



# Pioneer News

## April 2009

### Issue 36



## APH gets funding for play equipment

Ashton Pioneer Homes have been successful in gaining funding of £48,000 to upgrade the play area over on West Park.

To meet the requirements of the bid, the play area will fit in with an earth, wind, fire and water theme. We have also decided to go for timber as opposed to plastic for a more natural look.

This funding is great news and will benefit residents and the local area in general. In order to find out what kind of equipment residents want, we held a consultation day on Saturday 21 February. It was a very cold Saturday morning and we received some very useful feedback. Children and their parents were shown images of various pieces of equipment, and were invited to stick coloured stickers on their favourites. We'll now use this feedback when deciding which pieces to go for. We recognised that seating areas in parks generally draw in older youths who may mistreat the park. In order to reduce the likelihood of this, we



Natalie Leyland receiving the Wii console and Wii Fit

want to keep seating areas to a minimum. To keep with the healthy living theme, we've also secured funding to install adult exercise equipment. These will be cross trainer type pieces that will enable parents to exercise whilst watching their children play. This funding has come from the Healthy Living Project.

At the consultation day, we had face painters; refreshments and a prize draw to win a Wii console and a Wii Fit. The Wii Fit was also donated by the Healthy Living Project. Natalie Leyland of Ellison House was the lucky winner.

## APH raises money for Comic Relief!



The Customer Services Team would like to thank all staff who took part in Red Nose Day!

Since 1985, Comic Relief has inspired the nation to have a laugh whilst raising cash to help change lives. The money raised gets spent by Comic relief to help poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged people turn their lives around across Africa, throughout the world's poorest countries and closer to home here in the UK.

Red Nose Day fell on Friday 13 March this year and APH staff got involved to raise some cash! Our Customer Involvement Consultant Tina, stayed up all night making personalised t-shirts for each member and staff made a donation to

wear these t-shirts to work. We also played 'Eggact Amount!' where staff and residents made a donation to guess how many chocolate eggs were in the jar to have a chance at winning the eggs! Paul one of our Estate Services Assistants won this and shared them with the office staff. Staff also played 'Up for a laugh' where we tried to guess which celebrity was under the scratch panel. Vicki one of our Customer Services Officers won this and won £15! The total raised was £100. Thank you to everyone who took part.

### Easter Opening Times

We'd like to wish all of our residents a Happy Easter and to remind you of our opening times for the Easter period.

The office will close at 5 o'clock on Thursday 9 April and re-open at 9 o'clock on Tuesday 14 April.

Our Neighbourhood Services Team will be available 24 hours a day as normal if you have any emergency repairs or any queries. They can be contacted on 0161 339 9377.



### What's Inside the Pioneer News

**Page 2 & 3**  
**Housing Management**

**Page 4**  
**Customer Services**

**Page 5**  
**Maintenance**

**Page 6, 7, 8**  
**Resident Reporters**

**Page 9,10,11**  
**Community Involvement**

**Page 12**  
**7 day gym & pool pass**

# Value for Money Empty Property Review



The readers of Pioneer News will be aware APH have been carrying out a full value for money review of the way we turn our empty properties (voids) around.

The performance by APH staff in turning void properties around and re-letting them has been exceptional. For example empty properties continue to let on average in less than 3 weeks. Other Tameside Housing Associations have a void property turn around time of 56 days.

The amount of lost rental income last year equated to £14,284. When you consider the amount of lost rent in 2002 was £152,422. It is clear the company can demonstrate continuous improvement in this area. This not only is saving our residents money it means APH can invest more money in our housing stock.

However during recent void inspections there is a feeling from staff that void standards could perhaps be improved. Customer complaints remain very low but APH decided to survey all new tenants to test customer satisfaction levels with their new home.

## THE REVIEW PROCESS

A small working group was set up and it consulted with all interested parties on the current procedures and processes including Board, The Residents Panel and Staff. In addition every resident that had moved into an APH property in the past 12 Months was sent a Questionnaire based on the customer journey map analysis. The group also compared the APH service with that provided by other housing organisations.



## THE REVIEW FINDINGS

The survey highlighted a number of areas where satisfaction levels were very high. For example the application process and interviews were seen to be either very good or good by the majority of customers. The feedback on the information provided to prospective tenants was again very positive. The interview and reception facilities for customers scored very high and it was very reassuring that the vast majority of respondents found staff to be very helpful and polite. However the survey did highlight that new tenants on average did not score their new properties very high in terms of decoration and cleanliness.

The review also highlighted a number of internal procedures that could be streamlined still further despite the fact that empty properties are let very quickly.

The Resident Panel indicated that it would like to see the decoration of properties improved when they are let. They highlighted that when a new tenant moves in all their money is spent on furnishing the tenancy and often there is no money left to decorate. If properties did not need decorating when a tenant moved in then it would help with the settling in period for that person. The Panel recognised that this could be a major cost issue and so therefore suggested all walls were just painted white/magnolia until the person was in a position to decorate. The Panel also believed that residents should be involved in some way in terms of setting the standards and monitoring quality control.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

The working group involved in the review recognised that APH compared favourably with other Housing Associations in many areas and yet void standards were similar to other Associations. The group however were keen that APH exceeded the service provided by other Housing Associations in terms of performance effectiveness, cost efficiency and most importantly customer satisfaction. Using this philosophy the working group came up with the following recommendations;

There were some training gaps identified with some staff that needed to be addressed

New detailed procedures needed need to be developed in terms of the inspection process

The cleaning specification needs to be updated and enhanced ensuring that all staff involved are aware of the required standards

The void cleaning specification needs to be enhanced but also the use of specialist cleaning staff should be utilised for valeting empty properties.

