



# tlc

Tenants' and leaseholders'  
community magazine



**NORWICH**  
City Council

**Autumn/Winter 2013**



## Your unsung heroes recognised

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to tenants 2012-13



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# Introduction from Bert Bremner Welcome to the autumn/winter issue of *TLC magazine*

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

I've spent the past few months meeting many of the tenants who work closely with councillors and officers to improve our housing services.

I was delighted to attend the city council's first ever tenant summit (full story on page 9), where I met representatives from all of the groups that make up the new tenant involvement framework, and I look forward to more of these events in the future.

As part of our housing strategy, we are currently exploring options for the homes that

will be needed in Norwich in the future. We will keep you updated on our progress with this project in *TLC*, but if you would like to be involved in shaping our homes of the future, please email **involvement@norwich.gov.uk** or contact our tenant involvement team on the number below.

This issue of *TLC* features a summary of our annual report (see pages 4 to 7), which details the performance of our housing services over the last 12 months, and on page 8 we provide insight into how

homes are allocated through our Home Options service.

There is still time to save money on your gas and electricity bills by signing up to Norwich's Big Switch and Save scheme. It's free and easy, and there is no obligation to switch, so contact us before 19 November to register, using the contact details below.



We hope you enjoy this issue of *TLC magazine*.

## How are we doing?

To see how our housing service is performing, check out the latest scorecard in the housing section of our website: **www.norwich.gov.uk** or call **0344 980 3333** to request a copy.

REPAIRS	COMPARED TO TARGET	HOMES	COMPARED TO TARGET
97% of our customers are satisfied with the quality of repairs.	😊	95% of Norwich City Council homes meet the Norwich Standard.	🟡
97% of our repairs appointments are kept by our contractors.	😊	1,281 kitchens and 714 new bathrooms have been fitted in the last 12 months.	🟡
91% of repairs are completed right first time.	😊	15 is the average number of days it takes us to relet an empty property.	🟡



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: The Lord Mayor meets this year's good neighbour winner, Fay Wales (pictured right).

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@EventsNorwich  
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Norwich City Council events

# This year's good neighbour revealed

In the spring issue of *TLC*, we asked you to send in details of unsung heroes in your neighbourhood who deserved recognition. We received lots of great nominations, which gave our tenant judging panel a very difficult time when selecting the finalists.

The shortlisted finalists were invited to a tea party in the Lord Mayor's parlour at the end of August, and the nominations were put on display so everyone in attendance could share in each other's acts of kindness.

Fay Wales was crowned the winner of the good neighbour award, scooping the £100

prize, while the other finalists all received a certificate in recognition of their good deeds.

Fay was nominated by her neighbour, Joyce Andrews, who said: "Fay saved my sanity when I lost my husband, visiting me every day to make sure I was ok and take care of my shopping. She is always there for me in an emergency and has cancelled her own family engagements to wait with me for the doctor. She phones every morning to check I'm ok and brings me homemade sausage rolls. She does a lot of work for the community as treasurer of our social committee and always takes me to events. Fay is like a

sister to me and looks after all of the vulnerable people on our site."

The Lord Mayor, Councillor Keith Driver, said: "I would like to congratulate the winner and all of this year's unsung heroes. I would also like to thank everyone who took the time to write in and share with us their heartfelt appreciation of these exceptional people."



Fay (pictured right).

## Residents come together

A recent initiative to improve the communal areas of Globe Place, off Vauxhall Street, has really helped to bring the community together.

It all started when residents asked their local councillors, Emma Corlett and Stephen Little, to look into how shared areas of paving and raised shrub beds could be improved. Funding was secured for development work and two consultation events were organised, to gather views on the changes people wanted to see.

Residents felt better areas for children were needed, along with more colour and planting, and that the improvements should be geared towards bringing the community

together. Ideas put forward included a drawing surface for children; markings for games such as hopscotch; murals to brighten up the walls; flowers rather than shrubs; and small allotment areas to be looked after by children.

The consultation inspired a community barbecue, organised by local resident Helen Woods, which turned out to be a great day for everyone.



Globe Place.



There was a raffle with more than 100 prizes, a bouncy castle, and wonderful food provided by residents and the local pub.

Helen said: "It was great to see so many people spending time together and talking about ways we can improve our local area."

We hope this is the first of many community events at Globe Place and we look forward to seeing the improvements come to life.

# Annual report summary

This brief summary gives you an overview of the Annual Report 2012-13. The report highlights where your housing services have excelled and where improvements are needed. If you wish to read the full report, which has been produced in partnership with a tenants focus group, please visit [www.norwich.gov.uk](http://www.norwich.gov.uk). If you have any questions about this report please call **0344 980 3333** or email [involvement@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:involvement@norwich.gov.uk).

## This year's highlights

### Tenant involvement, empowerment and customer care

#### New structure

During the last year, we have worked with tenant representatives to revise and improve our involvement framework. We want you to have more influence on our service standards, to scrutinise our performance and to ensure value for money.

#### Customer service excellence

In recognition of the joint work between tenants and staff, we continue to retain the customer service excellence accreditation for another year.

