

March 2013

## Tenants Enjoy Fab Event



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# Welcome to the latest issue of Your News

**We must open with the good news that our Tenants' Conference at Alnwick Castle was a huge success.**

The day showed tenants how to get more involved in your housing company and it was great to meet so many new people there. We have included a special supplement in this edition of Your News which talks about the conference in more detail. I hope to see you at our next conference this year in September – details will be released soon.

Another highlight recently was the Spirit of the Community Awards event which rewarded the good work of those people who have worked selflessly for the benefit of their community. We also had an inspirational talk from Fab Flournoy of the Newcastle Eagles at the event. If you know anyone in your community who you think should be recognised, please call our Customer Services Centre to find out how to apply for the Spirit of the Community Awards next year - it is so important to recognise these unsung heroes of Northumberland.

Having been recently appointed as the permanent Managing Director at Homes for Northumberland and with a new team of permanent Directors to take the company

forward, I am proud to say that your housing company is at the dawn of a new era. It is a time of opportunity and my priority is to make Homes for Northumberland the best it can be by offering you first class services.

We have a lot of work to do, but my key priorities in the coming months are:

- Continuing our consultation with tenants to make sure our Delivery Plan for this year includes improvements that you think are important.
- Offering tenants the chance to put us under scrutiny so you can tell us how we can improve services.
- Encouraging more tenants to tell us if you are not happy with a service. By doing so we can map where the issues are and make things better. My motto is don't moan – complain.
- Making officers more visible on estates to deal with issues face to face
- Offering budgeting and money advice during this period of Welfare Reform changes.

It was great to see tenants at our recent Big Debate and we want to do more to engage with more customers and hear what you have to say. We are therefore launching Tea with the Team, where the Executive Team will visit communities and offer you the chance to chat to us directly over a cuppa. Please look out in this edition of Your News for details of when we will be near you. I hope to meet you soon at one of these sessions.

**Best Wishes**

**Kevin Lowry**  
**Managin Director**



## Message to tenants from Northumberland County Council



In the last edition of Your News I told you about the Council's decision to retain Homes for Northumberland as an ALMO.

As part of this long term commitment, Homes for Northumberland has now appointed a new, permanent Executive Team to

lead the company forward, while focusing on delivering top quality services to tenants.

I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome Kevin Lowry as the permanent Managing Director of Homes for Northumberland and Associate Director of Strategic Housing at Northumberland County Council. This new, dual role marks the beginning of a new era for housing in Northumberland as Kevin will bring together the Council housing management

service delivered by HfN with the Council's Strategic Housing service. The appointment is designed to ensure a coherent and comprehensive approach to housing across the county.

Welcome also to Paul Harrison (Corporate Services Director) Ian Johnson (Property Services Director) and Samantha Mason (Neighbourhood Services Director) to your new roles.

It is a new beginning at Homes for Northumberland and I very much look forward to seeing the exciting new changes and improvements that the new Executive Team will bring.

**Mrs Daljit Lally**  
**Corporate Director of Adult Services and Housing**  
**Northumberland County Council**

**NORTHUMBERLAND**  
Northumberland County Council

## Changes to the way we deal with complaints

From the 1st April 2013, the Localism Act will put in place new arrangements for dealing with complaints by social tenants against their landlords. The Act introduces the role of the 'designated person' who will refer complaints from social housing tenants to the Ombudsman. Designated persons are defined in the Act as an MP, a local councillor or a designated tenant panel.

Homes for Northumberland is in the process of updating its complaints policy and procedure to reflect these changes and new leaflets will be available this Spring.

If you have any questions about changes to the way complaints are dealt with, please get in touch via the Customer Services Centre on 01670 542424.



**You said**, you wanted us to review our rent statements

**We did**, meet with a panel of tenants and have made a number of improvements based on this feedback

**You said**, most of your complaints are about jobs out of priority, particularly fencing, roofing, and guttering works which are external

**We did**, we will ensure our Trades Operatives put a card through your door explaining we have completed external work if you weren't at home

**We did**, all managers will make a daily check on jobs that are going out of priority and will contact tenants to advise them if we can't make the deadline and when the work will be done

**You said**, there are times when jobs are showing as complete on our systems when they have not been done.

**We did**, all jobs must be complete and confirmed by the Trades Operative before they are signed off

**You said**, central heating parts are not always available

**We did**, produce a factsheet for tenants who have central heating repairs to tell them what happens next. All heating engineers will also be briefed on what commitments should be made to tenants so you are clear about what to expect from us

**We did**, all heating engineers will be briefed on what commitments should be made to tenants so you are clear about what to expect from us

**You said**, that follow on jobs identified by inspectors or a tradesperson are not ordered.

**We did**, ensure all staff and inspectors were briefed on the importance of ordering follow up work and this will be monitored closely in the future

**You said**, missed appointments are hugely frustrating. Also, tenants are not informed of changed or cancelled appointments. This is sometimes confusing over whether appointments are a.m. or p.m. resulting in tenants missing appointments and/or waiting in at wrong times.