More emphasis needs to be placed on decoration and reduce the need for decoration vouchers so that customers do not need to redecorate as soon as they move in. Walls should be neutral where possible and new customers do not feel under pressure to immediately decorate. Hopefully this will reduce the pressure, stress and cost for new customers if there was not an immediate need to decorate.

Where possible APH staff should be used for decorating where appropriate. The advantage of using internal staff if that the cost will be an internal cost of time/materials and it can introduce

more flexibility into the process when minor patching up work is needed.

Where a property is in need of full decoration then it is more cost effective to pass the work to external contractors.

The week after a tenant has moved in they will receive a courtesy call from a member of the Residents Panel and a Neighbourhood Services Assistant. The purpose is to see if the person had any problems moving in and they were satisfied with the property. In addition they would be informed about the NSA service and given details of resident involvement activities in the area.

## CONCLUSION

The review of the void service has been very comprehensive and involved a number of different processes. All teams and various groups were given the opportunity to contribute including Board, Residents Panel, staff and new tenants.

Customer satisfaction levels remain high from new and existing customers but as part of our continuous improvement strategy APH is still keen to enhance and develop a services still further.



The recommendations are designed to address customer dissatisfaction at decorating standards and cleaning standards albeit the two often are closely linked. A number of internal operational and procedural issues need to be addressed now that they have been identified by the review. There have also been areas identified where savings can be made.

It is envisaged that these operational improvements will take effect in full from April 2009.

APH would like to thank all staff and residents that took part in the review.

## Rent Increases for October 2009

It is around this time every year that the Board of Ashton Pioneer Homes agrees the Budget for the financial year to 31 March 2009. This year the task of producing the Budget has been affected by the Credit Crunch and ensuing Recession.

### APH has never been able to set rents by choice

Originally there was the Tenants Promise, whereby for 5 years APH would keep rents below those projected by the Local Authority.

As soon as this ended, Government brought in policies geared to ensure that rents for similar properties in a given area were to be standardised at what are known as Target Rents. The process, known as Rent Restructuring would require the Target Rents would be met by landlords by March 2012.

Target Rents are increased each year by utilising a formula laid down by government, which is: -

### Current Rent x RPI + 0.5%

The RPI (Retail Price Index) used is that based on the last issued September RPI figure, prior to the increase date. Target Rents therefore will increase by  $5 + 0.5 = 5.5\%$ .

As APH rents are generally lower than the target rent, increase in excess of the formula may be required to bring an individual property up to the Target Rent by 2012. A limit of an additional £2 applies.

The Board of APH and with the trade body of Housing Associations, The National Housing Federation, have tried to identify ways of reducing the impact of such an increase with no success.

In October 2009, the rent increase will therefore be based on a minimum of 5.5%.

APH staff will be initiating contact with tenants, initially with those facing the higher increases, to assist in ensuring benefits etc are maximised and this exercise will occur between now and October 2009.

## Debt Advice

In the current economic climate more and more people are finding themselves struggling to budget rent, food, travel, utility bills as well as making repayments on loans and credit cards, etc.

To be able to tackle your debt you need carry out an income and expenditure task. This will allow you to evaluate what money you have coming in and how much you spend.

Having a list in front of you, of all your weekly/monthly outgoings, will allow you to see where you can make cut backs by re-prioritising your bills/costs, enabling you to budget effectively.

### Why Budget?

**Budgeting** gives an accurate picture of your financial position. It will almost certainly demonstrate that money is not being spent according to the priorities and will highlight where changes in spending habits can be made and possibly, where savings can be made.

**Budgeting** also helps make money go further. The fundamental aim of Budgeting is to ensure that basic needs are met and that, where necessary, steps are taken to get you out of debt.

**A budget** can be a very effective brake on large impulse spending.

**Budgeting** can help prevent the running up of debts to the point where contractual payments can no longer be maintained.

It can also help to reduce stress levels.

It can also help to make a spending diary, writing down each thing you buy each month can highlight those small impulse buys which add up.

If you are struggling with your debt there is free advice and counselling available. Listed are some agencies/charity's that offer free advice.



Get legal advice now: call 0845 345 4345 - Offer a call back service

[www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk](http://www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk)



Free phone helpline 0800 138 1111

[www.cccs.co.uk](http://www.cccs.co.uk)

Tameside Citizen's Advice Bureau  
0161 330 2156  
9 George Street  
Ashton-under-Lyne  
OL6 6AQ



Tameside also has its own advice centre online at [www.mintameside.org.uk](http://www.mintameside.org.uk) where you can download a personal budget sheet. Just go to their website click on Money problems need help, managing your money, the Debt handbook and click on the Excel link to download the sheet.

