

September 2010



New customer services centre opens soon

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Key contacts

Customer Services Centre
(open from 11 October 2010)
01670 542424

For information on Dog Wardens call
0845 6006400

To contact the Alnwick Housing Team,
please call **0800 0 461 431** or email
housingalnwick@hfn.uk.com

To contact the North Blyth and
Cramlington and the South Blyth and
Seaton Delaval Housing teams, please
call **01670 542 248** or email
estates@hfn.uk.com

This information is also available in large print, Braille and audio. If you would like to receive Your News in another format or language, please contact Melanie Armstrong at melanie.armstrong@hfn.uk.com or telephone 01670 542106.

Arabic

يمكننا تقديم هذه المعلومات بتنسيقات ولغات أخرى. إذا كنت ترغب في الحصول على هذه المعلومات بتنسيق أو لغة أخرى، برجاء 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 मुहैया करा सकते हैं। अगर आप अन्य फॉर्मेट या भाषा में जानकारी चाहते हैं तो कृपया हमारे कार्यालयों में से किसी एक में संपर्क करें

Polish

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

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 ਬਦਲਵੇਂ ਫਾਰਮੈਟਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਪ੍ਰਦਾਨ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਾਂ। ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਫਾਰਮੈਟ ਜਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਕਰੋਗੇ, ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਡੇ ਦਫਤਰਾਂ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਇੱਕ ਨੂੰ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ

Slovak

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

Turkish

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

Urdu

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

If you have any comments or suggestions for Your News, please contact Melanie Armstrong, Communications, Homes for Northumberland, Civic Centre, Renwick Road, Blyth, Northumberland NE24 2BX or call 01670 542106.

Front cover: Joan Briston, Homes for Northumberland tenant in Seaton Delaval

Welcome to the Autumn edition of Your News

We've had a busy few months and have lots to report in this edition of the magazine.

You may also notice that, after careful consultation with our Tenant Editorial Panel, we have made a number of improvements to this edition of the magazine – including more photographs and a slightly different layout. If you have any comments on any of these changes or would like to suggest other ideas, then we would love to hear from you.

Some of the highlights in this packed Autumn edition include information on the launch of our new Customer Services Centre and the introduction of one single telephone number for all of your queries. This means that you will be able to access a range of Homes for Northumberland services by simply dialling 01670 542424.

We also held our first Big Debate and Question Time recently which invited you to come along and ask our Executive Management Team the questions that matter to you. We had some outstanding feedback on this session and I look forward to seeing what the future events will bring.

Our Homelessness and Housing Advice Team has also been working with students at Blyth Community College to make them think about the reality of leaving home through our No Home No Hope project. This initiative has been so well received by the students involved that we are hoping to



Ray Boycott
Managing Director

roll the programme out to other high schools in both the Blyth and Alnwick areas.

This Autumn's Your News also includes a number of articles to provide you with important information, ranging from making ends meet, how you can get involved in the organisation and details on maintaining your garden.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition of the magazine – and don't forget that if you have any feedback on Your News then please don't hesitate to get in touch with us.

**Best Wishes,
Ray**

Providing excellent services

Blyth Area Board Update

Blyth Area Board has been continuing to focus on the performance of Homes for Northumberland and look at any issues in the Blyth area.

The last Board meeting was held on 2 August 2010 at Civic Centre in Blyth. Members were informed that HFN had been successful in passing the inspection of sheltered units in Alnwick and Blyth by Supporting People. The Board reviewed the new Customer Services Centre as well as information reports from the Strategic Board.

Attention was also drawn to the Credit Union for South East Northumberland (CUSEN) and the large amounts of money saved by tenants in interest payments and retained for the local economy due to tenants taking out cheaper loans with them. The 'Home Energy Doctor' scheme had also been successful in saving money for tenants in choosing the best gas and electricity deal and the Board heard that they are now looking to offer a similar service to tenants when gas service safety inspections are carried out.

Board meetings are open to the public and are held every two months. The upcoming dates are as follows:

17 November 2010
12 January 2011
23 March 2010

If anyone has any comments, please contact Allan Hepple on 01670 542 140.

Alnwick Area Board Update

Over the last four months the Alnwick Area Board has focussed on performance, specifically looking at rent arrears and Homefinder.

The Council presented its new Allocations Policy and the accessibility of the Homefinder scheme in the Alnwick area to the Board. Concerns were noted by the Board about allocations in more rural areas.

