

A MAGAZINE FOR NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL TENANTS

# YOUR news

*Be a good*  
**NEIGHBOUR**

**STAY  
WARM**  
*this Winter*





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**FRONT COVER IMAGE:**  
Alice Quarmby Wallington Hall.

# FOREWORD

**As the Leader of Northumberland County Council, I am very pleased to introduce this edition of Your News which includes information on some of the exciting and innovative ways we are developing to support affordable housing.**



The demand for affordable housing in Northumberland is an ever increasing issue, and as a council we are committed to creating housing that is affordable and available to everyone.

This edition of Your News not only focuses on the latest affordable housing schemes completed in the county (pages 8 & 9), but also describes the work which goes into getting empty properties back in use (page 10 & 11).

Through a project with Arch, the Northumberland development company, we are moving into a new

era of providing affordable homes. Arch has purchased 54 new build homes across the county, which will be made available for affordable rent, taking the creation of affordable family homes beyond the 1000 promised by the Labour administration.

We will continue to strive to work closely with you as our tenants to ensure we are creating communities which you can be proud of.

Finally, may I also take this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

**Grant Davey, Leader of the Council**

## LOCAL TEAMS for LOCAL PEOPLE

**To further improve the service you receive from our Repairs and Maintenance team we have changed the way we will be allocating work.**

We have now established dedicated teams in Alnwick, Blyth North and Blyth South. So now when a repair is reported it will go directly to the relevant trade team.

Workers will have local knowledge of the area and its properties. You will be more likely to see the same worker more than once. Team leaders will work closely with their staff and tenants to understand the needs of the community, therefore improving the service provided.

With the introduction of a new housing system and hand-held devices for remote workers, we will



now be able to check the availability of workers in that area.

The worker will automatically be sent the repair job and you will be contacted to check your availability, which should reduce the time taken to complete a repair.

These new areas reflect those of the housing management team, meaning we are now working even closer with your housing officer to try and identify any possible issues.



# NEWSHAM & NEW DELAVAL'S COMMUNITY FUN DAY

A special community day was held on the Newsham and New Delaval Estate in the summer when local residents of all ages enjoyed the fun.



The event was held at the Newsham Pavillion and included a range of free activities, such as a Newsham and New Delaval's Got Talent competition; arts, crafts, games and activities and the Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service brought along a fire engine too.

The council's dog warden was also there, offering free dog chipping and animal welfare advice.

The event was funded by the Homes for Northumberland team at Northumberland County Council through the new "Make a Difference" fund.

Each housing officer and sheltered housing manager has been given a small budget which they can use to organise an event or project in the community they work in.

## Vintage Tea Party AT NYE BEVAN HOUSE

A vintage tea party at Nye Bevan House in Blyth provided the perfect excuse for residents to eat cake, drink tea and share laughter with their friends and neighbours.



"It was great that everyone dressed up for the occasion. Residents also brought along some of their personal photos to the event which we will use to make a memory book for each resident as part of our work around dementia awareness."

Sarah Bell



Elderly residents living in the sheltered housing scheme donned their best finery for the event in the summer and enjoyed a wonderful time as they tucked into tasty treats and tea served in the best china.

The event was also funded through the "Make a Difference" fund using the sheltered housing managers budget of £100.

Sarah Bell, warden at Nye Bevan House said: "It was great that everyone dressed up for the occasion. Residents also brought along some of their personal photos to the event which we will use to make a memory book for each resident as part of our work around dementia awareness."

# Meet the team...

# STRATEGIC HOUSING TEAM

*You can also welcome new tenants to your area by telling them about any community events, or inviting them in for a cuppa!*

## Who are we and what do we do?

The strategic housing team is responsible for helping people who are having difficulties with their housing options. They could be homeless, or finding it difficult to afford their current home, and need help with downsizing.

The team, led by Julie Young, working alongside the Homefinder team, can help with advice on things such as managing your finances, and working with you to find different housing options.

When vulnerable tenants move into an area, the housing team will offer support to help them settle into a community.

## Private Sector team

Another area of responsibility for the team is working with the private sector, e.g. owner occupiers, tenants and landlords, who own properties across the county.

By working closely with landlords we can raise the standards expected by, and provided by private landlords to private tenants. We can then create sustainable communities, which are safe for everyone to live in.

We also run an accreditation scheme, available to any landlord, this offers them a thorough tenant check, for free; advertising of their property on Homefinder; and help with obtaining all the relevant safety certificates needed on a property.



