



## Amble gets a Spring Clean

### IN THIS ISSUE

Spirit of the  
Community  
Awards now open

*Page 8-9*

.....

Neighbourhood  
Agreement launched

*Page 10-11*

.....

Get more involved

*Page 12-13*

# Welcome to the Spring edition of Your News

I want to open with the news that the Strategic Board has appointed me as Interim Managing Director of Homes for Northumberland for a twelve month period. You may also be aware that there have been a number of changes to our Boards and a new member, Ian North has been appointed as Chair of the Strategic Board. A full list of board members can be found on our website.

The purpose of my new role is simply to ensure that the housing company continues to deliver the best possible service for tenants. I am currently working with the Board, staff and tenants on an improvement plan for the company – to ensure all of our services are the best they possibly can be for you, our tenants.

Homes for Northumberland has plenty to shout about – which is celebrated throughout this edition of Your News. For example, we have recently hit our 100 per cent target in gas servicing which is a great achievement and there is an article about this later in the magazine.

However, we are aware that there are areas which could be improved so I would like to invite tenants to give us their feedback. We want to hear from you about how you think we can develop and improve our service. We already have a series of service panels on which tenants review specific areas of service. We are going to help make those panels aware of what is possible and what the very best in the business are doing for their tenants. We should all work together and not rest until we are satisfied that the tenants of Northumberland get a service that can't be bettered anywhere. To do this we need your input and to know what you want from us.

I am aware that the company has been going through a period of change so I invited the Your News Editorial Panel along to interview me and ask questions on behalf of tenants. A review of this session appears later in the magazine. I hope to run other similar sessions like this one in the future – so tenants can ask questions about our services and really shape the company. I found it really useful, and the tenants were kind enough to say they did too. The question is how we can have more open discussion like this.

You will also find in this edition of the magazine an update from Northumberland County Council. We know that tenants have a number of questions for the Council about the changes that have happened recently. I hope that this article helps to answer any of the questions you may have for the Council. What it does show is that Homes for Northumberland and the Council are working together in a really effective way to achieve the best results for the service and tenants.

If you have any suggestions for improvement or you have any queries on the recent changes that have taken place. Please speak with your Housing Officer or contact our Customer Services Centre. If you have ideas about what we need to do to improve things please let us know. This includes ideas about how we can continue to have the sort of open discussions I enjoyed with your editorial panel.

**Best Wishes,  
Kevin Lowry – Managing Director**



# Message to tenants from Northumberland County Council



**I am very pleased to provide you with some updates about the management of your homes from the council's perspective.**

We wrote to all tenants in December last year about some changes that we were making to the management of Homes for Northumberland and we want to explain the most up to date position on this.

During the latter part of 2011, the council was becoming increasingly concerned about a number of aspects of the management and performance of the company which manages your homes on behalf of the council. Following investigations by an independent organisation we considered that it was necessary, and in the best interests of tenants, to make changes to the Homes for Northumberland Board, as well as to the management of the company.

There were serious concerns which involved issues including management of the gas servicing programme, financial controls and some staffing issues, which were putting the company at risk. We replaced some of the Board members on a temporary basis with council nominated representatives.

The former managing director of Homes for Northumberland has now left the company and Kevin Lowry has been appointed as interim Managing Director for the next 12 months. Kevin has very wide experience in the housing sector and will be overseeing a number of improvements at the company.

We are pleased to report that significant progress is now being made in addressing the areas that were causing the council concern and were presenting some risks. There is now a healthy and effective dialogue between Homes for Northumberland and the council.

As we said in our letter in December, the council has set aside its considerations about changing the management of your homes. The council has invited Homes for Northumberland to provide proposals on how it could provide a cost effective and improving service in the future. The council will be considering these proposals in July.

Importantly, however, is that we want to assure tenants that, regardless of the management issues, **there are no plans to sell off homes to a housing association or any other organisation.** In fact we are investigating action we can take to protect us from ever being forced into a position like that.

I want to let all tenants and leaseholders know that we remain fully committed to ensuring that you have the very best possible housing service, and one in which you play a significant and influential role. We also want to involve tenants in development and improvement of services and we will be letting you know more about this through a series of consultation events. We will issue the details shortly.

If you have any queries about management issues please get in touch with your local housing officer.

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

## NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland County Council

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

## Blyth Area Board Update

Members viewed the Annual Report DVD and commented on whether they would like to see it as a regular feature. The group agreed it was user friendly and asked for further information on the number of copies requested by tenants.

The board reviewed the company's performance information. It was stated that the target for Gas Servicing was exceeded and performance on priority response times for emergency jobs was now 100%

With reference to welfare reform, a Member asked what would be done to address the collection of rent arrears. It was agreed that a report will be available in a future meeting on this issue.

Homes for Northumberland officers delivered presentations on the Delivery Plan for 2012/13 and the recent inspection of the housing company.

Board members discussed the future role of the board and put comments forward.

## Alnwick Area Board Update

Board members welcomed the significant improvement in gas servicing performance. They congratulated staff on the progress made and acknowledged the contribution of the Board.

After viewing the Annual Report DVD, members agreed that it was an innovative communications method, but stated that this must represent value for money.

Members reviewed all performance information and asked for further information on tenants that abandon their properties. They also expressed a desire to see more detailed information on rent arrears and further work on the impact of welfare reform.

Presentations were delivered by Homes for Northumberland on the Delivery Plan for 2012/13 and a review of the recent inspection of the housing company.

