and upgraded to meet modern standards.
- Where historic buildings have been retained but they no longer meet the needs of older people, some almshouse charities have changed their target group (e.g. letting to people under pension age).

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.almshouses.org](http://www.almshouses.org)

This paper is a personal view, showing what almshouse charities can offer, how other organisations can work more closely with them, and how problems can be overcome.

We end this overview with a summary of risks to the almshouse movement and an outline of ideas for the future.

### 1.3 Transforming almshouses for the 21st century: risks and challenges

Despite the good work being undertaken by many almshouse charities, there are risks for both local communities and the future of the almshouse movement.

Local communities risk losing low-cost housing, often in areas where there is great scarcity. Commissioners may be missing the potential to make scarce resources go further by working with progressive almshouse charities.

For the almshouse movement, key challenges include:

- Governance: changing charity structures (eg unincorporated charities, where risk falls on individual trustees); ageing Trustees and Clerks; out-dated objectives; restrictive criteria for appointing new residents (ie moving in), issues around terminating appointments (ie moving out);
- Resident involvement: not all almshouse charities realise the extent to which expectations are changing; this may result in presenting a paternalistic (and negative) image both to potential residents and to prospective partner agencies;
- Failing to meet rising expectations from residents and partners/funding agencies, concerning governance, housing design and facilities, and the “extras”, including community engagement, and access to support and perhaps care.

### 1.4 Structure of the report

**Section A** explores the key characteristics of almshouse charities:

- what makes them different, in terms of their organisation, compared with most housing associations?
- how are almshouse residents different from social tenants?
- what barriers do some almshouse charities face, in terms of outdated or hard-to-let housing stock and management practices?

**Section B** shows how progressive almshouse charities are adapting to overcome the barriers identified in Section A, to enable them to offer appropriate housing (and sometimes care and support) in the 21st century. Examples include:

- *Lench's Trust in Birmingham*, whose new extra care scheme replaces outdated sheltered housing; one third of the units are for shared ownership;
- *Girton Town Charity, Cambridge*, which has built new almshouses for young couples and families;
- *Tiverton Almshouse Trust*, with a potential site for a new extra-care scheme in partnership with other providers;
- development initiatives to support almshouse charities (including small and rural charities) to access HCA funding through the *Almshouse Consortium*;

- new initiatives in *East Anglia* to enable small (and sometimes defunct) almshouse and other local charities to make better use of hidden or underused assets (including land) and to access (and share) funding and development expertise;
- governance and housing management innovation and practice, including new structures (eg the *Legacy East Almshouse Partnership*), resident involvement (e.g. at *Durham Aged Mineworkers' Homes*), creative use of mediation, and examples from *Nottingham Community Almshouse Charity*, where a local housing association is corporate trustee, providing professional management and new or refurbished housing; rules have been updated to remove previous restrictions (e.g. religion, sex, locality, class) on eligibility for residents.

**Section C** develops ideas for the future:

*For local authorities and housing associations:*

- How much do you know about almshouses in your area?
- Can you assist local almshouse charities with management and governance?

*For the Homes and Communities Agency:*

- Are the regional investment teams aware of the potential contribution of almshouse charities to meeting housing need?

*For the National Housing Federation:*

- As the trade body for housing associations, how can you work more closely with the almshouse movement?

*For other national agencies:*

- For the Housing LIN, how can you work more closely with the almshouse movement?
- For Age UK and similar agencies, how can you strengthen links between local older people organisations and almshouse charities?
- For Elderly Accommodation Counsel / FirstStop Advice<sup>2</sup>, how can you help almshouse charities to fill vacancies and access information and advice?

*For almshouse charities:*

- How can you make closer links and develop partnerships locally and nationally?
- Have you updated your governance for the 21st century, and re-interpreted the wishes of your benefactor(s) to meet current needs?
- For larger charities, can you help smaller almshouses with management and governance?
- Have you considered all the available sources of funding for upgrading or redevelopment?

---

<sup>2</sup> Elderly Accommodation Counsel (EAC) is a national charity that aims to help older people make informed choices about meeting their housing and care needs. FirstStop Advice is an independent, free telephone service offering advice and information to older people, their families and carers about housing and care options for later life. The service is provided by EAC in partnership with a number of other national and local organisations, [www.firststopcareadvice.org.uk](http://www.firststopcareadvice.org.uk)

## 2. SECTION A: KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF ALMSHOUSE CHARITIES

### 2.1 What makes almshouse charities different from other social housing?

The almshouse is often quoted as the forerunner of the housing association movement and the originator of the concept of sheltered housing, but they are different from other social housing. Tables 1 and 2 compare almshouse charities with housing associations to summarise and explain their distinctive characteristics. Key differences include:

- size and scale: there are more almshouse charities than housing associations, but most are very small, with no paid staff; nearly half have never been registered with the Housing Corporation/Homes & Communities Agency (HCA); many have now de-registered;
- constitution and governance: most almshouse charities are very local; they may have very few (sometimes elderly) trustees; resident trustees are rare; the trustees can be personally liable if the charity is unincorporated;
- resident issues: accommodation charges vary, are eligible for Housing Benefit, and cover a wide range but can be similar to housing association rents for equivalent properties; almshouse residents have no formal security of tenure because they are licensees; there is limited or no formal resident involvement in many almshouse charities.