Our website also has a link to the Mint website.

Personal Budget sheets will be available from our Margaret House Office and on our website [www.ashtonpioneerhomes.co.uk](http://www.ashtonpioneerhomes.co.uk).

## Tameside Home Services

Tameside Home Services is a local community organisation providing practical and social support to mainly older people in their own home. Tameside Home Services is supported by Tameside Social Care & Health and the Opening Doors for Older People Project

Employing a small team of dedicated local staff who are all CRB screened and trained, we are happy to support people with a wide range of activities such as:

**General cleaning/laundry**

**Intensive one off cleans/clean up after builders etc**

**Preparation of meals/checking food supply**

**Shopping/collecting benefits/prescriptions**

**Accompanying people on trips/appointments**

**Practical support following a spell in hospital**

The service generally costs £7.80 per hour to people aged 65 years plus.

Initial enquiries can be made directly to Tameside Home Services on 0161 343 6582 or by visiting our website on [www.tameside-homeservices.com](http://www.tameside-homeservices.com)

Following a request for our service a member of the team will arrange a home visit where we can discuss your personal requirements. Staff



are always introduced to clients prior to the service starting, giving people an added sense of security. We try to make the service as accessible, flexible and user friendly as possible. People can use the service weekly/fortnightly or as a one off.

We are happy to quote for a service to younger people who may not qualify for the £7.80 fee.

# The National Conversation

The Tenants Services Authority is the new regulator for social housing. They launched on 1 December 2008 and have taken over the regulatory powers of the Housing Corporation. They believe that housing



matters and that access to good quality housing improves lives. Their goal is to raise the standard of services for tenants.

To understand what issues matter most to tenants, the Tenants Services Authority will listen to tenant's views. To facilitate this, they held the National Conversation. This was the biggest consultation exercise ever to take place for Housing Association tenants. It was to find out what services tenants need and what standards they expect.

Each housing association held at least one National Conversation event. Ashton Pioneer Homes held various events which involved the Residents Panel and the Men's Group filling in National Conversation questionnaires. We also turned one of our interview rooms into a Big Brother style diary room. We invited tenants to come in and speak about how they felt about us as a housing association. We got some really great feedback and this will be available to watch on You Tube and also in our reception area very soon.

# 3 C's Update Compliments, Complaints, Comments

Thank you to all of you who have taken the time to complete our C Cards. We really do value your feedback as this helps us to improve our services. If you would like to pay us a compliment or if you have a comment or complaint to make then please complete one of our C Cards in our reception and communal areas. When complete, please return to our Customer Services Team.

Here's a brief update on some of the feedback we have received over the last few months.

## Compliments

It was our Maintenance Team who received the most compliments recently. The Estate Services Assistants or 'the two Pauls' as they're more commonly known around the office, have been carrying out work to furnished properties and also helping vulnerable tenants to decorate. Various tenants who have had work carried out have telephoned the office and also completed 3 c's cards to compliment on how helpful, friendly and thorough they were. Our Maintenance Manager has also received a compliment on how friendly and helpful he was whilst carrying out an inspection.

## Complaints

We have received a complaint about the vehicle gate at Moss Terrace breaking intermittently. On investigation by the Maintenance Manager it looks to be a design fault and he is working with the contractors to get this matter resolved as quickly as possible.

## Comments

We have received no comments over the last few months. If you have a good idea or would like to comment on one of our services, please complete one of our 3c's cards.

## Repair Questionnaire Winners

December  
Mrs Clayton

January  
Ms Williams

February  
Ms Griffiths

Thank you to all who have taken the time to complete our questionnaire when you've had repairs completed in your home. This enables us to monitor our repairs service and ensure we deliver as promised.

Congratulations – each have won £25 worth of vouchers!

Don't forget to return your completed questionnaires in the self addressed envelope provided – next time it could be you!

# Complaints Satisfaction Survey Results

At Ashton Pioneer Homes we value all forms of feedback from customers and stakeholders. We believe that all complaints, compliments and comments should be treated in a positive way as it assists the organisation in its aim of Continuous Improvement. Complaints in particular, should be viewed as a valuable source of information which enables Ashton Pioneer Homes to learn from mistakes and improve services. In order to ensure that tenants are happy with the way their complaint was dealt with, we



sent out a survey to all tenants who have reported a complaint within the last 12 months. With help from the Residents Panel and staff members, we compiled a list of questions which we thought would best gauge how tenants felt about the service they received.

The results were extremely positive and we will now take into account any comments made – for example, make tenants more aware of how they can complain etc. Thank you to the tenants who took part.

## Fire Risk Assessments

Our responsibilities in respect of Fire Safety require Ashton Pioneer Homes to undertake Fire Safety Risk assessments of the common areas within each of the seven high rise tower blocks.

These assessments, together with day to day checks made by Neighbourhood Services are essential to ensure the premises are safe. They include maintaining that all escape routes are kept clear, that all designated Fire Doors are operating correctly, and that there are no potential hazards from combustible materials left about the common areas.

Given that there is a greater risk of a fire occurring within a flat rather than the common areas, e.g. from an unattended chip pan, it is important to consider fire safety for the whole building.

