

Winter 2012



Spirit of the Community Award winners are announced

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scrutiny panel
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Get your gas bill
paid for a year
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Key Contacts

Customer Services Centre
01670 542424

For information on Dog Wardens call
0845 6006400

Northumbria Police

Blyth Neighbourhood Inspector;
Trevor Oakley

03456 043 043 or

blyth.npt@northumbria.pnn.police.uk

Cramlington Neighbourhood Inspector;
Dave Fitzgerald

03456 043 043 or

cramlington.npt@northumbria.pnn.police.uk

Alnwick Neighbourhood Inspector;
Sue Peart

03456 043 043 or

alnwick.npt@northumbria.pnn.police.uk

Northumberland Citizens Advice Bureau
0844 4111309

This information is also available in Braille and audio. Magnifying sheets are available on request. If you would like to receive Your News in another format or language, please contact **Melanie Armstrong at melanie.armstrong@hfn.uk.com or telephone 01670 542424.**

Arabic يمكننا تقديم هذه المعلومات بتنسيقات ولغات أخرى. إذا كنت ترغب في الحصول على هذه المعلومات بتنسيق أو لغة أخرى، يرجى الاتصال بمكتبنا

Bengali আমরা এই খবর বিকল্প ফর্ম্যাট ও ভাষায় প্রদান করতে গিয়েছি। আপনি যদি এই খবর বিকল্প ফর্ম্যাট বা ভাষায় পেতে চান, আমাদের ফোন করে আমাদের হে ফোনো একটি ইমেল মেসেজ寄る।

Chinese (simplified) 我们可以提供此资料的其它格式和语言版本。如果您希望获取其它格式或语言版本，请与我们的任一办事处联系。

Chinese (traditional) 我們備有此資料的其它格式和語言版本。若您需要其它格式或語言版本，請聯絡我們的辦事處。

Hindi हम यह जानकारी वैकल्पिक फॉर्मेटों और भाषाओं में मुहैया करा सकते हैं। अगर आप अन्य फॉर्मेट या भाषा में जानकारी चाहते हैं तो कृपया हमारे कार्यालयों में से किसी एक में संपर्क करें

Polish Możemy udostępnić Państwu te informacje na różnych nośnikach i w różnych językach. Gdyby chcieli Państwo otrzymać informacje na innym nośniku lub w innym języku prosimy skontaktować się z jednym z naszych biur.

Portuguese Podemos disponibilizar esta informação em formatos e línguas alternativas. Se gostasse de receber informação noutra formato ou língua, por favor contacte um dos nossos escritórios

Punjabi ਅਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਬਦਲਦੇ ਢਾਂਚਿਆਂ ਅਤੇ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਪ੍ਰਦਾਨ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਾਂ। ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਢਾਂਚੇ ਜਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਕਰੋਗੇ, ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਡੇ ਦਫਤਰਾਂ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਇੱਕ ਨੂੰ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ

Slovak Môžeme poskytnúť tieto informácie v ďalších formátoch a jazykoch. Ak budete chcieť informácie v iných formátoch a jazykoch, prosím, kontaktujte jednu z našich kancelárií.

Turkish Bu bilgileri başka formatlarda ve dillerde sağlayabilmekteyiz. Bilgileri başka bir formatta veya dilde almak isterseniz, lütfen ofislerimizden biriyile irtibat kurunuz.

Urdu ہم یہ معلومات متبادل شکلوں اور زبانوں میں فراہم کر سکتے ہیں۔ اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی دیگر شکل یا زبان میں مطلوب ہو تو براہ کرم ہمارے کسی دفتر سے رابطہ کریں

If you have any comments or suggestions for Your News, please contact **Melanie Armstrong, Communications, Homes for Northumberland, Civic Centre, Renwick Road, Blyth, Northumberland NE24 2BX or call 01670 542424.**

Welcome to the Winter edition of Your News

I know that I will be a new face to many of you reading this, so I would like to begin by introducing myself – I am Kevin Lowry and have been seconded to Homes for Northumberland as the Interim Managing Director.

You may recall that Northumberland County Council sent a letter to all tenants at the end of December to tell you all about their decision to address some performance and management issues over the coming months at Homes for Northumberland. As part of this process, Northumberland County Council has made some changes to the Board and has also identified certain areas they want the housing company to improve, under its contract with the Council.

My role in the coming weeks and months is to therefore work closely with the Board and tenants to develop an improvement plan for the company.

To tell you all a little about myself, I have worked in social housing my entire working life and I have a very simple philosophy. In reviewing services or homes I ask myself three simple questions: Would I live here or be happy with this service? Would I be happy for my pensioner parents to experience this? Would I be happy for my 24 year old

daughter to have these facilities? If the answer is no, then why would we expect our tenants to? I see the coming months as a real opportunity for Homes for Northumberland to be the best it possibly can be for you: the tenants who we all work hard to support.

To help us make sure that the improvement plan is what tenants want, we want to hear from you about how we can improve or develop our service. The Council and Homes for Northumberland will therefore be running some events to allow tenants and leaseholders to help us identify these areas.

We want tenants to be in the driving seat and really have a say about the future development of Homes for Northumberland. Feel free to give us a call or speak directly with your Housing Officer if you have any suggestions for improvement. This is a real opportunity for you to make a difference.