*How can you contact us?* Please call 0345 600 6400 or email [housingservices@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:housingservices@northumberland.gov.uk)





We organise events such as the Annual Landlords Forum (see story on page 5) to raise awareness of the work we do, and ensure that landlords are kept up-to-date on changes in legislation.

It is also our responsibility to return empty homes back into use, making communities more sustainable and reducing the blight on the area. With funding from the Homes and Community Agency we have been able to bring hundreds of properties back into use across the county.

To further reduce the number of empty homes in our communities we also offer a property matching service, which helps to bring together buyers and sellers.

### Diverse Groups

We also help diverse groups such as Gypsy Roma Travellers, who may be travelling through the county, to access services in the area.

The council looks after two permanent traveller sites at Hartford Bridge, Bedlington and Lyneburn Cottages, Lynemouth. We have a Gypsy Roma Traveller Liaison officer, and officers, who can help travellers to apply for pitches on these sites, or to access other types of accommodation.

We monitor and assess unauthorised encampments, by checking the site and its inhabitants, and putting them in touch with things such as children and health services.

We have the power to issue a Direction to Leave to any unauthorised encampment, which results in anti-social or criminal activity. This gives travellers a reasonable time to move off the property. If they fail to do this, a request will be made to the police to use their powers to evict.

*By working closely with landlords we can raise the standards expected by, and provided by private landlords to private tenants. We can then create sustainable communities, which are safe for everyone to live in.*

# LANDLORDS GATHER AT COUNTY FORUM

**Landlords and agents from around Northumberland gathered at an annual forum organised by Northumberland County Council.**

Almost 100 landlords attended the event, now in its sixth year, at Morpeth Rugby Club in the autumn. The free event showed landlords what services the council can offer, updated them on any new legislation and highlighted any industry issues.

Guest speakers from the Department of Work and Pensions and the National Landlords Association addressed the forum on a range of issues, including Universal Credit, securing tenant deposits and issues in the private rented sector.

There were also a number of traders exhibiting at the forum including, Checkatrade.com and Northumbrian Water.



# BE PREPARED FOR UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Universal Credit, the new benefit for working age people is being introduced in stages across the country. It is set to replace many existing benefits combining them into one payment which will be paid directly into your bank account.

If you are entitled to help with your rent this money will be included in your Universal Credit payment and paid directly to you

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 weekly in arrears. This means that once Universal Credit starts you will be behind on your rent by four weeks.

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).  
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.

**To find out more on how to set up a Direct Debit, go to [www.directdebit.co.uk](http://www.directdebit.co.uk) or speak to your bank.**

- 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.







# TO LET

## Advice for LEASEHOLDERS

### SUBLETTING/RENTING YOUR HOME

You can rent out your home to someone else, but you will remain responsible for the property. You must inform us of the change and pass on all the relevant contact details, including your contact address and the details of your tenant.

You need to inform your insurance company of any change, as any claim could you make could be invalid. If you have a mortgage it may be a condition of your mortgage to get permission to let your home.

You will still need to pay the service charges, as well as making sure your tenants behave and do not cause a

nuisance to the neighbours and comply with the conditions of your lease.

If you have sublet your flat and it has any gas appliances, the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 apply to you. This means that as a landlord you have a duty, by law, to your tenants and you must make sure that a gas safety check is carried out every year and that your appliances are properly maintained.

**If you are subletting your property please request a sub-let form from Marie Bradley, Leasehold Service Officer on 01670 622906.**

### GAS SAFETY AND SERVICING

All gas appliances should be serviced on an annual basis to make sure they are safe and in full working order.

Northumberland County Council can arrange for this work to be carried out for a one off annual payment of **£45.00** + vat.

*If you do have your own Gas Safety servicing carried out, NCC require a yearly copy of your service certificate.*

### SELLING YOUR HOME

You can sell the property at any time. This is known as assigning the lease. If you bought your home under the Right to Buy Scheme, you may need to repay all or part of the discount you received should you sell in the early years after your original purchase.

**You must ensure that you inform any prospective purchaser of the leasehold, and any rules or conditions which apply.**

Your purchaser's solicitor will request a pre-sale enquiry pack. We charge a fee for this service. This pack includes all of the information we hold on your property, including if there are any outstanding charges. We will issue the pack within 10 days of receipt of the fee.

Your solicitor must register the change of ownership within one month. All outstanding service charges must be paid before completion of the sale. We cannot update our records until the change of ownership has been registered. Failure to do this will result in you still being liable for any charges against the property.

# New affordable housing FOR SHILBOTTLE

**Louise and Lee Stanfield and their daughter Megan were one of the first tenants to be handed their keys for a new affordable housing development in Shilbottle.**

The 20 new homes have been funded and developed by Northumberland Council, and include 4 one-bed apartments, 4 two-bed bungalows, 8 two-bed houses and 4 three-bed houses.

