



**As promised:**  
Improvement  
Programme



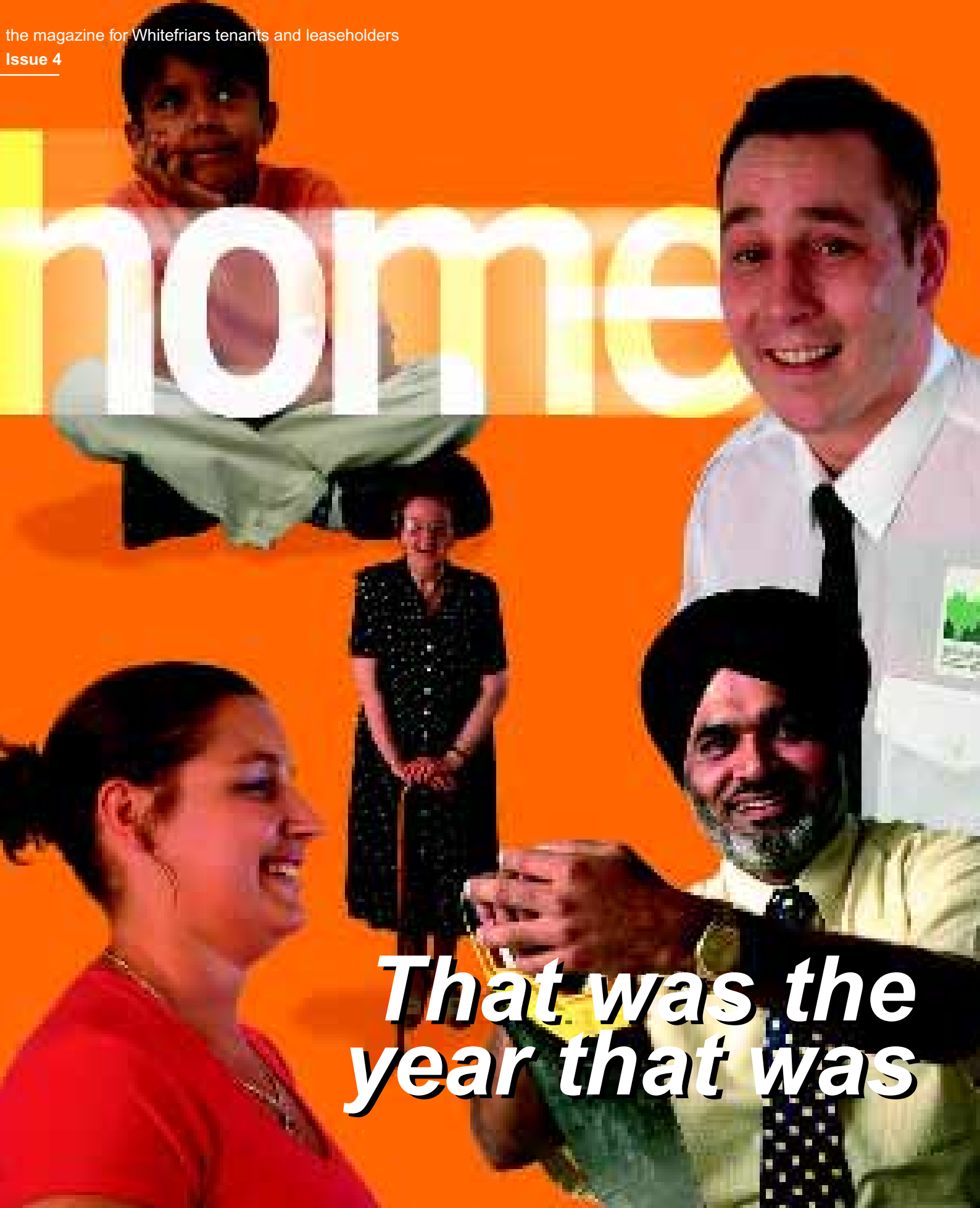
**What a  
response:**  
rush for Agency jobs



**Working  
with you:**  
creating better  
communities

the magazine for Whitefriars tenants and leaseholders

Issue 4



# moments

***That was the  
year that was***

# Keeping our promises

This edition of Home is a little different, because it incorporates our first annual report to tenants.