**Table 1**

<i>Aspect</i>	<i>Almshouse charities</i>	<i>Housing associations</i>
Number of organisations	1,663 almshouse charities, with 2,607 groups of almshouses (members of The Almshouse Association)	c.1,200 housing associations (HAs) (England) (members of the National Housing Federation – NHF)
Housing stock	30,695 dwellings; Range: Two-thirds of almshouse groups have 10 or fewer units; 17% have 11-20 units; 12.4% have 21-50 units; Only 2.8% have over 50 units	Over 2 million dwellings Range: from under 10 to 50,000+ homes; National specialist HAs include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anchor (23,000 units)</li> <li>• Hanover (19,000 units, 600 locations)</li> <li>• Housing 21 (18,000 units, 470 schemes)</li> </ul>
Staff	Many (especially smaller) almshouse charities have no paid staff, though always a Clerk to the Trustees (= Chief Executive); Over half with no e-mail/on-line access*; Over 400 almshouse charities employ wardens/scheme managers	All but the smallest HAs have paid administrative and support staff; Many housing associations no longer employ scheme-based staff at their sheltered housing

Constitution	Incorporated charities: limited liability Unincorporated charities: Trustees personally liable	Varies but most are Industrial and Provident Societies (limited liability for Board members); some are also registered charities
Governance: membership	Trustees; Appointed according to 'Scheme' (ie rules); may specify individuals with local links (eg church, local council, benefactor's family) If no time or age limit, Trustees may remain in place for many years; Some almshouse charities carry out skills audits and have a formal recruitment process	Board members; Usually appointed for limited period; Most HAs carry out Board member skills audits and have a formal recruitment process; NHF runs 'Get on Board' initiative through NHF website to recruit and match prospective Board members with HAs (for which a small charge is made)
Governance: resident involvement	Very few almshouse charities have extensive resident involvement or formal roles (eg on committees or boards of trustees). There are occasional formal links with a resident committee or scrutiny committee	Most HAs have extensive resident involvement. Some have tenants who are also Board members; The NHF runs events for Board members; There is usually formal liaison with (eg) tenant committee/scrutiny committee/tenant meetings and representatives
Registration HCA	370 (another 259 have de-registered)	c. 1,200
Regulation (housing aspects)	370 (via HCA) Almshouse Association publishes <i>Standards for Almshouse Management and Support and Care for Residents</i> , accepted by HCA	Nearly all (via HCA); some very small housing associations have de-registered
Regulation (other)	Charity Commission; Care Quality Commission if domiciliary/personal/nursing care provision	Varies according to how HA is constituted; includes CQC for care providers



Membership and linked organisation/s	<p><i>Almshouse Association</i> (1,663 member charities);</p> <p><i>Elderly Accommodation Counsel (EAC)</i> housingcare website data: 656 groups of almshouses (324 'with support'; 33 'with care/extra care/close care')</p>	<p><i>National Housing Federation (NHF)</i>: c 1,200 HA members, (including around 20 almshouse charities)</p> <p><i>Elderly Accommodation Counsel (EAC)</i> housingcare website data: c.12,000 schemes for rent, including over 3,500 'age-exclusive' (no support); nearly 8,000 'with support'; over 1,100 'with care/extra care/close care'</p>
--------------------------------------	---	--

Sources (Tables 1 & 2): *The Almshouse Association Annual Report 2011*; \**The Almshouses Gazette, Issue 229, Winter 2012*; NHF personal communication; websites for NHF, Anchor, Hanover, Housing 21, EAC and The Almshouse Association January and June 2013; Pannell (1999); NHF/EAC housing association information for England only.

**Table 2: Residents**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Almshouse charity</b>	<b>Housing association</b>
Tenure	Licensee: beneficiary of a charity; no tenancy	For most residents assured tenancy
Allocations	<p>In accordance with Charity Commission approved 'Scheme' (ie rules);</p> <p>'Appointments' made by Trustees (may include personal interview or references; may not have a formal system or criteria)</p>	<p>Published policy, usually through local choice-based lettings shared with other HAs and local authority;</p> <p>Allocations usually made by paid staff according to published criteria</p>
Rents / charges	<p>Most almshouse charities charge 'Weekly maintenance contribution' (WMC) up to 'equivalent fair rent': often similar to comparable sheltered housing, although WMC varies and may include extras (eg heating, hot water);</p> <p>if publicly funded, subject to rent target</p>	In accordance with government/HCA rent target
Tenancy agreement or equivalent	'Letter of appointment' and (usually) residents' handbook	Tenancy Agreement, tenants' handbook (varies, e.g. in supported housing/introductory tenancies)
Tenant consultation and involvement	Varies greatly but many have no formal arrangements	Formal mechanisms including tenant board members, committees, meetings, forums, conferences, scrutiny committee

Complaints	HCA requires membership of housing ombudsman service if currently or previously registered (covers over 600 almshouse charities)  No requirement for others, although recommended in <i>Standards for Almshouse Management</i>	HCA requires membership of housing ombudsman service
------------	--	--

## 2.2 What are the barriers to almshouse charities offering more to their local communities?

Although almshouse charities have the potential to offer good quality affordable housing to their local community, not all are able to do so. The two case studies below are composites drawn from actual examples. Furthermore, Section 2 shows how progressive almshouse charities have been able to overcome the difficulties highlighted in our two case studies.

### ***Housing in disrepair, trustees unable to cope***

Lady Mary Jane's Almshouses are four two-storey 17th century one-bedroom cottages in a village. They are Grade 2 listed, with narrow twisting stairs, small windows and very cramped bathroom and kitchen facilities in a poorly insulated 1930s rear extension. They are in a poor state of repair. However, they look very attractive (from the outside!) and have considerable value for conversion into a large family house in what is now a popular commuter village.

There are four trustees and a part-time Clerk: one trustee is a descendant of Lady Mary Jane, but he does not live locally or play an active part; the Clerk and the other trustees are now in their 70s and 80s. They have been managing the almshouses themselves, with no professional help or local connections to provide housing expertise. The almshouse charity is not a member of The Almshouse Association, and the Clerk and Trustees are not on-line. The charity also owns a small field on the edge of the village which is let to a local farmer at a low rent; the rental income is used to give small grants to local people in need.

As older almshouse residents died or moved on to care homes, the trustees couldn't find anyone who wanted to move in. Two cottages have been empty for three years. The other two cottages are now occupied by younger people, because the village has no affordable housing for them; they are paying a very low Weekly Maintenance Contribution (WMC is the almshouse equivalent of rent); they are entitled to Housing Benefit. When one young couple in the almshouses applied to go on the housing list, the local authority visited. They were shocked at the poor conditions and state of disrepair. The trustees were informed that if the cottages were to remain occupied, they must be repaired and brought up to modern standards, otherwise the trustees would face legal action. The trustees have no idea what to do next.

