

June 2010



**1 Year old...**  
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£6m budget

# Our first year...

April marked the first Anniversary for Homes for Northumberland and I would like to let you know about some of our early achievements. It has been a very busy year with many changes for the Housing Company following Local Government reorganisations.

Our first priority was to ensure that the service we provide to you did not suffer during these changes and I hope that this has been the case.

We made a conscious decision not to rush into making changes too quickly and you will have noticed that old vans were kept until the new ones were needed. By now you should have seen some of the new vans with our name on.

The main areas of the business we have been trying to improve for you, our customers, are:

- Local Accountability

We have set up Area Boards in Blyth and Alnwick giving tenants a direct say in running the Housing Company

- Improving Customer Service

Following consultation with Tenant Groups, we are changing how we deliver our Housing Management service. All tenants will have a named Housing



**Ray Boycott**  
Managing Director



officer and we are going to introduce a Customer Contact Centre to make it easier for you to get in touch. More details of this are inside.

- Meeting Housing Needs

Working closely with the Council, we have started on site with our first ever New Build Scheme to build 22 homes in Allendale.

We are also working with the Council to build a further 20 houses in Blyth and are proposing to buy 18 properties in Alnwick from Gentoo and 21 from Home Group in Glanton and Lesbury.

This is only a flavour of the things we have been working on and more information is provided inside.

I hope you find this newsletter informative and interesting, but if not **please let me know and we will change it.**

**Best wishes**  
**Ray**

**See pages 12 and 13 to see how our first year has shaped up.**

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# Neighbourhood Services is Moving Office

**Homes for Northumberland will be operating most of its services from the Civic Centre Offices, Renwick Road, Blyth from July 2010.**

This will correspond with the opening of a new reception area in the Civic Centre and the closing of the reception at Dinsdale House, Marine Terrace, Blyth.

**The date set for the office move and opening of the new Reception is Monday 28th June 2010.**

The changes to services that we are currently working on will start from the same date. The main changes are :

- **Neighbourhood housing services will operate in area-based teams dealing with rents, estates and tenancies**
- **Neighbourhood Housing Officers will be at the forefront of delivering customer services to tenants on estates**
- **Customer contact with a Neighbourhood Housing Officer will be ongoing from the start of a tenancy**
- **Improved co-ordination between teams to deliver services, such as Safer**

**Neighbourhoods, Choice-Based Lettings and Resident Involvement.**

**The service changes will involve up to six days of staff training during June. Our offices will be open as normal, however, on these days we will have to operate a reduced service.** These training days will be published on our website and in our offices when all dates have been finalised.

### **Customer Service Centre**

We are also developing a customer service centre to deal with the majority of customer enquiries at the first point of contact. There will be one telephone number for all tenants to contact Homes for Northumberland. We aim to have this operating in October 2010 so watch this space for further information.

### **Alnwick Offices**

There is currently a review of office accommodation underway in the North of the County and this is likely to result in an office move for staff based in Alnwick. Full details are still being worked on and we will update you further once this is known.

# New Independent Regulator



**From the 1st April 2010 the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) will become the independent regulator for affordable housing in England, working with landlords and tenants to improve the standard of service for tenants and residents.**

The TSA have three priorities for the next three years:

- securing a fair deal for tenants
- protecting the taxpayer
- delivering modern and effective regulation

They have taken a different approach to regulating and have set out six clear standards to start in spring 2010. They will aim to build relationships with landlords and would like tenants to become co-regulators to help shape, influence and monitor the service provided:

- Improve standards of service delivery for tenants
- Support decent homes and neighbourhoods
- Promote effective tenant involvement and empowerment
- Ensure providers are well run and deliver value for money
- Promote and protect public and private investment
- Encourage and support a supply of well-managed social housing

## What can tenants expect in the future?

- A greater focus on the issues that matter most to them, such as repairs, affordable rents and tackling anti-social behaviour
- More opportunities to get involved and to hold their landlord to account
- A greater emphasis on their own priorities, through new local standards agreed by tenants and landlords
- More feedback from their landlord, including an annual report setting out just how well they are doing against local standards and the TSA's national standards

## What can landlords expect in the future?

- More responsibility to work closer with their tenants to drive improvements
- More flexibility about how they deliver their housing services.
- A modern 'co-regulatory' relationship with tenants and the regulator
- A fair and proportionate approach if their performance needs to improve

**Homes for Northumberland will be asking for your help over the next few months in developing local offers to you. If you want to get involved, let us know on 01670 542239 or by email to [participation@hfn.com](mailto:participation@hfn.com)**



### Alnwick Area Board Update

Alnwick Area Board has now been in place for almost one year and its aim is to focus on the performance of Homes for Northumberland and also to look at any issues in the Alnwick Area.

The Board, which is made up of 15 Board Directors including council members and tenants representatives, receives updates on any events or work being done countywide by Homes for Northumberland.