The Alnwick Area Board has focussed on the introduction of payment cards and how easy it is for people in the rural areas of Northumberland to access some services - including how this might impact on the take up. Rent arrears have also been discussed, looking at the progress on improving collection rates.

The Board has approved a Community Fund being set up in the Alnwick Area as well as the Alnwick Capital Programme. They also visited the renovated and extended properties at Shilbottle and reviewed performance.

Board meetings are open to the public and are held every two months. The upcoming dates are as follows:

10 November 2010
19 January 2011
16 March 2010

If anyone has any queries, please contact Anna Benbow on 01670 542 140.

Performance to June 2010

Indicator	Blyth	Alnwick
Amount of rent outstanding	£369,556	£278,363
Tenants evicted for rent arrears	4	0
Average time taken to let an empty home	33.7 Days	17.6 Days
Total number of repairs made	6,588	1,218
Total number of complaints received	50	1
Number of customers involved in groups, associations and resident involvement events.	1161	

You have your say at our first Big Debate and Question Time event

We are dedicated to establishing a dialogue with our tenants and we recently held the first in a series of Big Debate and Question Time events.



The session opened with a progress report from Ray Boycott, which covered:

- Changes to neighbourhood management and the introduction of one single number for all enquires.
- Long term plans for Homes for Northumberland.

Residents were then invited to ask questions directly to our Executive Management Team.

The event was very well attended and the feedback from tenants was excellent. Some comments from you included:

- An enjoyable, well planned and informative afternoon – well done
- The event was excellent, giving everyone an opportunity to have their points put forward

- Thanks for a very useful event
- It was well presented with a good atmosphere and the information was given in a precise manner
- Well presented – well done
- It was all useful as it gave tenants the opportunity to ask direct questions
- All information given during the debate was both informative and relevant

Ray Boycott said: “Resident feedback is extremely important to us and we have set up these sessions as a way of effectively collecting their views and to offer direct feedback, so we can continually improve what we do for the better. The session was a real opportunity for us to ensure residents are informed about issues that

matter to them, as well as giving them a chance to ask any questions of us.

“Our residents are at the heart of everything we do and we want them to tell us what they think so we can involve them in any decisions we make.”

Allen Nevin, Vice Chair of Blyth Residents Forum, 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.”

Providing excellent services



How you can get involved in Homes for Northumberland

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

Homes for Northumberland works with local tenants in a number of ways that are designed to suit your needs and circumstances. This allows us to listen to what you want and helps us to make things happen.

Residents can:

- Join a residents group with neighbours to improve the place where you live
- Help produce this newsletter by becoming part of the editorial panel
- Become a mystery shopper and tell us what you think of our services
- Register for “armchair” involvement and give us your views from the comfort of your own home
- Take part in Estate Walkabouts with your Neighbourhood Housing Officer
- Sit on one of our Service Panels and find out how we are performing and suggest ways to improve the service
- Be part of the Community Fund Panel and help make decisions on how grant money is used to benefit local communities.

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

Health day will be a breath of fresh air

Homes for Northumberland is working alongside Groundwork NE and Sustrans to host a health day at Ridley Park on 23 October between 11am and 2pm.

Being outdoors is a fantastic way of spending the half term holidays and this event is designed to help show our residents how they can live healthy lifestyles. Getting outside into the fresh air can help to improve your health in a number of ways, including perking up your mood, reducing anxiety and contributing to your children's development.

Cycling is a great way to get fit while enjoying your local environment and the half term health event offers you the opportunity to ask experts at Sustrans all of your questions on cycling.

Spending time in your garden is another great way of getting exercise in the fresh air. Residents will also be given the opportunity to take part in planting a tree at this event.

To find out more, please contact Sue Vaughan on 01670 542093.



Improving quality of life

Helping you to making ends meet balance your books

To help ensure you have more pounds in your pocket, Graham Brewis our Financial Inclusion Manager, has listed the top five things you should never pay for:

1. Debt advice

There are plenty of organisations that offer brilliant debt advice absolutely free. Some companies may even be able to speak to the companies you owe money to on your behalf and negotiate more manageable repayment plans so you can get your finances under control again.

There is some excellent free telephone advice available. The Northern Debtline 0300 333 3445 was recently set up by the Citizens Advice Bureau and Northern Rock Foundation. Others include:

- Northern Debtline 0300 333 3445
- Community Legal Advice 0845 345 4 345
- National Debtline 0808 808 4000
- Consumer Credit Counselling Service 0800 138 1111

2. Current accounts

Many current accounts now come with 'perks' such as travel insurance or breakdown cover – however you have to pay extra for these, usually somewhere in the region of £5 to £25 per month. There are some really great free current accounts on the market right now.