This example summarises the problems facing some small almshouse charities:

- housing that is in poor repair and no longer suitable for older people;
- the risk of a Closing Order from the local authority;
- empty properties, low WMCs (= rent), very low income stream to pay for repairs;
- one absentee trustee, and other elderly trustees who lack expert advice and the ability to think through all the options for the future;
- the possibility that the almshouses will be sold for 'gentrification' and lost as potential affordable housing;
- an asset (the field) which could provide much-needed replacement housing (for older or younger people/families) if planning permission and finance were to be obtained.

### ***Upper floor flats with no lift, over-supply of sheltered housing, restrictions on who can be housed***

This almshouse charity in a market town has one almshouse development in a conservation area (but not a Listed Building) near the town centre and next to St Peter's parish church. There are ten bedsits and ten one-bed flats in a two-storey block built in a traditional Gothic architectural style in the 1920s, with extensive gardens. The almshouses were modernised 30 years ago, to provide night storage heaters (instead of coal fires) and en-suite instead of shared bathrooms. At that time the charity started to charge WMCs (= rent) and these are now at nearly the same level as rents for other sheltered housing in the area. There are steps up to ground-floor units and no lift to the first floor. Five first-floor flats and six ground-floor bedsits are now empty. There is a part-time resident warden in an adjacent two-bedroom house; she is due to retire within the next six months.

The almshouse charity is a member of the Almshouse Association. There are six trustees. Two trustees (the vicar and the mayor) are ex-officio, but they are busy and rarely attend meetings: the vicar has three parishes to cover, and the mayor changes every year. The other four trustees have been in post for over 20 years and have been trying to retire, but they have been unable to attract younger trustees. Housing management is carried out by a local estate agent.

The town has expanded considerably in recent years to include adjacent villages and a broader ethnic mix. However, the almshouses are restricted to members of the Church of England who live within the boundaries of the town centre parish of St Peter's. When the trustees asked the local district council for nominations, they were told that their almshouse accommodation no longer meets the standards required for sheltered housing. There is an over-supply of sheltered housing in the town; the main need and demand now is for one- and two-bedroom housing to extra-care standards, where the local authority can then provide a care package if needed.

This example summarises the problems facing many medium-size almshouse charities, including those with sheltered housing:

- housing that is well-located and in good repair but includes bedsits, no longer meets current requirements (e.g lift, level access) and is no longer in demand by older people;

- WMCs similar to other sheltered housing, but a reducing income stream because of increasing levels of void properties;
- ex-officio trustees who don't play an active part; other trustees who have been unable to attract younger replacements;
- management by a local business, but with no networking or links to other social housing initiatives;
- the possibility that the almshouse site will be sold for redevelopment and lost as potential affordable housing;
- an asset (the extensive grounds) which could allow for an extension or redevelopment to HAPPI<sup>3</sup> or extra-care standards, if planning permission and finance were to be obtained.

### 3. SECTION B: EXAMPLES OF PROGRESSIVE ALMSHOUSE CHARITIES

#### 3.1 Almshouse charities providing housing with care

Almshouse charities have been building or adapting their accommodation to provide extra care housing, and also care and nursing homes, for decades. Examples include some of the oldest foundations: Gloucester Charities Trust (12th century), St John's Hospital Bath (12th century) and Bristol Municipal Charities (including 14th and 15th century charities) (see also Pannell, 1999).<sup>4</sup> In this paper, we feature Lench's Trust in Birmingham.

Other almshouse charities are upgrading accommodation to extra care standards, to allow individualised care packages as needed, but without providing an on-site care team: this may be because the development is too small or because of uncertainties over revenue funding for care.

#### ***Lench's Trust, Birmingham: extra care housing, shared ownership, partnerships***

William Lench Court (named after the 16th century founder of the Trust) is a new-build extra care scheme in Quinton; for further information, pictures and video clips of residents, see [www.lenchs-trust.co.uk/william-lench-court](http://www.lenchs-trust.co.uk/william-lench-court). It was completed in 2011 and developed with Waterloo Housing Association as Preferred Partner. Funding came from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), a capital appeal, the charity's reserves and the proceeds of shared ownership sales. The scheme occupies the large site of a former sheltered scheme, built in the 1930s and no longer fit for purpose; existing residents moved elsewhere and some have moved back.

This is one of very few almshouse developments offering shared ownership to meet the needs of owner-occupiers with modest houses who cannot afford outright ownership of

<sup>3</sup> The Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation (HAPPI) was established in June 2009 to consider what is needed to ensure that new build specialised housing meets the needs and aspirations of the older people of the future. Their report outlined innovative housing examples from across Europe and made recommendations to central and local government and developers. [www.homesandcommunities.co.uk](http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk); The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Housing and Care for Older People, chaired by Lord Best, has highlighted the benefits of improved housing options for older people in their HAPPI2 report and plan for implementation (2012).

<sup>4</sup> Pannell J (1999) *Almshouses into the next millennium: Paternalism, partnership, progress?* Bristol: The Policy Press

housing association or private extra care housing. The almshouse charity interpreted 'need' in the 21st century as including health, social or housing needs as well as the financial need of the applicants.

William Lench Court is a community hub with extensive communal facilities. There are 63 one- and two-bedroom apartments: the scheme was fully occupied within a year of completion. 19 apartments across the site are occupied by shared owners. Two apartments (with HCA agreement) can be used flexibly for shared ownership or lettings. The 'rental' element of the shared ownership lease is a licence, not a tenancy; it was approved by both the Charity Commission and the HCA. Most shared owners have bought a 50% share, though shares range from 25% to 75%.

Lench's Trust has partnerships with two other charities at William Lench Court (see [www.lenchs-trust.co.uk/william-lench-court](http://www.lenchs-trust.co.uk/william-lench-court)):

*Yardley Great Trust* (also an almshouse charity, and registered with the CQC) provides the Home Care Team, offering help with personal care and domestic tasks to Court residents and to local people in the wider community. All staff are recruited and trained by YGT: they are directly employed, with no agency or self-employed staff.

The *Jericho Foundation* runs the café-restaurant; the charity provides training and employment to people from disadvantaged backgrounds and minority ethnic groups, through a number of social enterprises.

