



# **PARTNERSHIP PROPOSAL**

*Your questions answered*



We wrote to all residents last month to tell you about a proposal for Westlea to form a new partnership with Oxford Citizens Housing Association (OCHA). We know that many of you will have questions about this proposal and wonder how it may affect you.

This special newsletter includes answers to many of the questions residents have asked us already, and details of how you can ask more. You can make sure your voice is heard and ask more questions at resident meetings in the next few weeks. You can also send your comments to us using the freepost response card to be enclosed with HOME (Summer 2007). See back page for full details.

**What might the new organisation be like? What will it be called?**

We are looking at forming a new group. Westlea and OCHA would continue to operate under their own names and with their own identities. There would be little or no change to

the people you deal with at Westlea day-to-day. This is different from a merger where two organisations are combined into one.

The new group would have about 350 employees and 9,000 homes, and

build about 400 new homes a year.

We don't yet know what the group itself would be called, but OCHA and Westlea would keep their own names.

**So who are OCHA? What are they like?**

Oxford Citizens Housing Association was established in 1866. Their aim has always been 'to provide healthy and comfortable dwellings' for local people. They provide over 2,800 homes in Oxfordshire, including general rented and supported homes, plus accommodation for people aged over 55 and affordable home ownership schemes. Like us, OCHA are keen to provide an excellent service to their residents, and have high levels of resident satisfaction. They also have a keen focus on investing in communities and resident

involvement. They value their staff very highly, and have a very similar approach to equality and diversity as us. You can find out more from their website: [www.ocha.org.uk](http://www.ocha.org.uk)

**What's in it for me as a tenant?**

By combining our strengths with OCHA, we can:

- provide better services to residents;
- build more new homes; and
- reduce costs.

Put simply, we can achieve more together than we could alone. We believe that we need to grow to meet our expectations, and those of our partners and government regulators. This is because we face new and increasing competition from private developers and other larger housing association groups.

**Will it affect the service I get?**

Not at all. We would not do it if it would. We think that doing this will make our services better. And for the most part, you would be dealing with exactly the same people as you do now.

**Will this affect the waiting list or how you allocate properties?**

Our allocation policy, and OCHA's will stay the same. We will not end up housing the 'overspill' from Oxford. The new group would actually increase the number of new homes available in the future for people on the waiting and transfer lists. Existing local residents will have a wider choice of homes in the future.

**Will the office move?**

Our current office at Methuen Park will remain the main office for Westlea, and you can still come in to visit us here. We are looking at opening an extra, smaller, office in Swindon, because of the increasing work we are doing in the area.

**Will you be able to build more new homes?**

This partnership would mean we could develop more new homes in the future than we could on our own, or by continuing as a member of the Sovereign Development Consortium.

**WIN! £50 in shopping vouchers**

As we made clear when announcing the proposal, there has been no decision made about a choice of name for the new housing group that would be

formed if the proposed partnership between Westlea Housing and OCHA goes ahead.

The shadow board would like to hear suggestions from residents for a name. There's a prize of £50 in vouchers for the person whose suggestion is chosen! Please use the space on the Partnership Proposal 'Questions and comments' freepost reply card (pictured left) to send us your suggestions.



We would aim to develop 400 homes per year within the new group from 2008/09 onwards.

**Why OCHA? Why not another housing association in Wiltshire?**

The majority of local housing associations already work with other housing associations as part of groups. Others don't want to, or can't be. We needed to find someone who was also looking to be in a partnership, and who has the same aims and objectives as us. OCHA fitted the bill perfectly.

Part of the reason for this is that Swindon lies directly between Oxford and Chippenham. The planned growth in Swindon gives us a real opportunity to grow, as well as keeping local links and investing in our neighbourhoods. OCHA also have real strength and experience in redeveloping sheltered housing, regeneration and a number of other areas. We therefore think we can work together really well.

**What is the process? How does it work?**

Westlea and OCHA board members are forming a shadow board in June 2007. This board will oversee the work involved in creating the new group. In the coming months, external experts (accountants and lawyers) will check the performance of both organisations to make sure that the proposal makes good business sense. Although how long this will take is difficult to predict, we expect to finish this by the autumn. After that we will ask the Housing

Corporation to approve the partnership. We will both then ask our shareholders to approve it – this should be before Christmas. It is likely the formal partnership would start at the beginning of April 2008.

**Do residents get a vote in this?**

It is very important that we listen to your views, ideas and suggestions, and we will have to give evidence to the Housing Corporation (our regulator) to show that we have done this. We are working closely with the District Forum to make sure that we consult you in an effective and meaningful way.

However, you do not get to vote on whether this happens or not. Only our shareholders (although some of them are residents) can vote on this decision.

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**Keeping you informed**  
 We will publish a full set of questions and answers on our website at [www.westlea.co.uk/ocha](http://www.westlea.co.uk/ocha) that will be updated regularly. A further update will be included in the next HOME magazine, out in early September.

We are very keen to hear your views, ideas and suggestions and have been working closely with the residents' District Forum to make sure we consult you in an effective and meaningful way.

**There are several ways you can tell us what you think about the proposal and ask more questions:**

- (1) by coming along to one of the 'Community Get-together' meetings organised by the District Forum, in Oaksey on 25th June or Chippenham on 2nd July (details below). Westlea Chief Executive Dave Ashmore will give an update and answer questions at both meetings.
- (2) by filling in the Partnership Proposal 'questions and comments' freepost reply card enclosed with HOME (Summer 2007 edition).
- (3) by coming along to one of the other residents' meetings happening during the next few weeks – the Older Persons' Forum on 10th July and 17th July or the Disability Forum on 21st June, for example (please contact Neighbourhood Involvement on 01249 466163 for more details of these events).
- (4) by emailing enquiries@westlea.co.uk (with 'OCHA Partnership' as the subject name).

Westlea Housing residents' District Forum invites you to:

# Community Get-together

**With Westlea/OCHA Partnership Proposal questions, answers and discussion.**

*All residents welcome!*

**25th June 2007**

**Oaksey Village Hall, Oaksey**

(for residents in Malmesbury, Cricklade, Purton, Wootton Bassett, Sherston, Hullavington, Oaksey)

**2nd July 2007**

**Neeld Hall, Chippenham Town Hall, Chippenham**

(for residents in Chippenham, Rudloe, Corsham, Calne, Potley and Pockerridge)

- **Westlea/OCHA Partnership Proposal questions, answers and discussion with Westlea Chief Executive, Dave Ashmore.**  
**7pm to 8pm**
- 'Meet and greet' with light refreshments and raffle.  
**8pm to 8.30pm**

**For more information**, including details of how to arrange free transport, please contact the Neighbourhood Involvement Team on 01249 466163 or email [esther.lim@westlea.co.uk](mailto:esther.lim@westlea.co.uk)

If you would like to have any part of this document explained or translated, or in a different format such as in larger print, in braille or on audio tape, please contact Westlea on 01249 465465 to discuss your needs.