Best Wishes,
Kevin Lowry – Interim Managing Director

The logo for Homes for Northumberland features a stylized green bar chart above the word "Homes" in a large, blue, serif font. Below "Homes" is the text "FOR NORTHUMBERLAND" in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font.

Homes
FOR NORTHUMBERLAND

Working in partnership with Northumberland County Council.



Providing Excellent Services

Blyth Area Board Update

The Blyth Area Board met in December to review numerous reports.

The Board agreed a number of improvements to our gas servicing procedure and also endorsed the recent review of repairs ordering.

They also heard about the achievements of the Resident Involvement Team, including the Breath of Fresh Air event at Amble, and considered performance in Blyth, particularly in relation to rent arrears.

A report was reviewed on how the Council's Customer Services Team had performed on services provided to tenants. The Board are keen to know more about this and will be inviting the manager of the service to the next Board meeting.

The Board also noted a report of the work of the Safer Neighbourhoods Unit and praised the staff for their achievements.

Alnwick Area Board Update

The Alnwick Area Board heard about the achievements of the Resident Involvement Team, including the Breath of Fresh Air event at Amble, and considered performance in Alnwick, particularly in relation to rent arrears.

Thanks were given to those tenants who carried out a mystery shop on our Customer Services Centre and those who had taken part in our Service Panels.

A report was reviewed on how the Council's Customer Services Team had performed on services provided to tenants. The Board agreed a number of improvements to our gas servicing procedure and also endorsed the recent review of repairs ordering.

They also noted the work that had been done to secure Government funding to invest in air source heat pumps at Longframlington.



You said you would like more information on ways to get involved in your local area as well as fencing at the Windmill Flats.

Fencing has been erected and a notice board with local information put up.

You said during the health walks that you would like a Breath of Fresh Air health day at Amble.

An event was organised.

You said you would like a security code on the door entry at Dolphin Court, Amble.

Tenants all now have a key and the entrance is secure.

Homes for Northumberland on HouseMark

HouseMark is a national body that evaluates our performance. We have included below two diagrams to illustrate how we are doing on Housemark, in comparison to our peers.



The diagram to the left shows how we are performing in comparison to other housing providers of a similar size and geographical make up as Homes for Northumberland.



The diagram to the left shows how Homes for Northumberland is performing in comparison to other housing providers in the North East area.

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| ① Responsive repairs and void works | ⑤ Tenancy agreement |
| ② Rent arrears and collections | ⑥ Resident involvement |
| ③ Major works and cyclical maintenance | ⑦ Estate services |
| ④ Lettings | |

We want to hear your feedback

We try our best to make sure nothing goes wrong, but we want to hear from you if it does. If you are unhappy with the service you have received from us, please get in touch on 01670 542424.

Your complaint will help us put things right and improve our service to you and to others in the future. We are always open to new ideas, so if you have a suggestion on how we can improve our services then please tell us.

Here is a breakdown of the complaints we received recently:

Number of complaints received	23
Number of leaseholder complaints received	0
Number of repairs complaints received	16
Average time to respond to complaints (days)	30.4 days
Percentage of complaints found in favour of the complainant	51.5%
Number of compliments received	6



Providing Excellent Services

Our Performance

As part of our commitment to keep you up to date with how Homes for Northumberland is doing, we will now be reporting our performance to you in every edition of Your News. Here we take a look at what was achieved in certain areas for quarter 3 (October to December) of the financial year April 2011 – March 2012. All of the areas below were highlighted by the Your News editorial panel as important to Council tenants. Tenants on the editorial panel also requested that we report quarterly performance in each edition of Your News. For more detailed information on our performance, please visit our website at www.hfn.uk.com

If you have any comments or questions about our performance, please contact us on 01670 542424

Property Services

Percentage of gas servicing completed

Target 100%



Higher is better. Last quarter we were slightly below our target of 100%, however we did increase our performance each month of the quarter. We are looking at ways to continue this improvement by promoting the importance of gas servicing in this edition of Your News.

Property Services

Percentage of repairs appointments kept

Target 97%



Higher is better. In quarter 3 we were successfully above our target of 97% in November and December, however in October we were slightly below our target.

Property Services

Average number of days to complete void repairs

Target 13 days



Lower is better. Void repairs are repairs made to empty properties when a tenant moves out. The last quarter was mixed. We completed void repairs in less than the average number of days in both October and December. However, in November the average number of days was above our target.

Customer Contact Centre

Percentage of calls answered at first point of contact

Target 80%



Higher is better. Calls answered at the first point of contact are those resolved by speaking directly with a Customer Services Officer.

We exceeded the nationally recognised target of 80% in December.

Providing Excellent Services

Neighbourhood Services
Average number of days to relet housing

Target 23 days



October 2011



November 2011



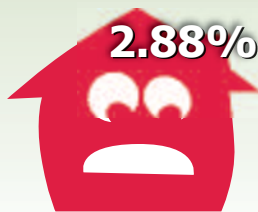
December 2011

Lower is better. This is the number of days we take to make an empty property suitable for the next tenant and get the new people moved in.

In quarter 3, we were successfully below our target.