### **Tiverton Almshouse Trust: exciting new opportunity to develop an extra care scheme with no land cost, in partnership with other organisations**

Tiverton Almshouse Trust ([www.tivertonalmshouse.org.uk](http://www.tivertonalmshouse.org.uk)) is an example of a medium-sized almshouse charity which is engaged in long-term strategic planning. The Trust is seeking to develop its services to meet the needs of older people in the 21st century, making use of an existing and well-located site and the assets held in another local almshouse charity.

The Trust has 83 almshouses (mainly in two sheltered schemes with resident wardens). There is high demand – even for upper floor bedsits – which the Trust attributes to their warden service and their good local reputation. The original foundations date back to three merchant benefactors in the 16th and early 17th centuries. Additional almshouses were constructed in the 19th century and in 2004; another local almshouse charity (Ford's Homes) is also in the process of merging with the Trust. The Trust also owns a number of commercial properties. Alexandra Lodge is centrally located in an acre of land: this partly listed 18th century building (with later additions) was formerly used as a nursing home and as a Devon County Council Social Services Centre. Since the lease ended in 2012, the building has been empty.

Devon CC is now embarking on a major programme of developments of extra care housing. Elizabeth Fathi, Clerk to the Trust, is well-networked and was aware of Devon CC's plans and of the shortage of suitable sites: Alexander Lodge is well-located and there is no land cost. Trustees have been concerned about older residents with care needs being "stuck" in the almshouses. At a recent Housing LIN conference, her presentation showed how the Trust has been working with their local town, district and county councils, potential housing association and private partners, the Charity Commission and with voluntary organisations (eg Age UK, Devon Senior Voice) to develop Alexandra Lodge as an extra care scheme.

Plans are now under way to lease Alexandra Lodge for the construction of a 50-unit extra-care scheme. The 125-year lease ensures that the land is held in perpetuity for the almshouse charities. Some units will be leased back to the Trust, for allocation to almshouse beneficiaries (including to residents in their existing almshouses).

### **3.2 Almshouses for younger people, families and people with disabilities**

Some almshouses have always been occupied by younger people and families. For example, the 12 two-bedroom *Shrewton Flood Cottages*, in four villages in southern Wiltshire, were “*buildded in the year of Our Lord 1842*” with public donations to “*repair the losses sustained by the poor ... in the Great Flood of 1841*”; they have a particular resonance after the severe West Country flooding in late 2012. An almshouse resident interviewed (in Pannell 1999) was pregnant, with a young toddler: she worked locally and her mother lived nearby. Without this almshouse cottage, she would otherwise have been offered council housing much further away.

#### ***New almshouses provide homes for local residents***

Girton Town Charity (Cambridgeshire) has a vision to help improve its community by offering a range of accommodation to meet the needs of all ages and also provides grants to local organisations and individuals. GTC has completed a £1 million building project to provide new-build almshouses for young families and people with disabilities. The GTC Trustees purchased what was originally agricultural land and then obtained planning permission for the new homes.

Centenary Court comprises 11 traditionally-built homes, seven of which are owned by GTC and four by King Street Housing Society (KSHS). Centenary Court is being managed on a day-to-day basis for GTC by KSHS which has experience in almshouses management through its work with other local charities in and around Cambridge.

All GTC homes have green features including solar panels, triple glazed windows, enhanced thermal insulation and a heat recovery system which extracts polluted air from the living space, recovers heat from the air through heat exchangers and circulates fresh warm air. There are four two-bedroom properties and three three-bedroom properties, one of which can be specially adapted for a family with a wheelchair user.

The almshouses have now been made available to residents of Girton or those with family or close connections to the village who otherwise would be unable to afford to live there. Dr Robin Hiley, Chairman of GTC said: “*After six years of preparatory work, our Centenary Court Almshouses have now been completed and occupied. Applications from potential residents were invited ... following a rigorous selection process and interviews, appointees were chosen and were able to move into their homes during December. We had a large number of applications and making our selection according to the Charity’s criteria was a difficult and lengthy process needing care and sympathy.*”

Appointments will initially be for three years and GTC hopes that this will enable younger families to save for a deposit on their own home. Disabled or retiree appointments are not subject to this same timescale.

Previous research (Pannell 1999) gave examples of almshouse charities where historic almshouses are now occupied by people under pension age (for example *Lady Margaret Hungerford Almshouses*, Corsham, Wiltshire, where the Grade I Listed buildings are no longer suitable for elderly residents).

Almshouses in Colchester have been let for many years to people with learning disabilities: the trustees considered who were the most excluded, and so deserving of help from an almshouse charity that wanted to re-interpret its role in the late 20th century.

### **3.3 Accessing public funding to upgrade almshouses or develop new-build on existing sites: grant funding, the Almshouse Consortium and new money for almshouses**

#### ***Grant funding for almshouses***

Almshouse charities have been registering with the Housing Corporation and accessing grant funding since the 1970s. Grant has been available for remodelling, new-build almshouses and (until recently) major repairs.

Initially, all almshouse charities handled their own developments; Pannell (1999) explores some of the difficulties that could arise. By the 1990s, almshouse charities were increasingly required to partner with an experienced housing association (eg Lench's Trust, p.11). Only the largest almshouse charities (see DAMHA, see p.18) still managed their own development programme.

Since the 2008-2011 grant programme, bids had to be made through one organisation: the Lead Developer of a partnership or consortia already approved by the Housing Corporation/Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). A national partnership of almshouses (with a London almshouse charity as Lead Developer) received an initial allocation of £2.5m which increased to over £14m during the course of the grant programme.

#### ***The Almshouse Consortium Limited***

The current 2011-2015 grant programme is for remodelling and new-build, but not (at present) for major repairs. To access grant, a new partnership has been created: Almshouse Consortium Limited (ACL), with a significant initial allocation from the HCA and the Greater London Authority (GLA). Almshouse charities with a grant allocation are Members of ACL (a Company limited by Guarantee) and each nominates a Director. ACL provides technical and administrative support from two Programme Managers and an administrator. As Kathy Green (ACL Programme Manager) says:

*"If we are to continue to obtain grant funding for almshouses in the future, then we need to be seen as a worthwhile, reliable partner of the HCA/GLA which delivers affordable housing in the long term."*

To pay the costs of the increased borrowing that results from a reduced grant level, almshouse charities will need to set their eligible housing charges at 80% of market rents. Those producing new dwellings must also become registered with the HCA prior to practical completion.