**We did**, make sure that staff ring ahead to their next job explaining their expected time of arrival, where telephone numbers are available. Managers will also make a daily check on jobs that have an appointment and will contact tenants to advise them if we can't make the appointment and when the work will be done

# Carbon Monoxide **know the warning signs**

You can't see it, taste it or smell it, but carbon monoxide can kill quickly and with no warning.

Carbon Monoxide is produced by unsafe gas appliances and it can cause death as well as serious long term health problems such as brain damage.

**There are six main symptoms to look out for:**

1. headaches
2. dizziness
3. nausea
4. breathlessness
5. collapse
6. loss of consciousness

**Other signs that could point to carbon monoxide poisoning:**

- Your symptoms only occur when you are at home
- Your symptoms disappear or get better when you leave home and come back when you return
- Others in your household are experiencing symptoms (including your pets) and they appear at a similar time

Don't assume your gas appliances are safe. Your Homes for Northumberland annual gas safety check is the only safe way to prevent yourself and those around you from incurring serious illness or death due to carbon monoxide exposure.

**For more information about your gas safety inspection, please call us on 01670 542424.**

## Exciting New Changes Have Been Made To Amble Library

**The Amble Library and Customer Information Point has been getting a makeover.**

Having been relocated to the Tourist Information Centre during its 9 week renovation period, it is due to return to its original location on Middleton Street on Saturday 9th March

The range of improvements made include essential repairs to the windows and roof, whilst the main internal space has been fully repainted and decorated with new lighting and floor coverings.

The layout of the library has been improved by the introduction of baby changing facilities in the unisex accessible toilets and the installation of new electronic doors at the main entrance which now make it fully accessible for all wheelchair and pushchair users.

A new self-service system will provide a quick and easy way for customers to issue and return their own library books. A new private meeting room will give customers and partner services some privacy for enquiries of a confidential nature.

New services will be introduced when the Registrars Service (Births and Deaths) relocate from their current location on Queen Street into the Library and Customer Information Point and join other partners such as Action for Hearing Loss, Social Care and Health Information Point (SCHIP) and Councillor Robert Arkless who currently deliver a range of drop in and appointment led information and advice sessions from the building.

# Our Performance

See below a breakdown of how we performed against our performance indicator targets in Quarter 3 (Oct to Dec 2012) of the financial year April 2012 to March 2013.

## Property Services

Percentage of gas servicing completed

**Target 100%**



October 2012 November 2012 December 2012

Performance was slightly lower in this quarter as some tenants would not allow us access to their property to carry out a gas service.

**Higher is better.**

## Property Services

No of emergency jobs done on time

**Target 99%**



October 2012 November 2012 December 2012

**Higher is better. Emergency repairs (priority 1) are defined as:** Any defect that puts the health and safety or security of the tenant, or a third party, at immediate risk; or that affects the structure of the building adversely.

## Property Services

No of urgent jobs done on time

**Target 98%**



October 2012 November 2012 December 2012

**Higher is better. Urgent repairs (priority 2) are defined as:** Any defect where comfort or convenience of the tenant or third party is seriously affected

## Property Services

No of routine jobs done on time

**Target 97%**



October 2012 November 2012 December 2012

Performance in this area has been affected by severe weather conditions impacting external works. We will continue to review this in the months ahead.

**Higher is better. Routine repairs (priority 2) are defined as:** Any defect that can be deferred without serious discomfort, inconvenience or nuisance to a tenant or a third party, and can await the next convenient maintenance visit.

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

**Customer Services**

Percentage of calls abandoned

**Target 4%**



**Lower is better.** An abandoned call is one which is not answered. Although performance is not yet reaching target year to date, the percentage of abandoned calls has considerably improved.

**Neighbourhood Services**

Average number of days to re-let a property

**Target 26 days**



**Lower is better.** This is the number of days we take to get a property ready for the next tenant and get the new people moved in.

There will be increased focus and a sustained effort to improve performance in this area month on month.

**Neighbourhood Services**

Percentage of estate inspections completed against number planned

**Target 95%**



**Higher is better.**

Estate inspections were completed to target in this quarter.

**Neighbourhood Services**

Current tenant rent arrears outstanding

**Target £505,804.59**



**Lower is better.** Rent arrears occur when tenants don't pay all or some of their rent.

We aim to keep rent arrears as low as possible.

# New Housing Officers in Alnwick

We have appointed two new Housing Officers in Alnwick.

Housing Officers can visit you to discuss housing services including: rent, estate management or your tenancy.

The area covered by each Housing Officer is shown below and if you would like to book an appointment with them please call our customer services centre on 01670 542424.

## Simon Crosthwaite covers:



Alnwick	Netherton
Elsdon	Powburn
Glanton	Rothbury
Harbottle	Thropton
Longframlington	Whittingham

## Graeme Harwood covers:



Alnmouth	Lesbury
Amble	Longhoughton
Boulmer	Newton by the Sea
Craster	North Broomhill
Embleton	Shilbottle
Felton	Warkworth
Hauxley	

# Emily turns 100

**A tenant from Concorde House in Hollywell has celebrated her 100th birthday.**

Emily Brown was born in Leeds in 1913 and lived in Walker in Newcastle until her 70s. She worked in a clothes shop in Wallsend and then in a factory in Walker.