Louise, originally from Swarland, said: "We feel very lucky to now have a home we feel secure in. Now we have a fabulous brand new home where we can finally settle and fill it full of wonderful memories. This can potentially be our forever home."

Northumberland County Councillor Allan Hepple, cabinet member responsible for housing said: "The lack of affordable housing is one of the biggest issues facing the people of Northumberland and is a particular problem in some rural communities.

"This is a fantastic housing scheme and will make a real difference to the lives of those who are now living there."

Northumberland County Council has placed a strong emphasis on building new council homes and has financed the build of around **300 properties over the last three years.**

"Now we have a fabulous brand new home where we can finally settle and fill it full of wonderful memories. This can potentially be our forever home."

**Louise Stanfield**



Northumberland County Council's head of housing, Phil Soderquest, Northumberland County Councillor Allan Hepple, cabinet member for housing, Louise and Lee Stanfield with daughter Megan



## BUNGALOWS READY FOR NEW TENANTS

Work to build 26 new bungalows on the former Morpeth Road school site is now complete.



Leader of the council, Councillor Grant Davey; Councillor Allan Hepple, cabinet member for housing and ward councillor Kath Nisbet

Northumberland County Council funded the £2.8m scheme as part of its Affordable Homes programme.

The two-bedroom bungalows have received a lot of interest from prospective new occupants, with tenants being allocated through applications on the county's Homefinder register.

There are two wheelchair accessible bungalows on the development. The dwellings will also be built to Lifetime Homes Standard and include direct access 'en suite' facilities and provision for future hoists as well as level access showers. There are also dementia friendly elements such as glass fronted kitchen cabinets.

The new development, which will be known as Silverbirch Close, has been constructed by Esh Property Services.

## TENANTS INVITED FOR A "NATTER"

Elderly and vulnerable tenants in Northumberland enjoyed a coffee and a chat at a new event aimed at bringing people in the community together.

The Network and Natter events are being held across the area.

Representatives from the council's housing team will attend the events to offer tenants information on the services offered, advice on their tenancy, as well as hearing their views and opinions.

There will also be activity sessions and guest speakers, such as the Handy-person service, which offers vulnerable and elderly tenants help with DIY jobs, free of charge.



If you would like to find out more about future events please contact the Resident Involvement team at HfN on 01670 542424

## COWPEN ESTATE COMMUNITY WEEK

Council tenants in the Cowpen Estate, Blyth, were called to action to help improve the appearance of their community.

Northumberland County Council's housing team joined forces with Northumbria Police to run a Community Action week on the estate, which included street clean-ups, a parent and child litter pick, drop-in sessions with community police officers and estate inspections.

Tenants were also able to meet with the local housing management team, in confidence, about any issues relating to their tenancy. A money advice officer was also on hand to answer any financial concerns.



Free dog chipping and animal welfare advice, street-clean-ups and a special parent and child litter pick were also organised.

# Have you ever wondered what goes into getting an empty house on your estate back into use?

Colin Blackett, Voids and allocations manager, heads up the team at Northumberland County Council, responsible for carrying out repairs on council homes when they become empty. They ensure they are at a “lettable” standard and getting them back into use as quickly as possible. His team also looks after the housing allocation process, assessing bids on properties and allocating them according to a priority banding scheme.

While the property is being repaired the team will be looking for a new tenant. It will be advertised on our Homefinder website, which is Northumberland County Council's housing allocation service.

## HERE HE EXPLAINS THE PROCESS IN MORE DETAIL

“From the moment we receive a termination the process starts to get that home back in use as quickly as possible.

The first thing we do is inspect the house to assess if any repairs need to be carried out. We also look at our Capital Works programme to check if the property is due to have, for example a new kitchen, and if so this work would be carried out at the same time.

Every empty property must be repaired to a “lettable” standard before we can offer it to a new tenant.

We will carry out any essential repairs, such as those which may affect the health and safety of an occupant. A full inspection of the house would be done, checking things such as windows and doors and heating and gas to ensure they are in full working order before someone can move in.

We will also clean the property to an acceptable standard. By acceptable we mean floors will be swept and bathrooms and kitchens cleaned.”

## APPLYING FOR A HOME

As long as a person is registered with Homefinder then they can bid on a property. When they register each applicant is assessed on their need and given a priority banding. Using this banding we prioritise any bid on a property.

Rent and household checks will be done. Once we have confirmed that the person at the top of the list is still eligible for the property, we would contact them to arrange a viewing.