ACL has negotiated a single Framework Development Agreement for the grant programme. This covers all the HCA/GLA requirements and also provides support to member charities: key aspects include:

- meeting the HCA's Design and Quality Standards: individual almshouse Trustees may only have the benefit of their own experience, and so the HCA's standards could help them better meet the needs of their residents over the longer term;
- ensuring proper management and the necessary professional input to run the project and give good advice to Trustees (many of whom will not have any development experience);
- meeting external audit requirements for grant-funded housing developments (because failing this could lead to loss of grant).

### ***Do almshouses in your area need funding?***

There is an opportunity for new almshouse charities to apply to join the consortium and access HCA/GLA grant, because some who originally received grant allocations have been unable to proceed with their developments (interest should be expressed to ACL's administrator, Liz Prince on [lizprince@live.co.uk](mailto:lizprince@live.co.uk)).

Kathy Green points out to almshouse charities that the HCA/GLA

*“will approach the local authority to see if they support the use of grant within their area for our client group. It is therefore important for each almshouse seeking grant to develop a good working relationship with the enabling section of the Housing Department. This is not the Planning Department. It is not unknown for a planning application to be welcomed by planners, but unsupported by Housing staff.”*

## **3.4 Governance and housing management**

There has been very little independent research across the almshouse movement on governance and housing management, although some larger charities have informative websites or publish annual reports. However, we do know of some examples of good practice from the Housing LIN call for information and other sources. This section includes case studies in East Anglia and Nottingham, and further information on:

- moving in: allocations, transfers, low demand;
- 'rents' (Weekly Maintenance Contributions) and charges;
- resident consultation, participation and empowerment;
- moving out.

### ***New initiatives in East Anglia: new developments, linking moribund charities, accessing unused assets***

Making use of recent legislation including the Localism Act, the National Planning Policy Guidelines, the Charities Act of 2011 and regulations permitting the establishment of Charitable Incorporated Organisations, new initiatives are being explored in East Anglia. Almshouse charities could in principle:

- work within the Localism Act to ensure local community involvement in the provision of affordable housing for local people and, in particular, vulnerable adults;
- work with local authorities to plan developments using existing almshouse charity (or other local charity) assets (land, buildings, finance);
- work with Health and Well-being Boards to ensure that identified needs can be met.



To give a current example of the recycling of charitable assets, one group of almshouses currently consists of seven redundant bedsit bungalows; they are to be replaced with nine one- and two-bed flats, funded by an innovative route: accessing over half a million pounds previously locked in a moribund charity elsewhere in East Anglia. The trustees are applying to the Charity Commission so that these funds can help to build the new flats. This is one of a number of ideas that have been formulated, based on hidden (and perhaps wasted) assets of almshouse and other local charities.

***New governance opportunities through CIOs (Charitable Incorporated Organisations): Legacy East Almshouse Partnership***

A recent initiative is the creation in 2013 of a new CIO almshouse charity, the *Legacy East Almshouse Partnership*. LEAP aims to provide efficient management of traditional almshouses, upgrading them where necessary, and to build new almshouses for people (of any age) in need of housing. LEAP (with the assistance of partners) can also take on the management of existing almshouse charities from trustees who may be struggling to meet all the demands of corporate governance and appropriate financial management.

LEAP is an incorporated charity. Most almshouse charities operate as unincorporated bodies, but the disadvantages include problems over entering into contracts, the risk of personal liability for individual trustees, and potential problems in selling property if registered in the name of individual trustees who died many years ago. A CIO overcomes such disadvantages:

- as a body corporate, it can enter into contracts and hold land;
- trustees have limited liability;
- it provides a more flexible constitution and the opportunity to modernise the way in which the charity operates and the rules which provide corporate governance;
- the CIO constitution recognises the advances in electronic communication (eg trustees may take part in meetings via telephone or video conferencing; email can be used to make and record decisions).

***Modernising almshouses in Nottingham: professional management; removal of previous restrictions on eligibility for residents (religion, sex, locality, class); accessing funding and expertise for new or refurbished housing; housing association as corporate trustee***

The *Nottingham Community Almshouse Charity (NCAC)* runs almshouses in 14 locations in Nottinghamshire, mostly dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries (see <http://housing.ncha.org.uk/ui/content/content.aspx?ID=200> for further details, including photos and history). The almshouses used to be managed by individual voluntary trustees who faced many of the problems identified in our two case studies in Section A, including properties in disrepair and restrictions on prospective residents. Because of the complexities of property management and problems finding trustees, Nottingham Community Housing Association (NCHA) was asked to take over the trusteeship in the 1990s. In 2009, the separate charities were merged, with a new Charity Commission 'Scheme' (rules) which consolidated and modernised all the previous documents dating back to when the charities were founded.

The almshouses were originally provided by 12 different benefactors. As shown in the Table at Appendix 1, the earliest foundation was in 1712; the most recent in the 1970s. Some had eligibility restrictions dating from the original foundation (e.g. from one parish; members of the Church of England; women only and from a certain class); in other cases, properties were in poor condition. This made it difficult to find eligible occupants in the 21st century. Since 2009, the rules have been updated to remove previous restrictions: the almshouses are now available to any person who has “lived in Nottingham or Nottinghamshire” and who is “in need, hardship or distress”. Under the NCAC new Scheme (rules), preference has to be given to people over the age of 50.

The table at Appendix 1 on p.24 also shows how NCHA/NCAC’s involvement enabled access to finance and development expertise for replacement or improvements, usually within a year or two of them becoming involved, so that hard-to-let outdated housing was upgraded or replaced. For example, unsuitable but valuable Victorian Gothic almshouses owned by the John Wright Charity were sold and replaced by new-build bungalows, as part of a larger brownfield site redevelopment undertaken by Nottingham Community Housing Association. At Norris Homes, the number of trustees had fallen below the necessary level and they were unable to find the funds to renovate the listed almshouses, which by then had fallen into serious disrepair.