Residents can contact Graham Brewis on (01670) 542094 for the most up to date information on free current accounts available.

3. Water in restaurants

Going out for a meal is a treat we all look forward to, but can often be expensive. If you fancy a glass of water with your meal, save money by asking for iced tap water rather than an expensive bottle of spring water. Iced tap water is free in some restaurants – and you can even request a jug rather than a glass if you prefer.

4. Your Credit Rating

Rather than paying to review your credit rating, there are a number of ways you can access your credit report yourself. For example, Experian offer this service, simply visit www.experian.co.uk for further details or call 0844 481 8000

5. ATM withdrawals

Watch out for sneaky ATMs that charge you a fee of around one to two pounds for withdrawing money. Even if it means walking an extra five minutes to another cash machine, its worth saving those pounds.

For more information, please contact Graham Brewis, Financial Inclusion Manager, on 01670 542 094



Community Fund Update

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

Some of our residents have already benefited from the fund:

Solingen

Elderly and disabled residents from Nye Bevan House and Solingen Estate in Blyth enjoyed a day trip to Holy Island after receiving money from the community fund.

The coach picked up 45 local residents and took them for a trip around Holy Island, stopping on the way back at Seahouses for fish and chips. They returned back to Blyth after having thoroughly enjoyed their day.

Alnwick

Alnwick Community Centre received support from the Community Fund to provide two street dance sessions for local children and young people.

The sessions were well attended and the young people reported that they all enjoyed the activity.

It was so successful that the centre will now be delivering Street Dance sessions every week this term.

Seaton Sluice

Residents in Seaton Sluice have now completed their colourful planters placed at the three entrance points to the village, thanks to the community fund. The Residents' Association also entered the Northumbria in Bloom competition and we will continue to keep you up to date on their progress.

If any Homes for Northumberland Resident Association has a project which they can demonstrate would benefit their community, you can apply for community funding of up to £500 from Homes for Northumberland by telephoning 01670 542239 or emailing julie.turner@hfn.uk.com



Residents enjoy a trip to Holy Island

Calling all Cowpendale residents

Cowpendale Residents Association has now been set up to cover the area from Tynedale Drive to Briardale Road.

The Association will work together to help foster community spirit in the local area, increase play facilities for children and work with partners to alleviate anti social behaviour.

If you are interested in joining or have any queries, please contact:

Paul Green, 15 Nidderdale Close: 01670 540940

Barry Baker, 18 Patterdale Road: 01670 369498

Providing excellent services

Leaseholder Matters

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

We are responsible for managing the services provided to your home and the communal areas on behalf of the Council. Homes for Northumberland is dedicated to keeping you up to date with the issues that affect you and we are also keen to hear what you have to say about the services we provide.

Give your feedback on the new Leaseholder handbook and service standards

We are about to embark on an evaluation exercise of the existing Leaseholder Handbook and our Service Standards and we want to encourage you to come forward with your views.

The Leaseholder Handbook is a useful resource that we provide to every one of our leaseholders. It provides information on your lease as well as your rights and obligations as a leaseholder.

The handbook covers a range of areas, including service charges, repairs and maintenance, insurance and caretaking services.

It is designed to be a useful, comprehensive resource to answer your queries. Many internal sections of Homes for Northumberland contribute to the handbook, including Repairs and Maintenance, Finance, Safer Neighbourhoods, Neighbourhood Management, Resident Involvement and Procurement.

Our Service Standards set out our main objectives - so every leaseholder is clear about the high level of service they can



expect from us. The current Service Standards include a number of goals, including ensuring it is easy to contact our staff, consulting with you on any major repairs and holding a leaseholders forum every 12 months.

We want to hear your feedback on our existing service standards. This is your chance to shape our objectives and decide what you want us to do for you.

Homes for Northumberland is planning two Service Panels with leaseholders at the Council Chambers, Clayport Street, Alnwick on 30 September and the Civic Centre, Renwick Road, Blyth on 7 October to discuss the new Leaseholder Handbook and Service Standards.

For more information, please contact Richard Bryan on 01670 542 245.

Success is in the pipeline for Sarah and Stephen

Two new faces have joined our Blyth area Repairs and Maintenance team to complete their plumbing qualifications.

Stephen Cochrane, who is 17, has joined Homes for Northumberland as an apprentice plumber. After leaving school, he gained work experience with our plumbers at Cowley Road and enjoyed it so much that he decided to pursue a career in plumbing. Stephen lives in Blyth and is currently working towards his Level One Plumbing course at Ashington College.