As long as a person is registered with Homefinder then they can bid on a property. When they register each applicant is assessed on their need and given a priority banding.

If, after viewing, the applicant decides to refuse the property it will be offered to the next person on the priority list. Applicants will not normally be penalised for refusing a property and will continue to be able to bid for properties advertised.

When someone is offered a property, they will not be short listed for other properties until they have decided to either accept or refuse the offer.

Once they accept the property, we would advise them when they can move in and help them at the sign-up process, with for example getting their utility services set-up, completing any relevant housing benefit form, and also providing details of their housing officer.

## HOMESWAPPER

If you are already a tenant, another way of moving house is by swapping homes with another tenant – this is called a mutual exchange.

**You can apply for a mutual exchange online at [www.homeswapper.co.uk](http://www.homeswapper.co.uk)**

Once you have registered, you will be able to view matches online and HomeSwapper will send you emails with details of suitable exchange partners.

**To register with Homefinder go to [www.homefindernorthumberland.org.uk](http://www.homefindernorthumberland.org.uk)**

**For more information contact us on 01670 542424**



# Community pulls together AFTER TRAGEDY

**It was a day that Debbie and Neil Wilkinson will never forget. Hearing the screams of children playing in nearby Burns Park, Blyth.**

On rushing to the park Neil found a scene of panic and distress as a rampaging Staffordshire bull terrier attacked children playing there.

Neil managed to pull all of the children, including his 6 year son Kayden, to safety whilst others rang the emergency services.

The attack sent shock waves through the community, and such was its severity that it hit the national headlines, with many of the children requiring urgent hospital treatment.

Following the incident Debbie and Neil wanted to bring some fun back to the park, so they organised a community fun day. A range of local organisations came along and showed their support including Northumberland County Council

which brought along a fire engine, the RNLI, Northumbria Police, the Cadets and a local veterinary practice. Morrison's of Morpeth also supported the event by giving children in the community gift vouchers and goody bags.

Debbie said: "This incident left everyone in the area traumatised, especially the children who were injured in the attack. So we wanted to do something for the whole community that people could look forward to and enjoy.

"We had a really lovely day and it was great to see the children having fun and hopefully it helped them to forget about this awful incident.

"We are now hoping to make the fun day an annual event, and are

also working with the council to put two new benches into the park, using money raised.

"Despite it being a really difficult time for lots of families in the area I think in a way it has had a positive impact too. I've lived in this area for 40 years and people tended to keep themselves to themselves and didn't really speak to each other, but the attack has brought people together and it feels more like a community now.

"The other positive thing to come out of it is that children in the area are more aware of the possible dangers of dogs who are not on the leash, with vets visiting the local schools to give advice."





*"Despite it being a really difficult time for lots of families in the area I think in a way it has had a positive impact too."*

**Debbie Wilkinson**

## ADVICE FOR YOU AND DOG OWNERS

**Stephen Hall, senior animal welfare and enforcement officer at Northumberland County Council, gives some advice on what you should do if you are approached by a dog not on a lead, as well as advice for dog owners.**



**ALWAYS** advise children not to approach a stray dog or a dog not on the leash



All stray dogs **SHOULD BE** reported to the council's Animal Welfare Team



**ASK** the owner of the dog first before you try and stroke any dog you don't know



**ALWAYS** be aware that dogs are animals and therefore can be unpredictable



All lost dogs **SHOULD BE** reported to us, if your dog is picked up as a stray there may be a cost to get it released



From April 2016 it is now **LAW** to micro-chip your dog. You must also ensure that all your contact details for your dog are up to date.



It is an **OFFENCE** to have a dog in a play area. If you are found with a dog in a play area you could be fined up to £1,000



It is also an **OFFENCE** to have a dog not on a lead on a designated A or B roads, as well as any adjoining footpaths and verges

If you would like to report a dangerous dog, a stray or report a noisy dog, you can call us on **0345 600 6400**, go to **[www.northumberland.gov.uk](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk)**, or download our free **MyStreet Northumberland** app.





# Be a good NEIGHBOUR

By taking the time to establish good terms with your neighbours you can make your community a friendlier and safer place to live.

Here are some of our top tips to help you on your way:

**1. Introduce yourself.** Whether you're new in the neighbourhood or new residents have just moved into your street, introduce yourself and say hello. In the winter you could set some time aside to drop in on an older neighbour and checking they are keeping warm and eating well, and that they have plenty of non-perishable food in case they can't leave the house for a few days.