She married Andrew Brown, who sadly died 40 years ago, and has one daughter and two grandchildren.

Emily enjoyed her special day surrounded by friends and family at Concorde House. She was also presented with some flowers by her Housing Officer Caroline Hedley.



# Environmental Champions Take To The Streets

**An army of tenants have joined together to review the standard of their estates and improve the place where they live.**

Homes for Northumberland has set up a new group of tenants, known as Environmental Champions, who will be responsible for monitoring the grounds maintenance services on their estates – from grass cutting and fly tipping to



**Ian McLeman a tenant from Concorde House, said:** I attended the Environmental Champions meeting following the Conference in 2012. The information has brought home the importance of the work HfN are doing to keep the surrounding area in a good condition and pleasant to live in. The more residents who get involved the better, and participating in the panel gives me a real sense of community and pride.

graffiti and dog fouling. Tenants will tell us the standard they expect and will contribute to making their communities safer, cleaner and more pleasant. We want to work hand in hand with local residents to ensure we are meeting their expectations on estates.

The Environmental Champions are our eyes and ears out on the estates and can highlight any problem areas to Homes for Northumberland so we can help make sure they are addressed and resolved as quickly as possible.

For more information on becoming an Environmental Champion, please contact Homes for Northumberland on 01670 542424.



# Celebrating Community Spirit at a Fab Event

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

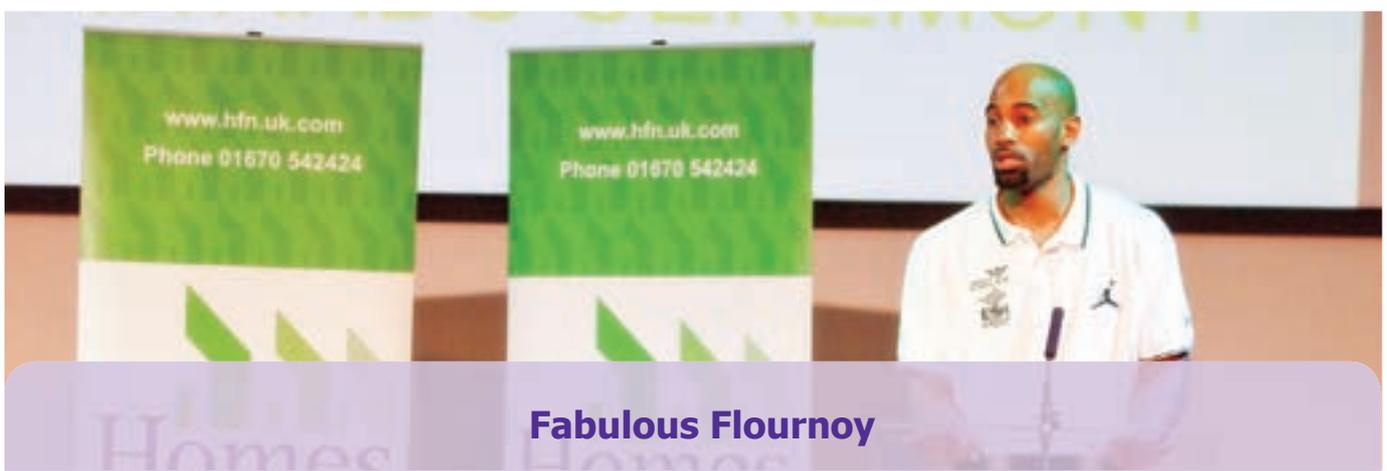
Homes for Northumberland invited customers to nominate neighbours, friends and groups whose endeavours have made a real difference to them or the wider community. The winners were selected by a panel of tenants and presented with awards by acclaimed basketball legend Fabulous Flournoy, from Newcastle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

**Well done to all of our winners!**

Special thanks were also given to our tenant judges on the night, who give up their time to review all of the award entries:

- Margaret Hedley
- Elaine Orr
- Grace Ramsay
- Emily Dady

**If you know someone who has gone the extra mile and think they should get an award, contact us on 01670 542424 for an application pack for next year's event.**



**Fabulous Flournoy**

# The Winners



**Young Person of the Year Award**  
Overall Winner: **Kurt Smith from Blyth**



**Good neighbour award**  
Overall Winner: **Elizabeth Saddleton from Seaton Delaval**



**Getting Involved Award**  
Overall winner: **Karen Mitchell from Cramlington**



**Getting Involved Award**  
Runner up: **Alan Fryer from Blyth**



**Best Community Group**  
Overall winner: **Cowpen Quay Community Association**



**Garden of the Year Award**  
Overall winner: **John Angus from Alnwick**



**Best Community Group**  
Runner Up: **Newsham and New Delaval Youth Forum**



**The Judges**

# Meet the new Executive team

The Tenants' Editorial Panel met the new Executive Team to ask them a few questions about their roles and their plans for the future of Homes for Northumberland.