It is important that we show you what we have done in the time since we took over the Council's housing stock, and look at how we have matched up to targets and expectations - ours and yours - and whether we have kept those promises we made prior to transfer.

So this edition of Home provides information on key areas of activity, including rents, repairs and improvements, homes and neighbourhoods, work we are doing with communities, and tenant feedback.

Because Whitefriars Housing Group was only formed in September 2000, and annual report information has to be collected together at the end of March, much of the information included in this report does not cover a full year.

This report is also available in large print and audio versions, details of which are included on the back page.

Copies of the main Whitefriars Housing Group Annual Report and our Annual Accounts are available from the Chief Executive's Office by phoning 024 7676 7007.

## How's it gone?

Quickly, that's for sure. It is hard to imagine that more than 12 months have passed since we took over the running of the city council's housing stock of more than 19,000 homes right across the city.

While we knew there would be problems that would have to be dealt with along the way, we have made significant progress in our efforts to improve homes, and are making progress in other areas such as improving neighbourhoods and involving tenants.

Already thousands of homes have new windows and hundreds now have refurbished kitchens and bathrooms.

To give you an idea of the scale of what has been achieved so far, consider this: in our first six months Whitefriars invested £7.7 million in improvements. Compared to £5 million that the city council were able to invest in its last full year of running those 19,000-plus homes.

And that investment has been spread across the city, something we promised we would do before we took over.

We have also been instrumental in developing new initiatives that address the sort of local issues that demand their own, tailored solutions. This has seen Whitefriars become involved in a number of innovative regeneration partnerships aimed at improving neighbourhoods and tackling social exclusion.

Whitefriars is for example, a main partner in the New Deal for Communities initiative in the north-east of the city and a major player in redevelopment proposals for the Guild and Pridmore estate in Foleshill. We are also working on a regeneration proposal for part of the Stoke Aldermoor area.

So that we knew exactly what you, our tenants, thought of Whitefriars and how we are performing, we commissioned an independent survey of tenants, the findings of which will inform much of what we do in our second year and beyond. We wanted to know what you wanted us to do, and you told us.

Tenants got involved, too, during the tenant elections, enabling tenants to have a say in what Whitefriars does and actually be part of the decision-making process. Over 8,000 of you voted. And we are working to increase tenant participation further by conducting a review with tenants, of how we involve you in what we do.



# Rents

Whitefriars promised tenants whose homes were part of the transfer that rents would only rise by inflation plus 1%. And that's what happened.

Indeed, as the figures in this report reveal, Whitefriars' rents compare very favourably with other registered social landlords running homes in the city. So much so, that we believe Whitefriars represents good value for money, particularly in light of the major improvement and regeneration works that we are undertaking.

Something that has been very well received - and which was introduced at the time of transfer - were our new rent cards. You have welcomed the fact that the cards can be used at all sorts of locations, including 65 Post Offices and 55 other designated locations, including newsagents, general stores and petrol stations.

Improving our rent collection record is a priority area for improvement. Rent income funds the service we provide and pays the interest on money raised to undertake improvement work. So unpaid rents reduce the services and improvements which we are able to provide.

Whitefriars knows that most tenants want to see a firm yet fair approach to rent arrears recovery. This is another area in which we will be seeking to improve performance.

We will do this by maximising the collection of due rents through accurate and cost effective administration, by putting more staff time into arrears recovery and taking prompt action where arrears exist, including through the courts in the case of persistent non payers. We will also help those tenants who are in arrears by making them aware of benefit entitlements.

## Rent levels

	Whitefriars North	Whitefriars South	Whitefriars Group	Average RSL rent in Coventry*
Bedsit	32.69	33.66	<b>33.18</b>	34.86
One bedroom home	36.42	37.42	<b>36.92</b>	45.86
Two bedroom home	38.59	41.06	<b>39.83</b>	55.24
Three bedroom home	40.99	43.17	<b>42.08</b>	60.03
Four bedroom/more home	45.35	47.03	<b>46.19</b>	66.03
<b>Weighted average</b>	<b>38.67</b>	<b>40.15</b>	<b>39.41</b>	<b>53.58</b>

\* Source 45: The Housing Corporation's published guide to local rents 2000

## Rent collection

	Whitefriars North	Whitefriars South	Whitefriars Group
Rent collected as a % of gross rental income due	94.4%	94.9%	<b>94.7%</b>
Rent arrears as a % of gross rental income	11.5%	10.5%	<b>11.0%</b>
% gross rent lost due to empty homes	10%	4.6%	<b>7.28%</b>

# Repairs and improvements

Right from the start we knew - because you'd told us - that repairs and improvements to your homes were your number one priority.