All buildings, including the tower blocks, are constructed to take full account of fire safety for occupiers and other users. Buildings are constructed so that in the event of a fire, the fire is isolated and contained to allow vacation of the premises by all building users should this be necessary. In fire safety terms this is called 'compartmentation'.

Each of the individual dwellings in a tower block acts as a compartment to contain fire and smoke should a fire break out in a flat. Each compartment is provided with a smoke and heat detector in the hall and kitchen respectively.

In the event of the activation of a detector within your flat you need to take appropriate action. If necessary, depending on the circumstances causing the activation, this would be to leave the property closing the front door behind you, and immediately calling the Fire Brigade. You should then go to the stair landing of the floor below so that you can direct the Fire Service to the incident.

Please note that we need you to play an active part in the issue of fire safety by ensuring that the fire detection system provided in your property is in full working order so that you, your family, and your neighbours are adequately protected.

If you are in anyway unsure of your role and responsibilities please do not hesitate to contact Customer Services. Alternatively you can contact Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service's Home Risk Fire Assessment Unit on 0800 555 815 or [www.fire.gov.uk](http://www.fire.gov.uk) who will provide free advice and support.



## Digital Aerial Upgrade

The properties still requiring an upgrade of the aerial point we provide are the low rise houses, maisonettes, and bungalows on Victoria Street and Bollington Street, and the cul-de-sacs and walkways off them.

A contract has been placed with AC Aerials and Digital Ltd, a local company specialising in this work.

You should by now have been contacted by Customer Services advising you that your upgrade is planned and directly by AC Aerials who require access to your property to complete the installation.

If you have not been contacted by now, or have difficulty in allowing access to our contractor during normal working hours, please contact Customer Services so that the oversight or problem can be resolved. AC Aerials hope to complete all installations by early May.



## Lift Refurbishment – Richmond Park

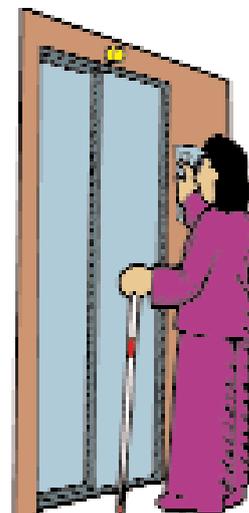
The project has progressed well this year. Both new Welbeck House Lifts are now in services.

The Portland House Odd Lift was commissioned and put in service at the end of March as the programme revised in December 2008 indicated.

There has been a slight delay in the completion of the Margaret House Odd Lift due to unforeseen additional works required in the removal of the equipment which powered the previous lift. The refurbished lift will be in service by April.

The projected handover of the second lift at Portland House remains the end of May 2009. The Margaret House Even Lift, the final lift to be refurbished, should still be on programme and in service by the end of May.

We now need to ensure that the quality of finishes in the new Lift Cars is maintained. Please be aware that we do have available removable curtains which provide protection to lift finishes. Prior to using lifts for moving bulky items of furniture or white goods please contact Neighbourhood Services to arrange for the protective curtains to be installed.



## Gates Consultation

We are committed to maintaining the security benefits from the work undertaken back in 2005 to make our Estate secure by the enclosing of several areas which allow controlled access via pedestrian or vehicular gates.

Unfortunately there have been several recent incidents where vehicular gates have been damaged by misuse resulting in expensive repairs. Within a short time of gates being returned to service, further damage has occurred.

We are now reviewing the operation of the gates at Balmoral Court and Hanover Court and looking to modify the gates to make them less prone to accidental damage or vandalism.

# Resident Reporters

Stepping Out  
Into Your  
Local Community



## Nikki's role as a Resident Inspector

In January 2009, Ashton Pioneer Homes asked if Nikki Spiers would like to be a Resident Inspector on behalf of the community. Luckily, she said yes and now holds this position. I asked Nikki what the position involves and besides a lot of reading with regards to health and safety and communication with residents, her role should be beneficial to the community.

The position involves looking at how the team at Ashton Pioneer Homes maintain an excellent service to residents, how to improve the upkeep of the estates and if any problems are found, how to resolve them. I hope Nikki is given support from the community as not only being a mum she is an active member of other committees such as Casper and the Residents Panel.



Resident Inspector is just one of Nikki's roles

## Local residents have their say on grants

On the 21 March 2009 Greater Manchester Police invited the local residents of St Peters Ward to a fun day at Oxford Park.

The reason for the fun day was to ask the local residents to assist the Police with the distribution of £35,000 of grant money for local community groups in St Peters Ward.

Local residents were treated to various displays by the local emergency services and the Police canine unit did a practical demonstration of the work that they deal with on a regular basis.

There were also displays from the scout movement and children had the chance to partake in rock climbing activities under the supervision of the scout leaders on the climbing wall at the park, and also enjoy themselves on the bouncy castles and slides that were available.

The local residents were then asked to make their way into the main hall where various groups had stands, and to take a seat ready for the day to begin.

After a brief welcome from the chief constable and the introduction of Mayor Jack Davis and Councillor Warren Bray the timetable for the day was laid out for the people who were present.

We were told that there would be 19 presentations from the various short listed community groups and that it would be up to the local residents that were present to vote on which groups we felt would benefit from the grant money.