### ***Moving in: allocations, transfers, dealing with low demand***

Almshouse charities that have not updated their allocations criteria, or modernised their accommodation, risk their almshouses becoming hard-to-let, as in the examples in Section A. Conversely, both large and small almshouse charities that provide high standard accommodation have few such problems (see for example *Lench’s Trust*, *Girton Town Charity* and *NCHA* above).

### ***‘Rents’ and charges***

Almshouse residents pay ‘Weekly Maintenance Contributions’ (WMCs) to cover the costs of their accommodation. Almost all almshouse charities charge WMCs; these may be as much as rents (and service charges) for other social housing, or (much) lower if subsidised from investment income; some almshouse charities also include heating, hot water or water charges in the WMC. The reference to ‘maintenance’ is a little misleading because WMCs cover loan repayments (for refurbishment or new-build) and housing management costs as well as maintenance – in other words, similar items to housing association rents and service charges. Many almshouse charities refer to ‘rents’ on their websites, although the Letter of Appointment (ie equivalent to tenancy agreement) would always refer to WMC.

At *Nottingham Community Almshouse Charity* (see above), the average Weekly Maintenance Contribution is £ 64.47 (2013 figures). This is significantly lower than Nottingham Community Housing Association’s average rent and service charge for equivalent housing (£87.58), and around 10% lower than the ‘Equivalent Fair Rent’.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> The Equivalent Fair Rent is calculated by the Rent Officer Service to set a maximum WMC comparator figure for almshouse charities.

*Lench's Trust* weekly charges for its extra care scheme are £85.93 Weekly Maintenance Charge and £87.80 Service Charge for a one-bedroom apartment, and £96.56 Weekly Maintenance Charge and £87.80 Service Charge for a two bedroom (2013 figures). There is also a Wellbeing Charge of £8 per week per apartment to pay for the out of hours cover by the care team. The "extra care" is paid via individual budgets or personal funds directly to the care provider (Yardley Great Trust, another almshouse charity) at a cost of £11 per hour.

Recent research for Age UK and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>6</sup> analysed information on rents for new lettings of social rented older people's supported housing. Average weekly total costs for housing 'with support' were £97 (rent £65, service charge £22, support charge £10). Lower quartile average figures were £75 total; higher quartile average £120 total. For housing 'with care' total costs (rent, service and support charges), average weekly costs were £130: lower quartile average £95, higher quartile average £170.

### ***Resident consultation, participation and empowerment***

Progressive almshouse charities are involving residents through consultation, participation on committees and (in a few cases) board membership.

#### ***Examples of resident involvement in large, medium and small almshouse charities***

*Pickering and Ferens Homes* is the largest locally-based independent housing association for older people operating exclusively within Hull and the East Riding, with 1,200 properties. Two resident trustees are nominated and voted for by residents; the resident trustees also attend quarterly meetings of the Resident Committee to act as their representation. *Pickering and Ferens Homes* describes itself as "committed to listening to its residents and involving them in the association's everyday running ... Residents are also encouraged to play an active role in the association by joining groups like the Local Area Forums, or running for resident trustee as part of *Pickering and Ferens Homes*' Board. There is also a Residents' Committee, which allows residents to have their say, and an Editorial Committee, which plans the association's quarterly magazine, *People First*." (from [www.pfh.org.uk](http://www.pfh.org.uk))

*Durham Aged Mineworkers Homes* (DAMHA: [www.durhamhomes.org.uk](http://www.durhamhomes.org.uk)) is the largest almshouse charity with 1,700 dwellings in north-east England. DAMHA's Executive Committee (i.e. Board of Trustees) has included two residents since 2005, and a third since 2008. There is a formal appointment system, based on guidance from the National Housing Federation: vacancies are advertised in their residents' magazine, and applicants are short-listed and interviewed by senior staff and trustees. DAMHA's Scrutiny Committee, established in 2010, meets bi-monthly to monitor performance and is made up entirely of residents.

DAMHA also manages three smaller almshouse charities; a vacancy came up in 2009 for a new trustee at a small almshouse charity (*Hartlepool War Memorial Homes and the Crosby Charity*, with 24 properties). Three residents had already been attending board meetings as observers; like other small almshouse charities, it was not always easy to

<sup>6</sup> Aldridge, H., Kenway, P. & Pannell, J. (2012) *Who can afford retirement housing?* JRF/ New Policy Institute All figures averaged from CORE data for 2010-11 and 2011-12, from New Policy Institute research for Age UK and Joseph Rowntree Foundation [www.jrf.org.uk/publications/who-can-afford-retirement-housing](http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/who-can-afford-retirement-housing)

find active trustees. DAMHA staff suggested that it was good practice to have a resident trustee, and trustees agreed. They invited nominations and held an election to appoint a resident trustee.

*Lench's Trust* in Birmingham is a medium-sized almshouse charity; as well as the extra care scheme featured above, the Trust also owns two sheltered housing schemes, each with a scheme manager, and a shared activities co-ordinator. There is extensive resident involvement across the sheltered and extra care schemes (featured with a resident interview on the website - [www.lenchs-trust.co.uk/william-lench-court](http://www.lenchs-trust.co.uk/william-lench-court) - about us - our local promise) and they are working towards elected resident trustees. Involvement includes:

- the well-being sub-committee where residents and trustees are equal members;
- a scrutiny panel: volunteers from each site decide on an issue to consider in depth at each meeting, facilitated by a Trustee (Sarah Davis, Senior Policy and Practice Officer at the Chartered Institute of Housing);
- elected resident committees (at each site) who have six-weekly meetings with senior staff.