The last meeting of the Board was held on 31 March where the board discussed the adoption of a community development approach to resident involvement and welcomed the new strategy. The board also welcomed the building of new properties.

Meetings are held every two months and the dates are as follows:

- 21 July 2010
- 15 September 2010
- 10 November 2010
- 19 January 2011
- 16 March 2011

If anyone has any issues they would like to raise please contact Anna Benbow on 01670 542140

### Blyth Area Board Update

Blyth Area Board has now been in place for almost one year and its aim is to focus on the performance of Homes for Northumberland and also to look at any issues in the Blyth Area.

The Board, which is made up of 15 Board Directors including council members and tenants representatives, receives updates on any events or work being done countywide by Homes for Northumberland.

A meeting of the Board was held at Civic Centre Blyth on 10 March 2010. During the meeting there was a presentation given by the Homelessness Manager on the Homeless Service at Homes for Northumberland. A further meeting of the Board was held on 25 May 2010.

Meetings are held every two months and the dates are as follows:

- 14 July 2010
- 22 September 2010
- 17 November 2010
- 12 January 2011
- 23 March 2011

If anyone has any issues they would like to raise please contact Allan Hepple on 01670 542140

## Performance to year end 2010

Indicator	Blyth	Alnwick
Amount of unpaid rent outstanding	£327,524	£234,314
Tenants evicted for not paying rent	12	1
Average time taken to let an empty home	27.81 Days	30.14 Days
Total number of repairs done	27,511	6,914
Total number of complaints received	202	2
Number of customers involved in Homes for Northumberland	3511 all together	

Providing excellent services

# Equality = Diversity

## A new policy

### In March this year, Homes for Northumberland agreed its new Equality and Diversity Policy.

Homes for Northumberland are committed to promoting equality and acknowledging diversity.

We believe that every person should be treated with dignity and respect regardless of age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion or belief.

If you wish to see a full copy of our Equality and Diversity Policy, it is available on the website or contacting us on 01670 542517.

The points below show some key elements of what we will do:

- ✓ Collect customer profile information.
- ✓ Take appropriate action against the perpetrators of racial harassment and hate crime.
- ✓ We will provide support and protection to the victims of any harassment and/or discriminatory behaviour.
- ✓ Provide an accessible, open, fair and transparent housing allocations system.
- ✓ Work with our customers and communities to provide practical assistance around issues such as fuel poverty, access to insurance and bank accounts through our 'Making Ends Meet' service.
- ✓ Work with the Warm Zone partnership to tackle fuel poverty, home improvements and the free, confidential benefits advice service.
- ✓ Work with our Tenants, Leaseholders and Residents groups to offer a range of training through our partnerships.

- ✓ Actively promote involvement from under represented groups.
  - Offering travel and carer's allowances
  - Using accessible venues for meetings
  - Providing information in translation, large print, audio, Braille etc on request and where we know this is the resident's preferred form of contact.
  - Offering access to hearing loop systems
- ✓ Ensure our offices are wheelchair accessible and well signposted.
- ✓ Offer a range of services electronically and provide services to allow bidding for homes, payments, complaints and repairs.
- ✓ Reviewed and streamlined our complaints procedure in partnership with our customers to make the process more accessible and transparent.
- ✓ Ensure customers are offered a confidential and safe service, arranging mediation and access to translation services or a signer.



# Summer Solstice

**Solice, Midsummer of Litha on Monday 21 June 2010, is the longest day of the year and means stopping or standing still of the sun.**

People have always been amazed by the power of the sun, the Celts celebrated the sun's power with bonfires, the Pagans believe that the Goddess who took over the earth from the horned God is at her height in June. Some Pagans say that Summer Solstice marks the marriage of God and Goddess and see their union as a force that creates harvest fruits.

This is a time to celebrate growth and life. In England thousands of Pagans and non-Pagans go to places of ancient religious sites such as Stonehenge to see the sun rising on the first morning of summer.



# Leaseholder matters

## Leaseholder Forums

Homes for Northumberland currently manage nearly 250 properties where residents have bought the long lease of their home in formally Council owned accommodation.

29 leaseholders attended forum meetings in Alnwick and Blyth arranged by Homes for Northumberland in February to provide an opportunity for people to comment on the service they receive.

It was decided at the meeting that a steering group of leaseholders and company staff should be formed to work towards further improvements in the service

If you are interested in attending any future meetings of the steering group please contact Richard Bryan on 01670 542245.

## Insurance

A number of leaseholders have queried the cover provided by the Buildings Insurance paid for in the service charge. All leaseholders were therefore sent a summary of the cover with their recent bills.

Full details can be obtained by contacting the Councils Insurance Officer Nicola Johnson on 01670 534127.

In addition to the Buildings Insurance we strongly advise that leaseholders also obtain home contents insurance. Homes for Northumberland operate a pay as you go home contents insurance scheme with premiums starting from as little as £1.81 per week. This will cover you for items such as furniture, TV, clothing, carpets and general household goods if you were to suffer from theft, fire, vandalism, burst pipes and other household risks.