Then the presentations began and we heard from a wide and diverse number of groups who were asking for a grant for such things as sports equipment through to money to build a meeting room.

After the presentations the voting forms were handed in and the people present were treated to a free buffet lunch whilst the votes were counted.

Then it was back to the hall to hear the results. Of the 19 groups who made formal presentations I am glad to say that 14 were successful in obtaining the funding that they wanted. The most notable for this reporter being the Pioneer Gardeners, who gained funding for a new greenhouse house on their allotment. Danny Fannon gained funding to organise local music events aimed at the teenagers of St Peters Ward and Nikki Spears of CASPER, gained funding to hold a fun event in summer for the local community.

This reporter hopes that all goes well for these groups and for everyone who was lucky enough to be granted the funding and I hope that I will be able to report at a later date on how a number of the various grants have been used.

To close, I personally feel that this was a good way to decide how this money was spent and I hope that if the same thing is planned for next year that more residents will attend and use this opportunity to have their say.

**By Tony Thompson**  
Resident Reporter



## Ken's Recipe Column

### Easter Hot Wrap

#### Ingredients

4 chicken breast  
Small block of cheddar cheese  
Mild or hot chilli powder  
8 rashers of smoked bacon  
Bread crumbs

#### Method

Mix Bread crumbs with a teaspoon of chilli powder in a bowl.  
Grate cheddar cheese.  
Mix the grated cheese together with 1 teaspoon of chilli powder.  
Make a slit in chicken breasts.  
Spoon in the cheese mix.  
Role the breasts in the bread crumb mix.  
Wrap two rashers of bacon around each chicken breast.  
Place in oven on a baking tray at 190 degrees for 30 mins  
Check cooked before serving with salad or veg and a choice of potatoes.

**Enjoy!!!!**

# Doing the girls proud!!



My name is Kimberley OCR Level 2 English, OCR Newton I'm aged 23 years Level 1 Maths and passed a old and I live in the St Weed and Pesticide course at Myrescough college. I Peters area of Ashton Under Lyne. I started doing voluntary work at a young age; I have been doing voluntary work for St Peters Partnerships for almost a year being a volunteer for Resident Reporters and Pioneer Gardeners. Through the Pioneer Gardeners I gained employment with St Peters Partnership through one of their social enterprises Newscape / Greenscape which was a paid contract for just a month but possibly longer, depending on funding. I was a trainee landscape gardener and as I was doing well and kept a good time keeping record, my contract got extended and I stayed for 6 months. I was the third female to work for Greenscape / Newscape and the only female to stay for 6 months so I recommend that all the females who read this who do like gardening to get involved. Whilst working for St Peters Partnerships I gained qualifications in

OCR Level 2 English, OCR Level 1 Maths and passed a Weed and Pesticide course at Myrescough college. I also did Learnscap which is health and safety, manual handling, and COSH plus a Health and Safety refresher training day. At the moment I am half way through my OCR Level 2 Maths and an NVQ Level 2 Customer Service course.

With all the hard work and support, I have gained a new role with St Peters People as a Community Champion which is mostly about getting local residents in to employment and training. I just wanted to say a big thank you to St Peters Partnerships and to all the staff at Greenscape/ Newscape. Special thanks goes to Mick Brickell and Leanne Bold for their support and training which I took with both hands. I wanted to gain as much experience, knowledge and training as I could and with that, I have moved on and up with St Peters Partnerships and St Peters People. "THANK YOU"

**By Kimberley Newton**  
Resident Reporter

## The Welbeck Street Baptist Church (Church in the middle)

The church has just had a re-dedication for their newly decorated sanctuary and kitchen on Sat 7 March. The dedication was led by the head of the Baptist North West District.

Praise and thanks were sung by a full church of invited congregation and guests and was followed by a lovely buffet tea and refreshments and was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

It was a small miracle because two years ago the Church were talking about closing due to lack of attendance. They now have three services every Sunday - two for ethnic groups and one for Baptists. Many other activities take place each week including the popular lunch club on Wednesdays where you can enjoy a full cooked meal, sweet and drink for a very reasonable £2.50p. For all activities, service times and lunch club please see the church notice board on Welbeck Street.

**By Margaret Anderson**  
Resident Reporter



## The day Ashton Shook

**By Paul Broadbent**  
Resident Reporter

During the First World War, Ashton was rocked by a huge explosion in a local ammunition factory.

On June the 13 1917, the explosion occurred at the factory of Hooley Hill Rubber and Chemical works on William Street in Ashton's West End.

The factory was producing TNT for bombs. Sadly forty three people lost their lives in the explosion and hundreds more were injured.

The explosion took place at 4:20pm when many schoolchildren were on their way home. One off those who died was a child who was swimming and was hit by glass when the glass roof of the swimming baths was blown in.

The blast blew out windows as far away as Duckinfield and over a hundred people were made homeless.

Hundreds of people living near the works were made temporarily homeless and were accommodated in nearby schools. Inside St. Peters primary school is a brass plaque commemorating the seven pupils from that school who died in the explosion while on their way home from school.

We think there should be a statue in memory off all who died.