Members discussed what the Area Boards should focus on in the future and their desire to see services retained locally in Alnwick.



You said you wanted information on what to do if partners are not keeping our Neighbourhood Agreement.

We included these details in the Neighbourhood Agreement leaflet and this issue of Your News.

You said you wanted details on our capital works projects.

We are putting this information on our website and it will also be available from our Customer Services Centre.

You said you wanted help clearing up litter in Amble.

Our Resident Involvement team organised an Amble Big Tidy event.

You said tenants would like to interview other tenants for Test the Service.

We asked a group of tenants to do a telephone survey on the last edition of Your News and hope to extend this further.

You said you wanted the seven year painting plan changed to five years.

We have now launched our five year painting plan.

You said you needed heating engineers to diagnose boiler problems quicker and easier.

We have purchased new software to allow us to assess boilers more quickly and accurately.

# We want to hear your views

We need your complaint, compliment or suggestion so that we can:

- **Tailor services to meet your needs**
- **Learn and make improvements to services**
- **Recognise the good work of our teams and build on good practice**

To give us any feedback, please get in touch on 01670 542424

## Here is a breakdown of the feedback we received this year (11/12):

Number of complaints received	<b>148</b>
Number of leaseholder complaints received	<b>0</b>
Number of repairs complaints received	<b>97</b>
Average time to respond to complaints (days)	<b>11.99 days</b>
Number of compliments received	<b>39</b>

Tenants on the Your News Editorial Panel asked us to add examples of compliments in this section of the newsletter. Here is a snapshot of your comments:

- “ **Thank you to resident involvement for all the hard work they put in to organising meetings and training. ”**
- “ **A joiner called at my home today and did a very good job when repairing my internal doors and left the property clean and tidy. ”**
- “ **The workforce are always friendly and do everything possible to help. ”**
- “ **Thanks for helping me sort my tenancy issues. ”**
- “ **The Customer Services Centre is very pleasant and helpful ”**
- “ **After a fire that left me temporarily homeless, Homes for Northumberland helped me find another house to live in that was near to my home. They even arranged furniture so I could have all of the essentials I needed. I had very little furniture left after the fire but they helped me find storage for these items so I knew they were safe. They really went the extra mile for me and thought of all of the little things that would make a difference during such a difficult time, I can't thank them enough. ”**

## Why do we collect diversity information?

Homes for Northumberland needs to make sure our services are meeting tenants' needs. In order to do this, we need to gather information about our customers. We do not want to intrude in a person's personal life. We want to ensure that all our tenants have the opportunity to live in a safe and welcoming environment that allows them to live free from visible or invisible discrimination.

If we don't measure the levels of community representation amongst our tenants, we can't be sure that we and our systems are fair. We will never report in a manner that allows the identification of an individual. All information will be kept confidentially and only used to find out where we need to provide additional services or improve service to meet needs we are currently unaware of.

## Our Performance

We promised in the last edition of Your News that we would keep you up to date with how Homes for Northumberland is doing by reporting our performance. Here we take a look at what was achieved in certain areas for Quarter 4 (January to March) of the financial year April 2011 to March 2012.

Tenants on the editorial panel asked us to look at the following key areas. For more detailed information on performance, please visit our website at [www.hfn.uk.com](http://www.hfn.uk.com)

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

### Property Services Percentage of gas servicing completed

**Target 100%**



January 2012



February 2012



March 2012

**Higher is better.** We hit our 100% target for completing gas services this quarter. An article on our gas servicing performance is included in this edition of Your News.

### Property Services Number of emergency jobs done on time

**Target 99%**



January 2012



February 2012



March 2012

**Higher is better.** In Quarter 4, we exceeded our target of 99%.

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

### Property Services Number of urgent jobs done on time

**Target 97%**



January 2012



February 2012



March 2012

**Higher is better.** We beat our target of 97% in Quarter 4.

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

### Property Services Number of routine jobs done on time

**Target 97%**



January 2012



February 2012



March 2012

**Higher is better.** In Quarter 4, the number of Routine Jobs done on time was above our target.

**Routine repairs (priority 3) are defined as:** Any defect that can be deferred without serious discomfort, inconvenience or nuisance to a tenant or a third party, and can await the next convenient maintenance visit.

**Customer Services Centre**  
Percentage of calls abandoned

**Target 4%**



January 2012



February 2012



March 2012

**Lower is better.** An abandoned call is one which is not answered. This is an area we have been working hard to improve in recent months and our performance has improved greatly in March 2012.

**Neighbourhood Services**  
Current rent arrears

Target £583,307.00  
Reached £542,575.74



January 2012

Target £552,752.00  
Reached £547,497.56



February 2012

Target £500,000.00  
Reached £505,804.59



March 2012

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

**Neighbourhood Services**  
Percentage of health walks with tenant representation

**Target 100%**



January 2012



February 2012



March 2012

**Higher is better.** In quarter 4, all health walks had tenant representation.

**Neighbourhood Services**  
Percentage of estate inspections completed against number planned

**Target 100%**



January 2012



February 2012



March 2012

**Higher is better.** All planned estate inspections were completed in Quarter 4.

**Neighbourhood Services**  
Average number of days to relet a property

**Target 23 days**



January 2012



February 2012



March 2012

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

# Spirit of the Community Awards – Enter now!

Entries are now open for our second Spirit of the Community Awards.