For further details please contact our Tenant Engagement Officers, Simon Crosthwaite or Susan Frame on 01670 542094, or via email [makingendsmeet@hfn.uk.com](mailto:makingendsmeet@hfn.uk.com)

## Gas Servicing & Electrical Checks

It is important for your own safety that the key services to your home are maintained correctly.

All leaseholders should have recently received a letter from our Property Services team offering both gas servicing and electrical testing.

If you are interested in either of the services or require any further information please call the number provided or contact us on 01670 542424.

## Selling your lease?

If you are selling your lease it is important that you advise Homes for Northumberland of the sale. Failure to do so may result in you remaining liable for charges incurred.

## Prize Draw winner

We recently surveyed all of our leaseholders to obtain further information about you and the services that you wish to receive. Everyone who returned a survey form was entered into a prize draw. Mr Turner of Blyth was the lucky winner of £100 of high street shopping vouchers.

Richard Bryan, Regional Housing Manager commented; "we really appreciate the time that people take to tell us their views. We thank all the leaseholders who took the trouble to return the survey form and can assure them that we always try to listen to our customers and develop services suitable to their needs"



# That little extra does help...

It's always great to hear from our customers that we have gone the extra mile in a number of service areas, the following are comments from our satisfaction surveys.

## Out of hour's service

*"As the carer of a tenant who has a learning disability I found the service excellent. From the time the loss of power was reported to the electrician attending within 30 minutes. As the problem was a mains cable he contacted the supplier who attended within 40 minutes they could not connect a supply until the next day, at all times we were kept informed what would happen next. All the workmen were very understanding and caring as it is not always easy to deal with someone who does not always understand"*

### Cramlington.

*"Overall the service is excellent: the girls on the telephone are very pleasant and if they can't give a day they will ring and tell you. The workmen are mostly jolly and are respectful of your belongings"*

### Seaton Delaval

#### New Tenants

*"I was delighted with the service I have received so far with Homes for Northumberland. My Bungalow was more than I ever expected – I love it!"*

### Blyth

*"I have always found staff very pleasant and helpful when I needed help"*

### Blyth.

*"Every aspect of finding a council home has been excellent. The property is everything we were looking for. Thank you so much for an excellent service"*

### Blyth

*"We cannot single out any particular part of the service we received as it was all good"*

### Cramlington

#### Gas Service

*"The service is excellent, don't change anything, carry on with the good work, thanks for caring, and good luck to you all"*

### Blyth

#### Repairs

*"I cannot fault any of the staff; never had any problems with them, always friendly on the phone, workmen always leave my home tidy"*

### Blyth

The Director of Property Services, Anna Benbow commented:

It is positive that customers have taken the time to respond and give some excellent feedback on a range of areas and this shows why Homes for Northumberland are top for customer satisfaction.

## You said - we did

**You said ...** staff needed to be more visible when carrying out Estate Inspections

**We did...** ensure staff wear high visibility Homes for Northumberland jackets when involved in Estate Inspections

**You said...** rent statements should be changed to make them easier to understand

**We did...** Sent all tenants a redesigned rent statement in January

Improving quality of life

# *Fw* Families Work *Fw*

Help and advice for people wishing to return to work

Want things to change for the better?

We offer a home visiting service for parents in south east Northumberland who are not working or work less than fifteen hours a week.

We listen to what you need and can link you with other services that could help you to improve your quality of life.

**Give us a try! Don't be shy!**

**Nothing to lose!**

Just good sound information – for you to use if you choose

**Text your name to 07500 987 181**

**Phone 01670 532362**

**Email:**

**Alison.Thomas02@Northumberland.gov**



## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

# THERE'S A WAY TO STOP SMOKING THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

It's easier to cut smoking with support and advice from the NHS. All of the services are free and they'll help you find the ones that suit you best.

Call now and you'll receive a free stop smoking DVD and information pack.

The DVD features real people who have

used NHS support including local NHS Stop Smoking Services and nicotine replacement therapy to help them quit smoking successfully.

Take your first steps to enjoy a smokefree life with some free help and advice from the NHS. Get your free DVD and information pack today.



**Step 1.** Call the NHS free on 0800 917 2318 and ask for your free DVD and information pack.



**Step 2.** Choose the way to quit that's best for you. A stop smoking adviser can help with this.



**Step 3.** Set your quit date and get all the free support you want from the NHS. In just the way you want it.



**Step 4.** Enjoy your new smokefree life. And use free NHS support whenever you need it.

Call **0800 917 2318** or visit [www.nhs.uk/smokefree](http://www.nhs.uk/smokefree)

# 100 Year Celebration



## Homes for Northumberland tenant Mrs Mitcheson celebrates her 100th birthday

Mrs Mitcheson has been a tenant for 16 years at Hartley Court and stated that it was the best move she made and is really happy there. She has one son and two grandchildren who flew in from their homes in America to be by her side to celebrate her special birthday with her.