Neighbourhood Services
Percentage of tenants involved

Target 3.5%



October - December 2011

Higher is better. We were below our target last quarter. We are looking at a number of new ways to get you more involved – a number of these are promoted in this edition of Your News, including Test the Service and the Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

Neighbourhood Services
Percentage of anti social behaviour cases handled on time

Target 100%



October 2011



November 2011



December 2011

Higher is better. In quarter 3 we attended all cases of anti social behaviour on time.

Neighbourhood Services
Percentage of new tenant visits completed within target

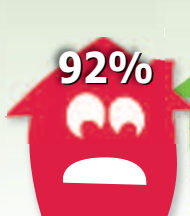
Target 100%



October 2011
Blyth Valley



October 2011
Alnwick



November 2011
Blyth Valley



November 2011
Alnwick



December 2011
Blyth Valley



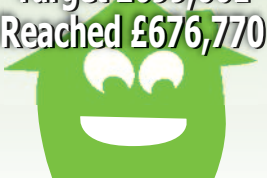
December 2011
Alnwick

Higher is better. Our Housing Officers visit every new tenant within a target time.

Last quarter, with the exception of Blyth in November, we hit our target

Neighbourhood Services
Current rent arrears

Target £699,001
Reached £676,770



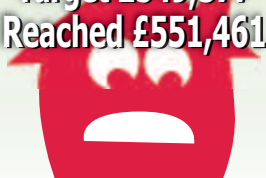
October 2011

Target £687,237
Reached £674,904



November 2011

Target £549,377
Reached £551,461



December 2011

Lower is better. Rent arrears occur when tenants don't pay all or some of the rent they owe their landlord. We aim to keep rent arrears as low as possible.

Providing Excellent Services

A day in the life of a Housing Officer

Take a look behind the scenes at Homes for Northumberland with our review of a typical day in the life of Housing Officer, Debbie Waite.

8.30am: Debbie arrives at the office to check her emails, confirm her diary appointments and go over the details of the day. Her patch covers Cramlington, including East Hartford, Collingwood Grange, Allensgreen, Allerhope and Mayfield Glade.

10am: The day's first appointment is with a prospective new tenant to show them around a property in East Hartford. In this meeting, Debbie discusses repairs and expected completion dates. Debbie meets with all new tenants in her area and this appointment is an opportunity for tenants to ask any questions. This time, she deals with queries around rent, paint packs and local bus routes.

11.30am: Afterwards, Debbie then heads across to Mayfield Glade to attend an estate walkabout, alongside tenants, Northumberland County Council's Street Scene, Northumbria Police and staff from our Safer Neighbourhoods Team and Resident Involvement Team. Maintaining the standard of our estates is really important to us, so this is a real opportunity for the team to pick up on any maintenance issues that may affect the environment of a local area, ranging from rubbish in gardens to car parking.

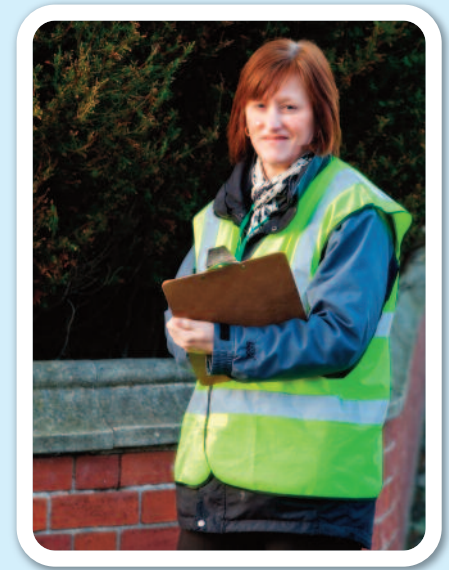
12:30pm: After the walkabout, Debbie heads back to the office for lunch.

1.30pm: A sign up meeting is the next appointment of the day. Once a tenant has accepted a property, their Housing Officer will meet with them to give them their keys and talk through the tenancy agreement. In this meeting Debbie answers questions from the tenants around gas suppliers, how to report a repair, furniture packs and reporting anti social behaviour.

3pm: Debbie returns to her desk to write up a report on the estate inspection carried out earlier in the day and to review the actions that must be completed as a result.

She then returns a number of calls – including phoning a tenant who has made a complaint about a neighbour playing loud music.

The day usually ends at 5pm, once she has completed any paperwork and planned ahead for the next day.



Every tenant living in a Northumberland County Council property has a named Housing Officer responsible for their estate. Your Housing Officer is there to offer face to face contact with Homes for Northumberland and is ready to take your query on any issue, offering advice and support from someone you can trust and providing a visible presence on your estate. For more information, please call 01670542424.

Tenants test our service

Test the Service is a brand new way for you to get involved and feedback your thoughts to us.

Getting involved is quick, easy and convenient. Simply contact our Resident Involvement Team who will add you onto our Test the Service database.

Once you have shown your interest, we will be in touch via email when we need to conduct a survey. All you need to do is complete the questionnaire and email it back to us.

We have already conducted two really successful Test the Service exercises.

The first involved 19 tenants who answered questions about some recent repairs – this included the quality of the work and customer satisfaction.

29 people also recently took part in a survey to help us improve our website.

