

INSIDE

DON'T BE A VICTIM OF DOORSTEP CRIME • EMPTY HOMES BROUGHT BACK INTO USE

A MAGAZINE FOR NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL TENANTS

YOUR news

Newsham
MATTERS

YOUR VOTE
- use it or lose it



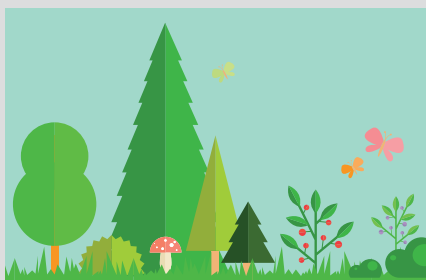
4

**DON'T BE A VICTIM
OF DOORSTEP CRIME**



8

**EMPTY HOMES BROUGHT
BACK INTO USE**



14

SOLID FUEL



16

**GET YOUR KIDS DAY OFF
TO A HEALTHY START**

FRONT COVER IMAGE:

Spring fun at
Whitehouse Farm Centre.

FOREWORD

Welcome to the Spring edition of Your News, which focuses on investments made by the council to help improve the communities in which you live.



The word community means a group of people who live in the same area and who have a shared interest or a common goal.

As a council we are committed to working with our tenants and partners to create welcoming communities you can be proud of and live in.

One of the ways we try to achieve this ambition is by investing to improve our estates with improvement projects, such as those at The Oval in Newsham.

We couldn't do this without your co-operation. Projects like Newsham Community Matters aim to bring a community together, to develop a

scheme, which can improve the lives of everyone in the area. Hopefully, this pilot will help us to develop our approach and we may then replicate this in other areas.

A community is also about taking care of each other, whether that's looking in on an elderly or vulnerable neighbour, or reporting suspicious activities in your estate, such as door-to-door callers or anti-social behaviour.

We all have a part to play in making Northumberland a happy place to live and we welcome your support and involvement.

**Allan Hepple, cabinet member
for housing at the council**

YOUR HOUSING MANAGEMENT TEAM IS ON THE MOVE



The team, currently based at Blyth Civic Centre, is moving to a new home at Compass House in the centre of Blyth, following the sale of the civic centre.

Compass House, as with the Civic Centre will not be open to the public but we intend to improve access to our services by offering meetings by appointment.

No set date has been agreed for the move but we anticipate that it will take place in May.

If you need to access the team or have a housing management enquiry, you should continue to call our Contact Centre on **01670 542424** or call into one of our Information Centres.

You'll find a full list of those centres on page 19.

NEW BUNGALOW

brings back memories for tenant



"The bungalow is going to make things so much easier for us, we are really impressed with it. As time passes and we get older, we will now have a house which will hopefully suit our needs."

Rita Railton

New tenants have now moved into a development of bungalows in Blyth.

And for Rita Railton opening the doors to her newly built bungalow, on the site of the former Morpeth Road school, was like stepping back in time.

The 70-year-old is a former pupil of the school and grew up on the nearby Cowpen Road. The old school railings now also border her back garden

She said: "It's like I've come full circle. The bungalow is going to make things so much easier for us, we are really impressed with

it. As time passes and we get older, we will now have a house which will hopefully suit our needs."

The £2.8m development is part of the council's Affordable Homes programme and is made up of 26 two-bedroom bungalows, two of which have been built to accommodate wheelchair access.

The bungalows are part of a focus on affordable housing by the council, which has seen more than 300 new homes being built across the county in the last three years.

Northumberland County Councillor Allan Hepple, cabinet member for housing said: "The lack of affordable housing is one of the biggest issues facing people in Northumberland and the council has placed a strong emphasis on building new affordable homes.

"It's fantastic to see the tenants moving into their new homes, which are helping local people, such as the Railtons, stay in the communities they know and love."

DON'T BE A VICTIM OF DOORSTEP CRIME

Northumberland Trading Standards Service is warning residents to be aware of bogus door to door callers.

These callers may offer services such as garden maintenance and home repairs, or try to sell you products. Fish sellers are a common complaint for Trading Standards. Rogue door to door sellers target vulnerable or elderly tenants, who may feel intimidated or pressured into buying from them or agreeing to have work carried out in their home or garden.

They often have a good "story" to tell and can be very persuasive. Once inside your home it can be difficult to get them to leave. Tenants should also be aware that in some cases some people have been subject to distraction burglary after allowing these sellers into their home.

Typically the work carried out is of a low standard, people are charged an excessive amount for work done or they fail to complete the work altogether even when they have been paid to do it. Complaints about fish sellers indicate that they may show you a small amount of quality product, but leave you with a large amount of lower quality product, for which you may be charged a lot of money.

**Remember
if you are unsure
call the Citizens
Advice Consumer
Helpline on
03454 04
05 06**

You may also end up on a "suckers list" where your details could be passed around to other rogue traders. As a result you may then receive an increased number of calls and visits to your home.