Sitara Choudhury, Homes for Northumberland housing officer celebrated the event by presenting Mrs Mitcheson with a cake and some flowers on Monday 10 May at Hartley Court. Whilst she was there Mrs Mitcheson received a telegram from the Queen.

Mrs Mitcheson used to work as a secondary school teacher at Newlands school, Blyth. Her subjects were English and Sports.

## Amble enjoys Easter with an action packed week!

A week of action organised by Coquet Partnership Extended Services, Northumbria Police, Homes for Northumberland, Action for Children, Northumberland County Council Community Safety Team and Positive Futures saw over 80 Amble children and young people take part in the Easter craft, play and sport activities to celebrate their community.



During the action days on 6 and 8 April Community walkabouts were carried out with residents, Homes for Northumberland, the County Council's Community Safety Team and Northumbria Police providing an opportunity to discuss issues and concerns about anti-social behaviour. The action days for residents ended with a successful litter pick.

For more details, contact Shirley Young on 01665 511271 or email [Shirley.Young@hfn.uk.com](mailto:Shirley.Young@hfn.uk.com)

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

# First Year Achie

## Customer Involvement Strategy

The Resident Involvement team have worked in partnership with customers and Board Directors to produce a customer involvement strategy. The strategy shows how you can get involved with Homes for Northumberland and have your say on matters which affect you to improve the service you receive. It means that everyone who wants to has an opportunity to have their say in a way that suits them. For example you could:

- Join a residents group with neighbours to improve the place where you live.
- Be part of a reader's panel and give your views on information that we send you.
- Help produce this tenants newsletter
- Become a mystery shopper to tell us what you think of our service

The resident involvement team will help you get involved in a way that suits you.

For more information please contact: The Resident Involvement Team, 01670 542239 or complete the involvement form on page 23.

## Income Management

The Rents Team have identified an additional £47,651 in benefits for tenants of Homes for Northumberland in the Blyth area in the last year. 40 tenants have benefited due to backdated awards of Housing Benefit, Pension Credits, Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance, an average of £1191 for every tenant. The Rents team are aware that nationally there are over £16 billion of benefits unclaimed. Customers are requested to contact either the Blyth or Alnwick teams if they have any queries concerning benefits.

## Homeless service

The Homeless Service team have seen almost 500 cases for Housing Advice throughout the course of the year and have prevented almost as many cases. This has meant that these households have not had the stress of becoming homeless.

We were the first in the County to be



successful with a Mortgage Rescue case this meant the family could stay in their own home therefore preventing them from becoming homeless.

# vements...



## **New Build and Regeneration Update**

As most of you are aware our first new build scheme is on land located at Allendale in the Tyne Valley. We have achieved planning permission for the development of 22 units on this site and have claimed the Start on Site grant from the Homes and Communities Agency. Works are now beginning on the site



to prepare the site and access to enable the main build to commence.

A successful consultation event was held in February where we presented some updated plans to the community. Over 40 people attended and 31 of them put their names down for information about how to rent the properties. There was also some interest in the four units on the scheme that will be offered as affordable home ownership via Intermediate rented with an option to purchase within a two year period.

The scheme will take about a year to complete and we aim to start letting the units to new tenants at the end of March 2011.

## **Northumberland Homefinder**

Northumberland Homefinder was launched in September 2009. Applicants now only need to fill in one application form to access social housing throughout Northumberland. Over 1000 applicants have already successfully found a new home in Northumberland through the Homefinder service. You can get more information about Northumberland Homefinder by logging on to our new website

[www.northumberlandhomefinder.org.uk](http://www.northumberlandhomefinder.org.uk).

## **Support room at lamb house launched**

Homes for Northumberland have worked in partnership with Surestart and a local church to provide a support room for the residents of Lamb House.

The support room has computer facilities so that residents can update CV's, look for jobs, bid for properties or just keep in touch with friends. It can also be used for private meetings if required.

## Improving quality of life

## Seaton Sluice And Old Hartley Residents Association

### Residents Association Supports Northumbria in Bloom

Seaton Sluice is a beautiful place to live and with your help in ensuring your front gardens impress the judges when they visit, we can make it even better.

The Residents Association has accessed funding for flowers through the Parish Council and Homes for Northumberland and would like to enter the Northumbria in Bloom competition. Categories include combined efforts by residents and most attractive front gardens.

Colourful planters will be placed at the three entrance points to the village and a planted boat will be at the Harbour Car Park.

Ron Morton Chair of the Residents Association, said: "Many front gardens in the village are a joy to behold. If we all play our part by ensuring our particular area is neat and colourful then we have a real chance of carrying off at least one prize."

For further information and how you can get involved, contact Ron on 0191 237 5340.



## Community fund update

### Solingen Residents Association

Solingen Residents Association is a well established association, and is based in the Solingen Estate area, and has regular meetings using Nye Bevan House as a venue.