*Hopton Almshouses* in Southwark, South London used to be managed by Anchor until they ceased their corporate trusteeship arrangements and transferred their almshouses to other charities. Hoptons Almshouses residents chose to go to a local almshouse charity, United St Saviours Charity ([www.ustsc.org.uk](http://www.ustsc.org.uk)). Under the old rules, only men or couples (one of whom had to be a man) could apply to live in the almshouses. Philip Sturrock, chair of the United St Saviour's Charity told a local community website in 2012: *"The no-women rule was out-of-date, discriminatory and, in our specific case, illegal. We are abolishing it with immediate effect. We would like to thank our colleagues in the Charity Commission for permitting this change, showing that tradition and innovation can walk hand in hand."* A Hoptons resident said: *"As residents we were formally consulted on the proposed change. The vote was 17 residents in favour of ending the men-only rule, and only one against. We are proud to be creating an almshouse for the 21st century."* United St Saviours Charity's Housing Committee also has two elected resident members.

Housing management practice can also encourage - or discourage - resident empowerment. Whenever new legislation comes into force, housing providers have to adapt their policies, yet by enforcing new legislation, they can run the risk of restricting residents' activities. In about 2006, sheltered housing residents were angry and upset when their housing association banned their Christmas party (and any resident involvement in food preparation) because of food hygiene regulations. The residents complained to AIMS (the former Age Concern's Advice, Information and Mediation Service).<sup>7</sup> In contrast, AIMS found that an almshouse charity took a quite different view, as reported in the AIMS newsletter in 2007.

---

<sup>7</sup> AIMS ceased to exist when Age Concern and Help the Aged merged to form Age UK

### ***Almshouse charity leading the way in empowering residents***

The almshouse charity was required to register with the local Environmental Health Department as a food provider for cups of tea and biscuits at the residents' weekly bingo session. They found that registration was straightforward and free of charge. The almshouse manager also chose to offer training to residents to gain a food handling certificate, telling AIMS that:

*“Although this is not a legal requirement, we felt that there were a lot of advantages in empowering residents to run their own ‘food businesses’ for the good of the community. I have noticed increased self-confidence amongst those residents who took part in the training course. Running events gives residents a sense of place and worth in their community and reduces isolation.”*

*Adapted from Resolve, the Newsletter of the Advice, Information and Mediation Service (AIMS) for private and retirement housing: Health and housing, Issue 12, February 2007.*

### ***Moving out***

Almshouse residents do not have security of tenure and, as in other older people's housing, moving on can be a sensitive issue, covered in guidance from the Almshouse Association.

### ***Almshouse charity facilitates a creative solution with the help of mediation***

A social worker had been arranging a client's discharge from hospital, but the almshouse charity where her client lived said it planned to evict the resident, as she had care needs they could not meet, and her challenging behaviour upset other residents. It was, said the charity, in the best interests of all concerned that she move into a care home rather than return. The social worker contacted the then Age Concern's Advice, Information and Mediation Service after a meeting with the almshouse ended in an argument. AIMS advised that the client had no security of tenure but suggested mediation. All parties agreed and the resident's grandson attended as an advocate.

The mediation resulted in a better understanding of the repercussions of eviction by the charity, and also an acknowledgement by the resident and her family of the problems she was causing other residents. There was a constructive discussion about possibilities, which led to the idea of re-opening an external door to the property, which had previously been blocked up, so that the resident did not need to use the internal facilities. This led to a creative solution that allowed the resident to remain in her home while protecting the rights of other residents. The almshouse charity should be commended for its willingness to look beyond its 'rights' to find solutions that work for all concerned, and at a significant financial cost to itself.

*Adapted from Resolve, the Newsletter of the Advice, Information and Mediation Service (AIMS) for private and retirement housing: Conflict and dispute resolution, Issue 14, October 2007.*

## 4. SECTION C: IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

So what more can be done to encourage partnerships and increase the range of offers of housing (with or without care or support) for older people and other disadvantaged, disabled or vulnerable people in housing need? As we have seen, almshouse charities have a lot to offer, and many of them have been able to adapt their governance, services and housing provision to meet expectations in the 21st century.

As of 1 May 2013 a sub-group within the Almshouse Association was formed to promote best practice and to represent the views of larger almshouse charities. The Housing LIN is pleased that the preparation of this paper has been a catalyst because this new sub-group has arisen partly through contacts made during the research for this paper. The sub-group aims to share information relevant to larger charities, and also to disseminate best practice which could be shared with smaller almshouse charities. This will be through email exchanges, the Almshouse Association website and one day seminars. For further information, contact Anne Taylor, Chief Executive Officer, Thorngate Almshouse Trust, Gosport ([Anne.Taylor@thorngate.org.uk](mailto:Anne.Taylor@thorngate.org.uk)).

### ***For local authorities and housing associations***

*Find out about almshouses in your area:*

- Where are they? Who do they cater for? How do they advertise vacancies?
- Do local advice agencies and housing associations have links with them?
- Do they add another housing option for your housing options advisers?
- Do they have land, buildings or funding for development opportunities? If so, are they on your radar (eg helping you to make public funding go further)?
- Are they invited to any forum you have for considering housing issues in your area?

*Almshouse management and governance:*

- Does the local council (eg district, town, parish) have the right to appoint one (or more) almshouse charity trustees? If so, can you help by ensuring that those appointed have an interest in housing issues in the locality and will be actively involved?
- Are there other ways to help facilitate the appointment of new trustees to almshouse charities (for example from your staff or other contacts)?
- For housing associations, is there scope to provide housing/charity management services to almshouse charities?

### ***For the Homes and Communities Agency:***

- Are the regional investment teams aware of progressive almshouse charities in their region and the potential contribution they could make to meeting housing need?

### ***For the National Housing Federation:***

- How can the NHF work more closely with the almshouse movement? Is there scope for encouraging membership, for links with the Almshouse Association, for sharing information, services and training/networking?

### ***For national agencies:***

- How can the Housing LIN and other national housing agencies work more closely with the almshouse movement? Is there scope for encouraging membership, for links with the Almshouse Association, for sharing information, services and training/networking?
- How can Age UK and similar agencies work more closely with the Almshouse Association at national level, and strengthen links between local older people organisations and almshouse charities? For example, if local Age UK organisations run services (eg befriending, handy person, advice) are these offered to almshouse charities in their area? Are there opportunities to publicise the work of almshouse charities via a website, e-bulletin or magazine?
- How can EAC / FirstStop help almshouse charities to fill vacancies and access information and advice? How can almshouse charities be encouraged to upgrade their information to gain the EAC Quality Mark? Is there scope for partnership with the Almshouse Association?