# Celebration Time



On the 14 of February, the Mayor and lady Mayoress invited community members to a celebration of Valentines day and the 10th year that Ashton Pioneer Homes celebrated their takeover and success of improving the estates.

The evening was a great success and all the proceeds will be distributed at the end of the

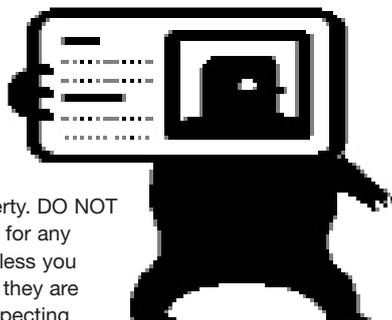
mayoral year to charities and voluntary organisations within Tameside. The evening concluded with a Glenn Miller style band.

Thank you, Mr. Mayor for your support for all the charities and voluntary workers within Tameside.

**By Peter Glenn**  
Resident Reporter

# Crime look-out!!

Watch out for door step callers who require access to your property. DO NOT let them in for any reason, unless you know who they are and are expecting their presence.



They may show you a photo identification card but they may not be genuine and it's not worth the risk.

HOW can you check if they're who they say they are - ask them to make an appointment by letter, make sure you're not on your own for the time you make the appointment and NEVER leave them on their own in your property. Remember, an identification card is not always genuine. How many people would look at the card and see a photo of the person and the name of the company and think it is ok? Identification cards are cheap to buy and print so do not trust or believe them.

## BE SAFE, BE CAREFUL!!

**By Ken Newton**  
Resident Reporter

## WHAT'S ON WITH TONY T

- April 4 to 16 May** Tameside music festival, at various locations. For more information phone 0161 342 4144
- April 18** St Georges day celebration, Ashton town centre
- April 19** Charity concert in aid of Oldham Royal Artillery Association at Irish National Institute Ashton, 1pm to 5pm. Entrance, pay on door
- April 22 to 25** Inspector Drake & the Black Widow, Hyde Little Theatre Company at Hyde Festival Theatre, phone 08448 042634 for tickets
- May 3** Tulip Sunday family day out, Stamford park 12 noon till 4pm
- May 6** Laurel and Charlie, Bad Apple Theatre Company at Hyde Festival Theatre. Phone 08704 280785 for tickets
- May 11 to 16** Stepping Out, Droylsden Little Theatre Company at Theatre Castle close, phone 0161 370 7713 for tickets
- May 13 to 16** Hindle Wakes, Romily Little Theatre Company at Hyde Festival Theatre, phone 08704 280785 for tickets
- May 17** Charity concert in aid of The Federation at Irish National Institute Ashton, 1pm till 5pm. Entrance, pay on door
- May 16 to 23** The Graduate, Guide Bridge Theatre Company at the theatre, Audenshaw Rd, phone 0161 330 8078 for tickets
- June 8 to 13** Greater Manchester drama federation, One Act Play Festival, at Hyde Festival Theatre. Phone 08448 042634 for tickets
- June 21** Charity concert in aid of The Children of Chernobyl at Irish National Institute Ashton 1pm till 5pm. Entrance, pay on door
- June 24 to 27** Stage Struck. Hyde Little Theatre Company at Hyde Festival Theatre. Phone 08448 042634

And finally dear readers, don't forget the Ashton Pioneer Homes 10th birthday fun day on Sunday 17th May. Time and venue to be arranged, for more information please ring 0161 343 8128 and ask for Kate or Tina.

## Gardening Time!

Spring is well and truly here and everything is sprouting fresh, green new life all around.

It's that time of year again when we hope for a nice summer and make plans for our gardening projects large and small.

The gardening competition last year was a great success with some fantastic gardening achievements. Seven of our residents also went on to win a second prize in the prestigious "Champion of Champions" event.

There were some spectacular balcony spaces too, proving that you don't need a traditional garden to create a nice space. With the help of pots, compost and a little imagination any space no matter how small can be made beautiful for you to enjoy throughout the summer and indeed all year round.

This year we would like to encourage all our residents to take part in the competition, so whether



Last years winner of the best specialist garden category was Helen Bradbury from Brooke Street East who went on to win a second prize in the "Champions" event

you have a garden, yard or balcony and are entering alone or with neighbours, give the competition a go. Its fun and you could bag yourself a prize or even two!

To request a form please call Tina on 343 8128.

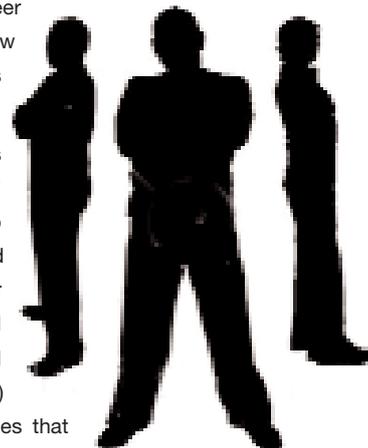
## Redmire and Hadfield & Britain sponsor Resident Inspectors

Two local residents have recently received formal Level 2 training to become Resident Inspectors on behalf of APH. We would like to thank our 2 longstanding maintenance contractors Redmire and Hadfield & Britain for their financial sponsorship which has made a significant contribution to the training costs.