**If you
have elderly
neighbours or
relatives be aware
that they may be
vulnerable to rogue
traders so pass on
these tips and
advice.**

NORTHUMBERLAND TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE ARE HERE TO HELP WITH SOME TIPS AND ADVICE:



If you are unsure about the service being offered, you should always take the time to think. Ask for a business card and say that you will contact the trader rather than agreeing to work immediately.



For home maintenance or gardening services it may be better to ask a friend or neighbour for a recommendation for a tradesperson they have used.



Look for businesses on the Business Approval Register www.businessapprovalregister.com. This is a directory of businesses providing home improvements and professional services, providing a safer way to choose a tradesperson.



Ask for identification. Most reputable businesses will have a telephone number on the identification cards, you can call this to confirm the identity of the doorstep caller. If you are concerned about a door to door caller report it immediately. Contact the police via the **101 emergency number** or call the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on **03454 04 05 06** for further advice.



Avoid allowing someone you do not know into your home and use a door chain if possible.



Never agree to take someone to your bank to withdraw money to pay for goods or services.

- Staff in most high street banks are now trained to look out for any suspicious withdrawals



Fish sellers need a licence to sell door to door, so ask for evidence of this.



Place a no cold callers sign in your window (please cut out the sign provided)



PHONE AND EMAIL SCAMS

Be wary of letters, phonecalls or emails asking for personal information, such as bank account numbers, login details or passwords. Sometimes emails may look convincing but banks and Government departments such as HMRC would not ask for your personal details in this way.

Never respond to letters or emails asking for you to send money to an account. Even if an email is from someone in your contacts, their account could have been hacked, so always check with them first.

Be wary of letters, e-mails or phonecalls which tell you you have won a prize, especially if they are asking you to send money or call a premium rate number in order to claim this prize. Remember if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

If you are still unsure call the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on **03454 04 05 06**.

CUT OUT YOUR NO COLD CALLERS SIGN HERE



We DO NOT deal with COLD CALLERS

PLEASE LEAVE AND DO NOT RETURN
Failure to do so is a criminal offence

The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008

NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland County Council

YOUR VOTE MATTERS

DON'T LOSE IT



Local Elections: 'THEY'RE ON YOUR DOORSTEP'



Deadline
to register
**Thursday
13 April**

Elections
take place
**Thursday
4 May**

Northumberland County Council and local Parish and Town Council Elections take place on Thursday 4 May. This is your opportunity to choose who decides, on your behalf, what happens in your area and for the people of Northumberland.

To be able to vote, **you must be registered** and registering to vote is easy. You can do it in just a few minutes at gov.uk/register-to-vote. You'll need to provide your National Insurance number, your date of birth and your address. **Thursday 13 April** is the deadline to register to vote, so don't miss out!

If you have moved house or recently moved into Northumberland, you

may not be on the Electoral Register. If you are unclear about whether or not you are on the register call 01670 624811 or email elections@northumberland.gov.uk

If you can't vote in person you can still have your say with a postal vote or, if this doesn't suit your needs, a proxy vote (where a person you trust votes on your behalf). Go to yourvotematters.co.uk to find out

how to apply, or contact Electoral Services on the details above to request an application form.

Once you have registered you will receive a polling card which advises you that you either have a postal vote or give the details of the polling station where you should attend on the 4 May. If you have chosen to vote by post, you will receive your postal vote within the month of April.

**Make your vote count in this year's local Elections.
#OnYourDoorstep**

BE PREPARED for UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Universal credit, the new benefit for working age people, who are on a low income or out of work, is being introduced in stages across the country.

It will combine these benefits into one payment, which will be paid directly into your bank account.

This means that if you are entitled to help with your rent, (i.e. you are currently on Housing Benefit) this money will be included in your Universal Credit payment and **paid directly to you**. Unlike before, **you will be responsible** for paying your rent and making sure you don't fall into arrears.

Remember your rent is due weekly and in advance, housing benefit usually pays four weeks in arrears. This means that once Universal Credit starts you will be behind on your rent by four weeks.

It is vital that you pay your rent on time every week, failure to do so could lead to legal action being taken against you.

The easiest way to pay your rent is via Direct Debit, see details above on how to set up a direct debit. You can also pay by Standing Order, contact our Customer Contact Centre for a form, by telephone or pay online at **www.northumberland.gov.uk**

If you are having issues paying your rent then please contact us and we can help to set up a payment plan. If you receive a letter about your rent from us, don't ignore it – the problem won't go away. It is always best to discuss your problems with us so that we understand the difficulties you are facing and have a chance to help you.

Please don't wait for the changes to happen. You need to start getting prepared now.

Housing Benefit

Child Tax Credit

Working Tax Credit

Income Support

JSA

Income-related Employment and Support Allowance

The six benefits Universal credit will replace

We are waiting to hear when Universal Credit is to be introduced more widely in Northumberland. But please don't wait for the changes to happen. You need to start getting prepared now.