Sarah Murdoch, who is 31, is our new trainee plumber and is Homes for Northumberland's first female operative. She comes from Fenham in Newcastle and is currently studying for her formal qualification in plumbing at OLCI Construction Ltd at North Shields.



Sarah and Stephen with Anna Benbow, Homes for Northumberland Director of Property Services.

Update on Allendale



Work is now well underway on 22 affordable, eco friendly new homes at Allendale.

The new development is Homes for

Northumberland's first new build project and we recently marked the start of work on site with an event with representatives from the Homes and Communities Agency, the Leader and officers of Northumberland County Council, and the Chairman of Dunelm Property Services.

Progress on site is going well and site meetings are being held on a monthly basis. To date, the house and bungalow foundations have been build and deep

excavation works are also nearly completed, including access to the site from the main road through Allendale.

The drainage is the next phase of work and this will involve temporarily reducing access on the main road, so we can connect the on site drainage to the main sewers off the site. The contractor is also erecting some site cabins at the top of the site, including welfare and rest facilities.

Homes for Northumberland is planning to start marketing the four intermediate rented homes on the site soon.

The homes will be available for rent by people who live in or around Allendale and we are already getting requests for information from local residents in this area.

For more information or to express an interest in these properties please contact Homefinder.

Providing excellent services

Our new Customer Services Centre enquiries

Homes for Northumberland will be opening a new Customer Services Centre on 11 October 2010.

We are introducing one, single telephone number – 01670 542424 – to deal with all of your queries. By simply dialling this number, you will get straight through to our customer services team, who will be ready to take your call on any issue, ranging from making appointments and booking repairs to taking a rent payment or bidding for a home.

What does it mean for me?

By dialling 01670 542424, you will be able to access a range of Homes for Northumberland services with just one single call.

This means that there will always be someone at the end of the phone to deal with your queries and you don't need to worry about speaking to answering



machines. Our team is just one phone call away and is ready and waiting to talk you through your enquiry - no matter how big or small.

Our Advisors are all fully trained in customer service and are prepared to answer your questions on a range of issues, including:

- Homefinder
- Leaseholders
- Repairs
- Rents
- Homelessness
- Neighbourhood Services
- Safer Neighbourhood Unit
- Estates
- Resident Participation
- Financial Inclusion
- General Queries

Homes for Northumberland has also introduced extended opening times, making it even easier for you to get in touch.

The customer services centre will be open from 8am till 6pm Monday to Thursday and 8am till 5pm on Friday. If you have an emergency outside of these hours, please call the same number 01670 542424 and you will be put through to our out of hours helpline.



We are ready to deal with all of your

Why has it changed?

The new Customer Service Centre is the result of resident feedback. You told us that you wanted one single telephone number for all enquires and also extended opening hours, so we have developed this service to meet this need.

Ray Boycott, Managing Director at Homes for Northumberland, said: "This new streamlined approach will mean that the majority of customer queries are handled at the first point of contact, helping us to deliver an efficient, high quality experience for customers."



"Providing excellent customer service and listening to the needs of our residents are of great importance to us. I very much look forward to opening our new customer services centre in October."



contact, or put you through to the best person to deal with your call

- Respond to complaints within ten working days
- Our staff will also treat all information as confidential – and not disclose it to others without your permission.

Our promise to you

The new Customer Services team will:

- Deal with all of your queries from a single number
- Answer 80 per cent of calls within 20 seconds. All other calls will be answered in 60 seconds
- Deal with your enquiry at the first point of

The centre opens on 11 October 2010 – please only use 01670 542424 from this date and discard all previous telephone numbers.

Opening Hours:

**8am till 6pm Monday to Thursday
8am till 5pm on Friday.**

All out of hours calls will be handled by an experienced emergency team.

Improving quality of life

No Home No Hope

Year Nine and Ten students at Blyth Community College have been taking part in an education programme designed to make them think about the reality of leaving home.

The No Home No Hope project from our Homelessness and Housing Advice Team highlights the realities and consequences that young people face after leaving home before they are ready to cope with this type of responsibility.

It aims to prevent homelessness by giving young people an accurate picture of the responsibilities involved in running a home, helping them to make informed decisions, as well as signposting them to help on offer in their local area.

Homes for Northumberland is pleased with the success of the programme and we are hoping to roll the programme out to other high schools in both the Blyth and Alnwick areas.