**Managing Director  
Kevin Lowry**

## **Tell us briefly about your background experience**

I started my career as a Junior Clerk with Birmingham City Council and have moved up the ranks in the housing sector over the last 36 years. Despite that, I'd say that the most important experience came when I was a council tenant myself aged 20. I learnt then first-hand how a housing company can really make a difference in the lives of every tenant.

## **Tell us briefly about your new role**

I am responsible for the overall operation of Homes for Northumberland. I am also the Associate Director of Strategic Housing for Northumberland County Council. Linking these two roles together will help improve housing across the whole county through joint working.

## **What do you see as Homes for Northumberland's greatest opportunities at present and how do you see your role delivering these opportunities?**

I want to improve all of our services to meet tenants' needs and aspirations. To help us with this, we have a group of committed tenants who get involved, but we need to encourage more involvement to get to the heart of what tenants' want.

## **What projects are you working on at present and what are your priorities for 2013?**

Firstly, our Delivery Plan, which sets out our action plan for the year ahead. This time the document will tell you all about Homes for Northumberland, including financial, performance and staffing plans. Secondly, we are changing the structure of the organisation. Feedback from panels, the conference and the board tell us that Housing Officers need to be more visible on estates and we need more people in the contact centre, so we are making this happen. Thirdly, hearing the views of tenants is a big issue for me so I'm going to be going out onto the streets with Tea with the Team.

## **What are your long term hopes and plans for the company?**

I'm here for the long haul. I've moved myself and my family up from the Midlands and see this role as a long term commitment. My aim is to make Homes for Northumberland the best, with other housing companies around the country asking us – "How do you do that?"

## **Do you have a personal vision or mission statement?**

It's simple – I always ask would this service be good enough for me, my daughter or my parents? If the answer is no then we know something is wrong.

## **Is there anything else you would like tenants to know about you or your new role?**

I believe we should put tenants first in all we do. Tenants need to know who I am, so I'm going to start Tea with the Team sessions around estates to get your feedback.



**Corporate Services  
Director  
Paul Harrison**

**Tell us briefly about your background experience**

After 15 years of travelling the world as a Marine Biologist, I decided to train as an accountant in London when my first child was born 15 years ago. My career has included working at international firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC).

**Tell us briefly about your new role**

I oversee all of the company's Corporate Services to ensure the business runs smoothly. This is a varied position covering finance as well as IT, human resources and governance.

**What do you see as Homes for Northumberland's greatest opportunities at present and how do you see your role delivering these opportunities?**

We are in a unique position to improve tenant services. In Corporate Services we work behind the scenes to help other departments to deliver excellent front line services – so we play an important part in this.

**What projects are you working on at present and what are your priorities for 2013?**

The main thing on my agenda at the moment is to set the budgets for 2013/14 to ensure it fits into the company's Delivery Plan whilst making any necessary efficiency savings.

**What are your long term hopes and plans for the company?**

To be in a position where other housing companies start asking us to share our best practice. We need to be the best of the best.

**Do you have a personal vision or mission statement?**

My vision is to make Homes for Northumberland a beacon of good practice that other organisations can learn from.

**Is there anything else you would like tenants to know about you or your new role?**

I've been really impressed with tenant involvement so far, but know that it can always improve. I'm committed to listening to customer needs to ensure I am doing my job properly.



**Property Services  
Director  
Ian Johnson**

**Tell us briefly about your background experience**

I was a professional footballer for three years before joining Sunderland City Council as a Housing Assistant. I worked my way up the ranks and managed ASB at Blyth Valley and Business Support services at Homes for Northumberland before moving into my current role.

**Tell us briefly about your new role**

It covers all responsive repairs and maintenance as well as our capital investment programme.

**What do you see as Homes for Northumberland's greatest opportunities at present and how do you see your role delivering these opportunities?**

Our greatest opportunity is in building new houses, which we want our staff to design and build. There is a huge demand for homes in the Northumberland area and we must meet that need – it is my role to make that happen.

**What projects are you working on at present and what are your priorities for 2013?**

I'm working on a staff restructure, new apprenticeship programme, introducing a handyman service, delivering a huge investment in new heating systems, ensuring every home has a carbon monoxide monitor and also reviewing with tenants when they want repairs done. I would urge tenants to look out for updates on all of these areas in future editions of Your News.

### **What are your long term hopes and plans for the company?**

Once we get the right staff structure in place, tenants and our Board need to challenge how we do things and staff need to respond. Working together we can be stronger.

### **Do you have a personal vision or mission statement?**

I have two mission statements. I know I will always give the best service possible by sticking to these simple rules. The first is "If it was your business, would you do it?" and the second is "Do the right thing the first time, every time."

### **Is there anything else you would like tenants to know about you or your new role?**

Tenants should be able to get the right answers from all of our staff, not just through a manager or director. We are empowering our staff to deal with all of your queries, first time.



