

Great expectations in housing

Joan Allen has high expectations of housing in Coventry so she put herself forward to become a tenant board member for Whitefriars Housing Group.

Originally from Essex, Joan's family had instilled in her a sense of justice and fairness since she was a child. She has carried these values with her all her life, advocating for the needs of people who feel apprehensive when it comes to getting their voices heard by those that provide services.

When Joan moved to Coventry in 2001, she made her home in Willenhall. Joan wanted to bring her experience and ideas formed as a founder member of Broadwater Farm Tenants and Residents Association and so she joined her local association in Willenhall. Joan's commitment to the community was later recognised when she was elected as a tenant board member on Whitefriars housing association.

Joan doesn't just see her home as bricks and mortar; its also the parks, streets and people that surround her home. *'Some people want to take pride in the area that they live in, and need to know how to help themselves. There are things that everyone wants to change, but you've got to get up and do it – there's no point in moaning and doing nothing. Sometimes it's hard to take on the powers that be to make changes, but you've got to keep hammering away. The key is to do things as a community, to make our voices strong'.*



Joan Allen

Whitefriars Housing Group Ltd is a not-for-profit housing and regeneration organisation established in 2000 that owns and manages approximately 17,000 homes across Coventry.

The Group has committed £240 million to the repair and improvement of its housing stock, ensuring that the Government's Decent Homes Standard is met five years ahead of schedule.

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A Coventry Community Empowerment Briefing

Small things matter

Joan still thinks that it's the small things that matter. If you have lived in a place where you think you can't make a difference then perhaps you can by:

- Sharing - if you have a lot of plants in your garden share them with others - then the whole street will look good
- Creating awards that recognise people's work i.e. a good neighbour award
- Holding events like a summer fete - activities that bring people out of their homes. By having fun together we can also create understanding between people of different ages and backgrounds
- Setting up a mentoring project between younger and older people. Running a home when you have no experience is difficult; decorating, cooking and looking after a home needs experience and skills. The older people could show the young ones how to decorate; wallpapering is a tricky business!

Whitefriars Tenant Board Member

As well as her ideas, Joan believes her involvement as a tenant board member also enables her to share her experience and knowledge. She is listened to and her guidance has been sought when housing issues are highlighted. She can see the difference to the housing stock and environment.

'The culture of the meetings I attend is welcoming' she said; 'all of the Executive Management Team, particularly the chief executive, Howard Farrand, are down to earth and approachable' which enables everyone to feel equal and able to speak on the same level.

Joan states 'There are a number of different tenant involvement opportunities and meetings where the focus is all aspects of service delivery'. Joan added, 'if I am to criticise anything, I would have to say, when you are keen to be involved you like to attend a number of meetings to voice your views as a tenant. I think it would be good if Whitefriars were able to communicate between the different groups better, as the meetings sometimes clash. She commented, 'Those who are keen to get involved can feel so valued that they can burn themselves out as they try to participate in all the areas of tenant involvement'.

Conclusion

Joan now feels that Coventry is a good place to live with her family. People have a way to get their voices heard and actioned through an organisation, Whitefriars Housing Association, which is prepared to listen.

The views expressed in this article are those of the people interviewed, and not necessarily those of Coventry Community Empowerment Network