Managing Director of Homes for Northumberland, Ray Boycott said: "We feel it is very important to invest time working with young people to help them understand the reality of leaving home at a young age. The production of this package has been very well received and we are looking forward to working closely with Blyth Community College, and other schools, in the future."

Why you should not forget Remembrance Sunday



Ridley Park in Blyth.

Each year Remembrance Sunday gives us a chance to remember the heroes who have died in service.

Remembrance Day takes place every year on the Sunday nearest to 11 November (Armistice Day) and is associated with Poppy Day.

It is the day on which the United Kingdom commemorates the fallen of World Wars I and II, and the other conflicts which have occurred since 1945, including the wars in Korea, the Falklands, the two Gulf Wars, the conflicts in the Balkans and Afghanistan and those areas where British (and Commonwealth troops) in particular have been engaged.

The national ceremony is held in Whitehall, London with the Cenotaph as the focus of attention. It has been televised annually since 1946 by the BBC and has been broadcast on the radio for even longer.

Look out for local events in your area commemorating Remembrance Day.

Providing excellent services

How does your garden grow?



All tenants with a garden (that is for the sole use of their household) are responsible for its maintenance. This includes trees, bushes, hedges, lawns and flowerbeds.

This is your guide to the dos and don'ts of having a garden.

Q What if I am not able to maintain my garden?

A. Whatever your situation, you have responsibility for your garden. Your Tenancy Agreement states that the Council will take action for breach of tenancy if a garden is not properly maintained.

However, if you are not able to keep the garden neat and tidy, we may be able to help you, from helping you to find a property that you can manage or providing assistance in looking after the garden.

Please speak to your Housing Officer if you have any concerns.

Q What action will the Council take where a tenant won't look after the garden?

A. Untidy gardens affect the appearance of our estates and in the worst cases can be a health hazard. If there is no good reason why a tenant can't maintain the garden, the

Council may clear it and charge for the work.

Q. How does the Council find out about gardens that aren't looked after?

A. HFN carries out regular Estate Inspections where the condition of the Council estates and houses are checked. Where concerns are found, the first step would be for the Housing Officer to contact the tenant either by visiting or sending a letter. If you are contacted, please use this as an opportunity to sort things out.

Q. How can I tell you about an unsightly garden?

A. You can contact your Housing Officer regarding your concerns. You don't have to give your name.

Q. Who looks after a communal area?

A. If you live in a property with communal gardens, the Council may cut the grass and maintain flower beds and trees. If the Council does not maintain the communal gardens, each tenant or leaseholder is responsible for maintaining the gardens by mutual agreement with their neighbours. This will be stated in the tenancy or lease agreement.

Advice on Your Right to Buy

If you are interested in buying your home, then Homes for Northumberland's Right to Buy section should be your first point of contact.

We have fully trained staff who are happy to help tenants looking to get on the property ladder. Our team can assist with every aspect of the process, from offering general advice to helping you complete a Right to Buy application form.

This is a free service to tenants who fit the Right to Buy criteria.

While there are many reputable companies offering people assistance in buying their homes, Homes for Northumberland is aware that tenants may be persuaded to sign up for what they thought was a free valuation of their property when in fact they have signed an application to buy the property and sometimes financial arrangement too. We

would caution tenants to beware of companies offering you more than what you bargained for.

Homes for Northumberland can assure tenants that they do not ask any other company to operate on their behalf in relation to Right to Buy and will only visit a tenant in their home with prior notification and agreement with the tenant.

In addition, all staff carry identification, which they will be happy to produce on request.

Tenants are strongly advised not to sign any agreement unless they fully understand and are satisfied with the information they have been given.

If you need advice on any aspect of the Right to Buy scheme, please contact Angela Hastings on 01670 542216 or by emailing: Angela.Hastings@northumberland.gov.uk

A Guide to Back to Work Benefits

The Government is currently promoting a number of back to work benefits through Job Centre Plus.

There are three new benefits available:

1. In Work Credits – £40 per week for one year

To qualify you must:

- Be a single parent who has been in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance Income Based or Income Support for 12 months
- Find a job working 16 hours or more that would last for a minimum of five weeks.

2. Return to Work Credit – £40 per week for one year

To qualify you must:

- Have been claiming benefits due to ill health for 13 weeks or more (i.e. Income Support, Incapacity Benefit, Employment and Support Allowance, Severe Disablement Allowance)

- Be starting a job of 16 hours or more a week, expected to last five weeks or more
- Earn less than £15,000 gross per year
- Claim within five weeks of starting work.

