

Housing boss experiences life at sharp end

A housing association boss swapped his desk and swivel chair for life at the sharp end.

Andrew Bowden, the Chief Executive of Cartrefi Conwy, joined the building maintenance team, for a day.

The day was so successful that Mr Bowden is planning to make it an annual event.

He spent the morning helping to refurbish a newly vacated flat in Deganwy so that it was spic and span for the new tenant.

He then spent the afternoon helping another building maintenance team carrying out repairs.

It was a totally new experience for Mr Bowden who has spent all his working life in white collar jobs.

But it was, he felt, a valuable investment of his time so that he could find out exactly what it was like providing front line services.

The housing association came into being last year when it took over responsibility for 3,800 properties from Conwy County Borough Council.

The stock transfer followed a vote by tenants after it was explained that Cartrefi Conwy would be able to access funding for repairs and improvements that the local authority would not have been able to achieve.

The association has embarked on a massive £30 million improvement programme to bring all its 3,800 properties up to Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2012.

At the same time, Cartrefi Conwy is still carrying out the normal running repairs and ensuring that, when properties become vacant, the facilities are up to scratch.

During a tea break, Mr Bowden explained: "This was just something that I wanted to do and to experience what it's like actually working in properties and how the work is scheduled.

“It was an opportunity to listen to the guys about how we can actually manage their work schedule a bit more as well. I’m finding it really enjoyable.

“I’ve been putting legs on kitchen units, doors and drawers into kitchen units and I’ve been the tea boy.

“I do feel that it’s part of my job that I should be here experiencing front line services and see how they impact on our customers and how we can improve them.

“I think we can make some improvements around the work flow, getting the right skills to the property at the right time. We need to turn around any empty properties quickly.

“These are the kind of thoughts I’ll be taking back to the ranch to actually work with the managers and see how we can improve things.

“What the guys are saying is that every so often they’re pulled off to do an emergency repair and that can actually hold up this type of work.

“Importantly, someone is waiting for this accommodation and I want to get them in and give them the home they want as soon as possibly can.

“I have really enjoyed the experience and it is very hard work. It is nice to see how a new home is brought together by the improvements being installed, like new bathrooms and kitchens.

Joiner Nigel Fowler said: “The boss is trying hard, he’s getting hands on – he is very interested in what we’re doing and he is trying.

“We appreciate Andrew taking an interest in what we do and being here so that we can put what we think should be happening.

“Hopefully, he’s going to be taking things on board and trying to sort things out.”

“I hope he makes the grade by the end of the day because we don’t want any dead wood – there are no slackers on our team.”