Join in and have your say – contact our **Resident Involvement Team on 01670 542424** or at **info@hfn.uk.com** to be added onto our database and become part of the Test the Service community.

Tenant scrutiny

Your opportunity to drive change

We are looking to recruit volunteers to sit on our brand new Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

This is your opportunity to sit in the driving seat at Homes for Northumberland. It allows you to hold us to account for all of our services, from how we carry out a repair to the ways we reply to your queries.

The panel opens up our doors—putting tenants at the heart of everything we do.

We will be working with TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service), a national expert in this kind of work, to form the Scrutiny Panel. TPAS will work hand in hand with tenants to set up the panel. Training will be provided to all members.

If you are interested please contact Dawn Wright, Resident Involvement Team on 01670 542424



What would YOU do on the panel?

- Give your view of the services you get from us
- Tell us what's good and what needs to change
- Work with other tenants

The next meetings will take place on:

- 23rd February, Blyth Civic Centre
- 15th March, Blyth Civic Centre

Improving Quality of Life



Samina Karim - your contact for Furniture Packages



Furniture Packages

If you need help to set up your home, we can provide furniture packages which include beds, sofas, cookers and washing machines. There is a weekly charge for the furniture, which we add to your rent. If you get housing benefit, it may meet the cost for you.

How do I request a furniture package?

Your Housing Officer will give you information on furniture packages at the time you view your new home. If you would like to speak to your Housing Officer for further information, please call **01670 542424**.

Can existing tenants obtain a furniture package? No, the scheme is only open to new tenants – unless there are emergency circumstances such as a flood or fire.

Can I choose the furniture I want? Yes, you select items from a range of furnishings, ranging from beds and cots, to sofas and wardrobes, as well as white goods such as cookers and washing machines. Items such as TV's, music players and carpets are not available as part of the packs.

How much does it cost? The amount paid depends upon the furniture you select. We will show you what furniture is available and explain the costs. The charge for the smallest package is currently £10.02 and the largest is £42.82 per week.

Do I have to arrange to collect the furniture? No, the package will be delivered to your home at a pre arranged time. You will be asked to sign a delivery note to confirm delivery and that nothing has been damaged. The delivery drivers will assemble any items as required and move them into the room of your choice.

Do I own the package after a period of paying for it? No, the package remains the property of the Newcastle Furniture Service for the full length of the time you have it.

What if something breaks? Contact **Homes for Northumberland on 01670 542424** if you have any problems with the furniture you have been given. We will arrange for someone to repair or replace the item. If it is found that something has been wilfully damaged, the item will be removed, not replaced, and you will be charged for the damage.

How do I return items I no longer need? Contact Homes for Northumberland where an appointment for collection will be made. Drivers will ask for a signature to confirm collection. You should ensure that any items for collection which are broken or no longer needed are kept inside your home until the collection date. We encourage tenants to buy things of their own, to replace items from the furniture pack as their tenancy progresses – this enables the cost of the package to be reduced should you be already in, or gain employment.

For more information on furniture packages, please call **01670 542424** and speak with Samina Karim.

Walk the walk

Come along to our free, health walks to meet new people, learn about your local area and chat to our Resident Involvement Team.

These leisurely walks are led by Homes for Northumberland staff and are ideal for those looking to start a gentle exercise programme. Each stroll lasts around one hour and is at an easy pace.

Walking is a great way to exercise while enjoying some fresh air. Our upcoming walks are planned for the following dates:

- **10.00am every Tuesday, in Amble, meeting at Kennedy Road Community Room**
- **10.00am every Wednesday, in Alnwick, meeting at the Council Chambers on Clayport Street**
- **10.30am every Tuesday from 28 February, meeting at Blyth Civic Centre**
(Health trainers will be available on this walk.)



- **10.30am every Monday from 5 March, meeting at Astley Pavillion**
(Health trainers will be available on this walk.)

Our Walk Your Way to Health programme is led by Homes for Northumberland in association with the Department of Health and Natural England.

Please contact our **Resident Involvement Team on 01670 542424** if you would like to take part in a health walk in your local area.

Amble gets a breath of fresh air

Over two hundred Amble residents enjoyed our latest Breath of Fresh Air event.

This free health event was organised to help tenants learn all about healthier living, with health checks, sports taster sessions and healthy food demonstrations.

Visitors also had the opportunity to take part in a lantern making workshop run by Take Action Positive Steps – all of these lanterns were used in Amble Winter Festival and Lantern Parade.

Margaret Hedley, who lives on St Lawrence Avenue, in Amble, said: “I thought Homes for Northumberland put on a very, very good

event with something for everyone.”

Vera Hastings, who lives on Kennedy Road, added: “We took our five year old great granddaughter, Jessica, to the event and she really enjoyed herself. She tried the pumpkin soup and had her face painted. I thought the organisers did a really good job, all the kids seemed to be having a good time and there was something for adults too.”

Partners working alongside Homes for Northumberland to make the event possible,



included Northumberland County Council, North Country Leisure, Amble and Coquet Children’s Centres (Action for Children), Real Food Works, Northumberland Care Trust, Sustrans, Take Action Positive Steps, RNLI Amble and Northumbria Police.