The group applied for £500 to enable them to organise a trip to Holy Island this summer. The trip will allow approximately 40 residents and tenants to take a coach trip to Holy Island, and enjoy both lunch and tea. The purpose of the trip is to take elderly and disabled residents out of their homes and into the community for a day, these are tenants and residents who may otherwise not enjoy social inclusion.

### Seaton Delaval and Holywell Residents Association

#### Seaton Valley Radio

The above submitted an application to promote Seaton Valley Radio. This radio station is the project of Stephen Stanners, a local lad who is passionate about his community. The radio station is currently available online, and has attracted many listeners already. This award will ensure the community is aware of all local events, encourage tenants and residents to volunteer to work in/at the radio station and ensure the radio station will benefit the area in which Homes for Northumberland play a strategic role.

### Holywell Village Forum

This group secured funding from Homes for Northumberland so that tenants and residents could enjoy a choice of activities, which includes carpet bowls, when visiting the local community centre. It is hoped this will encourage tenants and residents to attend the centre and get involved.

# Is democracy working in Northumberland in 2010?

The Resident Involvement team have supported a group of 10 residents to attend a conference which was organised by The Workers Educational Association and held at Alnwick Gardens. The conference was organised as part of the Take Part campaign.

The group had a rewarding experience attending workshops including:

**Engaging with Parliament** – A practical session to introduce the different ways that ordinary people can have an input into national decision making

**Alnwick 2010** – An interactive and fun way to explore Alnwick in 2010 and look at its impact on the environment.

**Developing values for Effective Democracy** – this looked at which values we need to develop as individuals and as a society to make democracy effective and inclusive.



**Going local? How to get the best out of your councillor** – exploring what part councillors play in local democracy and how individuals can make the most of their role in local decision making.

After lunch there was an opportunity to take part in a Question Time session which was chaired by BBC News Correspondent Jenny Bond and featured prospective parliamentary candidates (including Alan Beith MP) from the major parties along with the recently elected member to the Youth Parliament. Our group of residents managed to have two of their questions selected for discussion by the panel. Jenny Bond also took time out to sit at our table and chat to the group congratulating them on their enthusiastic contribution to the event.

## Residents Association Meeting dates 2010

### Seaton Sluice & Old Hartley

Wednesday 16th June  
7pm, Library Building, Community Centre,  
Seaton Sluice

Wednesday 13th October AGM  
7pm, Library Building, Community Centre,  
Seaton Sluice

### Dates for Diaries in Seaton Valley

New Hartley Village Fayre  
Saturday 26th June 2010

Harbour Day Seaton Sluice  
Saturday 10th July 2010

To find out more about what is happening in Seaton Valley during the summer, you can visit [www.seatonvalley.org.uk](http://www.seatonvalley.org.uk)

### Seaton Delaval and Holywell

Thursday 8th July  
7pm Old Church Hall, Avenue Road,  
Seaton Delaval

Thursday 2nd September  
7pm Old Church Hall, Avenue Road,  
Seaton Delaval

Thursday 25th November AGM  
7pm Old Church Hall, Avenue Road,  
Seaton Delaval

**Maintaining and improving properties**

## Estate walkabout dates

**Cramlington (10am start)**

Eastfield Lea	Eastfield Community House	24 June, 22 July, 26 Aug, 23 Sep, 21 Oct, 25 Nov, 16 Dec
Eastfield Grange	Entrance to Cairnglass	23 June, 21 July, 25 Aug, 22 Sep, 20 Oct, 24 Nov, 15 Dec
East Cramlington	Lanercost Park Flats (3 storey)	11 August
Nelson Village/Sunnyside	Arcot Avenue Shop	6 August
Hall Close	Entrance to Adderstone Ave	12 August
Collingwood Grange	Car Park at estate entrance	5 October
Mayfield Glade	Barrasford Rd next to Car Park	17 June, 21 December
Mayfield Dale	Entrance to Thirston Drive	28 October
Mayfield Grange	Entrance to Ave, op Village Rd	8 December
East Hartford	Entrance between Stephen/Ormston/Wrightson	23 November

**Blyth North (9.30am start)**

Bebside	Kitty Brewster Pub Car Park	22 June, 20 September
Hodgsons Road	Netto Car Park	21 June, 19 July, 6 Sep, 18 Oct, 22 November
North Farm	Phone box at Junction of Temple/Walton	16 August, 6 December
Cowpen Estate – 3 monthly (Deneview to Briardale)	Blyth North Office, Brierley Road	15 June, 14 Sep, 7 Dec
Cowpen Estate (Briardale Shops to Weardale)	Post office on Briardale Road	12 July, 4 October
Cowpen Estate – 3 monthly (Briardale Shops to Tynedale)	Post office on Briardale Road	1 Sept, 1 Dec
Cowpen Farm	Isabella Community Centre	23 August