**2. Get to know your neighbours and their routine.** For example, if they work nights, quiet mornings will be important for them. If they have

young children, quiet evenings will be very important to them. Similarly, give them information that will help *them* be more considerate of your lifestyle.

**3. Be aware of shared walls.** Position noisy household appliances such as washing machines and TVs and speakers away from partition walls. If you have laminate flooring think about putting carpet or rugs down to muffle the sound and try not to bang doors.

**4. Park considerately** and never block anyone's access.

**5. Keep your yard or garden tidy.** Weed your garden regularly because the presence of weeds in your garden is not only unsightly but can also spread to your neighbour's.

**6. Party animal?** Give your neighbours plenty of warning if you are holding a party and let them know how long you expect it to last. Stick to your agreed arrangements, make sure your friends leave quietly and clear up any litter.

**7. Respect your neighbours.** If you're coming home late, keep the noise down otherwise you'll wake them.



# HAVE YOUR SAY

**It's time to have your say on how we can enhance the appearance of your estate and neighbourhood.**

We're asking tenants who have an idea for a project, or any improvement work however small, to get in touch. This is your opportunity to help make your community a place to be proud of.

Your ideas should be anything that will make your estates and neighbourhoods more appealing to the eye, or improve safety, but they should not involve the need for continuous maintenance.

An environmental works panel made up of tenants will then consider and vote on all suggestions brought to them.

They will decide which projects to take forward and these schemes will be included in the works programme for the following year

**So if you have an idea or want to discuss it further please contact your Housing Officer on 01670 542424.**

**9. Control your dog.** Keep your dog on a leash if it has a habit of running rampant on your neighbours' lawns, and make sure to always clean up after it. If your dog barks when you are out try not to leave it for long periods and consider making arrangements to leave it with a friend or relative when you are away.

**10. Ball Games.** You'd be surprised how often we get complaints about children's balls repeatedly going into neighbour's gardens. Take care and try to make sure you are not one of them.

**And remember...**  
If anything you are planning to do may affect your neighbours, let them know in advance. Remind them that if you're doing anything which disturbs them, they should feel comfortable approaching you about it.

# LOOK AFTER YOURSELF & YOUR HOME THIS WINTER

**With winter now upon us it's more important than ever that you keep yourself warm and protect your home from damage caused by the cold weather.**



The first thing you need to ensure is that your central heating is working. It's always best at the start of each winter to test your room thermostats, turn them up high and make sure the heating comes on. Then set a lower temperature, e.g. 5deg, to make sure your heating comes on if the temperatures plummet.

The temperature displayed on your thermostat is the current room temperature, to see your preferred temperature press the button or dial on your thermostat.

Check your water is hot and if its not log a repair call with us straight away.

To prevent condensation at this time of year you should avoid drying laundry on radiators or in front of fires, and keep your windows open slightly to improve air circulation.

It's also at this time of year when electric blankets come back into use. So here's some tips to ensure they're safe to use:

- Look out for danger signs on your blanket including; fraying fabric; scorch marks; exposed elements; damp patches or worn flex.
- If your blanket or any part of the wiring shows any of these danger signs, you should have it checked or replaced.
- You should replace your blanket at least every 10 years. If you're unsure of the date of your blanket look at the BEAB safety mark, if it's a round symbol it is likely to be more than 10 years old. (The new symbol is white capital letters on a black background).
- Don't buy a second-hand blanket.
- Make sure the blanket has an over-heat protection.
- Don't fold blankets as it can damage the wiring.
- Always follow the instructions.
- Never use an electric underblanket as an electric overblanket, and vice versa.
- Only leave an electric blanket switched on all night if it has thermostatic controls for safe all-night use. Otherwise switch it off and disconnect it before you get into bed.
- Don't get blankets wet, and if your blanket does get wet, don't use it. Never switch it on to dry it.

If you're feeling lonely this Christmas there are people you can talk to. **Call our Adult Safeguarding team on 01670 536400.**

Only leave an electric blanket switched on all night if it has thermostatic controls for safe all-night use.



## GAS SERVICING APPOINTMENTS

**We are required by law to carry out a check of your gas supply and appliances every 12 months, to ensure your safety and prevent the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.**

It is therefore vitally important that you keep any appointment we make, and allow us access to your property to carry out this check.

If you are unable to make the appointment you must either let us know, or make arrangements for someone else to give access to your property.

We now also offer Thursday evening appointments, as well as Saturday morning slots to give you even more options.

Failure to allow us access to your property could result in legal action being taken against you, and forced entry used. Any damage caused by forced entry would be paid for by you.