**Neighbourhood  
Services Director  
Samantha  
Mason**

### **Tell us briefly about your background experience**

I've worked in housing for more than twenty years, delivering and managing the full range of housing services for a wide range of customers across the region. I've always enjoyed working with people to make sure that we do our best work every day.

### **Tell us briefly about your new role**

As Director of Neighbourhood Services, I'm responsible for leading delivery of services to our tenants and for ensuring that they have influence over what those services look like, improving performance at the same time. I'm really excited to be working with the team in improving the quality of what we do.

### **What do you see as Homes for Northumberland's greatest opportunities at present and how do you see your role delivering these opportunities?**

This is a really exciting time for Homes for Northumberland with a new executive team and staff that really want to move forward and build on the success achieved to date. Together, we have a great opportunity to really make a difference in our communities and turn the organisations' vision into a reality that all our tenants can see.

### **What projects are you working on at present and what are your priorities for 2013?**

My initial priorities are to get to know staff and customers so that we can work together to review the way we do things and make positive changes for the future. I want to make sure that our customers' needs come first and that staff enjoy coming to work because it's a great place to be.

### **What are your long term hopes and plans for the company?**

Long term, I want to see Homes for Northumberland continue to thrive as a company with tenants that demand quality and receive it through the hard work of all of our teams working together. I would like to see Homes for Northumberland lead the way in achieving excellence, helping to create communities that are a great place to live and creating an environment that really does put people first.

### **Do you have a personal vision or mission statement?**

To do my best work every day, with a positive attitude and a smile!

### **Is there anything else you would like tenants to know about you or your new role?**

I have lived in Northumberland for most of my adult life and this job is my opportunity to give something back to the area where I have chosen to make my home.

# Tenants join the Big Debate



**Thanks to everyone who attended our Big Debate session recently.**

The event was a great success and offered tenants the opportunity to meet and ask questions directly to our new Executive Team. It was chaired by Cilla Isles from the Residents' Forum.

The main issues raised on the night were:

- Welfare reform and particularly the under occupancy charge.
- Visibility of HFN officers on estates and how this will be improved through new technology and officers being given the opportunity to stay out on their patch more.
- Allendale tenants raised some particular issues relating to their homes.

Resident feedback is extremely important to Homes for Northumberland and we have set up these sessions as a way of effectively collecting your views and to offer direct

feedback, so we can continually improve what we do for the better.

Full Minutes are available on our website, alternatively you can request a copy by contacting the Resident Involvement Team on 01670 542424. If anyone would like an invitation to the next big debate please get in touch.



**Margaret Hedley, a tenant from Amble who attended the Big Debate, said:**

The session was both enjoyable and informative, giving everyone an opportunity to put their points and questions forward. It is great that Homes for Northumberland speaks directly with residents in this way and I was pleased to be invited to such a useful and engaging event.



# Welfare Reform: Under Occupation

## What is under occupation?

Under occupation is when you have more bedrooms than the Government says you need in your home.

## What is going to change?

From April 2013, the Government is going to reduce the amount of housing benefit paid to people of working age who have spare bedrooms in their home.

“Working Age” is everybody between 16 and pension age.

## How much will my Housing Benefit be reduced?

The two rates of reduction are:

1. Your Housing Benefit will go down by 14% if you have one extra bedroom
2. Your Housing Benefit will reduce by 25% if you have two or more extra bedrooms

## Will these changes affect me?

The changes only apply if you are of working age and receive housing benefit

## What if my partner is over state pension credit age?

If you are a couple and one of you is of working age and the other is not you will not be affected

## I am a joint tenant, how is my room allowance worked out?

If you are a joint tenant the room allowance is worked out in the normal way. If the household is deemed to be under occupying and you are responsible for half the rent the appropriate reduction (14% or 25%) in housing benefit will be taken from your share of the rent.

## I share care of my children with my former partner; are we both allowed a room/rooms for the children?

Where parents who don't live together share care of their children the parent who receives the child benefit will be considered to be providing the main home and will be allowed the appropriate number of bedrooms. The parent who does not receive child benefit will not be entitled to receive housing benefit for rooms used for the child/children even if the children spend an equal amount of time with them.

## My partner needs to sleep in a separate room due to medical reasons/disability; will we be allowed an extra room?

No. As the rules stand at the moment a room will not be allowed in this situation. It may be possible to apply for help to the Discretionary Housing Payment fund but this is not guaranteed.

### Did you know...

When Universal Credit is introduced you will need a bank account to get your benefits. To find out more contact us on 01670 542424.

# – Your Questions Answered

## My child has a disability will I be allowed a room for him/her?

If you need a room for a child with a disability please seek advice from us on 01670 542424 as the situation is unclear at present. You should make a claim for a Discretionary Housing Payment from the Housing Benefit Department of the Council.

## Are you allowed a room for a foster child?

A foster child is not considered to be part of your family unit and you will not be allowed a room for him/her. If you are currently fostering or are planning to become a foster parent you will need to apply to the Housing Benefit department for a Discretionary Housing Payment to meet the shortfall.