- 1 Open a bank account:** even if you have a poor credit rating, you can open a 'Basic Bank Account' Go to a local bank and they will help you. You will need to take proof of identity (such as your driving licence) and proof of address (such as your heating bill).
It is very important that you pay your rent and it is paid on time. You do not want to get into debt. The easiest way to pay your rent is by Direct Debit. To find out more on how to set up a Direct Debit, go to **www.directdebit.co.uk** or speak to your bank.
Alternatively you can open a 'Jam Jar' account with a credit union. Jam Jar accounts work by splitting the money that enters your account into different 'jars'. You can have different jars for different expenses. For example you can have a rent, water, saving or food jar. You can set how much money you want to go into each jar so that you know you will have enough money to cover those expenses.
- 2 Get on the internet:** You will have to make your application for Universal Credit benefits on the internet. There are lots of places in Northumberland where you can use a computer for free, such as your local job centre and library and learn how to get online. Call us on **0345 600 6400** to find out about free courses.
- 3 Set up a direct debit to pay your rent:** this means you won't have to remember to pay your rent on time as it will be taken from your account automatically. Your bank can help you do this. Once you have set up your Direct Debit, you can ask us about changing the date you pay your rent to the day you receive your Universal Credit payment. This will mean that your rent will come out of your account the same day you receive your Universal Credit payment.
- 4 Come and talk to us:** If you have any questions or concerns about Universal Credit one of our friendly advisors can help explain the process and how it will affect you in the future. Just call in at your local council customer information centre or ring **01670 542424**. Alternatively your local Citizens Advice Bureau will be able to help.

EMPTY HOMES BROUGHT BACK INTO USE

Empty homes across Northumberland will be brought back into use thanks to a project being delivered by the council.



Thirty homes from across the county will be repaired and released back onto the rental market, using a £750,000 grant from the Homes and Communities Agency's (HCA) Affordable Housing programme.

The council is working with owners, who currently have homes which have been empty for two years or more, to identify the homes to be included in the scheme.

Each home will be assessed in terms of its viability, such as cost of repair work, future rental potential, housing need in the area and the impact of it remaining empty on a community.

Using an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO). The council will take over the management of up to

25 empty homes. Using the grant these homes would be returned to a habitable condition and rented out. The council will also purchase a further five properties, which will then be refurbished and once rented, would be managed by Homes for Northumberland.

It is hoped that repair work to the homes will be complete next year with each being available to rent no later than 2018.

Northumberland County Council's business chair, Scott Dickinson, said: "Empty properties can have a negative impact on the sustainability of an area, affecting everything from local businesses to public services, such as schools and transport.

"Thanks to this funding from the HCA, we will now be able to work with owners to identify properties, which could be given a new lease of life and become a much-needed family home."



MILLIONS INVESTED

in Blyth estate



A multi-million pound scheme to rejuvenate a Blyth estate is nearing completion.

The work is expected to be completed by the end of March.

More than 350 homes in The Oval area of Newsham and New Delaval have seen their garden walls replaced, footpaths relaid with flexi-paving and new streetlights installed.

The properties have also been re-rendered and new guttering and fascias fitted.

The council has invested £2.9m into the scheme of environmental services.

Roads in the estate will also be resurfaced and a front canopy placed on a number of properties.

The majority of the homes in the estate are managed by Homes for Northumberland, the council's housing management team,

alongside a number of owner-occupiers.

Northumberland County Councillor and ward member Deidre Campbell helped to initiate the project.

She said: "It's fantastic to see the project almost at completion. The transformation of the estate is wonderful, and tenants I have spoken to are really happy with the work.

"The estate was looking old and tired but this work has given it a new lease of life. If an area looks good it makes you feel better about the place."

Gordon Webb, chair of the council's housing working group, added:

"There were some issues with anti-social behaviour in this area, but hopefully the community will now take more pride in the estate."

Northumberland County Councillor Allan Hepple, cabinet member for housing said: "This major investment is part of our ongoing commitment to improving the lives of our tenants.

"We hope that there will be a positive impact, not only to their community, but to the area as a whole.

"As a council we ensure that all our homes meet the Decent Homes standard. Improving the appearance of our estates is a natural progression of this work."

Working with LANDLORDS

Did you know that the council is working with landlords in your area to help to improve standards across our estates?



Working with private owners is key to ensuring that all homes in your community are a decent condition.

We offer a range of support and services to encourage landlords and owners to look after their properties. This includes an accreditation scheme which offers a free tenant check, and a Rent Deposit Guarantee scheme.

The council is committed to working with landlords, property owners and agents to improve standards in rented housing across the county.

HERE'S HOW WE CAN HELP IN MORE DETAIL:

WHAT'S ON OFFER

The accreditation scheme was introduced to offer responsible landlords with a **free** reference checking service for tenants, the same way we reference check our own tenants, to make tenancies more sustainable and to minimise the risk of failing tenancies.

WHAT WE NEED

To access the scheme there are a number of things we require from landlords including; all the necessary safety certificates (Gas, Electrical and Energy); building insurance and proof of a buy to let mortgage.

Once we receive these we will do an inspection of the property to ensure there are no health and safety risks.