**For more information or to contact the team 01670 542424.**



**Christmas brings a flurry of activity with presents to buy, rooms to decorate, meals to plan and families to entertain! During the rush, don't forget to build safety into your Christmas planning and make sure you keep your loved ones safe and protected.**

**Here are some of our top safety tips**

- 1** Never leave burning candles unattended and never place them near your Christmas tree, furnishings or decorations.
- 2** Check your tree lights carry the British Safety Standard sign and always switch them off and unplug them before you go to bed.
- 3** Ensure you have a working smoke alarm installed on all levels of your home. Check the batteries regularly.
- 4** Keep candles, lighters and matches out of the reach of children.
- 5** Never overload electrical sockets. Take extra care with Christmas lights.
- 6** Decorations burn easily. Don't attach them to or near to lights or heaters.
- 7** Make sure cigarettes are completely extinguished before going to bed. Take care when tired or after a few drinks. It is very easy to fall asleep while your cigarette is still burning.
- 8** Thieves are opportunists. Keep alert to your surroundings when out shopping, keep your bag zipped up and keep expensive items out of view.
- 9** Going to a party? Arrange a taxi or designated driver in advance.
- 10** Be aware the morning after. You could be over the legal limit many hours after your last drink. Sleep and coffee won't sober you up. Time is the only way to get alcohol out of your system.



# 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 at the mid-year point between April and September 2016.

## CURRENT RENT ARREARS

Target  
**£517,011**

Actual  
**£861,120\***

\* Whilst the mid year amount appears very high, it matches the level of arrears at the same point last year and remains on track to meet its year end target.

## AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS TO RE-LET A PROPERTY

Target  
**30 Days**

Actual  
**30.7 Days**

## NUMBER OF GAS SERVICING CERTIFICATES COMPLETED

Target as a %  
**100%**

Mid-year point  
**99.92%**

Number of certificates completed  
**4,773**

Number outstanding  
**4\***

\*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%**

Mid-year point  
**100%**

Number requested  
**133**

Number completed  
**133**

## NUMBER OF REPAIRS FIXED FIRST TIME

Target as a %  
**98%**

Mid-year point  
**96.7%**

Total number of repairs  
**18,554**

Total completed first time  
**17,942\***

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

## NUMBER OF EMERGENCY REPAIRS COMPLETED WITHIN 24 HRS

Target as a %  
**99.20%**

Mid-year point  
**96.79%**

Total number of repairs  
**5,105**

Total completed within 24hrs  
**4,941**

## TENANTS FORUM UPDATE



Our Forum is made up of ten tenant members and was established in 2015. Our role is to make sure your views are considered when it comes to service delivery, performance and policy. We want to make sure rent money is spent wisely.

We meet every two months with housing management to discuss issues of concern, including findings highlighted from our Service Development Groups, so we can decide the best way to make improvements.

Our Tenants Voice group meets regularly with councillors from the council's Cabinet Advisory Group, thought to be the first of its kind in the country.

So far we have successfully challenged council decisions, and delivered a presentation outlining our work at the National Tenants Conference, Blackpool. We will be presenting at the Annual Tenant Scrutiny Conference, Leeds in December.

Going forward we will continue to deliver digital updates to tenants via facebook and the website. We plan to have our own page on the website, where we will publish reports and updates. So watch this space.

For more information about the Forum or any of its initiatives you can join our Facebook group Tenants Online Voice, or contact Julie Turner on 01670 623493 or Aileen Barrass on 01670 623492.

**Karen Bailey, Chair Tenants Forum**



# NOTICEBOARD



## Is your child aged 2, 3 or 4?\* Help protect them from flu

Flu can be horrible for little children and if they get it, they can spread it around the whole family.

The flu vaccine is not an injection, just a quick and easy nasal spray.

It's also free. So don't put it off. Ask your GP about the free flu nasal spray for your child.

**STAYWELL  
THISWINTER**

Flu mmunisation

[nhs.uk/staywell](http://nhs.uk/staywell)

\* borns between 1 September 2011 and 31 August 2014



Rachel Keith, Nurse



*Recommended posting  
dates for 2016*

**Tues 20 Dec** - 2nd Class

**Wed 21 Dec** - 1st Class

**Thurs 22 Dec** - Royal Mail  
Special Delivery Guaranteed

**Fri 23 Dec** - Special  
Delivery Saturday  
Guaranteed

## Head to your library this Christmas

With only a few weeks to go until Christmas, why not pop in to your local library for a little free help and inspiration.

Northumberland County Council's libraries stock a wide range of Christmas themed books that can help with your seasonal planning.

There are cook books to help you perfect that special festive feast and crafts books full of hints and ideas on how to decorate your home.