3. Self Employment Credit – £50 per week

To qualify you must:

- Have been on Job Seekers Allowance for six months or more and start self employment
- Not claim any other benefit in work credit, i.e. Lone Parent Credit or Return to Work Credit.

Job Centre Plus can offer advice on how you can be better off working, as well as offering support on managing your move into work and sorting out changes to your Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit or tax credits.

Information correct at time of going to press.

To find out more about benefits and help with going back to work, please visit www.direct.gov.uk/workingbenefits

Top 10 tenant rights and responsibilities



As a Homes for Northumberland tenant you can enjoy number of rights, here's the top ten:

1. A Right to the quiet enjoyment of your home

We will not interrupt or interfere with your right to occupy your home as long as you keep to the conditions of your Tenancy Agreement. Where access is required, we will give you reasonable notice of at least 24 hours (except in an emergency).

2. A Right to be consulted

You have a right to be consulted about matters of housing management or maintenance which are likely to significantly affect your tenancy. This does not include changes to rent or other charges. We must give you 28 days notice of those changes.

3. A Right to repair

We must carry out certain types of repairs within defined time limits. If we do not do this you can tell us to give the job to a different contractor and claim compensation.

4. A Right to end your tenancy

You have the right to end your tenancy. To do this you must give us at least four weeks notice in writing ending on a Monday and give us vacant possession.

5. A Right to pass on your tenancy

If you die your husband, wife, registered civil partner or another member of your family who has lived with you for 12 months may be entitled to the tenancy if they are living with you at the home at the time of your death. This is called succession, and can only happen once.

You can also assign your tenancy to someone who would be eligible to succeed to your tenancy if you had died. However, this right does not apply if you have a demoted, family intervention or unsecure tenancy.

Rights enjoyed by secure tenants only:

6. A Right to take in lodgers or to sublet part of the property

You have the right to take in lodgers, if you do not breach any specific age restrictions that apply to your home. You also have the right to sublet part of the property, but you must get written permission first. In some cases, housing benefit may be affected.

7. A Right to exchange

You have the right to swap your tenancy with a tenant from a local authority or housing association. You must apply for written permission from us before exchanging your tenancy. We can only refuse permission on specific grounds.

8. A Right to buy

If you have held a secure housing tenancy for two years or more (five years if the tenancy started after January 2005) then you can buy your property (or lease your flat) with a discount based on the length of your tenancy.

9. A Right to carry out improvements

You have the right to improve your home but you must get our written permission before doing so. If you have received our written permission for improvements that you have made in your home, you may be entitled to compensation when you move out.

10. A Right to vote prior to transfer to a new landlord

You have the right to vote for or against any proposed stock transfer. Stock transfer is where a council transfers the ownership and management of its homes to a Registered Social Landlord.

You also have a number of responsibilities, here's the top ten:

1. Read your tenancy agreement

If you haven't read your tenancy agreement recently, please make sure you do. This will tell you both your and your landlord's responsibilities. If you need any help with this, or need any of the clauses explained, please ask us.

2. Pay your rent on time and in full

Your rent monies are used to pay our bills, including property repairs and improvements - so if you don't make payments then neither can we. If you have any problems paying your rent, you should contact your Housing Officer straight away. The longer you delay, the longer it will be before we can help you and the more arrears you will have to pay back. If you don't pay your rent you could face eviction.

3. Keep the property secure and in good order

Please keep your property clean and tidy both inside and out, including any garden. Keep all stairs and passages free from clutter and don't store anything in the property that could be a fire risk, or that could attract vermin. You also need to make sure you lock the property when you go out (including window and door locks).

4. Report any problems

If you experience any problems, for example a leaking gutter, a tap that has stopped working or there is a issue with the heating, then report these immediately.

5. Don't disturb the neighbours

Be considerate to your neighbours. Don't behave in an antisocial way that could upset or annoy them, and don't let anyone in your household (including children, visitors or pets) do so.

6. Live in the property as your main home

You must use the property as your main home. If you don't, then you will lose your rights as a secure tenant and could be evicted. Please let us know if you are going to leave the property unoccupied for more than a few weeks, or if you will be away for a while and someone else will remain in the property.

7. Ask permission

Most tenants have to ask permission before they can for example:

- make improvements to the property
- pass on the tenancy to someone else
- run a business from the property
- park a caravan or trailer at the property or on the estate.

Depending on the type of tenancy you have, we may have the right to refuse. Always put your request in writing and make sure you get your landlord's written permission before you go ahead.

8. Insure your home contents

Many tenants think that we will automatically insure their furniture, carpets, belongings and decorations against fire, flood, or theft. This is not the case. You can take out your own home contents insurance or sign up to our in-house scheme. Please ask your Housing Officer for a leaflet.