## My house has been adapted to cater for my disability; will the rules still apply to me?

If you have had major adaptations carried out to your property you will still be deemed to be under occupying but will be eligible to apply to the Housing Benefit department for a Discretionary Housing Payment.

## What are my options?

You can:

- Pay the difference and stay living where you are. There are many ways to pay your rent, including direct debit, telephone, online or in person. Call us on 01670 542424 for more advice on how to pay your rent. If you are having problems meeting the difference in rent payments and need help with budgeting and money advice contact us on 01670 542424 to find out about our regular **Budgeting Advice Sessions.**

- Think about moving to a property with the number of bedrooms that meet your circumstances. Visit [www.homefinder.co.uk](http://www.homefinder.co.uk) for more information. If you are already a tenant, another way of moving house is by swapping homes with another tenant – this is called a mutual exchange. You can apply for a mutual exchange online at the HomeSwapper website: [www.homeswapper.co.uk](http://www.homeswapper.co.uk). Alternatively, you can contact Homes for Northumberland for advice on 01670 542424.



# Local tenants give regeneration works thumbs up

**NORTHUMBERLAND**  
Northumberland County Council

Tenants from Hodgsons Road Estate in Blyth have praised the improvement works completed to date.

The regeneration of Hodgsons Road Estate is part of Northumberland County Council's new Affordable Homes Programme, and is being managed by Homes for Northumberland. GB Solutions has been contracted to carry out the demolition and the scheme has received funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

Following the demolition works, the houses will all be replaced with 54 brand new properties comprising of two, three and four bedroom homes. The 54 properties were identified by the council for renewal as it was found to be more cost effective to rebuild the homes than upgrade these particular houses.



Existing homes have also been renovated to meet the Decent Homes standard and have received environmental improvement works.

**Paul McKay, a resident on Chestnut Avenue, said:** "I have enjoyed being part of the Residents Steering Group and it's nice to see the plans we talked about being put into action. The demolition team have worked hard to ensure that there has been little disruption despite our worries about dust and noise before they arrived. I am looking forward to joining the new Residents Group and being part of the further improvements being carried out on the estate."

**Claire Stewart moved from the estate to allow the demolition of her former home and is looking forward to returning to the estate. She said** "I am delighted with the improvements being made at Hodgsons Road Estate and I'm really looking forward to being part of this exciting regeneration scheme."

This initiative is part of Northumberland County Council’s wider Affordable Homes Programme within the county, which seeks to ensure that council housing in the area meets current demand.

Tenants living locally have commented that the disruption and noise caused by the works have been minimal, with many highlighting how well they have been informed throughout the process.

# Tenants have their say at open day

**Tenants from Hodgsons Road Estate in Blyth attended a special open day to find out more about the regeneration work taking place on their estate.**

The event invited tenants to ask questions about the estate improvements and register their interest for a new Hodgsons Road Residents’ Committee. The open day involved tenants who presently live on the estate and those who have moved during demolition and construction work on the new homes.

Children were also welcomed and enjoyed a range of activities including face painting, bird box making and using a smoothie bike.

Kevin Lowry, managing director at Homes for Northumberland, said: “It is important that tenants from Hodgsons Road estate have their say throughout this regeneration project and we want to offer every possible opportunity for them to do so.

“We previously worked closely with a residents’ steering group on the estate who were responsible for putting their ideas forward regarding the plans for the demolition. Now the work of the steering group is complete, we are working closely with local tenants to set up a new Residents’ Committee which will be responsible for handling any queries moving forward. I was delighted to hear that a number of people signed up to the

committee at the open day, but I would urge any other tenants who are interested to get in touch with us.”

Tenants with any queries about the project can attend drop-in sessions which run every Tuesday and Thursday 10am – 3pm at 24 Millfield Gardens on the estate and are run by Homes for Northumberland’s Resident Liaison Officer.

For more information on the project or the tenant drop in sessions, please contact Homes for Northumberland on 01670 542424.



# Taking action against anti-social behaviour

**The Safer Neighbourhoods Unit works closely with partner organisations, including Northumbria Police, and tenants to identify and address local concerns.**

The team has handled a number of serious cases of anti-social behaviour in recent months, including:

- Obtaining a 12 month injunction to prevent Stevie Angus from entering Byrness Row in Cramlington after repeated reports of his intimidating behaviour. He has regularly harassed a number of residents on Byrness Row, including threats to burn down neighbours' properties or attack their pets.
- Getting a 12 month injunction to prevent Dean Brown from entering Ravensdale Grove in Blyth after local people complained about his threatening, drunk and disorderly behaviour. He has repeatedly intimidated residents and even threw a disabled ramp against a house in the street.
- Evicting Wendy Brown of Ravensdale Grove after receiving a number of complaints from local people about noise nuisance and repeated anti-social behaviour. The SNU team sought possession proceedings after gathering CCTV evidence and noise recordings.



- Paul Bailey and Leanne Clark from Hortondale Grove in Blyth were evicted after they were found guilty of extracting power illegally. They repeatedly tampered with the electricity boxes in their home to bypass the meter. Northumbria Police also seized drugs from the property.

