

tlc

Tenants' and leaseholders'
community magazine



NORWICH
City Council

Summer 2013



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Introduction from Bert Bremner

Welcome to the summer issue of TLC magazine

Councillor Bert Bremner, Norwich City Council's cabinet member for housing.

Firstly, I'd like to introduce myself – I'm Bert Bremner and since 2006 I have been one of the councillors for University ward.

I am now also the new cabinet member for housing, following in the footsteps of my fellow councillor Victoria MacDonald, who had held this position since May 2011.

I'm looking forward to meeting many of the enthusiastic tenants and leaseholders who work so closely with councillors and officers to make sure our housing services keep getting better.

Some of the highlights of this issue of *TLC* magazine include our pride in all the tenants who have completed our free training course to get better at shaping council services. You can find these on the following page.

Meanwhile, you can read about enjoying summer in our fine city safely and in harmony

with your neighbours on pages seven and eight.

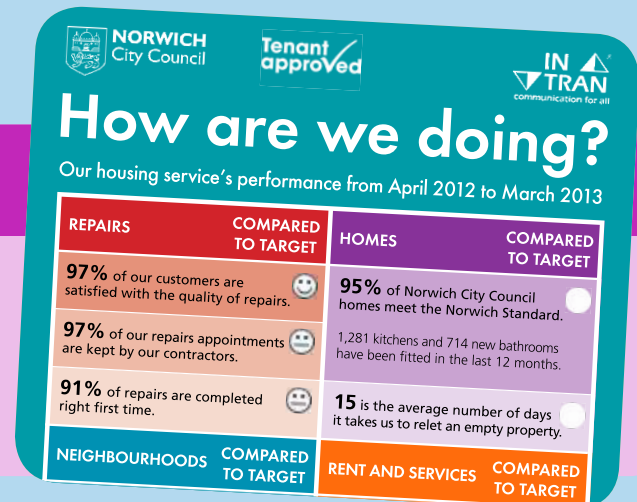
We also have a look at a new opportunity to help develop and improve NCAS (Norwich Community Alarm Service) on page 12.

Congratulations to everyone who was offered lower fuel bills after signing up to our successful Norwich Big Switch & Save scheme. The average saving was £164 for the year. Turn to page 10 for more energy saving news.

We hope you enjoy this summer issue.

How are we doing?

To see how your housing services are performing, check out the latest scorecard in the housing section of our website: www.norwich.gov.uk or request a copy by calling **0344 980 3333** or by visiting City Hall during opening hours.



If you would like this information in another language or format such as large print or audio cassette, please phone **0344 980 3333** or email info@norwich.gov.uk.

Cover image: We celebrated our involved tenants' graduation with a special ceremony at Norse's Fifers Lane offices.

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Norwich City Council events



Graduation joy for tenants

Our free training academy for tenants who want to better equip themselves to influence the housing services you receive has got off to a successful start. At a graduation ceremony held in April, we recognised the achievements of the first two groups of tenants to complete their training course, with 19 of them coming together to celebrate.

We worked with Norwich Tenants' CityWide Board last year to devise the training academy, which your tenant representatives voted to name Tenant Training for Norwich (TTFN). They also created the TTFN logo, helped to appoint the course provider, and acted as 'guinea pigs' before the academy was opened up to all tenants.

TTFN is made up of 10 modules, covering topics such as IT skills, positive thinking and behaviour, and influencing and negotiating skills.

Graduate Charmain Woollard (pictured below) says: "The training has given me the confidence, knowledge and

understanding to empower other tenants." Councillor Victoria MacDonald, former cabinet member for housing, presented certificates to those graduates who attended the ceremony, which was sponsored by our contractor, Norse.

T.T.f.N

Tenant Training for Norwich



New tenant panels

Tenants who complete the TTFN course are invited to apply for membership of our new tenant panels, which evolved from Norwich Tenants' CityWide Board earlier this year.

Its constitution and publication sub-groups were incorporated into a tenant involvement panel. This considers housing policy and finance issues, including reviewing housing publications and considering rent and budget setting.

The functions of the board's performance, repairs and recharges sub-group, and HRA sub-group, are now being handled by a tenant scrutiny



panel. This scrutinises the housing service's performance, and helps set and monitor targets and performance indicators.