WHAT A LANDLORD GETS

- Free tenant reference checks, including arrears checks and previous landlord reference
- Free advertising through Northumberland Homefinder
- A cash reimbursement on either your gas, electrical or energy certificate once the property is accredited
- Access to the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme (see opposite)
- Training sessions and networking opportunities (see opposite)
- A competitive advantage by promoting your properties as a responsible landlord



NORTHUMBERLAND PROPERTY ACCREDITATION SCHEME



RENT DEPOSIT GUARANTEE SCHEME (RDGS)

Once a property has been assessed and accepted into the accreditation scheme, the RDGS is available to tenants, who are unable to raise the funds through other means, to help them secure a property in the private rented sector.

The bond guarantee can be claimed upon by landlords at the end of a tenancy (up to 12 months) if there has been damage to the property or rent arrears. Both parties must be in agreement before a bond guarantee can be signed.

This scheme allows properties to be let more quickly. Tenants will be expected to save up over the period of the tenancy in order to repay the council in case of any claim being made.

TRAINING COURSES AND LANDLORD FORUMS

Working alongside the National Landlord's Association, Newcastle City Council and North Tyneside Council we offer a range of training courses for landlords throughout the year. These focus on everything from understanding deposits and disputes to landlords' safety. The courses are £85 per delegate.

We also organise an annual county-wide Landlords Forum. This event is a great way to network with other landlords, as well as finding out more about what the council can do to help.

There are also Development Forums in South East Northumberland, three times a year. The forum is a partnership between the council, private landlords and letting agents working in the private rented sector. It helps to promote the views of private landlords to contribute to the improvement of the county's housing.

For more information on the Property Accreditation Scheme and its benefits email privatesectorhousing@northumberland.gov.uk or phone **01670 622299**. Visit www.northumberland.gov.uk/Housing/Landlords.aspx#privaterentedsectoraccreditationscheme

MAKING THINGS MATTER *in Newsham*

A new community project led by Northumberland County Council is striving to improve the lives of people living in Newsham.

After a series of anti-social behaviour incidents in the area, the council carried out a door-to-door survey with the Police to find out what the main issues were, and what people wanted to see happen in the community.

More than 300 households responded, with many saying they would like to see a community project with everyone working together to bring back some pride to the area.

From there tenants developed the Newsham Community Matters project. With funding from NE Procurement the scheme aims to offer tenants and residents activities and courses to help improve their lives for the future.



Activities and courses will run in three different venues in Newsham. IT Matters, Church of Yahweh (lead by the Northern Learning Trust, offering support with job applications, help with benefit claims especially Universal Credit, help with writing CV's, short courses, and home budgeting). Practical Matters, St Bedes Church Hall (activities such as crafts, cake decorating, basic First Aid, leadership and confidence building and tenancy advice) and Family Matters, The Pavilion (activities such as healthy cooking, cooking on a budget, dealing with difficult situations and healthy lifestyle advice).



With funding from NE Procurement the scheme aims to offer tenants and residents activities and courses to help improve their lives for the future.

The council will be working in partnership with NE Procurement, the, Police, Community Voluntary Action Blyth Valley, Youth Forum, Northern Learning Trust, the Army, Northumbria Healthcare, Red Cross, St Bedes, Church of Yahweh and volunteers from the community to deliver courses and activity sessions starting on Wednesday 22 March.

We are also working with the Community Voluntary Action Blyth Valley (CVABV) to establish a Community Interest Company, made up of tenants, who can develop and take the project forward.

Irene Willis, 72, has lived in Newsham for more than 50 years and is fully supportive of the project.



"I have seen a lot of changes over the years, but recently we seem to have lost that community pride in the area," she said.

"This project has so many different elements to it that I think there is something for everyone. Working together, and getting the older generation to help the younger one, will hopefully not only improve the community but also the lives of people who live here.

"I would encourage everyone to go along to the open day and find out what courses and activities could benefit them."

Save the date

Come along to a family fun day to launch Newsham Community Matters on March 18th at The Pavillion from 10am to 2pm

For more information about the project contact the council's Resident Involvement Team on **01670 542424** or the Newsham Community Project mobile on **075522 60613**. Or go to **www.facebook.com/newshamcommunitymatters**

SOLID FUEL

Do you have a solid fuel appliance in your home? Then we have some advice on how to look after it and what fuel to burn.

There are a number of threats to your appliance which can not only cause large repair bills for the council, but also can pose as a danger to your home.

Northumberland County Council is responsible for servicing your appliance twice a year, this includes sweeping the chimney and cleaning and repairing any parts, such as grates or fire bars

However, we have seen an increase in repair work as some tenants choose the wrong type of fuel to burn.

Wood is wood, right? Wrong, Your solid fuel appliance is only as good as the fuel you burn on it.

SO HERE ARE SOME DO'S AND DON'TS

DON'T

- Burn "Green wood".
- This is wood which has not been dried, or seasoned. Unseasoned or green wood, still has the sap inside. Once the wood starts to burn the sap evaporates inside the chimney, the smoke cools and the sap turns into tar. This sticks to inside of the chimney and could result in a chimney fire.
- A fire would cause major damage to the lining of the chimney and would need to be replaced, costing the council £1,500 each time, to reline the chimney using a specialist chimney contractor
- Green wood also gives off less heat, so will end up costing you more as you will need to burn more to keep warm.