Colin Blackett, safer neighbourhoods unit manager at Homes for Northumberland, said: "We do not tolerate any form of anti-social behaviour as it is totally unacceptable that one resident believes that they can act in this way, to the detriment of their neighbours and other members of their community.

"I'd like to thank all of the people who came to us to report their concerns. I can reassure anyone who would like to make a report of this nature that all of the information you provide is kept confidential and really helps us to take action against these individuals - we must all work together to make a difference and stamp out this type of unacceptable behaviour."

## Test the Service

After every edition of Your News, we contact a random sample of tenants to find out what they thought about the magazine.

Following our latest set of feedback, we will:

- Ensure benefit advice information is also relevant for older people, where applicable.

- Include more information about community events linked to Homes for Northumberland
- Work closely with the editorial panel to ensure a balance of articles and stories, which reflect all geographic areas of our tenant base.

**If you have any other comments about Your News, please contact Communications on 01670 542424.**

## How to leave an empty property

**When you move out of your Council home, you are responsible for leaving the property clean, tidy and in a good state of repair.**

Your Tenancy Agreement says that tenants must take care of their home and report any faults or damage to us within a reasonable period of time. Homes for Northumberland will carry out an inspection of the property after we receive your termination notice to make sure it is in good condition.

**When you leave your property, you are responsible for:**

- Reporting any repairs that are needed and repairing broken items that belong to us. If you do not, we may carry out the work and charge you.
- Making good any damage to your home before you move. If you do not, you may need to pay for any costs incurred in repairing the damage.
- Removing all possessions, animals, rubbish and private papers when you leave. If you do leave any belongings we will dispose of them and charge you for this.
- Keeping your garden neat, tidy and free from rubbish and debris. Trees, shrubs and hedges must be trimmed so they don't overhang pavements or neighbouring properties – we may charge you for the cost of clearing your garden.

We will write and tell you about anything you will be charged for.



**What happens if the property does not meet our standards?**

In your first inspection we will outline any work or repairs you must complete. We will then return to re-inspect the property to ensure it meets the standards set out in your tenancy agreement.

If the work outlined in your first inspection has not been completed, you will not be allowed to move.

### Did you know...

You **MUST** leave your property in a state of good repair. If you do not, it means that we cannot let it again quickly and help someone else move into their new home.

### Did you know...

The price of bringing empty properties back to the lettable standard is increasing. This ultimately costs other tenants money. Please help us to avoid these unnecessary costs by looking after your property.

# Helping leaseholders to stay safe

**Leaseholders can now benefit from a special deal to help ensure the gas appliances in their home are working safely and correctly.**

Homes for Northumberland is now offering gas safety inspections to its leaseholders for just £50, plus VAT. The inspection would involve a visit from our specialist gas safety engineer who would review all of the gas appliances in the property. Any additional breakdowns or repairs would be subject to a separate survey and estimate.

Annual gas servicing helps to keep the heating and hot water in a property working properly.

It also keeps residents safe in their home by giving them the peace of mind that their gas appliances are not emitting the poisonous gas Carbon Monoxide.

A gas safety check should be a high priority for leaseholders as you could potentially be putting yourselves and your families at risk from carbon monoxide poisoning or potential explosions if you do not carry out regular gas safety checks.

For more information on booking a gas safety check, please contact Homes for Northumberland on 01670 542424.

## Tea with the Team

**As part of our commitment to providing excellent services to our tenants, we are holding Tea with the Team sessions over the coming months.**

Join our Executive Management Team at one of our informal sessions to discuss any issues or concerns you may have. We would also welcome any ideas on how you feel we can improve our service.

Between 4pm and 5pm on the dates below you can join our Executive team on a walkabout of your local area.

Come along to our drop in sessions at the following venues between 5pm and 6.30pm to meet with the Executive Team and ask your



questions.

\*Please note that the drop in session in Alnwick on 18 June will take place between 5.30pm and 7pm

Please come along and join us over a cuppa and tell us how we can improve the service we provide to you.

Date	Area	Venue
Thursday 21st March	Avenues, Blyth	Patterson House Sheltered Unit, Plessey Road, Blyth
Tuesday 30th April	Shilbottle	The community Room, The Haven, Shilbottle
Thursday 23rd May	Seghill	Institute Community Centre, Seghill
Tuesday 18th June	Alnwick	Alnwick Community Centre, Howling Lane, Alnwick
Tuesday 23rd July	New Delaval, Oval Estate	Welfare Pavilion, Newsham
Tuesday 27th August	Amble	The community room, 9 Kennedy Road, Amble
Tuesday 24th September	East Cramlington	Astor Court Nursing Home, Lamb Street, East Cramlington

**If you need any more information please contact The Resident Involvement Team on 01670 542424.**

[www.hfn.uk.com](http://www.hfn.uk.com)