To provide a solid foundation on which to build an effective repair process, we put in place special measures aimed at improving the performance of repair contractors. One of those measures involves a Repairs Contract Panel - which is chaired by a tenant Board member - who oversee and monitor work carried out by contractors.

This has been a factor in an improvement in overall repair work performance - which includes jobs being completed satisfactorily and on time - and tenants can look forward to that improvement continuing. Up until March, repair turnaround times averaged just over four weeks across the city.

Minor repair work can be completed more quickly thanks to the continuing success of the local housing repair teams that get the likes of plumbers and carpenters out to tenants homes within 3 days.

Figures in this report look at the overall performance of the contractor up to the 31st March.

In the first 6 months other improvements have also benefitted over 5,700 homes. This work included over 1,600 window replacements completed by the end of March (the figure has now reached over 3,000). Rewiring, reroofing, central heating installation work and boiler replacements were also done. Security doors have been fitted in 50 blocks of flats, there have been repairs to fascias, soffits and bargeboards on 500 homes, loft insulation upgrades to 2,000 homes and environmental works. This work is in addition to the window and kitchen and bathroom programme.

Responsive repairs service	Whitefriars		
	North	South	Group
% emergency repairs completed in target time (1 working day)	82%	85%	<b>83.5%</b>
% urgent repairs completed in target time (7 calendar days)	63%	71%	<b>67%</b>
% routine repairs completed in target time (1 calendar month)	69%	79%	<b>74%</b>
% completed by local housing repairs team (3 working days)	100%	100%	<b>100%</b>



## Home and neighbourhoods

So that tenants can live in homes that are well managed and well maintained, we have been working to ensure that the neighbourhoods those homes are in are 'sustainable'.

That is to say that we need to help create communities that are stable and in which tenant turnovers figures are low. Helping to achieve this has involved us working to reduce the number of properties that remain empty for long periods and which often become a focus for vandalism and more serious anti-social behaviour. We set ourselves targets for reducing the numbers of vacant properties and have done this. The 'chart' (on the opposite page), shows you what the position is now. Keeping properties well-maintained impacts positively on tenants and aids letting, which cuts the number of void (or empty) properties.

And this has been and will continue to be one of our main priorities.

However, there are properties in certain areas which are not available for letting either because they require extensive work before we can let them, or because proposals are being drawn-up about their long-term future.

Working with tenants, tenant groups and other agencies in the city, we have been seeking to secure Government funding for special regeneration projects, which will see significant improvements to some neighbourhoods and the facilities available.

We are involved in several regeneration projects, one of which is the proposed £6 million redevelopment of the Guild and Pridmore estate in Foleshill.

We have consulted the tenants there about whether empty homes in the area should be demolished and replaced with new ones as part of the project. The four-year scheme is supported by

the Government's Single Regeneration Budget funding, and proposes rented and private accommodation being built, plus the creation of green spaces and community areas.

In a number of other areas, where there is clearly no demand for properties, we have, or will shortly be, consulting with tenants about whether they should be demolished, and applications have already been submitted seeking approval for demolition in some areas of the city, including Henley Green and Wood End.

We have also bid successfully for monies to develop a new approach to letting homes in the Hillfields area. The scheme is now nearly ready to start and will involve all the social landlords in the area advertising vacant homes in the area through a jointly established Home Choice Agency.

# Managing tenancies and estates

Part of creating sustainable communities involves Whitefriars making sure tenants are abiding by their tenancy agreements, while at the same time looking after and maintaining your estates.

Unfortunately, not only do some people break tenancy agreements, but they are responsible for the sort of anti-social behaviour that impacts on the lives of people living around them.

So Whitefriars has committed itself to tackling anti-social behaviour with all the means available to us, including anti-social behaviour orders. To help us in this our mediation service tries to sort things out before they get out of hand. And we have strong links with the Police and other agencies, who can help tackle some of these problems. To date 17 Anti social behaviour orders have been obtained.