DO

- Buy your logs from a responsible supplier.
- These should be logs that are already seasoned and ready to burn.
- Wood should be stored under a cover to protect it from rain, but with a good supply of air. For softwood conifers, such as fir, they should be stored for a year and for a hardwood trees, such as oak, up to two years.
- If you are unsure ask the supplier who can advise you on the best type of wood to burn and how to store it correctly.



For more information call our Repairs and Maintenance team on **01670 542424**

Tenants invited TO EXHIBITION

DON'T

- Use Petroleum Coke.

Otherwise known as Pet Coke, this cheaper alternative to coal or coke, burns uncontrollably and at an intense heat.

It can burn through your fire bars, cause glass on the front of your stove to crack and crack the chimney.

DO

- Source your coal or coke from a reputable, registered coal merchant, who can advise you on the best fuel to burn.



Tenants were invited to a special exhibition to showcase the next phase of the council's £31million Capital Works programme.

This programme will include kitchen and bathroom replacements, electrical rewires, new heating systems, replacement roof coverings and windows and doors.

Tenants whose homes are in line for improvements this year were invited to an exhibition at Blyth's Civic Centre. They were able to view the choices on offer to them, ranging from bathroom suites and tiles to new front doors and kitchen units.

They were also given an idea of the date when work will start in their homes.

DID YOU KNOW...

If you need help moving furniture, or preparing your house for work, our housing Handyman can do this free of charge. Call **01670 542424** for more details

NORTHUMBERLAND *Residents' Festival*

OUR PEOPLE, OUR PLACES

Attractions across the county will be opening their doors to residents to encourage you to explore what's on your doorstep.

Just cut out the voucher at the bottom of this page, fill in the details and take it along to your chosen attraction, with proof of residence, such as a driving licence, utility bill or bank statement.

To find a full list of attractions involved pick up one of our leaflets from your nearest library or information centre or go to www.activenorthumberland.org.uk/northumberland-festivals-and-events

Here's some highlights:

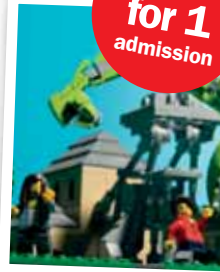
Seaton Delaval Hall

2 for 1 admission into this National Trust property where you can explore the drama of the central hall as well as the wide open spaces in the surrounding landscapes, gardens and woodlands.

**2
for 1
admission**

Woodhorn Museum

2 for 1 admission to Brick Dino exhibition, and come face-to-face with dinosaurs built entirely from LEGO® bricks.



**2
for 1
admission**

Blyth Battery

Explore this important WW1 and WW2 defence battery for free all weekend. The only WW1 battery observation post left in the world. There will be children's activities as well as guided tours.

**FREE
entry**



Newbiggin Maritime Centre

50% entry into the heritage and art exhibitions at the centre. There will be a host of special Residents' Festival activities throughout the weekend.

**50%
entry**

✂ CUT OUT YOUR VOUCHER HERE

Please be aware that you must bring proof of residence when presenting this voucher. A driving licence, utility bill or bank statement will all be accepted. To save time, please complete the voucher before arrival at the venue.

Name:

Address:

Email:

☐ The above information may be used by the attractions for marketing purposes, should you not wish to be contacted, please tick this box.

Get your kids day off to a healthy start

As the saying goes “Breakfast is the most important meal of the day” but did you know that some children are having twice the daily recommended amount of sugar before the morning school bell?

According to research by Public Health England some children in England consume more than 11g of sugar at breakfast time alone, that's almost 3 sugar cubes. The recommended daily maximum is no more than 5 cubes of sugar for 4 to 6 year olds and no more than 6 cubes for 7 to 10 year olds per day.

By the end of the day children have consumed more than 3 times these recommendations.

The research also found that of those parents of children who were eating 3 sugar cubes at breakfast, 84% of them considered the breakfast they were giving their children as healthy.

Public Health's Top Breakfast tips are:

- *Add fruit:* like sliced banana, raspberries or blueberries to plain cereals or porridge
- *Drink lower-fat milk* - like semi-skimmed, 1% or fully skimmed (but not for children under 5) with cereal
- *Have wholegrain toast* - instead of having white or a sugary cereal and use only a thin layer of toppings like jam
- *Master porridge oats* - by mixing them with fruit and low fat (and low-sugar) yoghurt and leave it to soften overnight in the fridge
- *Bagels* - go for lower-fat soft cheese
- *Swap sugary drinks for alternatives* like water, low-fat milk and juice drinks with no added sugar

So here's some stats which may surprise you, along with some tasty healthy options that your kids will love in the morning.



Download the useful and free Be Smart Food App to help you and your kids find a healthier start to the day.
www.nhs.uk/change4life-beta/be-food-smart



What's in your food?

Find out by downloading the FREE Be Food Smart app



Search Change4Life



TENANT FORUM *update*

Our tenant forum continues to lead the way with the development of a bespoke tenant engagement system called ThinkChange.

To help improve tenant engagement, and receive feedback on what is important to tenants and residents, the forum is working on an innovative web-based application called ThinkChange. When launched, the Tenants Forum will become the first of its kind in the region to have such a bespoke tenant engagement system in place.