# Estate walkabouts

<b>Alnwick</b>	<b>Meeting Place</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Dovecote Lane, Hotspur Place, Hotspur Street, Narrowgate Court, Dukes Memorial Cottage, Bowburn Cottages, Pottergate, Monkhouse Terrace, King Street, Lisburn Street, Lisburn Court, Howick Street, St Pauls Garth	Pottergate Tower	10am	24th April 2013
Windsor Gardens, Clayport Gardens, Howling Lane, Clayport Street, Westgate House	Junction of Howling Lane/ Windsor Gardens	10am	8th May 2013
Ivy Street, Leslie Drive, St Lawrence Avenue, St Cuthberts Avenue, Melrose Gardens, Holywell Crescent, Kennedy Road, Churchill Avenue, Davis Drive, Burton Road, Links Avenue, Links Road, Philip Drive	Junction of Ivy Street/ Leslie Drive	1.30pm	8th May 2013
Sycamore Avenue, Beech Grove, Cedar Grove, Upper Barresdale, Lower Barresdale, Alwynside	Entrance to Alwynside	10am	29th May 2013
Jubilee Crescent, Beechcroft, The Pinfold	Entrance to Beechcroft	10am	5th June 2013
Addycombe Gardens, Woodlands	Outside 1 Addycombe Gardens	11.am	5th June 2013
Cawledge View, Tanners Garth, Glovers Green, The Cordwainers, Farriers Court	Entrance to Cawledge View	10am	12th June 2013
Augur Place, Victoria Crescent, St Georges Crescent, York Road, York Crescent, Cornhill Estate, Sea View Terrace, St James Estate	Co-op, Victoria Terrace	10am	19th June 2013
Andrew Drive, Anne Crescent, Charles Road, Coquetdale, Glendale, Alndale, Redesdale, Cheviotdale, Dandsfield Square, Straffen Court	Car Park at Andrew Drive	1.30pm	19th June 2013
<b>Blyth North</b>	<b>Meeting Place</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Hodgsons Road	Asda Car Park	10am	20th Mar 2013
Edendale	Top of Edendale Ave	10am	11th Apr 2013
<b>Blyth South</b>	<b>Meeting Place</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Benridge / Cottingwood	Entrance to Benridge	10am	7th May 2013
Avenues 1-14th	Entrance to 1st Avenue	10am	14th May 2013
<b>Cramlington</b>	<b>Meeting Place</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Eastfield Lea	Outside 1 Axminster Close	10am	27th Mar 2013
Eastfield Grange	Entrance to Cairnglass	10am	20th Jun 2013
<b>Seaton Valley</b>	<b>Meeting Place</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Holywell	1 Holywell Avenue	10am	20th Mar 2013
Deneside	1 Burnlea Gardens	10am	15th Apr 2013
Hallington Drive	1 Mindrum Way	10am	17th Apr 2013
Seaton Sluice	1 Southward	5pm	24th Apr 2013
The Crescent	1 Stanley Gardens	10am	14th May 2013
Woodside	1 Woodside Avenue	10am	22nd May 2013
Blyth Town Centre	Catholic Church Bowes Ct	5pm	17th Jun 2013

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**

## 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.



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**.

## Key Contacts

**Customer Services Centre**  
**01670 542424**

**For information on Dog Wardens call**  
**0845 6006400**

**Northumberland Citizens Advice Bureau**  
**0844 4111309**

For queries about repairs, rents and neighbourhood services call  
**Homes for Northumberland on**  
**01670 542424**

If you have an enquiry about Homefinder, Council Tax, Housing Benefit Applications, Refuse Collection, Pest Control or other Council services contact

**Northumberland County Council on**  
**0845 6006400**



Please contact our Customer Services Centre if you would like to receive this information in another language or format, for example Braille or audio.

URDU	اگر آپ یہ معلومات کسی دوسری زبان یا فارمیٹ، مثال کے طور پر بریل یا آڈیو، میں چاہتے ہیں تو برائے مہربانی ہمارے کسٹمر سروسز سینٹر سے رابطہ کریں۔
BENGALI	আপনি যদি এই তথ্যাবলী অন্য ভাষাতে বা অন্য রূপে যেমন ব্রেইলে বা অডিওতে পেতে চান, অনুগ্রহ করে, আমাদের কাস্টোমার সার্ভিসেস সেন্টারে যোগাযোগ করুন।
CANTONESE	如果您想要本資訊的另一種語言版本或其他格式（如：盲文或音訊），請與我們的客戶服務中心聯絡。
MANDARIN	如果您需要本信息的其它語言版本或其它格式（例如：盲文或音頻文件），請联系我們的客服中心。
POLISH	Prosimy o kontakt z naszym Centrum Obsługi Klienta (Customer Services Centre), jeśli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać niniejszy dokument w innej wersji językowej lub w innym formacie, na przykład w alfabecie Braille'a lub w formie nagrania dźwiękowego.
PUNJABI	ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਬ੍ਰੇਲ ਜਾਂ ਆਡੀਓ ਦੇ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਕਰਨਾ ਚਾਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਡੇ ਗਾਹਕ ਸੇਵਾ ਕੇਂਦਰ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।