The Spirit of the Community Awards were so popular last year that we are holding another scheme for 2012 – to recognise the achievements of tenants who are going the extra mile. The Spirit of the Community Awards will look to find the people who have helped residents enjoy life more or made a difference to others.

Winners will be presented with an award at an event in November 2012. The deadline for nominations is 29 October 2012. All entries will be judged by our tenants – if you would like to be a judge please give us a call. The awards have five categories. You can either nominate another tenant or nominate yourself:



**2011 Overall Spirit of the Community Award Winners**  
Blyth and District Gateway Club

## ● GOOD NEIGHBOUR AWARD

Having a good neighbour can make a huge difference to your life. Is there someone who has made a difference to you or other people in your community by giving up their time to help out?

This is your chance to show someone that their work hasn't gone unnoticed.

## ● YOUNG PERSON OF THE YEAR AWARD

Do you know a young person who uses their time to help their local community?

It could be a young person who is involved with a local group or who gives up their free time to go the extra mile to help others in the community. The individual must be aged between 10 and 24 years old.

Let them know that they are valued by putting them forward for this award.

## ● GETTING INVOLVED AWARD

Is there an individual you who actively gets involved with Homes for Northumberland to improve things for everyone? Help to recognise their achievements and the value of their input with this award.

## ● BEST COMMUNITY GROUP

This award recognises community groups which have helped to improve their local area. Do you know a community group that has helped to ensure everyone is involved in improving your community?

## ● GARDEN OF THE YEAR AWARD

This category is open to all residents who are proud of their garden. Simply take a picture of your garden and submit it to us. All pictures must have been taken this year. If you would like to enter, but do not have a camera speak with us on **01670 542424**.



## HOW TO ENTER

Simply cut out and return the entry slip below to:

**Melanie Armstrong - Communications Manager**

**Homes for Northumberland Ltd , Blyth Civic Centre, Renwick Road, Blyth, NE24 2BX**

### APPLICATION FORM

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Tel No \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I would like to nominate the following group/ individual for the following category:

- |                                                         |                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good neighbour award           | <input type="checkbox"/> Best community group     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Young person of the year award | <input type="checkbox"/> Garden of the year award |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting involved award         |                                                   |

Please give brief details of why you think the particular person or group should be nominated. If we need to we will contact you for more information before we contact your nominated person or group. Please attach further sheets or information if needed

Name of person/ group you would like to nominate:

\_\_\_\_\_

Why you think they should be nominated *Please give us as much information as possible. Continue on a separate sheet if necessary.*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Nomination forms are also available by calling **01670 542424**. Please note, you must be a Northumberland County Council tenant or living in a Northumberland County Council property to apply. We look forward to seeing your applications!  
If you have any queries on the Spirit of the Community, please call **01670 542424**.

## Rent Draw Winners

All tenants with a clear rent account on 1 April 2012 were entered into a free prize draw. We had 6084 tenants who qualified for the draw this year. Well done to our winners:

**Mr and Mrs Hodgson**  
from Felton

**Mrs Scott**  
from Cramlington

**Miss Green**  
from Avenues Blyth

**Ms Dobson**  
from Cowpen Blyth

**Mr McCormack**  
from East Hartford Cramlington

Each winner received £100 in High Street vouchers.



## Tenant suggestions help improve estates

Housing Officers are allocated a budget of £1000 each to carry out small scale improvements on estates. Suggestions for these improvements are put forward by the community to help and improve their environment.

Thanks to suggestions from tenants, the following has been achieved:

- A new metal fence at Tranwell Drive, Seaton Delaval.
- Security grilles to 11 blocks of flats in the Newsham Area
- A planter installed to the entrance to Solingen Estate.
- New fencing erected at Denefields in Allendale.
- Fencing erected to the rear of flats at Windmill Grove, Cowpen.
- Fencing removed at Seghill.
- Ground maintenance work carried out on the Eastfield Lea Estate
- Bushes planted along the rear of Akeld Close in Cramlington.
- Upgrading 6 street lights in Park Drive, Newsham at the request of residents for security reasons.
- Decorating Alnwick Community Centre which was in need of repair.

If you have an idea for an improvement to your estate, please contact your Housing Officer or call **01670 542424**.



# Partners sign up to Neighbourhood Agreement

The Homes for Northumberland Neighbourhood Agreement sets out how the housing company and its partners will maintain the environment and safety of your estate. It also has information on how residents can contribute to making the place they live safer, cleaner and more pleasant.

Homes for Northumberland, Northumberland County Council, Northumbria Police and tenants have all signed up.

Under the agreement, agencies are committed to providing support, advice and enforcement on issues such as crime and anti-social behaviour, fly-tipping, graffiti, dog fouling and maintaining green spaces.

Residents' responsibilities are also outlined, including respecting one another, controlling pets, reporting incidents of anti social behaviour and putting rubbish in the bins provided.

For a full copy of the Neighbourhood Agreement, visit our website or contact the Customer Services Centre. If you feel any area of the agreement is not being kept, please call us on **01670 542424**.

## Residents' Roadshows coming soon

**Homes for Northumberland will be taking to the road this summer with a new programme of residents roadshows.**

Resident Involvement, local Housing Officers and the Safer Neighbourhoods Team will be visiting areas in a mini bus, giving tenants the opportunity to drop by to meet the team and ask any questions.

The roadshows are designed to get more residents involved and give you the opportunity to have your say about the work of Homes for Northumberland. Plus:

- Groundwork North East will deliver activities in your area.
- Enjoy a basketball fun day filled with lots of physical activity and specialist basketball coaching with the Eagles Community Foundation Community Coaches. These sessions are for basketball enthusiasts and those who just want to have a go for the first time. Lots of fun and games with opportunities to win prizes.