Celebrating Community Spirit

Outstanding tenants and community groups were honoured at our first Spirit of the Community Awards event.

Homes for Northumberland invited customers to nominate neighbours, friends and groups whose endeavours have made a real difference to them or the wider community. The winners were selected by a panel of tenants and presented with awards at a special celebration event.

The Spirit of the Community Awards set out to find the people who have helped their fellow residents enjoy life more or who have made a difference to others. The awards ceremony recognised the achievements of the many unsung heroes among tenants across Northumberland who give up their own time to help people. Well done to all of our winners!



Overall Spirit of the Community Award Blyth and District Gateway Club

Blyth and District Gateway Club is a leisure club for adults with learning disabilities. Volunteers organise days out, party nights, fairs and coffee evenings and are always available to talk to their members. The judges were really impressed with the difference they made in the lives of our tenants.

Nominated by tenants Paul and Jane Mackay for their fantastic work in the local community.



Young Person of the Year Award Ryan Dixon (Overall Winner)



Ryan spent much of his summer holidays and spare time making cards, collecting prizes and running raffles for a number of good causes - including the RVI Special Care Unit. The judges were impressed with how much good work Ryan has done for charity at such a young age.

Good Neighbour Award Barbara Thomas (Highly Commended)

Despite receiving two knee replacements, Barbara helps all her neighbours by clearing their paths and also cutting the grass for older people in her street.



**Good Neighbour Award
William Gaunt (Highly Commended)**

William was nominated by his neighbour to say thank you for his help in managing her front and back gardens over the last two years, as she has been unable to manage.



**Good Neighbour Award
Mavis and Kenneth Powell (Overall Winners)**

The judges were really impressed with this outstanding entry as it really showed how these neighbours had gone out of their way. Mr and Mrs Powell have supported their neighbour – helping with day to day repairs including plugs, lights and a pond – and they are always at the end of the phone. They are described by their neighbour as being “Simply the best”



**Getting Involved Award
Tony Milburn (Second Place)**

Tony was commended by judges for his participation in meetings - as he is always reliable and hardworking.



**Getting Involved Award
Margaret Hedley (First Place)**

Margaret is involved in a variety of our service panels, including mystery shopping, and plays an active role in her local tenants association where her opinion and local knowledge is much valued. She participates in our walking for health group and was actively involved in organising our last Breath of Fresh Air event in Amble. As well as this, Margaret dedicates a lot of her time to her local community – including caring for a neighbour, being a prison visitor and helping in a charity shop.

Margaret was nominated by fellow tenant Vera Hastings.



Improving Quality of Life

Best Community Group Isabella Centre (Joint First Place)

The centre was nominated by tenant, June Wood, who moved into the area from Durham and wanted to meet new people – she says she was made to feel very welcome to the local area at the Isabella Centre. There is something for everyone – from the nursery and credit union to age concern and zumba classes.



Best Community Group Children and Families First (Joint First Place)

A non-profit organisation which is run by a group of volunteer parents and carers, they fundraise and enter grant applications to offer opportunities for local families.

The judges were very impressed with the difference this group made to the local community – there was a variety of activities available for local families and it is great to see 75 families see the benefits of the group.

They were nominated by one of our tenants, Ailsa Dellbridge.



Garden of the Year Award John Angus (Overall Winner)

The judging panel was extremely impressed by the winning entry – they said the garden looked beautiful and would be a pleasure to sit in.



A special thank you to the Spirit of the Community Awards judges: tenants Carol Graham, Allen Nevin, Pauline Baird and Kathleen Morgan

Nominations for next year's Spirit of the Community Awards are now open. For an application pack, please call 01670 542424 and ask to speak with Communications.

Home improvements make a difference

Our capital works projects across Blyth and Alnwick have improved 1066 homes in just 12 months.

In 2011:

- 235** homes were modernised with new kitchens, bathrooms and electrical rewiring
- 283** properties are warmer and more energy efficient with central heating upgrades
- 122** homes are better equipped against bad weather with a new roof
- 426** properties are more secure with replacement windows and doors

One of the highlights of the year was the extension of four bungalows on Barnes Road in Felton from one bedroom to two bedroom homes.

This work has given tenants a spacious additional bedroom, which has been designed to blend in with their existing building, for family or carers who need to stay over night. They have also benefited from a replacement roof, new windows and have had patio doors installed leading out into their garden.

Other capital schemes last year ranged from new roofs for tenants living on Dodds Lane in Alnwick to new kitchens and bathrooms fitted on the Poets Estate in Blyth.

Tenants who are scheduled for work in the coming year will receive a letter to notify them of the details. If you have any queries about any improvements planned in your home, please contact us on **01670 542424**.

**Vera Birkley,
tenant at Barns Road, said:**

"I am over the moon with the work that has been completed on my home as it really makes a difference in my life. The extra bedroom means that I can have family stay over and is also a nice place for me to sit during the day."

"I am also really pleased with my new patio doors as they allow me to walk straight out into the garden in the summer – a ramp has also been built so I don't have any problems at all walking outside to enjoy the sunshine."



Providing Excellent Services

Help us to keep you safe

Homes for Northumberland carries out annual safety checks on the gas appliances installed in your home to make sure they are working safely and correctly.