As for estate management, we have reviewed the ways in which parts of our warden system operates, and this has led to more flexible working arrangements being agreed. In turn, this has meant that in certain areas wardens, now known in some areas as Estate Services Assistants, will be responsible for cleaning parts of estates that were not previously covered and providing more practical support to Estate Officers.

And where we have identified different approaches to tackling long-standing problems, we have sought to implement them. This has seen some long-neglected and overgrown spaces on estates being cleared by CovWise, a local organisation that provides people with opportunities to train and find long-term employment.

But we know that the key to managing and maintaining our estates is the reliability of core services like housing and estate management, repairs and maintenance, rent collection, regeneration work and the ongoing investment programme.

We recognise too that there are areas of service delivery where we can improve our performance. Where this has been identified we have prioritised which areas need to be tackled first and are working towards improvement. These areas include repairs and rent arrears collection.



## Empty Homes

Empty homes as at 31st March 2001

	Whitefriars North	Whitefriars South	Whitefriars Group
Number of empty homes available for letting (self-contained)	134	111	245
% of homes available for letting	1.38%	1.13%	1.25%
Number of empty homes not available for letting (self-contained)	835	403	1238
% of homes not available for letting	8.6%	4.1%	6.35%
Total number of empty homes	969	514	1483
% of empty homes	9.98%	5.23%	7.6%

## Relet times

Average relet times	4.8 weeks	3.6 weeks	4.2 weeks
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# Feedback and satisfaction

So that we know what you want us to do, we have to have your feedback. That is why Whitefriars commissioned an independent survey of tenants, the results of which will play a key part in shaping what we do next year and beyond.

We asked you about your homes, the areas you live in, your future housing plans, for your views on your day-to-day contact with Whitefriars, about your household and about the services we provide. We will be featuring the survey results in the next edition of Home.

But we have taken things a step further and have also begun a review of our tenant participation strategy, so that we are able to maximise the opportunities to involve tenants in all the issues that affect you, and so help our services meet your expectations. If you would like to get involved in this, telephone Lynn Hanson on 7676 7026.

Other feedback from tenants has revealed high levels of satisfaction with improvement work which we made a priority to start immediately after transfer. Our contractors Wates and Lovells have made a good start on bathrooms, kitchens and some environmental works. Here again feedback has been good overall despite some early issues in one or two areas.

You also said that the repairs service is a high priority area for continuous improvement. We will let you know how we are responding to that priority area in the next issue of Home, which will look in detail at the outcomes of the survey.

It is also very important that we get feedback from you on the repairs service, to help us monitor if the contractors are meeting their commitments. Please help us by filling in and returning the customer satisfaction forms.



# Working with Communities

One of the ways in which whitefriars can improve people's homes and build better communities is to work closely with communities.

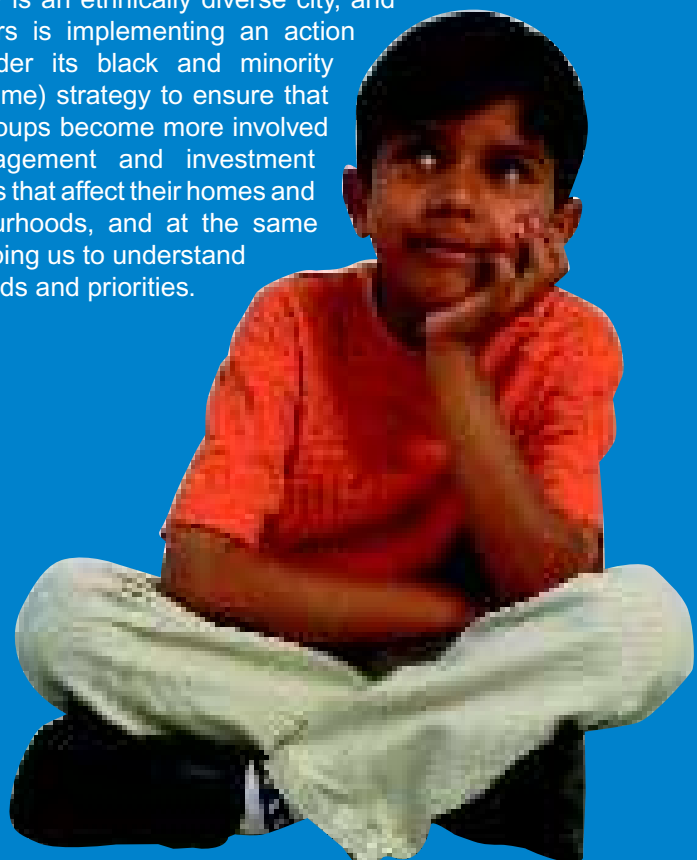
So we have become involved in, and have lent our expertise to, community projects and have donated funds to community groups.