9. Give us reasonable access

Your tenancy agreement contains information about when we can enter the property, for example, if repairs are needed or to service the heating system. You are entitled to be given 24 hours notice from us. We will only enter the property without your permission in an emergency or with a court order.

10. End your tenancy properly

You usually need to give us four weeks notice for ending your tenancy. Please refer to the Rewards for Ending your Tenancy property article on the next page for full details.

We want you to be happy and settled in your home. Your Housing Officer is there to help you so please ask if you have any questions about your tenancy, your home or Homes for Northumberland.

Providing excellent services

Rewards for ending your tenancy properly

If you decide to end your tenancy with us, you must give Homes for Northumberland four weeks notice – this will begin the Monday after we receive the notice.

Your keys must be handed in before noon, on the Monday your tenancy is ending at a Northumberland Information Centre.

If you give us the correct notice period and leave your home in good condition, we want to say thank you – and you therefore maybe entitled to a reward of up to £150.

This £150 reward is split into two parts:

1. You could receive £50, if you provide us with four weeks notice before ending your tenancy - providing us with your forwarding address and allowing us to inspect your home and do any minor repairs before you leave.
2. Tenants can then receive the other £100 reward if your home is clean and in good decorative order. This includes clearing your home of any belongings, rubbish or furniture, ensuring the garden is tidy and kept free of rubbish and there is no damage to the property fixtures or fittings.

To qualify, you must have been a tenant of the property for at least 6 months, have a clear rent account and return the keys to a Northumberland Information Centre.

You are not eligible for these rewards if you are exchanging properties with another tenant, and if you owe us money we will offset any reward against debt. You can qualify if you transfer to another vacant council property as long as the above criteria are met.



National Stalking Helpline Launched

According to the British Crime Survey, nearly 20 per cent of women and 10 per cent of men have been the victim of stalking and harassment at some point in their lives.

The National Stalking Helpline has been launched to offer information, advice and guidance for anyone affected by stalking and harassment. It can be accessed by calling **0300 636 0300**, emailing **advice@stalkinghelpline.org** or visiting **www.stalkinghelpline.org**. The helpline will be open weekdays from 9.30am to 4pm, except Wednesdays when it will be open 1pm to 4pm.

The Helpline will not be open on bank holidays. Calls cost the Standard National Rate.

Government plans to change how council houses are financed

Northumberland County Council has been collecting the views of council tenants on the best option for funding council houses in the future.

This follows the Government announcement that it is proposing to dismantle the current subsidy system and establish a self financing system.

Basically this means that all the rent you pay would be used to pay for the management and maintenance, and major investment in Council houses, for example new kitchens and bathrooms. In addition income from the sale of council houses to tenants would be kept by the Council (currently 75 per cent of the income is paid to the government, with only 25 per cent being kept by the Council). Any income left over after all of the selling costs have been paid could

be used for new council houses in the county, either through building new houses or bring empty homes back into use.

Council houses are currently financed by central government through what is called the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy System. This system was introduced before the Second World War and has only had some minor changes since. The Government estimates how much it will cost to manage and maintain council housing and how much income the Council will get from rental on the houses.

If it costs more to manage and maintain the properties than the Council can get from rental income, the Government pay 'subsidy' to the Council to make up the difference. If the Council gets more rental income than it costs to manage and maintain the properties the

Council has to pay the difference to the Government.

The new Government proposals will mean that Councils will have more responsibility for managing their housing budgets and be able to retain any net income from the Right to Buy sales.

Northumberland County Council must make a decision about whether to change from the current subsidy system to a self-financing system and has been collecting the views of residents. We will keep you informed on any decisions made as soon as that information is confirmed.

It isn't too late for you to have a say in whether you think the Council should accept the Government proposals to establish a self-financing system to pay for the council houses.

Please send any comments or queries by the 22 October 2010 to:

In Person: At any Northumberland County Council Information Centre

Email: housingservices@northumberland.gov.uk

Telephone: 0845 6006400

**Writing: Sandra Cain, Housing Business Manager
Northumberland County Council
County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF**

Improving quality of life

Northumbria Police – putting your safety first

Blyth and Alnwick both have their own Neighbourhood Policing Teams made up of Local Officers and Community Support Officers. The teams are committed to making the areas safe and enjoyable places for everyone to live, work and visit.

They work with partners like Homes for Northumberland and local residents to tackle the issues that matter to people and a big focus has been on anti social behaviour - which can affect anyone, living in any community.