Annual gas servicing helps to keep your heating and hot water working properly. It also keeps you safe in your home by giving you the peace of mind that your gas appliances are not emitting the poisonous gas Carbon Monoxide.

Our annual check will only take around one hour (depending on the number of appliances). We will send you an appointment date for about six weeks prior to the anniversary date of the last safety check.

You are putting yourself and your family at risk from carbon monoxide poisoning or potential explosions if you do not let us carry out this gas safety check. We can take court action to legally force entry into your home if you do not allow us to carry out this inspection. If this happens you will be responsible for the costs of doing so.

Keep yourself and your family safe - please let us in to carry out this important safety check.

If you have any queries about your next gas safety check, please give us a call on **01670 542424**.

WIN - YOUR GAS BILL PAID FOR A WHOLE YEAR

Tenants who allow us access into their home at the first appointment to carry out a gas service will be entered into a free prize draw



Blyth residents cook up healthier meals

Tenants at Nye Bevan House in Blyth have been learning how to make quick, easy and healthy meals.

A project led by Homes for Northumberland and Real Food Works gave residents the opportunity to learn how to make tasty, healthy recipes using store cupboard ingredients and their microwave.

Real Food Works offer workshops in the local community to demonstrate that eating well does not have to be expensive, complicated or time consuming. Tenants at Nye Bevan House took part in five cooking sessions and have made a range of meals, ranging from salmon with vegetables, cheese and leek bread pudding, smoked mackerel risotto and cheese cake.

They also learnt about food hygiene in the kitchen as part of these sessions. Those taking part are now making well balanced nutritional meals for both themselves and their families.

These sessions have been so successful we are looking to roll this out to other sheltered housing schemes. For more information, please speak with our resident involvement team.



Irene Morgan from Nye Bevan House gets involved in some cooking

Leaseholder Matters

Homes for Northumberland manages around 250 leasehold properties, where residents have bought the long lease of their home in a Council owned building.

Involvement to suit you

Our residents are of primary importance to us and we welcome the feedback and views of leaseholders so that we can involve you in the running of the organisation.

We work with local people in a number of ways that are designed to suit your needs and circumstances. This allows us to listen to what you want and helps us to make things happen.

There are many ways to get involved, including

- **Scrutiny Panel:** Work with a group of tenants/leaseholders to carry out tenant inspections to assess and feedback on our services.
- **Service Panel:** There are four service panels. Leaseholders can choose to sit on any two of the following four panels; Neighbourhood and Community, Home, Tenant Empowerment and Value for Money.
- **Mystery Shopping:** Work with us to agree questionnaires and surveys which will be used to test our services to ensure they are being delivered efficiently and in line with our service standards.
- **Health Walks:** To promote health and wellbeing, increase social interaction, access to housing staff and reduce social isolation.
- **Editorial Panel:** Work with a group of tenants/ leaseholders to agree the content of Your News.



If anyone would like to be involved or would like more information, please contact our Resident Involvement Team on **01670 542512** or by emailing residentparticipation@hfn.uk.com. You can also visit our website at www.hfn.uk.com for further details.

Stay safe - Don't forget your gas service

We would urge all of our leaseholders to get an annual safety check on the gas appliances in their home. Homes for Northumberland can provide you with a gas inspection service – please call our Customer Services Centre on **01670 542424** for a quote.

Providing Excellent Services

CUSEN now open in Cramlington

Credit Union for South East Northumberland (CUSEN) is now open every Wednesday with the support of Cramlington Town Council and based in the Town Council Office in Concordia.

CUSEN offers affordable loans and safe local savings to all residents of Northumberland. You now have a real alternative to doorstep lenders and high cost hire purchase stores. The repayment table below shows how much money you can save!

	Loan Amount	Typical APR	Term of Loan Number of weeks	Weekly Repayment amount	Total Repayable	Total interest payable
Illegal lender (Loan Shark)	£300	1,000%	52	£57.50	£2,990.00	£2,690.00
Shop-a-Check	£300	399.7%	32	£15.00	£480.00	£180.00
Provident	£300	272.2%	52	£10.50	£546.00	£246.00
Credit Union (New Member Loans)	£300	26.8%	26 52	£12.28 £6.51	£319.04 £338.08	£19.04 £38.08
Credit Union (regular Saver Loans)*	£300	12.7%	26 52	£11.91 £6.13	£309.43 £318.70	£9.43 £18.70

*Regular Saver loans are available after a saver has developed a consistent pattern of saving over 8 weeks. Information correct as at 14.11.2011 regarding interest rates taken from Provident and Shop-a-Check web pages and quoted as typical APR on loans of £300.

Call in to meet the Cramlington Team every Wednesday 10am till 4pm or call **01670 797283**. The Credit Union offers free membership to all Homes for Northumberland tenants.

CREDIT UNION
SAVE IT BORROW IT BUDGET FOR IT

Get advice on your benefits

If you would like to speak with someone about your benefits, you can contact any of the following for support:

Homes for Northumberland – Money Advisor

We have a Money Advisor who can meet with you to ensure you are claiming all of the benefits you are entitled to. For further information, speak with your Housing Officer on **01670 542424**.