Residents who attend the mobile event will also have the chance to win vouchers by completing survey forms.

### EVENTS COMING SOON

**Eastfield, Cramlington**  
22 June, 3pm - 6pm

**Rothbury and Longframlington**  
27 June, 1pm till 6pm

**Avenues, Blyth**  
Thursday 28 June, 4pm - 7pm

**Shilbottle**  
3 July, 4pm -7pm

**Amble**  
10 July, 4pm - 7pm

**Allendale**  
17 July, 3pm - 6pm

Watch out for us arriving in your area!



# Get Involved



All tenants and leaseholders have the opportunity to have their say on the issues that affect their homes and community.

We are launching a brand new campaign called Get Involved to show residents the many different ways they can help shape Homes for Northumberland and our services.

Taking part can take up as little or as much time as you choose. We provide training and support and meet all relevant out of pocket expenses.

Here are some of the ways you can make a difference:

## JOIN THE RESIDENTS' FORUM

The Residents' Forum meets regularly and is consulted on how Homes for Northumberland provides services. The forum is a link between local communities and the Homes for Northumberland Board and ensures information is shared.

## SIT ON A SERVICE PANEL

Customers can sit on up to two of Homes for Northumberland's Service Panels to discuss how well the service is performing and how it could be improved. Service Panels meet regularly and cover the following areas:

- 1 Home Panel: considers repairs and maintenance, major works and improvements.
- 2 Tenant Empowerment Panel: deals with customer services, complaints, involvement, empowerment and diversity.
- 3 Value for Money Panel: considers rents and value for money.
- 4 Neighbourhood and Community Panel: deals with neighbourhood management, anti social behaviour, tenancy matters and lettings.

## JOIN A LOCAL TENANTS AND RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION (TARA'S) OR INFORMAL GROUP

A tenant and resident group is an organisation made up of people living in a specific area. By attending tenant and resident group meetings, you can meet other like minded people who want to improve their local area. We can work with you to set up a group if there isn't one near to you.

## HELP US TEST THE SERVICE

We carry out a number of surveys during the year about the different services we provide. You can either complete a survey or help us carry them out.

## MYSTERY SHOPPERS

Helps us to carry out test the service surveys by agreeing the questions to ask customers, looking at the results and suggesting ways in which we could improve services. We provide training and advice to all of our customers involved in test the service and mystery shopping.

## SIT ON THE COMMUNITY FUND PANEL

This group looks at Community Fund applications and decides how grant money is allocated. Training is provided for all panel members.

## ATTEND THE EDITORIAL PANEL

The Editorial Panel helps to produce Your News (as well as other leaflets or reading information) before it is sent out to tenants to help make sure it is clear and easy to understand.



**GO ALONG TO THE LEASEHOLDER FORUM**

Leaseholders can attend regular meetings to receive information and discuss specific aspects of the service, particularly ways in which the service can be improved.

**WALK YOUR WAY TO HEALTH**

Homes for Northumberland works together with and NHS Health Trainers to provide guided walks for tenants. You will have the opportunity to chat with other tenants and Homes for Northumberland officers while getting out in the fresh air.

**INVOLVEMENT TO SUIT YOU**

From the comfort of your own home, you can have your say via telephone, e-mail or postal survey. Depending on your request.

Homes for Northumberland is committed to encouraging residents to get involved and take part in decision-making to make sure we provide the services you want. Tenants can also become Board Members or join our Scrutiny Panel – watch out for more information in the next edition of Your News.

For more information, contact the Resident Involvement Team on **01670 542424**.

**Meet some of our involved tenants**

Getting involved at Homes for Northumberland can be tailored to suit your individual needs and easily incorporated into your everyday life.

**Bill has a cup of tea...** while filling out a survey.

Bill Ferry says: "It is always a pleasure to have the opportunity to make a difference to the services that I receive as a tenant. I take part in a number of activities, from surveys to service panels and would encourage any tenant to become more actively involved in any way they can. This is our opportunity to have our say, so that Homes for Northumberland can continue to consider the best interests of the tenants in any future decision making."



**Margaret enjoys a walk in her local area...** while speaking face to face with a resident involvement officer.

Margaret Hedley says: "I regularly go along to the health walks as they are a brilliant opportunity to get some fresh air while chatting to the team, who are always so friendly. There are plenty of ways to put your ideas forward, so I'd urge other residents get involved too."



# Community Fund pot opens for 2012

**Resident Associations who would like to set up a project to help their local community can get financial support of up to £500 from our Community Fund.**

All of the money available for local projects was successfully allocated last year. We are now open for Community Fund applications in 2012.

**Some of our most recent projects included:**

Astley Park Community Partnership were awarded £435 towards their free, Olympic themed community event taking place this July. The event will focus on young people's health and wellbeing in the Seaton Valley area and the funds will be used to pay for a smoothy bike, go-kart and pony rides.

Concorde House Residents' Association received £500 to purchase equipment to allow residents to participate in activities together. The funding will also pay for a day trip to Gilsland, which is a great boost for those tenants who don't manage to get out much.

Newsham and New Delaval Youth Forum were awarded £500 towards their Friday Night Youth Club, which offers young people in Newsham an alternative to the street. The money was used to purchase a pool table, arts and crafts, Wii and small TV.