## Did you know?

Ashton Pioneer Homes now have a Men's Group.

The "Pioneers for Progress" Men's Group was formed as a group for men of all ages and cultures (18+) to tackle issues that directly affect the



men in our society. You do not have to be an Ashton Pioneer Homes' resident to join the group as it is open to any man from the St. Peters ward.

The group offers social inclusion and support to men who wish to be involved in the wider community and the vast array of groups out there but don't know where to start. The group gives the men involved the opportunity to learn, join in educational activities, training events, trips and cultural activities and give access to a wider social and friendship network of support from the other group members. The group will be also tackling men's health issues and promoting healthy living and wellbeing.

The group meet every Wednesday at the Ashton Pioneer Homes' office from 6.30pm till 8.30 pm and visitors to the group are always welcome.

If you would like to visit the group or know more about the group contact Tina on 0161 343 8128.

## Calling all ladies!

In response to the many enquiries we have had from our female residents, Ashton Pioneer Homes are considering starting a Women's Group. The success of the new Men's Group has prompted requests for a Women's Group. As a starting point, we would like to invite your views as to what women and you in particular would want from a Women's Group. There will be an informal meeting including a light lunch in the very near future. If you are a woman 18+ and would like to attend the meeting to discuss ideas for a new group, please contact Tina on 343 8128 to be added to the contact list.



# Like pea's in a pod!

As the Participation worker for APH, I get to meet all sorts of great people in all kinds of situations. Recently I decided to "hang out" at the POD, the giant green pea like structure on the Richmond park estate.

It was Friday evening and the weather was bitterly cold but despite this the pod was being used by 4 local young people. After making sure the young people didn't mind us "crashing" their space, myself and the participation volunteer Micky made ourselves at home for a chat.

It was great to see the young people enjoying the POD and obviously taking pride in caring for their space. They had said there had been a few unwelcome visitors mainly due to the broken gate on Katherine Street, but on the whole there had been no real problems.

When we asked the youngsters what they thought of the POD, their replies were "its nice to have a place just for us. We have waited a long time for somewhere to sit where we wont get moved from, and its good to finally have this place." The two boys Alex and Paul who were involved in the initial consultation day for the POD know just how much hard work has gone into the project. They added "It's a great space. We've needed somewhere for ages and it's nice to have the pod".

It was good to spend time with the young people and hear their views. These four youngsters have respect for their new meeting place and have actively been making an effort to keep the site clean, including picking up other people's litter and removing other people's graffiti. This is much appreciated. Let's work together, to keep this space a nice place to be.

There will be a POD planting day during spring and all residents are welcome to come and get involved in the planting and landscaping.

Contact Tina at the office for details 0161 343 8128.



## CASPER - Communities Across St. Peter's

CASPER (Communities Across St Peter's) are a local community group, based at St Peter's Children Centre, set up by local families for local families. They work with families in Ashton's West End and Holy Trinity areas to make a difference within their community and develop activities and services. Everyone is welcome to come along!

CASPER now has a website: <http://casper.stpeters.googlepages.com/home>. Find out their latest events and fundraising activities and post your comments and suggestions online.

Post your ideas onto our website or come along to a meeting, held every 3rd Wednesday of the month, 9.30am and 11.30am.

Next meeting is 22 April.

CASPER also wants to thank everybody who showed support for our ideas last Saturday at the Up2U Presentations.

For more information contact Nikki Spiers, Chair of CASPER, on [casper.stpeters@gmail.com](mailto:casper.stpeters@gmail.com) or 07884053336.

# APH Residents Panel



The mission statement of APH is to **work together** to make Ashton a better place to live. One of its core values is to listen and respond to the views of residents, staff and partners. The APH Residents' Panel is a forum at which local residents can air their views concerning APH and the services we provide.

## Proud in Tameside



Did you know there is a new LGBT group in Tameside specifically for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender residents?

The group hold regular meetings and is currently in the process of setting up its committee, constitution and ground rules with the help of staff from T3SC. The main aim of the group is to provide support, advice and to create a social network for gay and lesbian residents in the local area.

The group have gained some support from the LGBT in Manchester and also Tameside Council.

Ashton Pioneer Homes are committed to helping our residents to access any local interest groups and are happy to assist in the promotion of this new group.

If you would like more information about Proud in Tameside and how to get involved please contact Tina on 343 8128.

## Panel Composition

The panel consists of members that fully represent the local community with respect to age, gender, ethnicity and property type. The panel will have elected a chair and a vice chair.

## Aims and Objectives

- The panel will work closely with APH to help continuously improve the services to local residents.
- The panel reviews and advises on draft policies before they go to the board for approval.
- The panel decides which policies will be reviewed at each meeting.
- The panel also gives feedback on APH annual service standards.
- The panel also reviews performance reports as provided by APH and its conclusions forwarded to the board.
- The panel gives guidance and input on areas of business they would like monitoring.

## APH Responsibilities

- APH provides a suitable venue for the panel to hold their meetings and will provide refreshments.
- A member of staff will represent APH at the meeting.
- Travel and childcare expenses for all panel members are paid for by APH.
- Each meeting is recorded and reports provided to the Board each quarter.

