



## **Retired vicar and union official work together for the tenants**

A retired vicar is tending to a new flock after accepting a leading role representing the tenants of a housing association.

Having had one major change of career the Rev Mair Jones is clearly not afraid of new challenges, but she didn't expect to take on another important position in her retirement.

Now she has immersed herself in the task of representing nearly 3,800 tenants of the recently-formed Cartrefi Conwy.

The former Church in Wales vicar has been elected chair of the organisation's Tenants' Forum.

The vice chairman is a former union official who has never been afraid of speaking up for people's rights.

Brian Leggett, 65, has lived on Llanfairfechan's Pendalar estate for 40 years.

Born in Liverpool, he moved to North Wales at the age of 10 and for several years worked as an electrician for British Rail, based in Llandudno Junction. In 1970 he joined the NHS, working at Bryn y Neuadd Hospital, Llanfairfechan, and remained there until his retirement two years.

Cartrefi Conwy was formed last year after taking over the running of Conwy County Borough Council's housing stock.

The stock transfer happened after a majority of the council's tenants voted in favour of the move in a ballot.

One of the major benefits is that Cartrefi Conwy will be eligible to receive additional funding so that a higher level of repairs and improvements can be carried out.

Miss Jones, a native of Treuddyn in Flintshire, was a teacher for 30 years, the last 10 of which saw her working as a peripatetic special needs teacher in the Vale of Clwyd.

She retired from teaching in 1991 to train for two years at St Michael's College, Llandaff, for a new career in the Church.

On qualifying, she began her new life as a curate in Llangollen before moving to Llandrillo, near Corwen, and then to be Rector of Llanelian, Betws-yn-Rhos and Trofarth. After a reorganization the parish of Bryn-y-Maen then came under her wing.

Never having owned her own property, she put her name on the council's housing list when she moved into Conwy in 2001, and following her retirement in March, 2008, she was allocated a bungalow on the Fron Estate in Colwyn Bay.

"I moved in in April and was asked to join the Tenants' Forum. I thought it would be something to do but didn't realize what was involved, and now I appreciate how much work there is to be done," she said.

The Forum is the platform for tenants to make their views known to Cartrefi Conwy's management and to voice their concerns about the standard of the housing stock.

Just before Christmas the Forum established six working groups to concentrate on various aspects including repairs, housing management and communications, and there is also a Forum management committee, with Miss Jones at the helm.

"One of first things we have been asked to look at is the warden service in sheltered accommodation with a view to getting some uniformity in service standards throughout the county," she said.

She is very keen that all tenants participate in the work of the Forum and make their views known to ensure that standards are not only maintained but improved, and that tenants' rights are protected.

"As a Forum we want to assist in the setting up of tenants' and residents' associations, which would include those who have bought their houses from Cartrefi Conwy or previously from the local authority," she said.

"No doubt that some people were unsure about the transfer of the housing stock but I think the proof of the pudding will be seen in the new financial year after April 1 when money should become available for improvement schemes to be carried out."

Though her work as chair is keeping her busy Miss Jones still has authority from the Bishop to officiate, but is undertaking little church work at the moment.

In 2004 she was accepted into the Gorsedd of Bards at the National Eisteddfod in Newport, her bardic name being "Elian Fair" after the village of Llanelian.

Throughout his working life Mr Leggett was an active trade union member and served as chairman of the joint staff consultative committee at Bryn y

Neuadd Hospital, a role which he feels will serve him in good stead as vice-chairman of the Forum.

He was also active in establishing a tenants' association on the Pendalar estate some years ago.

"Whilst I feel I have a considerable amount of relevant experience the next 12 months is going to be a steep learning curve with the Forum," he said.

Mr Leggett concedes that he has little knowledge of the sheltered housing sector and disabled requirements he hopes that his experience will complement the skills of his chairman.

He also admits that when the idea of transferring responsibility for housing from the council was mooted he had grave reservations, but he now feels that it is the right way to progress.

"The Board has a duty to be cost-effective but it is vital that the tenants are treated fairly, and that is what I shall try to ensure," he said.

"It is the duty of the Forum to make sure that the work carried out to properties is up to standard. I shall speak my mind and make sure the Board knows what the tenants need."

Mr Leggett has firm ideas on matters such as the occupancy of "void", or empty properties, and the way repairs and maintenance can be carried out in the most effective and efficient manner, and he will not hesitate to make his views known.

He is also keen to see more young people with young families becoming involved in the work of the Forum, which currently meets every six weeks.

"We could do with their input to help ensure that we act in everyone's interests," he added.