Northumbria Police has been running a force-wide campaign focusing on anti social behaviour and how it can affect people's lives.

Neighbourhood Police officers have been engaging with young people in the area and working with our partners at the Council to offer young people positive activities to do over the summer. Police hope that if young people are actively engaged, then anti social type incidents will reduce.

Over the coming months, police are running a number of community events and meeting in your area to give residents their say on how the area is policed and the opportunity to raise any local concerns direct.

In Blyth, there is a PACT (Partners and Communities Together) meeting on Tuesday 19 October, at 10am at Blyth Civic Centre. It's a chance for residents to discuss issues with members of the local policing team and partner agencies.

In Alnwick, there will be a PACT meeting held on Thursday October 21 at 9.30am at the Council Chamber, Clayport Street in Alnwick.

The meetings are a chance for residents to discuss issues with members of the local policing team and partner agencies.

For more information on what's going on in Blyth or Alnwick visit www.northumbria.police.uk or ring 03456 043 043.



Alnwick Neighbourhood Inspector Sue Peart



Blyth Neighbourhood Inspector Trevor Oakley

Estate Walkabouts

Alnwick South (1.30 pm start)

Streets	Meeting Place	Dates
Cawledge View, Tanners Garth, Glovers Green, The Cordwainers, Farriers Court	Entrance to Cawledge View	29 September 2010

Cramlington (10am start)

Eastfield Lea	Eastfield Community House	23 Sept, 21 Oct, 25 Nov, 16 Dec
Eastfield Grange	Entrance to Cairnglass	22 Sept, 20 Oct, 24 Nov, 15 Dec
Collingwood Grange	Car Park at estate entrance	5 October
Mayfield Glade	Barrasford Road next to Car Park	21 December
Mayfield Dale	Entrance to Thirston Drive	28 October
Mayfield Grange	Entrance to Ave, opp Village Road	8 December
East Hartford	Entrance between Stephen/Ormston/Wrightson	23 November

Blyth North (9.30am start)

Bebside	Kitty Brewster Pub Car Park	20 September
Hodgsons Road	Netto Car Park	18 October, 22 November
North Farm	Phone box at Junction of Temple/Walton	6 December
Cowpen Estate – 3 monthly (Deneview to Briardale)	Blyth North Office, Brierley Road	7 December
Cowpen Estate (Briardale Shops to Weardale)	Post office on Briardale Road	4 October
Cowpen Estate – 3 monthly (Briardale Shops to Tynedale)	Post office on Briardale Road	1 December

Blyth South (10am start)

Avenues	Entrance to 1 st Avenue	10 November
New Delaval Estate	Newsham Coop	13 October
Cottingwood/Benridge Park	Entrance to Benridge Park	20 October
Bowes Ct/Town Centre/Crofton	Beside Catholic Church , Bowes Court	27 October
Poets Estate	Newsham Rd Coop	6 October

Seaton Delaval (10.00 start)

Hallington Drive Area – 3 monthly	Outside 1 Mindrum Way	23 November
The Crescent – 1 monthly	Outside 1 Stanley Gardens	Sept, 26 Oct, 30 Nov, 21 Dec
Woodside Avenue – 3 monthly	Outside 1 Woodside Avenue	12 October
Deneside – 3 monthly	Outside 1 Burnlea Gardens	9 November
Blyth Street – 3 monthly	NCC Info Centre, Council offices	16 November
New Hartley – 6 monthly	Hartley Court	14 December

Please contact the Estates and Tenancy Services Team on 01670 542248 for further information.

Dates for Residents/Community Association meetings

Seaton Delaval and Holywell Residents Association

All meetings take place at 7pm at Mustard Seed, Elsdon Avenue, Seaton Delaval.

14 October 2010
25 November 2010 (AGM)

Seaton Sluice and Old Hartley Residents Association

Tuesday 12 October 2010, Annual General Meeting. Community Centre, Library Building 7 pm



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** Blyth Civic Centre, Renwick Road, Blyth NE24 2BX.

Name	Address
Telephone Number	Mobile Telephone Number
E-mail address	

How would you like us to involve you?

Face to face (meetings etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Postal questionnaire	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone	<input type="checkbox"/>
E-mail	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tick all you are interested in

Join our mystery shopping panel	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attend one of the local tenant and residents groups	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sit on one of our service panels	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help with estate walkabouts	<input type="checkbox"/>
Armchair involvement	<input type="checkbox"/>
Join our editorial panel	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be part of a community fund panel	<input type="checkbox"/>