The system would allow tenants to suggest ideas on how to improve the housing service they receive as well as commenting on current initiatives and projects.

Each tenant would be offered the opportunity to sign up to the system and would be given a personal login which could be accessed from any computer or mobile device.

**Karen Bailey,
chair of the Tenants Forum**

"We are always looking at new ways of communicating with tenants and gaining their views on the housing service they receive.

ThinkChange is an exciting project and once again demonstrates how tenants in this area are leading the way on engagement and involvement."

The Tenants Forum could also use ThinkChange to consult with tenants on particular areas of the housing service, such as the Contacts Centre or Repairs. They could then take the views of tenants direct to the council for further discussion.



The Tenant Forum has also attended a Regional Tenants Conference. Following our successful appearance at a National Tenants Conference in Leeds four members of the Tenants Forum attended the TPAS Regional Conference (North) in York, where they met with other tenant forums from across the North as well as hearing presentations from a number of guest speakers from other housing organisations.

LEASEHOLDERS

Did you know?

Did you know that as a leaseholder you have a number of responsibilities you must carry out to protect your lease.

Northumberland County Council owns the land and the building that your home is in and is the freeholder of your building. We are required to maintain the exterior of the building and any common areas.

However, you must pay towards this cost and will be charged for any work carried out to the structure or communal areas of your building.

Here is a list of some of your other responsibilities:

- You must pay your service charge. It is a priority debt and failure to do so could result in the loss of your home.
- If you are struggling to pay the service charge the council can help by arranging a payment plan.
- Your building insurance is covered in your service charge
- You must carry out an annual Gas Safety Inspection - the council can arrange for this work to be carried out for a one off annual payment of £45 + vat
- You must inform us if you sublet your property as this could invalidate your building insurance.

Marie Bradley is your dedicated Leasehold Service Officer and is available on **01670 622906**.

ADD YOUR VIEWS

Over the next few months members of our Customer Service Development Group will be contacting tenants to get their views on the Customer Contact Centre.

They will be making phonecalls to more than 800 tenants to gauge customer satisfaction in relation to calls made to the contact centre.

So if you receive one of these calls make sure you give your feedback as it can help shape the way the service is delivered in the future.

Results of the survey will be collated by the Tenant Forum with the final report outlining the full results later in the year.

Tenants are advised that any members involved in the survey will be signing a Data Protection Declaration and

no personal details will be included in any results.

Remember if you do wish to speak to a member of the team, as well as calling **01670 542424**, you can also drop into one of our Information Centres around the county.



SEE BELOW FOR THE LIST OF CENTRES

You can visit us Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm (excluding bank holidays)

Alnwick

Greenwell Lane, Alnwick

Ashington

Wansbeck Square, Ashington

Bedlington

Within Bedlington library,
Glebe Road, Bedlington

Berwick

Walkergate Building, Walkergate

Please note: Alnwick Information Centres closes at 4:30pm, Bedlington has changed.