Both panels make recommendations for the benefit of all tenants and ensure continuous improvement while considering value for money, available resources, and the council's corporate objectives.

Tenant involvement manager Sandra Franklin says: "I am immensely proud of the amount of commitment shown by tenants in setting up the two new panels. By working together with us in co-regulation, they will ensure we include the interests of tenants across the city in developing housing policies and publications, and be deeply involved in improving the housing service."

If you would like to gain skills and build confidence to help you influence our housing services, sign up to TTFN for **free** by calling **0344 980 3333** or emailing **involvement@norwich.gov.uk**.



Councillor Victoria MacDonald presenting certificates to Charmain Woollard and John Kinghombe.



Helping you manage benefit changes

As part of our commitment to keeping you informed about the government's welfare reform legislation, we are continuing to advise and support tenants dealing with its impact.



A variety of stands at our 'Take care of your welfare' event offered benefits, housing and budgeting advice.

Thank you to the nearly 500 people who came to our 'Take care of your welfare' event at St Andrew's Hall. With plenty of information on offer about how benefit changes may affect your household, we hope you found the day useful.

We worked with partner organisations to answer queries at the event, while providing free activities to keep children entertained.

Deputy leader of the council and cabinet member for resources, Councillor Alan Waters, who was on hand to speak to people, says: "I'm pleased it was so well attended and the overwhelming majority of comments on our feedback forms were positive. It's vital that we do everything in our power to make sure anyone with concerns about the new benefit rules has access to the right support."

We hope everyone who stopped by at our dedicated market stall to receive welfare reform advice and a free bacon roll recently got the help they needed, too.

If you want to find out more about benefit changes, please go to the welfare reform link on our homepage www.norwich.gov.uk.

Welfare changes this summer

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) – new claimants were changed over to the new Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in June.

People aged between 16 and 64, who receive DLA and who need to report a change in their health, will be switched to PIP from October 2013. From 2015, medical assessments of all DLA claimants, even those who have an indefinite or lifetime award, will begin. Those applying for, or in receipt of PIP, will be

more rigorously assessed for eligibility and will be subject to more regular reviews.

For further information, visit the Department for Work and Pensions website www.dwp.gov.uk.

The benefits cap – from Monday 15 July limits are being put on the overall amount of benefit you can receive. The government will add up how much money you get from a range of benefits and, if the total comes to more than the maximum allowed, your housing benefit will reduce. Single parents and couples with or without children will be limited to receiving a maximum of £500 per week in benefits, and single people without children will be limited to a maximum of £350 per week.

The new rules will not apply if you, or your partner, are receiving pension credit or entitled to working tax credit; or if a member of your household (claimant,



Children enjoyed the fun free activities at our welfare event.

partner, children under the age of 18) is claiming DLA or PIP, attendance allowance or the support element of Employment and Support Allowance. However, the benefit cap will apply if there are resident children over the age of 18, even if they are in receipt of the above, as the government do not count them as part of the benefit household.

The DWP will write to all households affected – we urge you to read its letters carefully and call the government's advice line on **0845 605 7064** if you have any queries.

What help is available?

Working tax credit

Make sure you're not missing out on money you may be entitled to. If you are aged 16 or over, work a certain number of hours each week, get paid for the work you do and are on an income below a certain level, you could be eligible to receive up to £1,920 a year.

You don't need to be a parent to claim and you can claim if you're receiving maternity or sick pay, or if you're between jobs (providing you qualify). To find out more, call the helpline on **0345 300 3900** or visit **www.gov.uk/working-tax-credit/overview**.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

We have a limited DHP fund, which gives temporary grants to help people through particular circumstances. It is only available to people who pay rent and receive certain benefits, including housing benefit. Applications are considered on their own merits and criteria may change as the

impact of welfare reform is felt. More information about DHP can be found by looking at the benefits pages of our website **www.norwich.gov.uk**.

Here we take a look at examples of tenants who have received DHP help.

Case study one

A council tenant who was under-occupying her three-bedroom house by two bedrooms saw her housing benefit reduce by 25 per cent in April under the new legislation. She wanted to downsize but needed help covering the shortfall in rent while she looked for a smaller home. So she applied for DHP. She also talked to Norwich Home Options, our choice-based letting scheme, and was awarded gold banding as she had

two bedrooms she didn't need. The DHP panel agreed to cover her rent shortfall for three months, giving her time to find a suitable one-bedroom property. Four weeks later, she successfully bid for a suitable property in her chosen area.