Indeed, ten coventry community organisations - ranging from elderly persons clubs to youth groups and pre-school projects - all of which contribute to the quality of life of people living in whitefriars homes, have received grants.

Also during our first year we have encouraged the development of new tenant associations and have supported existing groups.

One of those groups is the hillfields 12 tenants association, comprising people living in the 12 blocks of flats in the city's hillfields area. together with watch, a local organisation, whitefriars worked with hillfields 12 residents to produce a report that looked in detail at their concerns and aspirations. the result is an action plan that aims to tackle the issues identified.

Coventry is an ethnically diverse city, and whitefriars is implementing an action plan under its black and minority ethnic (bme) strategy to ensure that those groups become more involved in management and investment decisions that affect their homes and neighbourhoods, and at the same time helping us to understand their needs and priorities.





# Phones red hot after Agency article



The response to last issue's article concerning the Mowlem Employment and Training Agency was remarkable, with dozens of calls within just a couple of days of it appearing.

The Agency is making sure everyone has the opportunity to benefit from the investment being made in your homes and communities.

Already more than 100 adults and 60 young people have been interviewed about going straight into work or joining training courses.

Mowlem Training's Nev Wells, who is responsible for the Agency, said: "As well as helping the contractors get the skills they need to carry out the improvement work, we want to help local people into jobs that they'll be in for a long time.

"We're off to a good start. The contractors, including those fitting new windows to tenants' homes, need people as soon as possible, and so we are busy with apprentice recruitment for Lovell, Wates, Anglian Windows and Graham Holmes Astraseal.

"The main skills they are looking for are tiling, carpentry and joinery, but we are also working to develop a new multi-skills qualification to equip people with more than one speciality."

The Agency has been instrumental in establishing a tiling course at Coventry Technical College. This has led in turn to 10 people having interviews for tiling jobs, with two now having been taken on by contractors as trainees with a view to full-time employment.

Other courses, including the multi-skills qualification, are being developed in association with the technical college for unemployed adults, and the contractors have agreed to offer employment opportunities to those completing the courses.

To find out more simply telephone the Construction Employment Unit on 024 7681 5240 stating that you have read this article and that you wish to register your interest in Whitefriars construction employment and training opportunities. You will then be contacted for an informal discussion about available vacancies, your work experience and any training needs.



## Tenancy agreements

The first phase of new agreements has now been sent out. If you have received one but have not yet had the chance to return it. Please do so as soon as possible.

## We've moved

The office move we told you about in Issue 3 of Home has now happened, and we are installed in our new home. Our new address is 9 Little Park Street, Coventry CV1 2UR, which is also the address for service of notices in England and Wales (including notice of legal proceedings) on us.

This is notice to you of our address as required by law (Section 48 (1) Landlord and Tenant Act 1987).

Please note that these offices do not have any public access, and that all personal enquiries should continue to be directed through your local offices.

## Want help with this magazine?

If you, or a friend, would like a copy of Home on audiotape or in a large print format, call Teresa Kimbrell on 02476 767029, and she'll make sure you receive a copy. We want all tenants to know what we are doing on your behalf.

## Tenant Board Members - any questions

Does your tenants group have any questions for Tenant Board Members about their role. If so let Lynn Hanson know by phoning 7676 7026. A number of these board members have said that they would be pleased to respond.

## Our website

If you have access to the Internet, you can keep up to date with what Whitefriars is doing at:

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

*If you have any comments please contact, Lynn Hanson at the following address:  
Home Magazine, Whitefriars Housing Group, Ground Floor, 9 Little Park Street, Coventry CV1 2UR*