Newsham and New Delaval Friendship Club received £378 towards their Queen's Jubilee and Chef's Workshop. The funds will be used for a chef to teach the group healthy cooking skills and there will also be entertainment at the event.

For more information on the Community Fund, speak with our Resident Involvement Team on **01670 542424**.

## Your News Test the Service

Test the Service is a new way for tenants to feedback their views to us.

Over the coming months, we will be conducting regular Test the Service exercises on Your News to get your views on the magazine.

We carried out a Test the Service following the last magazine by doing surveys with a random selection of our tenants. Thank you to everyone who took part, your feedback is important to us and we will review the magazine as a result of your comments.

Thanks to your feedback, the Editorial Panel will work on the following areas:

**Exploring "opt out" options, for those who do not wish to receive further copies of Your News**

**Promoting the different formats the magazine is available in – for example Braille and Audio**

**Continue to ensure a balance of articles and stories, which reflect all geographic areas of our tenant base**

We will report in the next edition of Your News how these activities are progressing.

If you have any feedback on the magazine, please contact Communications on **01670 542424**.

# HAVE YOU SEEN THIS LOGO?



## Who are North East Procurement? (NEP)

You might have seen the NEP logo somewhere in partnership with Homes for Northumberland; you might have heard them mentioned in one of your customer panel meetings, or you may even have been to an NEP customer event.

NEP are a not-for-profit organisation whose members are housing providers all over the North East. Our members have access to framework agreements for labour, renewables, new build and different materials they can use on their property maintenance and works programmes. The savings they gain from collective purchasing through us are reinvested into more works or to fund projects and worthy causes.

## So what has NEP got to do with me?

The savings that are made not only benefit Homes for Northumberland in terms of cost savings, but also forms our funding programme for local community and employability projects. This fund is called **future sparks**, which is available equally for all members and has already given grants totalling over £520,000 to projects all over the North East, from Alnwick down to Redcar.

We have a very active Customer Panel that is made up of customers from each of our members who represent their landlord and the wider communities.



## Want to find out more?

To find out more about NEP, visit our website at [www.neprocurement.com](http://www.neprocurement.com). To see more on future sparks, click on the Community tab of the website. Alternatively, to find out more, please email [info@neprocurement.com](mailto:info@neprocurement.com) or call **0191 280 4188**.

## Residents Forum

The Residents Forum meets regularly to discuss how Homes for Northumberland provides services.

Their meetings are open to all – including Northumberland County Council tenants, leaseholders and representatives of community groups.

Make a difference and get your voice heard – come along to the forum to talk about the issues that matter to you and your community.



Forum Chair Cilla Isles

If you are interested in finding out more about the forum please contact our Resident Involvement Team on **01670 542424**.

Date	Time	Venue
Wednesday, 21st March 2012	6:30-8:00pm	Concorde House, Seaton Delaval
Wednesday, 18th April 2012	6:30-8:00pm	Amble Development Trust, Fourways2, Amble
Wednesday, 16th May 2012	6:30-8:00pm	Eastfield Pavilion, Cramlington
Wednesday, 20th June 2012	6:30-8:00pm	Isabella Centre, Blyth
Wednesday, 11th July 2012 Big Debate	Buffet 6-6:30pm 6:30-8:00pm	Alnwick Council Chamber, Clayport Street, Alnwick
August - Holidays		
Wednesday, 19th Sept 2012	6:30-8:00pm	Seaton Delaval Pavilion Seaton Delaval
Wednesday, 17th Oct 2012	6:30-8:00pm	Alnwick Council Chamber, Clayport Street, Alnwick
Thursday, 8th Nov 2012 Big Debate	Buffet 6-6:30pm 6:30-8:00pm	Blyth Council Chamber Civic Centre, Blyth
December - Holidays		

# Amble gets a Spring clean

**Residents in Amble have been clearing up their local area at a Big Tidy Up event.**

The Big Tidy was organised by Homes for Northumberland in partnership with Northumberland County Council and Take Action Positive Steps. The organisations joined forces to help address the litter problem in Amble while getting local residents involved in clearing up their local area.

The day involved local residents litter picking around Straffen Court, which is a rubbish hotspot – this is partly caused by wind blowing refuse into bushes and shrubs on the estate. Town Councillors Craig and Maggie Weir, Kate Morrison and Jane Dargue also took part in litter picking and helped to clear six large bags of rubbish, plus a number of other discarded items from this area. Plans were also discussed as to how environmental work, following consultation, could help eradicate this problem in the long term.



Northumberland County Council's NEAT Team collected a large amount of rubbish, including discarded mattresses, unwanted household items and other general refuse from around the Radcliffe Estate and cleared the key fly tipping areas.

Twelve local children also took part in a Children's Recycling Day at Amble Boys Club which included a number of craft activities organised by staff from Take Action Positive Steps. The children ended the day with a litter pick in the area around the Boy's Club, clearing a further five bags of rubbish.

## Tenants kerb their rubbish at community clean up day

**Twenty three tonnes of rubbish were removed at a community clean up event on New Delaval Estate.**

The day was organised by Homes for Northumberland alongside Northumbria Police and Northumberland County Council. Residents were invited to put out rubbish at designated times to be cleared by a wagon – this included white goods and electrical items.

The community clean up saw residents on New Delaval Estate getting rid of mounds of unwanted household and garden waste.

Mrs Davison, who lives on Delaval Crescent, said "This event was a great idea and a big help to residents to clean their gardens and estate up."