Case study two

Another tenant who was under-occupying her two-bedroom house saw her housing benefit reduce in April, but wanted to remain in her property. She applied for DHP to cover the shortfall in rent while she took steps to ensure she could afford her rent long-term.

The DHP panel awarded her the full rent shortfall for three months, while she asked her employer about working more hours and advertised for a lodger.

Free money advice

If you need help taking control of your finances or relieving the burden of debt, please use our free dedicated money advice service for council tenants. Our specialist advisers can meet with you anywhere that's convenient for you to have a confidential chat about your financial situation, ranging from basic budgeting skills to intensive debt management. Remember, you are not alone and we will not judge you.

Whatever the issue, we can:

- offer advice on benefits entitlement, increasing your income, basic bank accounts and other financial services (such as low cost from credit unions)
- help you to identify your priority debts



- negotiate with creditors and doorstep lenders on your behalf
- assist with bankruptcy/insolvency queries and county court judgements procedures (CCJs).

If you would like any advice or to make an appointment, please email the money advice team at **moneyadvisers@norwich.gov.uk** giving us as much information as possible about your current situation. Alternatively, call **0344 980 3333** to ask for a referral.

Is your home gas safe?

As your landlord, we have a responsibility to ensure your welfare in your home and, as part of this commitment, we take gas safety very seriously. Similarly, as a tenant you need to make sure nobody in your home is endangered through your household's gas use.

The damage shown in these pictures was caused when a small LPG (liquid petroleum gas) cylinder used in a camping stove exploded in a council home. Thankfully, nobody was hurt. However, the explosion caused several thousand pounds worth of damage and could have caused a severe injury or a fatality if anybody had been nearby at the time.

LPG is highly flammable. The types of LPG you can buy in the UK are called propane and butane. Propane is usually stored in a red cylinder, and butane in a blue or green



cylinder. LPG is regularly used for camping stoves, cookers, cylinders for BBQs, and portable heaters and camping lights.

The cylinders can leak gas and explode in the event of a fire, potentially causing extreme damage. LPG is heavier than air, therefore any leaked gas will drop to floor level and you wouldn't immediately notice its smell when entering a room.

These appliances need a regular gas safety inspection, just like your gas cooker. **As a tenant, you are responsible for**

making sure you maintain your own appliances safely and do not compromise your safety, or the safety of your family and neighbours.

This means you should not store anything that is a safety risk and you should only use and store bottled gas appliances in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Bottled gas appliances should only be used if the layout of your home and the neighbouring properties make it safe to do so – **these appliances are not generally suitable for use in flats.**

Please also remember that as a tenant you must allow us access to your home to carry out maintenance and safety checks on appliances and/or flues that we provide for your use, and to check your home is gas safe.



Stay safe this summer

As soon as the warm weather arrives many of us head out to the garden to enjoy a barbecue (BBQ). When cooking outdoors, there are a few steps you can take to make sure all goes well. Get started by placing your BBQ on a level surface, away from plants, trees and the fence you share with your neighbour's garden. Have a bucket of water or sand nearby for emergencies and be considerate if your neighbours want to dry their clothes outside when you want to cook.

Food tips

- Ensure meat is thawed beforehand and turned regularly so it cooks evenly.
- Meat is safe to eat only when it is piping hot in the centre, there is no 'pinkness' and juices are clear – cut into the thickest part of the meat to check for these three signs that it's cooked.
- You run the risk of food poisoning if cooked meat touches raw meat. Use separate tongs and containers for them, and don't put marinade on cooked food if it has already been used with raw meat.
- To prevent food poisoning germs from multiplying it's important to keep certain foods cool. These include salads (and rice salads), dips, ham and cooked rice.

Only use a BBQ in the open air

Every year on UK campsites, people tragically lose their lives or are injured after bringing BBQs inside enclosed spaces. BBQs produce carbon monoxide, a highly poisonous substance



created when fossil fuels like gas and solid fuels like charcoal and wood fail to combust fully due to a lack of oxygen. You can't see it, taste it or smell it, but carbon monoxide can kill quickly and without warning.

To protect yourself and your family, **never use any kind of BBQ in an enclosed space like a tent, garage or caravan.** Whether it's a disposable, gas or charcoal BBQ, follow these tips to keep everyone safe.