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

CAB can provide independent advice on many issues, including benefits. You can contact Northumberland Citizens Advice Bureau by calling **0844 4111309** or visit **www.citizensadvice.org.uk**.

Age UK Northumberland Advice Line

Call **08450 950150** between Monday and Thursday (10am – 1pm) for free, confidential and impartial advice for over 50s, their families and carers. This includes advice on welfare benefits, community and residential care, care plans and personalisation, housing, home adaptations, disability issues, money advice, local leisure and health.

Christians Against Poverty

If you are struggling with debt and feel there is no way out, then call Christians Against Poverty (CAP). CAP is a national, free debt counselling charity. All you have to do is pick up the phone and call **0800 328 0006**.

Seaton Delaval's Oldest Resident

Great grandmother Charlotte Smith, known as Lottie, is Seaton Delaval's oldest resident.

Lottie was born on 25th of October 1908 in a single room in a building that was then known as the Black Bull in Old Hartley.

She started school at what was known as Seaton Sluice School - today this is Seaton Sluice Community Centre. She started school at five years old and it ended when she was fourteen. Lottie has lived in her home in Seaton Delaval since she moved there with her husband in 1938.



In this picture, Lottie is cutting a 100 years celebratory cake at the school where she was a pupil. Lottie was chosen to cut the cake because she is the oldest surviving pupil of the school.

Community Fund Update

The Homes for Northumberland community fund is available to Resident Associations who would like to set up a project that could help their local community.

A number of tenants have benefited from our Community Fund recently:

- **New Hartley Community Association** was awarded £500 to pay for an Xbox and other indoor activities, including games and a TV, for use at its Friday evening youth drop in session.
- **Cowpen Craft Club** received funding to pay for accommodation at the Briardale so they can continue running the group.
- **Seaton Sluice and Old Hartley Community Association** was awarded £500 for raising community awareness locally, this will include a spring clean of Seaton Sluice.

If you would like more information on the Community Fund, please speak with our Resident Involvement Team on **01670 542424**.

New service will come in handy

A handyman and gardening service had been set up by Northumberland Age UK. Services range from interior and exterior painting to fence painting and path laying. For more information, please call **08451 40088**.



Festive opening for Ropery Court

Ropery Court resident Tina Camilleri chats to deputy leader of Northumberland County Council Cllr Roger Styring at the official opening of the new affordable housing development at Alnwick.



Alnwick's newest affordable housing scheme was officially opened with a festive Christmas light switch on.

Northumberland County Council's deputy leader and local member for Lesbury, Cllr Roger Styring, turned on the lights of a Christmas tree in the grounds of the development of modern apartments in a prime location in Alnwick town centre.

Built by Sunderland based people and property business Gentoo, the 42 apartments at Ropery Court have been purchased by the county council to provide much needed affordable homes to rent in the area.

Their development was supported with funding from the Homes and Communities Agency's Kickstart

programme and a grant from its National Affordable Housing Programme.

The properties are being managed and maintained on behalf of the council by Homes for Northumberland.

Resident Tina Camilleri was happy to show guests at the official opening around her flat at Ropery Court.

She said: *"I am extremely pleased with the flat - I love the kitchen and bathroom and the size of the living spaces. I feel very secure and comfortable here and there is a nice community developing amongst the residents. All the amenities are right on our doorstep - including the shops and bus station - and I am looking forward to spending many years here."*

Green heating systems sourced for Longframlington

The residents of 15 homes in Longframlington in Northumberland will soon have new, environmentally friendly, heating systems thanks to a £96,000 grant awarded to Northumberland County Council.

The council has been successful in its bid for funding from the Government's Renewable Heat Premium Payment (RHPP) scheme fund for a £192,000 project to convert the heating in a number of the properties which it owns in the village, where there is no mains gas.

Working in partnership with Homes for Northumberland and the National Renewable Energy Centre (Narec) in Blyth, the council now plans to replace obsolete coal-fuelled Parkray fires with air source heat pumps.

The air source heat pump absorbs heat from the air outside, with the same process that a fridge extracts heat from its inside. The pumps can get heat from the air even when the temperature is as low as -20oC, and this is then used to heat radiators and hot water in the normal way.

As well as the air source heat pump, all properties will receive replacement radiators, a hot water cylinder and pipe work. Each home will also be fitted with a multi-fuel stove and immersion heater as back-up sources of heating and hot water.

Narec will be monitoring the performance of the heat pumps and energy bills in the future, to see how they compare with the current cost of providing heating and hot water. The findings will be used to inform decisions on future use of air to water heat pumps and other renewable heat technologies in the council's housing stock.

Homes for Northumberland will match fund an additional £96,000 towards the project, as part of our ongoing renewable energy drive. We will also be dealing with the installation of the new energy features, due to be completed by the end of March 2012.