# Want to get big product discounts AND low interest finance rates?

**Smarterbuys is the exciting new website that helps you buy the essential things you need at massively discounted prices.**

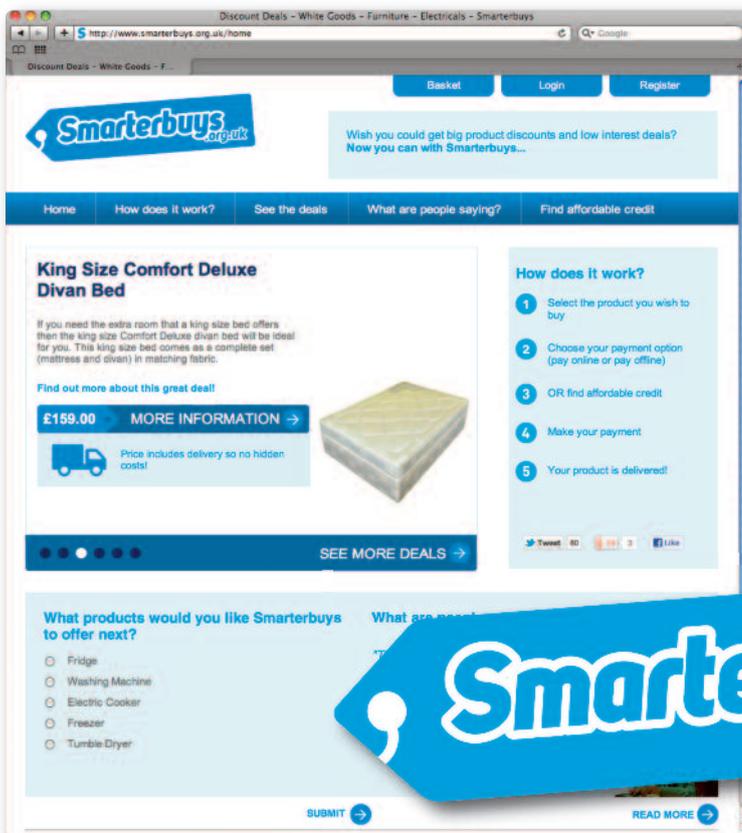
Smarterbuys offers one amazing deal every month – it could be for a fridge, washing machine, bed, sofa – any of the essential items you might need for your home. And there are a range of payment options to suit you – whether you have a bank account or not. You can pay with a debit card, use cash, or can access low-interest, affordable finance through credit unions.

We know some other high street stores and websites offer low weekly prices for goods, but you end up repaying far more than the goods should have cost you because of their huge interest rates. It's a totally false economy – and we don't think that's fair. That's why we are working with credit unions to help you access the lowest interest rates with the minimum amount of hassle. So, with Smarterbuys, you not only get a huge discount on the products you want, you get low cost finance too. It's about helping you to make your money go further – and making smarter buys.

Smarterbuys is supported by Homes for Northumberland. If you don't have internet access at home, ask us about the places within our community where you can get internet access free of charge (such as our local libraries).

To subscribe to Smarterbuys visit [www.smarterbuys.org.uk](http://www.smarterbuys.org.uk)

You can follow Smarterbuys on twitter: [@smarterbuys](https://twitter.com/smarterbuys)



# Improvements in your Home

## Repairs you Must do Yourself

Homes for Northumberland is responsible for doing a number of repairs on your home — for example on the structure of the property, on gas, electricity, plumbing or heating installations. These repairs are free.

But there are other, smaller jobs that you must do yourself. We consulted with our tenants to agree a list of repairs that tenants are responsible for, they are:

- Repairing minor plaster cracks
- Internal decoration
- TV Ariel's (except communal aerials)
- Loose screws on cupboards windows doors or gate furniture
- Washing machine installation
- Curtain Rails
- Gaining entry to the property
- External door locks
- Additional household keys
- Re glazing windows
- Shower curtains and poles
- Laminate flooring
- Loose floor coverings and carpets
- Bolts or locks to outhouses or garden gates
- Plugs and fuses for electrical appliances
- Light bulbs fluorescent tubes and starters
- Batteries for smoke detectors
- Clothes posts
- Safety chains
- Door Bells
- Blocked Gullies
- Sink and bathplugs and chains
- Toilet seats
- Coat rails or hooks

If everyone in your household is elderly or disabled, please let us know as we may be able to offer extra support.

## Permission for Improvements

If you are planning to make changes in your home, please be aware that you will need written permission from Homes for Northumberland if you want to build any of the following:

- Garden shed
- Greenhouse
- Car port
- Driveway or Patio
- Fences

Tenants can claim compensation from Homes for Northumberland (when they move home) for the cost of making the following repairs or alterations:

- Bath or shower, wash hand basin and toilets
- Kitchen sink and work surfaces for preparing food
- Storage cupboards in bathrooms and kitchens
- Central heating, hot water boilers and other types of heating
- Thermostatic radiator valves
- Pipe water tank and cylinder insulation
- Loft and cavity wall insulation
- Draught proofing of external doors and windows
- Double glazing or other window replacement or secondary glazing
- Rewiring or the provision of power and lighting or other electrical fittings (including smoke detectors)
- Security measures (excluding burglar alarms)

Compensation can only be claimed when you move to another property. You must have had written permission from us before you carried out the repairs to claim compensation.