Gas BBQs or gas camping equipment

- Never use a gas camping stove, light or heater in a house, tent, caravan or cabin.
- Only use the appliance if it is in good working order and the hoses are properly attached and undamaged. If in doubt, get the hoses replaced.
- Turn off the gas taps before changing the gas cylinder and do it in the open air.
- Don't over-tighten joints.
- When you finish cooking, turn off the gas cylinder before turning off the controls – this means any gas in the

pipeline will be used up.

- Read the manufacturer's instructions about how to check for gas leaks from hoses or pipework, such as brushing leak detection solution around all joints and looking for bubbles.

Charcoal and disposable BBQs

- Never take a smouldering or lit BBQ into a house, tent, caravan or cabin.
- When you finish cooking, keep the BBQ outside – this is because it will give off fumes for several hours after use.
- Never use a BBQ inside to keep you warm.
- Never leave a lit BBQ unattended, especially while sleeping.
- Choose a cooking area that's well away from your house or tent and ensure there is lots of fresh air in the area where you are using the BBQ.
- Only use your BBQ in accordance with the operating instructions.
- Remember the signs and symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning – headaches, dizziness, breathlessness, nausea, collapse and loss of consciousness.



Are you a good neighbour?



We all have a responsibility for making our neighbourhoods enjoyable, safe places to live. Getting on well with people who live in your area improves everyone's quality of life, and neighbours can become a good source of support.

Respecting each other's lifestyles and needs is the key to keeping the peace. Most conflicts between neighbours begin because of misunderstandings or inconsiderate behaviour.

In summer, reports of disputes increase simply because we tend to spend more time outside, enjoy a BBQ or two, and often sleep with our windows open. This means we're more likely to both cause a disturbance to people living nearby and to hear noise from our neighbours.

If you invite people round and think there might be a late end to your get-together, whether it's a late-night BBQ or a party indoors, give your neighbours plenty of notice or invite them too.

Make sure your guests don't block other people's driveways and if they leave by taxi, ask them not to gather on the pavement outside while they are waiting.

Take a moment to consider where you place your speakers, as noise carries easily from speakers close to walls, floors and doors. And be mindful that if you're playing music indoors with the windows open, it could easily cause a disturbance.

If you get a request from your neighbours to reduce the noise, respond politely and positively, so everyone can enjoy the warmer evenings and being part of the community.

As well as relaxing outside, summer is also a time for gardening, and you might find you're trimming hedges or mowing the lawn more often. Just as with noisy DIY, your neighbours will thank you for getting the work done in daylight hours.

If you have a dog, make sure it can't get out of your garden to cause a nuisance and that it isn't left chained up outside if it barks non-stop.

If you take your dog to one of Norwich's beautiful parks this summer – or even if you stick to walking your pet in your area – make sure you put any dog mess in a bag and bin it in any of our 850 litter bins dotted around the city (except those in fenced-off play areas).

The penalty for dog fouling is £80 (discounted to £60 for early payment).

Above all, neighbours should always be given consideration if you want to gain respect, build a good relationship and avoid disputes.

What can I do if my neighbour is causing a nuisance?

Have a quiet word with them before it gets out of hand as they may be unaware of how you feel.

If you can't resolve the issue and you need to report antisocial behaviour, you can call our 24-hour hotline on **01603 212100**; call **0344 980 3333** during normal working hours; come to City Hall; email **asb@norwich.gov.uk**; or write to Antisocial behaviour, City Hall, Norwich NR2 1NH.



Recycling has never been easier

We're committed to offering all tenants the facilities to recycle paper, card, plastic bottles, aerosols, tins, glass and food.

This year so far we have installed communal recycling facilities at Albert Place, Providence Place, parts of St Leonards Road, Ladbroke Place, Camp Grove, Quebec Road, Bussey Road, Ives Road, Blackhorse Opening, Vale Green, Barnards Yard, Hobart Square and Heathgate.

These additions alone mean over 1,000 more properties can recycle for Norwich, which is great for the city as everyone's recycling effort brings in more than £900,000 annually in recycling credits. We reinvest this money into the waste and recycling services you receive.

Take your recycling to the correct bin and let us do the rest!

Can you help us tackle fly-tipping?