**Blyth South (10am start)**

Avenues	Entrance to 1 Avenue	11 Aug, 10 Nov
New Delaval Estate	Newsham Coop	14 July, 13 Oct
Cottingwood/Benridge Park	Entrance to Benridge Park	21 July, 20 Oct
Bowes Ct/Town Centre/Crofton	Beside Catholic Church, Bowes Court	28 July, 27 Oct
Solingen, Seafeld Area	Entrance Solingen	23 September
Poets Estate	Newsham Rd Coop	7 July, 6 Oct

**Seaton Delaval (10.00 start)**

Hallington Drive Area – 3 monthly	Outside 1 Mindrum Way	17 Aug, 23 Nov
The Crescent – 1 monthly	Outside 1 Stanley Gardens	29 June, 27 July, 24 Aug, 28 Sep, 26 Oct, 30 Nov, 21 Dec
Holywell – 6 monthly	Outside 1 Holywell Avenue	20 July
Woodside Avenue – 3 monthly	Outside 1 Woodside Avenue	13 July, 12 Oct.
Deneside – 3 monthly	Outside 1 Burnlea Gardens	3 Aug, 9 Nov.
Blyth Street – 3 monthly	NCC Info Centre, Council offices	10 Aug, 16 Nov
Seaton Sluice – 6 monthly	Outside 1 Southward	7 Sept.
New Hartley – 6 monthly	Hartley Court	22 June, 14 Dec

Please contact the Estates and Tenancy Services Team on 542248 for further information.



**Maintaining and improving properties**

**Alnwick District Estate Walkabout Dates July – September 2010**

**Start time 10.00 am**

Alnwick North Area 1	Entrance to Alwynside	1 September 2010
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**Start time 10.00 am**

Alnwick North Area 2	Junction of Howling Lane/ Windsor Gardens	18 August 2010
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**Start time 10.00 am**

Alnwick Town Centre	Pottergate Tower	7 July 2010
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**Start time 10.00 am**

Alnwick South Area 1	Co-op, Victoria Road	22 September 2010
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**Start time 1.30 pm**

Alnwick South Area 2	Entrance to Cawledge View	29 September 2010
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**Start time 1.30 pm**

Amble Area 1	Junction of Ivy Street/Leslie Drive	4 August 2010
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**Start time 1.30 pm**

Amble Area 2	Car Park at Andrew Drive	25 August 2010
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**Start time 10.00 am**

Rothbury Area 1	Entrance to Beechcroft	21 July 2010
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**Start time 11.00 am**

Rothbury Area 2	Outside 1 Addycombe Gardens	21 July 2010
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**Start time 1.30 pm**

Shilbottle	Selby Road Garages	28 July 2010
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If you would like to join us on an estate walkabout but would like a reminder nearer the date please contact the Neighbourhood Services Team on 01670 542248.

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 08000 461 431 for further information.



Improving quality of life

# New Wellbeing project for Seaton Valley Communities



The Women's Health Advice Centre, (WHAC), a voluntary organisation has been successful in getting funds from Seaton Valley Fairshares Fund to promote healthy living in the Seaton Valley communities.

The wellbeing project which will run until January 2011 is open to residents of Seghill, New Hartley, Seaton Sluice, Seaton Delaval and Holywell.

Community Associations will be given a choice of training courses, events, counselling and advice sessions to promote healthy living. Courses may include; managing stress and anxiety, healthy lifestyles, confidence building, yoga, Tai Chi,

healthy eating and more. The counselling and one to one support and advice covers a wide range of confidential issues including debt advice, relationships, abuse, domestic violence and bereavement.

Dianne Keetch, community worker from WHAC will be asking the views of each Community Association about the health promotion programme and hopes to recruit new volunteers to assist in the promotion programme.

If you are interested in health promotion in the Seaton Valley area please contact Dianne at WHAC tel 01670 853977 or email [admin@whac](mailto:admin@whac)

## Could you be missing out on benefits?

**Did you know that £16 billion in means tested benefits go unclaimed every year?**

Changes in 2009 to the way that housing and council tax benefit is calculated mean child benefit and maintenance payments are no longer counted as income when working out how much benefit you can get. Some people could get more money to pay their rent and council tax.

You may also be able to get your Council Tax Benefit claim backdated for the previous 6 months if you are under 60 and can show good cause why you weren't able to claim earlier. If you are over 60 you do not have to show good cause however benefit can only be backdated 3 months

### **If you're aged 60 or over**

You can claim Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (including Second Adult Rebate) with your claim for Pension Credit.

Homes for Northumberland Rents team have already identified over £47,500 in additional benefits for our tenants. They have assisted in claims for backdating, identified new pension credit awards and attendance allowances on behalf of our tenants. They are happy to help and are trained to carry out free welfare benefit assessments.