There's also a range of winter and Christmas themed books for children and magazines, audio books and e-books.

It is free to join your local library. To find out more about the services on offer log on to [www.mylibrary.co.uk](http://www.mylibrary.co.uk)

## Stuck for ideas for the holidays?

Looking to take the kids to see Father Christmas in the holidays or trying to find a festive market to buy some unique gifts?

Check out [www.visitnorthumberland.com](http://www.visitnorthumberland.com) for all the latest event news.

## DON'T FORGET IT'S VITAL TO PAY YOUR RENT ON TIME EVERY WEEK, IF YOU DON'T WE COULD TAKE LEGAL ACTION AGAINST YOU.

You should also continue to pay over the Christmas break, particularly if you are currently in arrears.

Our housing officers will be visiting tenants, who are in arrears, in the next few weeks as part of our annual *Think Rent First* campaign.

The simplest way to pay your rent is by Direct Debit (See page 6 for more details).

**If you're having problems  
paying your rent, don't  
wait get in touch today  
- 01670 542424.**



FOLLOW US ON



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



@HomesforN\_land



# 10 THINGS YOU PAY FOR THAT YOUR PUBLIC LIBRARY HAS FOR FREE

Okay, so it's not strictly free... your council tax is already paying for these free resources, but many people forget to take advantage of them. To access these, all you need is a (free) library card! For more information and to join online visit [www.mylibrary.co.uk](http://www.mylibrary.co.uk).



## 1 Computer/Internet Access and WiFi for free.

Use one of the library's computers and get access to the Internet, Microsoft Word and Excel. Bring your own laptop or device and get free WiFi. Scanners, printing and photocopying are also available.

## 2 Computer help for free. Book with one of our Digital Champions for basic help to get online.

## 3 Events for children for free.

Bring the children to one of our many storytimes, preschool crafts, Summer Reading Challenge and other special events.

## 4 Books, audiobooks, eBooks and eAudiobooks for free.

Of course, you already know you can checkout bestsellers, children's, young adult novels, how tos and everything in between. You can also download eBooks and eAudiobooks to your devices from home or in the library. If you need help finding a good book, libraries can help with that too.

## 5 Study space for free.

The library is available for tutors and individuals wishing to study.

All you need is a **(FREE)** library card!



## 6 Learn a second language for free.

Learn a new language from home with our CD language courses.

## 7 Online information resources for free.

Access Universal Skills for jobsearching and Universal Credit help, Britannica, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography and online journals with Access to Research.

## 8 Genealogy research for free.

Come to the library to use Ancestry, Find My Past and British Newspaper Archive. Help to use these is available.

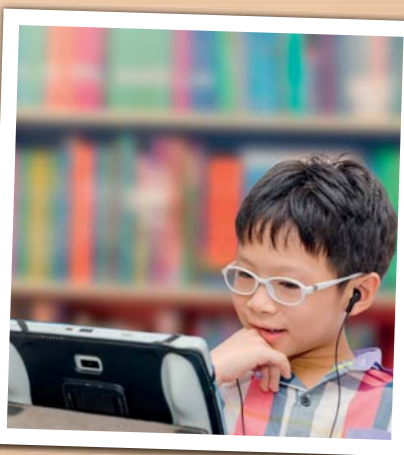
## 9 Magazines and newspapers for free.

With Zinio you can download and read current issues of popular magazines on your computer, tablet or mobile device. Downloaded magazines are yours to keep.

## 10 Reading group support for free.

Register your reading group with us and gain access to dozens of sets of novels to borrow and share. New titles are added every year.





For more  
information on  
opening times go to  
[www.mylibrary.co.uk](http://www.mylibrary.co.uk)

## YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY

**Alnwick Library**  
01670 622154

**Amble Library**  
01665 710419

**Ashington Library**  
01670 622262

**Bedlington Library**  
01670 622201

**Bedlington Station Library**  
01670 822211

**Blyth Library**  
01670 620149

**Cowpen Library**  
01670 798104

**Cramlington Library**  
01670 620232

**Rothbury Library**  
01670 620250

**Seaton Sluice Library**  
0191 2370210

**Seaton Valley Library**  
01670 620215

**South Beach Library**  
01670 363091

# Refurbishment of ALNWICK'S KING STREET IS COMPLETE

A major £700,000 scheme to refurbish some of Alnwick's oldest council houses in the heart of the town has been completed by Northumberland County Council.



Twenty properties on King Street have had new floors, walls, doors, insulation, heating and energy efficient boilers installed. They have been rewired and given new kitchens, bathrooms, blinds and carpets.