For more information on our repairs service, please call 01670 542424

# Gas Servicing is on Target

**We have completed 100 per cent of your gas services this year.**

Homes for Northumberland carries out annual safety checks in tenants' homes to make sure your appliances are working safely and correctly. This not only helps to keep your heating and hot water working properly, but also ensures these appliances are not emitting the poisonous gas Carbon Monoxide.

In the last edition of Your News, we reminded tenants that you are putting yourself and your family at risk from carbon monoxide poisoning or potential explosions if you do not let us carry out this important safety check.

The wellbeing of tenants is of utmost importance for us and Homes for

Northumberland has now successfully gained access to all properties to conduct an annual gas safety check and ensure gas appliances are all safe.

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



## Alcan worker gets trained

**Wayne Ramshaw has joined our gas safety team to gain the experience he needs to complete his gas safety qualification and register as a Gas Safety engineer.**

After working at Alcan for 12 years as an operative, Wayne will be made redundant in May after the closure of the plant. On news of his redundancy, he sent over 100 letters and emails to local businesses to find a placement to help him complete his portfolio towards his qualification in gas.

With only three replies to his letters all saying they were unable to help, Wayne saw Jeff Reid, Leader of Northumberland County Council, on television highlighting the support the Council was offering Alcan staff through this difficult time and decided to send a letter direct to him.

As a result of his initiative, Wayne is now gaining the experience he needs working on domestic gas appliances at Homes for Northumberland.

Initially Wayne will work with a team installing new boilers before he moves across to gas servicing and helping with annual safety checks. This will give him the skills he needs to complete his portfolio.





**NORTHUMBRIAN  
WATER**

# ARE YOU WISE ABOUT WASTE?

## BAG IT AND BIN IT

The sewerage system is designed to handle

### USED WATER, HUMAN WASTE AND TOILET PAPER.

Disposing of anything else can block your toilet, sink and drains and lead to blockages in the public sewerage system. These blockages can flood homes and gardens and harm the environment by polluting land, streams and rivers. They are also costly to fix.

Please help us to keep the sewer network flowing and your bills low, by disposing of all other personal waste in a bin.

These items should **NOT** be flushed down the toilet:

- Nappies
- Cotton buds
- Razor blades
- Sanitary towels, panty liners and backing strips
- Condoms
- Medicines and tablets
- Facewipes and babywipes
- Syringes and needles
- Cleaning wipes
- Dental floss
- Incontinence pads
- Kitchen roll

Food scrapings, cooking oils, roasting juices and fats also cause blockages.

### DO NOT PUT THESE DOWN THE SINK

- pour into a container and leave to cool before scraping into the bin.

# Report Do

**Domestic abuse can happen to both women and men of any age, race, disability, sexuality and lifestyle.**

It can take many forms – including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, humiliation or financial abuse. Victims often feel guilty and ashamed and usually don't seek help until the abuse has been going on for some time. Please contact us as soon as possible if you think you are a victim of domestic abuse – help and support is only a phone call away.

## Welcome

Inspector Dave Harris has recently joined Northumbria Police's Cramlington Neighbourhood Team. He is responsible for all issues related to crime and disorder in Cramlington, such as criminal damage and vehicle crime.

**You can contact Inspector Harris by phoning 03456 043 043 and asking for extension 69191**



# Domestic Abuse

## You are not alone. Did you know?

- Domestic abuse will affect 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men in their lifetime.
- It accounts for 16% of all violent crime.
- One incident of domestic abuse is reported to the police every minute.

## What can you do to stay in your home and feel safe?

- Remember – the law is on your side and you can apply to the court to prevent someone intimidating or harassing you or your family with injunctions. The Safer Neighbourhoods Team at Homes for Northumberland is available to speak with you confidentially if you would like to discuss your rights.
- If the violent person is a tenant of Homes for Northumberland, we can make an application to the court to end their tenancy. We can also do work in your home to improve security and make it safer.

## What if you want to leave your home?

- If you can't return home, we may be able to help with accommodation. Contact us on 01670 542424, or call in to one of our local Northumberland County Council information centres and ask for help.
- If you leave your home in a hurry, the police can go back with you to collect your personal belongings.
- If you need help outside normal office hours, you can contact our out-of-hours service on **01670 540501**.

For more information on the free and confidential support our Safer Neighbourhoods Team can offer, contact **01670 542424**.



# Kevin Lowry in the hot seat

Kevin Lowry was recently appointed as the new Managing Director at Homes for Northumberland.

The Your News Editorial Panel interviewed him to ask him the questions that they felt tenants would like reading about in the magazine.

Here is a breakdown of the topics tenants raised at this session:

**Q Some bungalows were recently extended from one to two bedrooms after tenant consultation. However some tenants refused to have the work done. Would it not have been better for the bungalow extensions to be mandatory, so that it would benefit future tenants?**

**A** We are always thinking about future tenants, but consultation is essential as every tenant has the right to “quiet enjoyment” of their home. If tenants feel that the work would be too disruptive, then they have the right to refuse. We do recognise that there is a lack of two bedroom bungalows so we are looking at other solutions for the future, for example extending some bungalows when they become empty.

**Q Do all new building projects need to provide a percentage of affordable housing?**

**A** Yes, it's called Section 106 and it applies to building projects of 25 properties or over. Homes for Northumberland are working with the council to see what we can do to support the building of more council homes in the future.