Blyth

Blyth Library, Bridge Street, Blyth

Cramlington

Concordia, Cramlington

Hexham

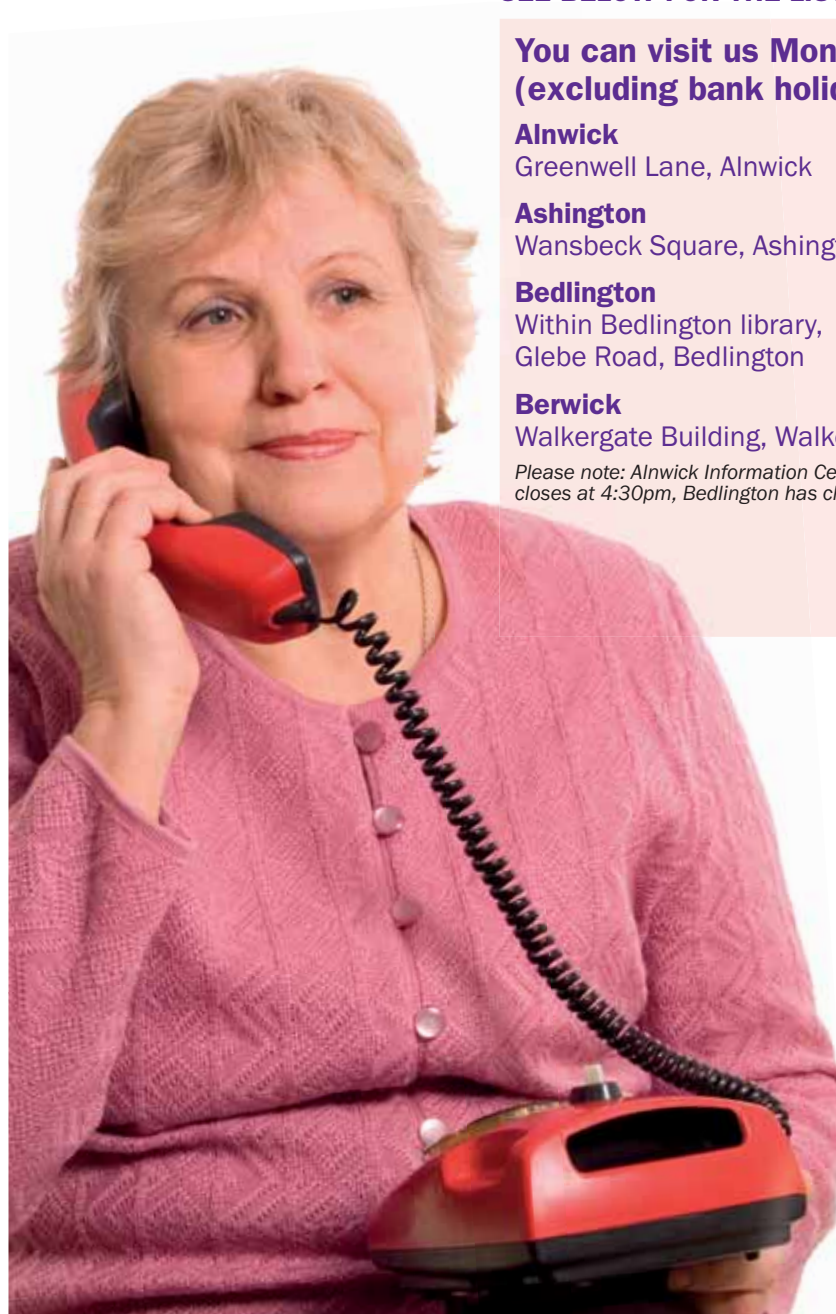
Hadrian House,
Market Street, Hexham

Morpeth






Royal Sovereign House,
Manchester Street, Morpeth

Seaton Delaval

Library, Astley High School,
Elsdon Avenue



AT ANY OF OUR CUSTOMER INFORMATION CENTRES YOU CAN:

-  get advice and information regarding any of our services anywhere in the county
-  arrange delivery of any council service anywhere in the county
-  make a payment for council services
-  submit applications along with supporting documentation or evidence
-  get assistance and advice in completing application forms

If your request can not be dealt with immediately, we will ensure the appropriate person or department will contact you.

MAKING A PAYMENT:

For extra convenience, you can also make a payment at any PayPoint or post office.

Boost for BLYTH DURING TALL SHIPS

Nearly half a million people flocked to Blyth last summer for the North Sea Tall Ships Regatta.



500,000 VISITORS



8/10 VISITORS WOULD RETURN TO THE AREA



ECONOMY BOOST OF £13.5M

The four day event saw people spending money in both Blyth and across the wider county, boosting Northumberland's economy by a staggering £13.5million

The four day event saw people spending money in both Blyth and across the wider county, boosting Northumberland's economy by a staggering £13.5million.

Spending on eating out, accommodation and other tourism and leisure services far exceeded initial targets and has demonstrated the huge value to the county.

The economic impact has been verified by independent research, which also shows that there was an extremely high satisfaction rate from visitors to the event.

A remarkable 99% of those attending the regatta described it as 'very good' or 'good' - while more than eight out of ten visitors from other parts of the UK said they would be more likely to return to the area, and spend, as a result.

Council leader Davey said: "Benefits from holding the Tall Ships event in Northumberland have far exceeded our initial expectations. This world class event produced a huge economic impact for the county as a whole, and particularly so in Blyth and surrounding areas.

"These figures more than demonstrate the importance of bringing high profile events to Northumberland.

"The legacy is not just in finance and memories however - it also gave opportunities for volunteers and trainees to become involved in learning and in gaining life skills of huge benefit to them in the future."

Blyth will once again host the Northumberland Live festival this year, which attracts 10,000 number of people to the area.

NOTICEBOARD

NORTHUMBERLAND Live

24 JUNE 2017

BLYTH

[Blyth Beach NE24 3PL]

ON SITE PARKING

www.blythtowncouncil.org.uk

#1 NorthumberlandLiveFestival

The Undertones
PLUS MANY MORE*

29 JULY 2017

BEDLINGTON

[Gallagher Park NE22 7LA]

NO ON SITE PARKING

#1 NorthumberlandLiveBedlington16

The Commitments
PLUS MANY MORE*

***** **FREE FAMILY FESTIVALS** *****

LIVE MUSIC / STREET THEATRE / FUN FAIRS
FOOD AT AFFORDABLE PRICES OR BRING A PICNIC
HAVE A-GO ACTIVITIES FOR ALL THE FAMILY (MOSTLY FREE)

For more information about the event please email northumberlandlive@gmail.com or for more information regarding public transport please visit <http://jplanner.travelineneast.info/>

* Both headline acts are supported by a wide range of bands which are suitable for a family audience

Northumberland
Northumberland County Council



WEST BEDLINGTON
TOWN COUNCIL

ACTIVE
NORTHUMBERLAND

**SAVE
THE DATE**



**Northumberland Day
Sunday 28th May**

Show your love for
the place you live by
celebrating the first ever
Northumberland Day.

Why not organise a street
party, or a special event or
fly the Northumberland flag
or decorate your house in
the county's traditional
colours of red and yellow.