APH will endeavor to address any training needs the panel may require. If you would like to join the Residents Panel or would like more information, please contact either Kate or Tina on 0161 343 8128.

# Ashton Pool's couldn't be fitter as it launches into the 21st Century!

When Ashton Pools first opened its doors in the late 1970's it provided just Swimming Pools, Squash and Sauna facilities for the general public. The mid nineties saw a boom in the fitness industry and the introduction of a fitness suite at the facility through joint funding by the Tameside Council and The Sports Council.

Over the decades Ashton Pools has been just one of the community focal points within Ashton-under-Lyne, providing leisure, learning, employment and fitness improvement opportunities for local residents. The facility was beginning to show it's age particularly in the swimming pool changing areas. The latest development launches the leisure centre into the 21st century with a brand new look including high quality finishes and state of the art equipment.

The latest redevelopment works include the following:

- New 63 Station Fitness Suite**
- New Dance Studio**
- New Thermal Suite**
- New Fitness Suite Changing Rooms**
- New Pool Changing Village**
- New Front Entrance**
- New Vending and Relaxation Area**
- Improved Disabled Access**
- All Public Corridors and Access Areas Refurbished**
- New Disabled Changing Rooms**
- New Disabled Lift**

The architects and interior designers, were given the opportunity to create something new in most parts of the centre whilst retaining certain elements such as the swimming pools, they were able to create a more spacious and stylish feel throughout the centre whilst improving the user friendly configuration for the centre.

The front entrance has been completely reworked with an impressive glazed, curved facade. It now provides a welcoming lobby and reception leading to a seating area that

has views of both the learner and main pools.

The old squash courts have been transformed into a new Fitness Suite split over two floors, accessible by a keyhole stainless steel staircase and disabled lift. With state-of-the-art Pulse Fitness gym equipment and the striking new décor, the Fitness Suite is a great place to enjoy a work out. The Fitness Suite changing has been enlarged to accommodate the new capacity and has sophisticated décor appealing to all tastes.

In order to attract to a wider audience and families to visit the swimming pools, a new communal Village Changing area into the plan. A disabled change, family group change and separate toilets and showers for men and women, makes the area completely user-friendly. The under-floor heating and décor make the spacious area comfortable and relaxing.

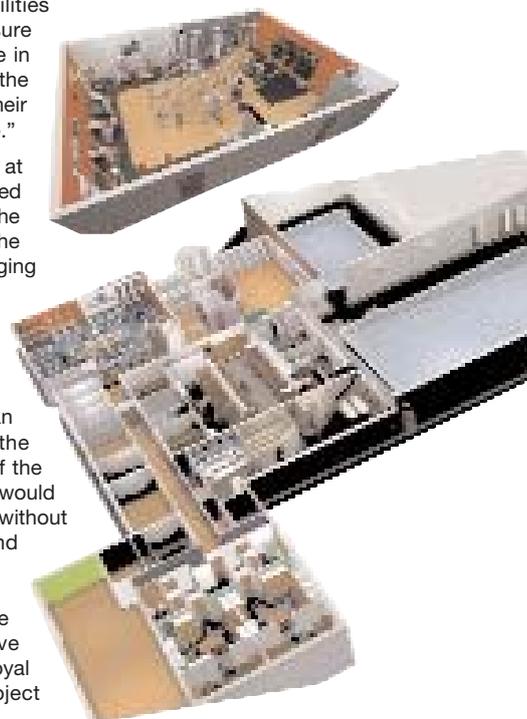
In today's fast moving world people want more time to sit back and unwind, and with the addition of a new Thermal Suite and Treatment Room in the rear extension, users can relish in the luxury of the new amenities that include a sauna, steam room, snail shower, body contoured heated loungers and relaxation area.

The new 100 sq m fully air-conditioned Dance Studio is spacious and light with floor to ceiling mirrors, wooden sprung dance flooring and a state-of-the-art sound system. The Dance Studio will launch with a brand new schedule of group workout out sessions. The group workout schedule will continue to evolve further to the input and popularity of the classes.

Steve Sharkey, Facility Manager for Ashton Pools says "We are really pleased with the outcome of the whole scheme and have thoroughly enjoyed being part of the changes made at the

centre. The new facilities give many more leisure opportunities to people in the area and we hope the new look will make their visits more pleasurable."

The swimming pools at the centre have remained functional throughout the project facilitated by the use of temporary changing facilities and reception areas. Neil Chaisty, General Manager for Tameside Sports Trust says "It hasn't been an easy task to keep the aquatics programme of the centre functional and would have been impossible without the commitment and dedication of all the staff at the centre and not forgetting those customers who have remained patient and loyal throughout the project works!"



Residents can receive seven days free access to the pool and gym by taking along a copy of the Pioneer News

Fun Day - Open day  
**Celebration**  
 Saturday 27 June  
 10am to 2.30pm

To celebrate the re-opening of the centre there will be a grand opening 'Fun Day' celebration where free tours of the facility will be held, free activities, workout sessions and swimming sessions will be offered. There will be promotional offers on the day and lots of fun!

Further details of the event will be available from Ashton Pools and on the Tameside Sports Trust website:  
[www.tamesidesportstrust.com](http://www.tamesidesportstrust.com)