**Q Some people are buying their council houses, and then letting them or selling them. What is being done to control this?**

**A** We are aware of this. The Right to Buy has been law since 1980. Once tenants have bought their homes there is little that can be done if they later choose to rent it out. The number of homes being sold had slowed down in recent years, however, the government has recently increased the right to buy discount up to a maximum of £75,000. The government hope this will encourage more people to purchase their properties. The intention of government is that for every home sold we will build one to replace it. This won't be easy as we will only get a portion of the money needed to build a new home from the



sale and will have to find ways of raising the cash for new replacement homes.

**Q How can the likes of ISOS and other registered providers build and yet the Council and Homes for Northumberland don't seem to be doing so?**

**A** ISOS are a Housing Association, which means that they operate in a different type of financial set up. They can raise funding from commercial borrowing allowing them to build.

**Q What is happening with the review of Sheltered Housing?**

**A** I am aware that the Sheltered Housing Review has been going on for some time, however we are awaiting the results of NCC's review of all sheltered housing across the county. As soon as this is concluded, HFN can take action. We are supporting the review with NCC as our tenants in sheltered housing are unhappy with some of the changes to services at present.

**Q What does Homes for Northumberland do about tenancy fraud?**

**A** If a tenant is aware of a property being used fraudulently we would ask them to make sure they tell a member of staff immediately. This can be done anonymously if they prefer. We will always make sure it is dealt with as priority.

**We want tenants to be in the driving seat and have a real say about the future development of the housing company. Feel free to give us a call or speak with your Housing Officer if you have any comments or questions.**

# Estate Walkabout Dates

## **BLYTH NORTH**

Edendale, Top of Edendale Avenue	5pm	17 May 2012
Briardale (Ravensdale), Briardale Shops	10am	14 June 2012
Brierley (Hallside), Brierley Road Shops	10am	26 July 2012
Cowpen Farm, Isabella Community Centre	10am	23 May 2012
Bebside, Kitty Brewster Pub Car Park	10am	20 June 2012

## **BLYTH SOUTH**

New Delaval Estate, Newsham Co-op	10am	5 Sept 2012
Benridge/Cottingwood, Entrance to Benridge	10am	12 July 2012
Solingen/Seafeld Area, Entrance to Solingen Est	10am	11 Sept 2012
Avenues 15th -16th, Entrance to 15th Avenue	10am	24 May 2012
	10am	20 Sept 2012
Blyth Town Centre, Catholic Church, Bowes Court	10am	17 July 2012

## **CRAMLINGTON**

Anton/Akeld Close, Entrance to Anton Place	10am	4 July 2012
Allensgreen/Allerhope, Back of 1 Adderstone Ave	10am	15 August 2012
Collingwood Grange, Carpark Entrance Chesterhill	10am	12 Sept 2012
East Hartford, Entrance to East Hartford	5pm	5 Sept 2012
Eastfield Lea, Outside 1 Axminster Close	10am	19 July 2012
Nelson village/Sunnyside, Arcot Avenue Shops	10am	19 July 2012
Eastfield Grange, Entrance to Cairnglass	5pm	28 June 2012

## **SEATON VALLEY**

The Crescent, 1 Stanley Gardens	10am	14 August 2012
Seaton Sluice, 1 Southward	5pm	19 June 2012
Hallington Drive, 1 Mindrum Way	10am	13 June 2012
Woodside, 1 Woodside Avenue	10am	11 July 2012
Blyth Street, Council Offices	10am	12 Sept 2012
New Hartley, Hartley Court	5.30pm	23 August 2012

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

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

## Follow us on Facebook



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



## Key Contacts

**Customer Services Centre**  
01670 542424

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

**Northumbria Police**  
Blyth Neighbourhood Inspector;  
Trevor Oakley  
03456 043 043 or  
blyth.npt@northumbria.pnn.police.uk

Cramlington Neighbourhood Inspector;  
Dave Fitzgerald  
03456 043 043 or  
cramlington.npt@northumbria.pnn.police.uk

Alnwick Neighbourhood Inspector;  
Sue Peart  
03456 043 043 or  
alnwick.npt@northumbria.pnn.police.uk

**Northumberland Citizens Advice Bureau**  
0844 4111309



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

### URDU

اگر آپ یہ معلومات کسی دوسری زبان یا فارمیٹ، مثال کے طور پر بریل یا آڈیو، میں چاہتے ہیں تو برائے مہربانی ہمارے کسٹمر سروسز سینٹر سے رابطہ کریں۔

### BENGALI

আপনি যদি ei তথ্যাবলী a ন্য ভাষাতে বা a ন্য রূপে যেমন bi লে বা a ডিওতে পেতে চান, a নুগুহ করে, আমাদের কাছে আমার সার্ভিসেস সেন রে যোগাযোগ করুন।

### CANTONESE

如果您想要本資訊的另一種語言版本或其他格式（如：盲文或音訊），請與我們的客戶服務中心聯絡。

### MANDARIN

如果您需要本信息的其它語言版本或其它格式（例如：盲文或音頻文件），請联系我們的客服中心。

### POLISH

Prosimy o kontakt z naszym Centrum Obsługi Klienta (Customer Services Centre), jeśli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać niniejszy dokument w innej wersji językowej lub w innym formacie, na przykład w alfabecie Braille'a lub w formie nagrania dźwiękowego.

### PUNJABI

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਬ੍ਰੇਲ ਜਾਂ ਆਡੀਓ ਦੇ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਕਰਨਾ ਚਾਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਡੇ ਗਾਹਕ ਸੇਵਾ ਕੇਂਦਰ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

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