Telephone: 01670 542121 or email: [hfn\\_incomemanagement@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:hfn_incomemanagement@northumberland.gov.uk)

# Affordable Credit – how to decide

**Where would you go to get £300 to avoid an emergency, say the washing machine had broken down, if you didn't have savings, couldn't borrow from friends or any other method not involving paying interest back?**

Many of our tenants end up paying way over the odds to door-step lenders, mail order catalogue companies, or worse still, loan sharks! Look at this table of loan options for £300.

Lender	Weekly	Total	Total Interest	Interest Rate
Loan Shark	£55.20	£2870.40	£2570.40	1000%+
Provident	£10.50	£546.00	£246.00	272.4%
Five Lamps	£6.57	£341.64	£41.64	29.9%
Credit Union (new member & Places For People)	£6.53	£339.56	£39.56	26.8%
Credit Union (existing members)	£6.15	£319.80	£19.80	12.8%

As you can see there is a choice to get credit quickly at affordable rates. There are two credit unions in Northumberland which are non-profit making financial co-operatives run by their members – South East Northumberland Credit Union (CUSEN) and Northumberland Credit Union. Both offer loan and savings products. CUSEN can offer 'instant' loans for tenants in Blyth Valley and the initial membership is free for all our tenants.

CUSEN also offer their loan service via a mobile van and will be coming to you on three dates: 18 June – Seghill, 25 June – Seaton Sluice, 2 July – New Hartley, 9 July – Seaton Delaval and 16 July – Seaton Delaval.

There are two other options available. Places For People offer 'instant loans' for all residents for households in postcodes NE23 Cramlington & NE24 Blyth, and Five Lamps offer the same across the whole county. These two organisations are not credit unions and do not require any savings with them.

For all the above organisations the minimum loan is £100 and average loans granted are about £300. They are all regulated by the Financial Services Authority (FSA) and are bound by law to be insured against fraud and theft.

Contact details for the above organisations are as follows:-

CUSEN	<a href="http://www.cusen.co.uk">www.cusen.co.uk</a>	01670 522779
Northumberland Credit Union	<a href="http://www.ncul.co.uk">www.ncul.co.uk</a>	01670 517915
Places For People	<a href="http://www.placesforpeople.co.uk">www.placesforpeople.co.uk</a>	0845 603 6695
Five Lamps	<a href="http://www.fivelamps.org.uk">www.fivelamps.org.uk</a>	01642 608316

Providing excellent services

## Clear Rent Account Incentive

David Garrett – Independent Board Member for Blyth area presenting Mr Ramsey from Bebside with his £100 of high street vouchers.

The first prize of £500 high street vouchers for the annual draw was won by a Cramlington resident. There were 5 x £100 worth of vouchers for the runners up.

Mr Ramsey from Blyth, Mrs Hinge from Blyth, Mr Fulton of Seaton Valley, Miss Britzman and Mr Straker from Blyth Valley area.

All Homes for Northumberland tenants will be eligible for the draw in 2010/11.



## Homes for Northumberland Tenant Board Members

Homes for Northumberland continue to show their commitment to the needs of their customers by recruiting tenant board members at both Alnwick and Blyth. If you would like any issues to be raised at our board meetings please contact you local board member:

### Strategic Board

Bob Bertram (Vice Chair)	01670 713891
Maureen McAvoy	01670 351141
Barbara Woodward	01665 510984

### Alnwick Area Board

George Robson (Vice Chair)	01665 575971
Barbara Woodward	01665 510984
Ken Walker	01665 575951

### Blyth Area Board

Bob Bertram	01670 713891
Maureen McAvoy	01670 351141
Robert Newall	01670 366283
Margaret Rochester	0191 237 2276
Karen Bailey	01670 812360



# Spring time safety

## Police news

### Don't make easy work for burglars

- Keep garden tools locked away
- Has your shed survived the winter without damage which would help a thief gain access? If not, don't delay – FIX it Now
- Use an alarm – battery operated alarms may act as a deterrent. If you have a house alarm, you could have it upgraded to include your shed.

### Planning a holiday

- Install timer switches on lights and radios
- Try to make your house look lived in while you are away
- If possible leave a car parked in your driveway and ask a neighbour to check on your home.

### Burglars like to work undercover

- Trim hedges back this Spring
- Cut back overgrown areas
- Gravel on paths and driveways can alert you to someone approaching so intruders will not be so keen
- Prickly plants and trellis can provide extra protection from the intruder

### How to access your local policing services

**Emergency Response** Dial 999  
**Non-Emergencies** 03456 043043

For deaf and hard of hearing  
**Minicom** 01661 82091

**Police Advice/Officer contact**  
 (7am – 11pm) 03456 043043

**Crimestoppers** 0900 555111  
 (anonymous information line)

### Contacting your neighbourhood beat managers

Email: Alnwick  
[alnwick.npt@northumbria.pnn.police.uk](mailto:alnwick.npt@northumbria.pnn.police.uk)

Email: Blyth  
[blyth.npt@northumbria.pnn.police.uk](mailto:blyth.npt@northumbria.pnn.police.uk)

Email: Cramlington (also covers Seaton Valley)  
[cramlington.npt@northumbria.pnn.police.uk](mailto:cramlington.npt@northumbria.pnn.police.uk)



## Improving our existing properties

## Fencing with the Duke of Northumberland

**Large scale fencing works started in Alnwick on the 1st February this year, on the Cedar Grove Estate.**

The work, which would normally have been carried out by a fencing contractor, was awarded to the Homes for Northumberland in-house workforce, and should last approximately four to five months.