Anyone can report fly-tipped rubbish – you don't need special authority.

Help us prosecute the people responsible by completing the online form in the Do it online section of our website www.norwich.gov.uk, or by emailing info@norwich.gov.uk.

Please record the date, time and place; description of people seen; vehicle details including make, model, colour and registration; and the type of waste.

Food waste bin

YES PLEASE

- ✓ Leftovers from your meals
- ✓ Meat – raw and cooked, including fat and bones
- ✓ Fish – raw and cooked, including bones and shells
- ✓ Eggs – including shells
- ✓ Dairy products
- ✓ Fruit and vegetables – raw and cooked
- ✓ Bread, cakes and baked goods
- ✓ Rice, pasta and beans
- ✓ Tea bags and coffee grounds
- ✓ Cooking oil, lard and other fats (liquid or solid)
- ✓ Leftover tinned and dry pet food

 Please remember to use a compostable bag or line with newspaper

NO THANKS

- ✗ Packaging of any sort
- ✗ Carrier bags
- ✗ Glass
- ✗ Straw or animal bedding
- ✗ General household waste
- ✗ Cat litter

Mixed blue recycling bin

YES PLEASE

- ✓ Steel and aluminium cans (rinsed out) – including food and drink tins and cans and metal aerosol cans (with lids removed)
- ✓ Plastic bottles (rinsed out with lids removed) – including washing up liquid, milk, fizzy drinks/squash, ketchup, spray cleaners and bleach
- ✓ Paper – including newspapers, magazines and printer paper, catalogues and phone books
- ✓ Cardboard – large brown boxes, toothpaste boxes, food packaging

NO THANKS

- ✗ Carrier bags
- ✗ Waxed fruit juice cartons
- ✗ Wrapping paper and envelopes
- ✗ Plastics which aren't bottle-shaped – including yoghurt pots and margarine tubs
- ✗ Glass
- ✗ Aluminium foil

Glass recycling bin

YES PLEASE

- ✓ Glass bottles and jars of any colour (rinsed out with lids removed)

NO THANKS

- ✗ Pyrex
- ✗ Light bulbs
- ✗ Window glass
- ✗ Carrier bags containing glass



Housing contracts, repairs and maintenance update

Tell us how we did

Our satisfaction forms are an important way to monitor work carried out by us and our contractors, so if you are sent a form after work is done in your home, please take a few minutes to complete it. Your views help us make improvements.

What's more, our contractors run prize draws for everyone who returns a completed satisfaction form, so make sure you send yours back to be in with a chance of winning!

Looking good

The successful partnership between Norwich City Council, NPS Norwich Ltd and Foster Property Maintenance is taking great strides in improving the look of your estates.

The works includes rebuilding boundary walls, fencing, shrub clearance, landscaping, replacing defective concrete canopies, painting, and adding children's floor and wall art.

This has improved tenants' pride in their neighbourhood. Thorpe Hamlet-Rouen, Colman, and North Earlham are next to benefit.

Save time, do it online!



You can use our online form to request non-urgent routine repairs to your property (except heating repairs) by going to the Do it online section of our website www.norwich.gov.uk and clicking on Tell us about it and then Housing repair.

Please use our joint website with Gasway www.gasway-norwichcitycouncil.co.uk if you need to report a heating repair; request a call back; change an appointment date; find out-of-hours contact details or find out gas safety tips.

If you don't have internet access and you need to report a repair, please call **0344 980 3333**.

Hope for more homes to become efficient

Energy Company Obligation (ECO) was introduced in January 2013, which means that energy companies will need to fund energy efficient improvements worth around £1.3 billion every year.

We are talking to our contractor Foster Property Maintenance about it delivering our ECO works using the Eastern Procurement Consortium (EPC) Framework agreement.

This will provide funding over the next three years for about 1,800 properties to benefit from loft insulation and top ups, about 300 council homes to have external wall insulation installed and internal wall insulation installed to almost 120

properties. The work will include a number of new doors being fitted, plus cavity wall insulation and draught-proofing.

We will also install up to 300 V-phase (voltage optimisation) units to properties that are having kitchen, bathroom and electrical upgrades. These units reduce voltage within the home, which means electrical appliances cost less to run.



The future of Right to Buy

Last year we wrote to tenants who hold a secure tenancy, to tell them about the government increasing the maximum level of discount from £34,000 to £75,000 for tenants wanting to buy their council home.

