Southwark & London Diocesan Housing and AmicusHorizon – looking ahead to a stronger future

Please read this newsletter as it has further information about the proposal for Southwark & London Diocesan (SLDHA) to merge with AmicusHorizon.

You may remember we told you in the January residents’ Newsletter that the Board of SLDHA chose AmicusHorizon as the organisation with whom to merge. We now want to tell you more about our plans. This newsletter answers some questions about how you would be affected, and seeks your views.

As you know Southwark & London Diocesan HA is an independent Housing Association, working across seven London Boroughs and stretching into Surrey. We want to protect and enhance the services we deliver as your landlord, as well as being able to continue to build and develop more affordable housing. To do this we are proposing to merge with AmicusHorizon, a well established and much larger affordable housing provider.

What are we proposing?
We are proposing to join forces with AmicusHorizon, a large, and successful housing association, operating across South London, Surrey, Kent and Sussex. SLDHA would be absorbed into AmicusHorizon as they are much the larger of the two organisations.

Why are we proposing a merger?
We believe a merger is the best way to protect and enhance the services we offer to our residents. The SLDHA tenants would see a number of benefits of being part of a larger, modern, well organised association which has its residents at the heart of decision making.
Why AmicusHorizon?
The Board of SLDHA chose AmicusHorizon following a careful selection process over several months, which considered a wide range of factors. At the heart of this was the quality of the services AmicusHorizon showed that they could deliver, their very real commitment to listening to and involving tenants in what they do, and that – despite the much greater size than SLDHA – they were committed to working closely together with us to make the transition work smoothly. The two organisations share a similar set of values, with a strong sense of social purpose.

There was also a logical, geographic fit between the areas where SLDHA has property and where AmicusHorizon operates. The exceptions to this are All Saints Court in Poplar, and Purkis Close in Hillingdon – but AmicusHorizon agreed they would organise their operations to be able to give a responsive landlord service to tenants of these schemes.

What are the benefits?
You would be part of a much larger organisation which offers numerous opportunities to its residents.

You would have the opportunity to get involved in their resident governance structure. You can choose to participate in their formal structures and of course you would receive training and support to make sure you can participate fully. You can also choose to be involved informally by getting involved in discussion forums or completing surveys. AmicusHorizon is committed to making sure residents voices are heard and listened to.

There would be greater opportunity to move home through mutual exchanges if you choose to do so. AmicusHorizon has more than 28,000 homes across London, Kent and Sussex.

You would be also be able to access many of the other services they offer including:

- debt and welfare advice from their financial inclusion team
- employment and training opportunities from their Community Development team
- support to set up a resident association from their Resident Involvement Team
- training to get online from their Digital Inclusion team.

and of course you would receive a customer service which has been recognised as one of the best and won many national awards.

Would I still be a SLDHA tenant?
No. SLDHA as an organisation will no longer exist. Your tenancy would legally be with AmicusHorizon but you would not need to change your tenancy agreement. The tenancy agreement that you have now would remain in place.
Would my tenancy or rights change?
No – your tenancy, security of tenure and all your other rights (such as the new right to buy being developed) won’t change as a result of SLDHA and AmicusHorizon merger.

Would my rents or service charges change?
Rents won’t be affected as a result of the merger. However, rents are reviewed each year, and change in line with regulations set by the government.

Service charges are reviewed each year and set in line with the expected costs at each scheme of delivering each service. The merger would help to achieve better value for money through purchasing on a bigger scale and more expertise in managing contracts, so over time we expect to be able to keep costs down, service charges lower than they would otherwise be, and to protect and enhance the quality of the services you receive.
Would I get the same services as before?
There would only be changes to the administration of services – for example how to report repairs, and how to apply for a move to a different property. However we believe that these changes would actually make things easier for you. We'll give more information about this in due course.

Would there still be an office at Trinity House?
No. We currently occupy space in the offices of the Diocese of Southwark. When the merger goes through, existing SLDHA staff would relocate to AmicusHorizon offices.

Would staff stay the same?
All permanent SLDHA staff are being offered new jobs in AmicusHorizon. These jobs would not necessarily be continuing to provide services directly to SLDHA tenants and schemes – but we would make sure you know how to contact the organisation when you have a need to do so, well before any of these changes happen.

Will you keep us informed of progress?
Yes. We'll keep tenants fully in the picture through specific communications such as this. We are also looking to invite all tenants to a consultation event near SLDHA’s offices, on Saturday 16th April. We will give you more information about this soon and hope you can come along.

How would you spend the money you save?
The money that the merger would save, would be used to keep costs down. In turn this would be used to help deliver more new affordable housing, and to ensure that you get the best value for the rent and service charges that you pay. AmicusHorizon estimate that they would be able to deliver an extra 25 much needed new homes purely as a result of the merger.

What happens next? And when?
The two organisations are currently carrying out a process of ‘due diligence’ on each other. This is really like ‘looking under the bonnet’ before you buy a used car. We do not expect any surprises to come to light, but it is important and necessary to do this properly. We’re also working through a range of practical, financial and legal issues. Following that, we currently expect to ask both boards to formally agree to go ahead, at their meetings in May. We will also engage the government regulator – the Homes & Communities Agency – about the merger and they will want to know that we have properly consulted with SLDHA tenants.

How can you get in touch?
If you want to know more or have any questions for us, please contact us in any of the ways shown below:

By email to Jonathan Card: jonathan.card@southwark.anglican.org
By phone to: 020 7089 1370
By post to: SLDHA, Trinity House, 4 Chapel Court, London SE1 1HW