During the work the properties were stripped down to the brickwork to install a membrane to help solve an historical damp problem.

Northumberland County Councillor Allan Hepple, cabinet member responsible for housing said: "The houses are over 100 years old yet with the installation of all the new fixtures and fittings they look fantastic and feel fresh, comfortable and modern."







# NEW Year, NEW You

**With the introduction of a new, simpler membership scheme across Active Northumberland's leisure centres, now is the perfect time to get fit and healthy.**

Active Northumberland have replaced the range of prices that was inherited from four previous providers with two membership options; a 12-month contract for £32 per month and a flexible 3-month tie-in for £40 per month.

The new membership scheme was launched on November 1 and gives customers access to gym, swim and classes at our 14 leisure centres across the county.

Couple memberships are no longer available at the rate of £68 per month as couples will now be able to save £4 per month with individual memberships.

To encourage healthy habits at an early stage, children's reduced prices have been extended up to age of 18 without needing to purchase an annual membership. Swimming is free for under 4's and low-income users on a range of benefits qualify for concession prices.

Active Northumberland have state of the art facilities and equipment with modern swimming facilities and are continuing to make investments of over £40 million to the centres. (See the story on the Concordia Leisure Centre on page 23)

Pay as you go options are also available for anyone who wants to use the facilities without a membership.

**For more information go to [www.activenorthumberland.co.uk](http://www.activenorthumberland.co.uk) or call 01670 542222.**

## Simple Memberships

Value  
membership  
£32  
per month

based on a 12 month contract

Flexi  
membership  
£40  
per month

based on a 3 month tie in

Access to:  
14 leisure centres | 10 pools | 450 weekly fitness classes

## Fair prices across the County


Gym .....	£7.00
Fitness class .....	£5.60
Swim .....	£4.00
Court hire (per hour) .....	£10.00
5 a side (3 court) .....	£3.00
5 a side (4 court) .....	£40.00

## Under 18 & concession

Gym .....	£3.50
Fitness class .....	£3.50
Swim .....	£2.00
Inflatable session .....	£3.00
Under 4 swim.....	FREE

Prices from 1  
November 2016 and  
fixed until April 2018

**To join or book call us today or go to our  
website for more information**

 01670 542222

[activenorthumberland.org.uk](http://activenorthumberland.org.uk)

**ACTIVE**  
NORTHUMBERLAND  
Registered Charity No. 1153198



# CONCORDIA LEISURE CENTRE

**Concordia Leisure Centre in Cramlington has had a £3.5m refurbishment.**

**The centre has been completely transformed into a modern, multi-functional hub for the local community, bringing together a range of services and leisure activities in one place.**



Improvements include a new reception area, a luxury spa, a refurbished gym with the latest exercise equipment, the region's only clip 'n climb facility, a soft play area and a 10-pin bowling alley, with diner and licensed bar.

The centre has also been redesigned to include the town's library and customer services as part of a review of the county council's property portfolio, providing a one-stop shop for easy access to council services and helping to protect frontline services.

County councillor Val Tyler, Cabinet Member for Arts, Leisure and

Culture, unveiled a commemorative plaque in September.

She said: "The leisure centre represents a major investment for the town and is part of a programme of investment in leisure services which adds up to more than £40m across the county.

"The work has made a huge difference inside the centre, creating a more modern look and feel, along with a range of new activities that will appeal to families and individuals and will be a real asset to Cramlington for many years to come."

The project was funded by Northumberland County Council and Active Northumberland; designed by Newcastle-based architects, JDDK Ltd, and built by Robertsons Ltd.

Lorraine Dewison, Chief Executive of Active Northumberland, said: "Supporting people's health, happiness, and wellbeing is a key priority for the county council. That's why we are investing so heavily in leisure services.

"The new-look centre gives people every opportunity to get active and enjoy one of the most modern leisure facilities in Northumberland. I am sure that local people will come to appreciate what we are striving to achieve and will take great pleasure from the facilities on offer at the centre."

**To find out more about Concordia and leisure centres in your area go to [www.activenorthumberland.co.uk](http://www.activenorthumberland.co.uk)**





# FOLLOW US ON



*for latest news & advice*

Our Customer  
Contact Centre will  
be open throughout  
Christmas as usual  
**Mon-Thurs 8.30am-5pm**  
and  
**Friday 8.30am-4.30pm,**  
but **closed on all**  
**Bank Holidays**

Our Alnwick  
Customer Contact  
Centre will be open  
**Mon-Thurs**  
**9am-4.30pm**

**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](http://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.