Improving Quality of Life

Stay warm this winter

Here are some simple tips to help you keep warm and safe this winter:

- 1 Eat regular hot meals and hot drinks for warmth and energy.
- 2 Keep moving as activities, like vacuuming, gets circulation going and makes you feel warmer.
- 3 Dress appropriately and wrap up warmly, indoors and out, ideally with several layers of thin clothing.
- 4 Keep your home between 21 and 24 degrees centigrade (70 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit). You can get a thermometer to help you assess this.
- 5 Keep warm at night - wearing the right clothing to bed is as important as wrapping up outdoors.
- 6 If you're sitting down, a shawl or blanket will provide extra warmth. You should also try to keep your feet up, because air is cooler at ground level.
- 7 Sleep with your windows closed and keep those cold draughts outdoors.
- 8 Claim your rightful benefits and grants – to find out if you are entitled to benefits contact our Money Advisor on **01670 542424**.
- 9 Use your heating timer to set the heating to come on and off at certain times.
- 10 Draw your curtains, as soon as it gets dark to stop the heat escaping and the draughts coming in.



Crack down on Blyth drug dealers and thieves

A joint operation between Homes for Northumberland and Northumbria Police is successfully targeting individuals who are storing stolen goods or supplying drugs from their Council homes in Blyth.

Police officers are working closely with Homes for Northumberland to conduct searches at addresses in Blyth where suspected drug dealers and thieves are based. This multi agency commitment has been a great success to date, with large quantities of controlled drugs, money and stolen goods seized.

Our Safer Neighbourhoods Team will also be using the powers available to them to take legal action against a person's tenancy agreement which may result in them being evicted. This is for those tenants who have been convicted of a drug offence, theft or who have allowed their council tenancy to be

used by someone who has been charged with the use of or dealing in drugs.

If you would like to report Anti Social Behaviour, please contact the Safer Neighbourhoods Unit on **01670 542424**.



(l to r) PC Claire Bradbury and CSO Lynne Forsyth from Northumbria Police alongside Stephen Cooper, Safer Neighbourhoods Officer at Homes for Northumberland

Blyth Estate Walkabouts

Cramlington Area - start time 10.00am Eastfield Grange

Meeting Place: Entrance of Cairnglass Close

Date: 22 February

Seghill - start time 10.00am The Crescent

Meeting Place: Outside 1 Stanley Gardens

Date: 14 February

Blyth North Area - start time 10.00 am Hodgson's Road Estate

Meeting Place: Asda Car Park

Date: 28 March

Alnwick Estate Walkabouts

Alnwick North - start time 10.00am

Sycamore Avenue, Beech Grove, Cedar Grove, Upper Barresdale, Lower Barresdale, Alwynside

Meeting Place: Entrance to Alwynside

Date: 29 February

Alnwick South - start time 10.00am

Augur Place, Victoria Crescent, St Georges Crescent, York Road, York Crescent, Cornhill Estate, Sea View Terrace, St James Estate

Meeting Place: Co-op, Victoria Terrace

Date: 21 March

Alnwick South - start time 10.00am

Cawledge View, Tanners Garth, Glovers Green, The Cordwainers, Farriers Court

Meeting Place: Entrance to Cawledge View

Date: 14 March

Amble - start time 1.30 pm

Andrew Drive, Anne Crescent, Charles Road, Coquetdale, Glendale, Alndale, Redesdale, Cheviotdale, Dandsfield Square, Straffen Court

Meeting Place: Car Park at Andrew Drive

Date: 21 March

Rothbury - start time 10.00am

Jubilee Crescent, Beechcroft, The Pinfold

Meeting Place: Entrance to Beechcroft

Date: 7 March

Rothbury - start time 11.00am

Addycombe Gardens Woodlands

Meeting Place: Outside 1 Addycombe Gardens

Date: 7 March

Smaller villages and settlements will be inspected on a periodic basis and tenants in these locations will be notified separately of the date/s of inspections in their area. Please contact the Estates and Tenancy Services Team on 01670 542424 for further information.

Please contact your Housing Officer or call **01670 542424** for further information.

Improving Quality of Life

Dates for Residents/Community Association Meetings

Cowpen Farm and Isabella Residents Association

Isabella Community Centre, Ogle Drive, Blyth

- Monday 13 February 2012, 7pm • Monday 12 March 2012, 7pm

Seaton Sluice and Old Hartley Residents Association

Seaton Sluice Community Centre, Albert Road. Seaton Sluice.

- General meeting: 27 March 2012, 7pm

Involvement to suit you

If you are interested in being involved, please complete the following questionnaire and return it **FREE OF CHARGE** to Homes for Northumberland, **FREEPOST RLYG-CCTU-THB2**, Blyth Civic Centre, Renwick Road, Blyth NE24 2BX.

Name _____ Address _____

Telephone No _____ Mobile Telephone No _____

E-mail address _____

How would you like to be involved?

- Face to face (meetings etc) E-mail
Telephone Postal questionnaire

Please tick all you are interested in

- Join our mystery shopping panel
Attend one of the local tenant and residents groups
Sit on one of our service panels
Join our editorial panel
Be part of a community fund panel
Join in on a health walk
Join our scrutiny panel
Involvement from home



Follow us on Facebook

If you have a Facebook account, you can stay up to date with news from us. Simply search for Homes for Northumberland and click to like our page.

In the spotlight

Instead of our usual Annual Report for 2010/11, we filmed a DVD to highlight our achievements from last year.

You can view the DVD on the publications section of our website on www.hfn.uk.com.

Alternatively, if you do not have access to the internet, we will also be organising viewing events. To register your interest in attending a DVD viewing, call **01670 542424**.