All the fencing rails, posts, boards etc are grown locally from sustainable forests owned by the Duke of Northumberland, and fully processed in sawmills which employ local staff, all employed on the Dukes estate, thereby keeping money in the county by using local labour and materials.

The style of fencing that is being erected was chosen by residents. A one-metre high fence is being replaced with a two-metre high, close-board fence, giving greater security and privacy to residents.

Resident comments and feedback regarding the work being carried out is very positive and they are delighted with the new fences.

This is the first joint initiative to be carried out on a large scale since the company was formed in April 2009.

The Director of Property Services, Anna Benbow, stated 'This is the sort of initiative the company are actively encouraging for the long-term viability of Homes for Northumberland and we will keep staff updated on this and any further new schemes.'



## Bungalows extended in Amble and Rothbury

**Two more bungalows have been extended from 1 bedroom to 2 bedrooms in the Alnwick area.**

The bungalows, one in Addycombe Gardens, Rothbury and one in Leslie Drive, Amble are being extended using funding from the Single Housing Investment Pot (SHIP). This now brings the total number of bungalows that have been extended in the Alnwick area to seven.

Stephen Kilmister, Property Services Manager said 'The SHIP funding has enabled Homes for Northumberland to provide much needed larger bungalows to meet housing need in the district'.

# Green and affordable housing on its way to Allendale

**22 new affordable homes – both rent and shared ownership – are on their way to Allendale in a development that will be green and family friendly!**

Homes for Northumberland, Northumberland County Council and the Homes and Community Agency worked together to secure the £1.3m investment which took several months hard work.

All of the properties will be built to Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable homes, to ensure that they are helping to cut fuel bills and saving the environment.

Some homes will even have photovoltaic panels where the sun's light is converted to renewable energy to provide hot water and heating, others will benefit from rain water harvesting. All will have coal fired stoves to ensure that there is a second heating source in case of a power cut.

The outside of the properties will use local stone and slate so it is in keeping with the area, and there will be a play area in the middle of the development which will be open to everyone.

The properties will be available using a local lettings policy to make sure that those with local connections including family and employment can remain in the area. This is very important when the average house price in this area is £265,300 - 11 times the typical income of those who live there.

**Ray Boycott, Managing Director of Homes for Northumberland said:**

“These will be the first homes that Homes for Northumberland will build and it will be a proud day for us when the tenants move in. I am looking forward to progressing this scheme but most of all helping local people remain in the area.”

## Involvement questionnaire

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** Dinsdale House, 75 Marine Terrace, Blyth NE24 2LN.

Name	Address
Telephone Number	Mobile Telephone Number
E-mail address	

How would you like us to involve you?

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

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
- Help with estate walkabouts
- Armchair involvement
- People pool

Improving our existing properties

# £6m for Home Improvement Works

The new financial year brings with it the start of a new exciting housing programme.

This year we have a budget of just under £6m to provide improvement works to houses in both the Alnwick and Blyth Areas.

The Company is rolling out a programme of improvement works to residents living in Blyth, Cramlington, Seaton Delaval, Alnwick, Amble and Rothbury.

The following contractors will be used for different works:

- Frank Haslam Milan for kitchens, bathrooms, rewiring and heating,

- Sekura for doors and windows
- Pringle Building Services for brickwork repairs
- Renvac for roofing work.

As part of the scheme, hard standings will be used on some of our estates to alleviate parking problems and disabled adaptations will be made to help tenants remain in their homes.

Anna Benbow, Director of Property Services said: "Homes for Northumberland will continue to provide improvement works to homes to ensure all the properties we manage are of a good state of repair and meet housing needs across the district."



**We can provide this information in alternative formats and languages. If you would like information in another format or language, please contact one of our offices.**

## Arabic

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

## Bengali

আমরা এই তথ্য বিকল্প ফরম্যাট ও ভাষায় প্রদান করতে পারি। আপনি যদি এই তথ্য বিকল্প ফরম্যাট বা ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে আমাদের যে কোনো একটি অফিসে যোগাযোগ করুন

## Chinese (simplifi

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 (traditio

我們備有此資訊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 सुदृष्ट्या 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.

## Portugu

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

## Punjabi

ਅਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਬਦਲਦੇ ਫਾਰਮੈਟਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਪ੍ਰਦਾਨ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਾਂ। ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਫਾਰਮੈਟ ਜਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਪਸੰਦ 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