### ***For almshouse charities***

If not already in place, make links locally and nationally:

- Make sure that local authority/ies, housing associations and potential partner agencies (eg local Age UK) know about your accommodation and services;
- Get on-line to gain access to web-based resources; if this isn't possible with the existing Clerk/trustee body, consider using an agency and/or getting a new Clerk/new trustees;
- Make links with organisations that can help with almshouse vacancies, especially EAC/ FirstStop (nationally) and perhaps a local choice-based lettings partnership;
- Join the Housing LIN – it is free, the website is full of relevant advice, and the e-bulletin will help you keep up to date; regional meetings(2-3 times a year) and an annual conference provide networking opportunities; larger almshouse charities could offer to host a regional LIN meeting;
- For the few almshouse charities that are not already members, join The Almshouse Association; share good practice and innovation amongst almshouse charities;
- Think about joining the National Housing Federation: around 20 almshouse charities are already members, there is a NHF group for smaller housing associations and the NHF provides a range of services to members which complement those provided by the Almshouse Association.

Does your charity's governance arrangements meet the requirements of the 21st century? Is your charity re-interpreting the wishes of benefactor/s to meet current needs?

- Review governance arrangements, because the regulatory bodies (Charity Commission, Homes and Communities Agency) are now looking for effective self-regulation;
- Carry out regular skills audits for the charity's Trustees. If the charity is unincorporated, does the lack of limited liability for Trustees impact on the available pool of talent? Does it make more sense (especially for very small almshouse charities) to merge or join with another almshouse charity or housing association for management or corporate trusteeship?

- For larger almshouse charities, are there opportunities to provide services to other (including smaller) almshouse charities in the locality? (See for example Yardley Great Trust partnership with Lench's Trust, p.12 above). Is there scope for encouraging almshouse charity mergers to make better use of resources?
- Look again at the Charity Commission Scheme (rules): is there a lower age limit, or flexibility about religion/ gender/ marital status/area of benefit? Consider whether the greatest need is now for a different group (eg disabled people or young families) rather than older people.
- If historic almshouse buildings are no longer fit for purpose, or the provision doesn't meet modern expectations, is it better to redevelop elsewhere? What should be the balance between the importance of maintaining historic buildings and meeting residents' needs?

Consider sources of funding for upgrading or redevelopment by:

- Accessing advice and potential funding through the Almshouse Consortium (see p.14 above);
- Accessing loans or small grants from the Almshouse Association or other charitable sources;
- Following up new initiatives for funding such as those being explored in East Anglia) (see p.15 above);
- Working in partnership with your local authority and housing associations to access funding.



## Appendix 1: Nottingham Community Almshouse Charity

<b>Almshouse Name</b>	<b>Founded / built</b>	<b>Original occupants (now updated)</b>	<b>Current housing</b>	<b>NCHA involved since:</b>	<b>Improved?</b>	<b>Source of finance Notes</b>
Norris Homes	1893		8x1bed	1989	Yes, 1991	HC grant; <i>Grade 2 Listed</i>
Wells Almshouses	1712	Poor unmarried or widowed women in parish of Clifton-cum-Glapton	2x1bed, 1x2bed		Yes, 2006	Interest-free loan from Almshouse Association; <i>Grade 2 Listed</i>
Pennhome Cottages	1877	Poor widows & spinsters whose fathers were merchants, tradesmen or professional men	6x2bed	1995	Yes, 1996	<i>Women only, restricted by class</i>
John Wright Charity	1905	Poor local people	9x2bed	1997	New -build bungalows 2002 as part of larger mixed development	Sale of original almshouses
Emma Birks Trust	1948	Persons born / living in Parish of Lenton	2x2bed	2000	Yes, 2001	Grant from Nottingham City Council <i>Restricted to one parish</i>
Frances Longden Almshouses	1852	Poor members of CofE who live in AncientParish of Bramcote	3x1bed	2007		<i>Restricted to Church of England and one parish</i>
Robert Wilkinson Smith Homes	1910		10x2bed			
Miss M.E. Hardstaff Homes (4 locations)	1900 1919 1936 1975*	} Miners' families } } Miners' families	} 2x1bed } 19x2bed } 2x3bed			<i>*includes J.G.Ryley Almshouses: 2 bungalows</i>
Capt Albert Ball VC Almshouses	1922		6x1bed 2x2bed			<i>Founded in memory of WW1 hero</i>
Coupe Almshouses	1929		2x2bed			
Hind Memorial Homes	1970		2x2bed			<i>Recent foundation</i>

## Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

## Acknowledgements

This paper would not have been possible without the help and encouragement of many people within and outside the almshouse movement. Special thanks are due to all the featured almshouse charities and consultants, and to Pauline Vernon who carried out some of the initial visits and interviews. Thanks are also due to the Almshouse Association (including staff and members of the Executive and Advisory Committees and the new sub-group) and to the National Housing Federation. As always, Jeremy Porteus (Director of the Housing LIN) has been most supportive and encouraging.

## About the Housing LIN

Previously responsible for managing the Department of Health's Extra Care Housing Fund, the Housing LIN is the leading 'learning lab' for a growing network of housing, health and social care professionals in England involved in planning, commissioning, designing, funding, building and managing housing, care and support services for older people and vulnerable adults with long term conditions.

For further information about the Housing LIN's comprehensive list of online resources and shared learning and service improvement networking opportunities, including site visits and network meetings in your region, visit [www.housinglin.org.uk](http://www.housinglin.org.uk)

The Housing LIN welcomes contributions on a range of issues pertinent to housing with care for older and vulnerable adults. If there is a subject that you feel should be addressed, please contact us.

## Published by:

Housing Learning & Improvement Network,  
c/o EAC, 3rd Floor, 89 Albert Embankment

London SE1 7TP

Tel: 020 7820 8077

Email: [info@housinglin.org.uk](mailto:info@housinglin.org.uk)

Web: [www.housinglin.org.uk](http://www.housinglin.org.uk)

Twitter: [@HousingLIN](https://twitter.com/HousingLIN)