The government has reviewed its Right to Buy scheme again and is now intending to reduce the amount of time you need to have lived in your home in order to qualify to buy it, from five to three years. There will be no impact on tenants with applications already in the system.

There are many factors to consider when deciding if you want to become a homeowner,



such as interest rates on your mortgage going up and down; homeowners being fully responsible for repairs and maintenance; and flat owners having to pay a share of repairs, maintenance and work done to the block. You should also think about how you would make mortgage payments if you lost some, or all, of your income.

To talk to us about the possibility of buying your home, please call **0344 980 3333** or visit the leaseholders section of our website **www.norwich.gov.uk**.

Information for leaseholders

Norwich Leaseholders' Association (NLA) will hold its Annual General Meeting on Thursday 25 July 2013 at 7.30pm in the council chamber at City Hall, with council officers on hand from 7pm.

All city council leaseholders are invited to attend and matters of interest must be raised by Thursday 18 July. Any nominations for NLA officers and committee members should also be received before 18 July, though an opportunity to



Members of Norwich Leaseholders' Association.

present nominations from the floor will be given during the meeting.

Access to City Hall will be via the side entrance on Bethel Street.

NLA is a group run by leaseholders that discusses issues affecting leaseholders, such as service charges, improvement, maintenance and painting contracts.

The NLA committee holds a public meeting once a year and meets with council officers on a monthly basis for Partnership Action Group (PAG) meetings.

Leaseholders are welcome to attend these meetings, providing they give advance

notice using the contact information below.

For further details or to get involved in shaping council services as a leaseholder, please contact any of the following:

Kevin Hayes – NLA chair
t: **01603 259781**
e: **kevinjhayes@talktalk.net**

Lorna Kirk – secretary
t: **01603 615132**
e: **kirklorna@gmail.com**

Gemma Mitchell – Norwich City Council home ownership manager
t: **01603 213143**
e: **gemmamitchell@norwich.gov.uk**

Contacting Norwich City Council



www.norwich.gov.uk

ONLINE You can access a range of council services including online payments

EMAIL You can email your enquiry to Norwich City Council by sending it to info@norwich.gov.uk

POST Norwich City Council, City Hall, Norwich NR2 1NH.

IN PERSON The customer centre at City Hall, via the Bethel Street entrance, is open 8.45am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, and 1pm to 5pm on Wednesdays.

PHONE 0344 980 3333.
Lines open 8am to 5pm,
Monday to Friday.

Telephone payment hotline:
(24 hour): 01603 212282.

Report antisocial behaviour:
01603 212100 (24 hour).

Out of hours emergencies:
01603 412180.

Minicom users only:
01603 212587 (8am to 5pm,
Monday to Friday).

Social housing fraud hotline:
0800 731 4515.

Money advisers:
0344 980 3333 or email
moneyadvisers@norwich.gov.uk.

Leaseholders:
For help and advice on your rights and responsibilities, contact the home ownership team on 01603 213143 or 213144 or at homeownership@norwich.gov.uk.

New opportunity to share your views

In the last issue of *TLC* magazine we told you about Norwich Community Alarm Service (NCAS) achieving full accreditation to the national Telecare Services Association.

As part of attaining this important seal of approval, NCAS set up a user group to ensure the in-depth involvement of a variety of people in developing and improving its service – and now it is looking for new members.

Whether you are an NCAS user yourself; you are a family member, friend or carer of an NCAS user; or you have a professional connection to NCAS, why not get involved?

The user group is currently made up of NCAS customers;

Norwich City Council sheltered housing tenants; housing association tenants; and other interested parties who have a level of involvement with the service.

Recent contributions the group has made include helping to review and develop a customer information handbook for new and prospective customers, and influencing the content and format of customer surveys (in order to encourage responses) and the first NCAS annual report, to be issued in October 2013.

If you, or someone you know, is interested in joining the NCAS user group, please contact Julia Wilkin or Kathryn Graves on **01603 213700** for more information.



The first meeting of our NCAS user group.

Have your say...

Please contact us if you have any concerns as a tenant or leaseholder, or if you would like to share something.

Write to *TLC* magazine, Conesford Room, City Hall, Norwich NR2 1NH or email involvement@norwich.gov.uk.