**Northumberland
Homefinder**



Watch this space

**Northumberland's Homefinder
will be re-launched at the end
of March.**

The new look website will be
more user friendly using the most
up-to-date technology to help you
choose your future home.



EASTER DATES

Good Friday **14 April**

Easter Monday **17 April**

Early May

Bank Holiday **1 May**

Spring Bank

Holiday **29 May**

free! fun!

**childcare
for your
2 year old!**

Your two year old could
get up to 15 hours of
FREE childcare per week.

For more information visit:
www.northumberland.gov.uk/freechildcare Or call:
01670 623592

Northumberland
Government of the Future

Scan here for
more information

FOLLOW US ON



Simply search *Homes for Northumberland* and click to like our page



@HomesforN_land

HOW ARE WE performing?

We aim to be the best we can possibly be and offer the best service we possibly can to our tenants. This is why we are constantly monitoring our performance and measuring our work against a set of performance indicators.

Performance Indicators are targets used to measure our performance in specific areas and provide important information on the key services we provide.

Our performance indicators have been agreed by tenants.

Our latest figures show how we were performing between April and December 2016.



CURRENT RENT ARREARS

Target
£517,011

Actual
£612,763

AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS TO RE-LET A PROPERTY

Target
30 Days

Actual
31.5 Days

NUMBER OF EMERGENCY REPAIRS COMPLETED WITHIN 24HRS

Target as a %
99.20%

Actual
96.69%

Total number of repairs
8,608

Total completed within 24hrs
8,323

NUMBER OF GAS SERVICING CERTIFICATES COMPLETED

Target as a %
100%

Mid-year point
99.93%

Number of certificates completed
6,816

Number outstanding
5*

*At the time of this publication going to print all outstanding gas servicing certificates had been completed, giving a 100% completion rate

NUMBER OF SOLID FUEL CERTIFICATES COMPLETED

Target as a %
100%

Actual
100%

Number requested
176

Number completed
176

NUMBER OF REPAIRS FIXED FIRST TIME

Target as a %
98%

Actual
96.84%

Total number of repairs
28,677

Total completed first time
27,772

*Many of the repairs requiring a second visit were due to a tradesman needing to order in materials to complete the job

YOUR HOUSING MANAGEMENT TEAM

Your Housing Management Team is here to help with questions on a range of housing services including, rent, estate management or your tenancy. We have a dedicated Housing Officer for each estate. **Find out who your officer is and contact them on 01670 542424.**

Philip Soderquest



Head of Housing

Susan Ogle



Head of Housing Management

Philippa Storey



Area Housing Manager
Blyth North and
Alnwick Area

Christine McGregor



Area Housing Manager
Blyth South

Pearl O'Hare



Team Leader
Blyth North
and Alnwick Area

Sarah Thorpe



Team Leader
Blyth South

YOUR HOUSING OFFICER

ALNWICK OFFICERS

Simon Crosthwaite



Simon covers:
Alnmouth, Boulmer,
Craster, Embleton,
Elsdon, Felton,
Glanton, Harbottle,
Longframlington,
Longhoughton,
Netherton, Newton
by the Sea, Powburn,
Rothbury, Thropton,
Whittingham

Hannah Brewis



Hannah covers:
All Amble estates,
Hauxley

Andrew Howstan



Andrew covers:
Alnwick

BLYTH OFFICERS

Shaun McConnell



Shaun covers:
The Poet's Estate,
Seaton Sluice,
New Hartley,
Allendale, Haltwhistle

Lee Danskin



Lee covers:
Eastfield Lea,
Collingwood Grange,
Mayfield Dale, Cowpen
Estate Flats

Graeme Harwood



Graeme covers:
Cowpen estate

Imran Ahmed



Imran covers:
The Avenues,
Solingen
Blyth Town Centre

Joanne Walker



Joanne covers:
East Hartford,
Cramlington Eastfield
Grange, Cramlington
Mayfield Glade,
Cramlington
Allensgreen/Allerhope

Dawn Wright



Dawn covers:
Newsham and
New Delaval

Debbie Halford



Debbie covers:
North Farm, Bebside,
Cowpen Farm,
Hodgsons Road,
Cowpen Quay

Kevin Bradley



Kevin covers:
Seaton Delaval
and Seghill

Jeff Baker



Jeff covers:
Seaton Delaval
and Seghill

FOLLOW US ON



for latest news & advice



Why not follow us on Facebook and keep up to date with the latest news and advice about your home and the services we provide.

If you have a Facebook account, simply search **Homes for Northumberland** and click to *like* our page.



KEEP IN TOUCH

CONTACT US

For queries about your council property, repairs, rents and neighbourhood services ring **01670 542424**.

For questions about any other Northumberland County Council service such as Homefinder, council tax, housing benefit or refuse collection ring **0345 600 6400**.

SAVE TIME AND DO IT ONLINE

If you want to report a problem, apply for services or pay bills it is cheaper, faster and easier to do it online. Simply visit **www.northumberland.gov.uk** and complete your task from the comfort of your own home.

CUSTOMER INFORMATION CENTRES

You can call in at any Northumberland County Council customer information centre and speak to one of our friendly advisors about any housing or council related issue.