#### Fundays - giving you a voice

It has been a wonderful year, full of successful events which gave the residents of Norwich and their families the opportunity to take part in a wide range

of family fundays and free entertainment while feeding back on our services. Thanks to the hard work of everyone involved, and the sponsorship of our contractors, we have achieved some fantastic results.

#### Chances to learn



We recently celebrated our involved tenants' graduation from our new training academy with a graduation ceremony at Norse's Fifers Lane offices. The ceremony noted the achievement of the first two groups of tenants to complete their training course.



Tenant panel training

15 tenants celebrated their graduation, all now armed with the knowledge and confidence to help improve the services tenants receive.

**Charmain Woollard, one of our Ttfn graduates, was recruited at the Mile Cross Festival and joined our training programme, completing all the course modules. Charmain is now on our scrutiny panel which started in April.**

**When Charmain was asked about what she had learned she said: "The training has given me the confidence, knowledge and understanding to empower other tenants. I am now confident to speak up and challenge comments and ideas."**

## Maintaining your home

In March this year, council employees from our property services team transferred to NPS Norwich, and tenants continue to receive their services as normal.

Norwich Norse also began to deliver our grounds, streets and trees maintenance contract in March for the next nine years. This work had previously been delivered by Biffa on a temporary basis.

## Upgrades and improvements

There has been various energy efficiency work carried out in the last year, which includes:

- homes benefitting from energy efficient 'A' rated boilers, loft, cavity wall and external wall insulation
- solar panels being installed at **31** homes across the city, including **19** homes at a sheltered housing scheme
- carrying out a trial of internal wall installation (IWI) at Suffolk Square. This has been a most successful trial with very positive results.



## Adaptations

**Jean and Ron moved into a sheltered housing scheme where adaptations were required in their property. The council transformed the bathroom into a wet room while fitting a new toilet. We also fitted steps at the rear of the property for easier access for Ron. He explained how the wet room had made a big difference to their lives. When asked about the service they received Ron and Jean said: "Everything was brilliant. We have no complaints about anything and would like to praise everyone to workmen and other staff. We would especially like to praise Michelle, our sheltered housing officer, who supported us all the way through."**



*Jean and Ron who have just had an adaption completed in their property.*

## Allocating homes and sustaining tenancies

### Norwich Home Options

In April 2012 we launched Norwich Home Options with 12 housing association partners. This resulted in a new website: **www.norwichhomeoptions.org.uk**, and a new allocations policy, designed to ensure that the housing needs of Norwich residents are prioritised.

### LEAP (Learning, employment, accommodation, project)



*A LEAP trainee with his certificate.*

LEAP empowers people who face homelessness to lead an independent life by coaching them towards employment and providing independent accommodation. St Martin's Housing Trust in partnership with LEAP, Norwich City Council and Construction Training Services have received funding through the Homes & Communities Agency to bring empty homes back into use

while helping local people gain new skills and become more employable.

### **Maintaining tenancies - pre-tenancy awareness sessions**

Sessions with Norwich City Council's money advice team are held for prospective tenants to increase their understanding of what is expected of them, to raise awareness of the costs involved and to help identify priority payments. The sessions cater for different learning styles to help attendees absorb all the information.

### **New homes**

We have embarked on a project to build new homes. Plans have been submitted for **12** new homes at Pointer's Field (four shared ownership, eight council stock) and **three** new council homes at Riley Close.

### **Neighbourhood and community**

#### **Fly-tipping**

The city council's environmental protection team works closely with colleagues in housing, citywide services, and local residents to tackle fly-tipping hotspots. For example, in the West Pottergate area, fly-tipping around communal

bins was becoming a recurring problem. The environmental protection team, along with staff from housing and waste and recycling, tackled the issue by conducting a door knocking campaign in the area. As a result, fly-tipping around the bins decreased significantly.

#### **Walkabouts**

This year we have delivered **40** walkabouts attracting **800** tenants and residents, and **four** road shows, one in each neighbourhood area.

#### **Estate auditors**

Estate audits have concentrated on new sites with a focus on the caretaker service, as well as looking at sheltered housing services. Les, an estate inspector, said "**Estate inspections are very important because we get an overview of our estates and which areas are not up to standard, while highlighting where money should be spent.**"

#### **Antisocial behaviour**

In 2012-13 we had **3,885** reports of antisocial behaviour (ASB). The most common types of complaint are noise, nuisance behaviour and harassment. Joint working between our

ABATE team and Norfolk Constabulary, has achieved notable successes. The team is now based with our police partners, enabling information to be shared more freely between the two organisations.

### **Value for money**

We collected **£56.6 million** in rent money in 2012-13.



### **Benchmarking**

To help us assess value for money at Norwich City Council, we have joined HouseMark, an organisation that helps us compare costs and performance with other social housing organisations throughout the country; this is called benchmarking. The information is used to highlight what we are doing well or where cost or performance improvements could be made.

We will report back on our results for 2012-13 in next year's annual report.

### **Self-financing**

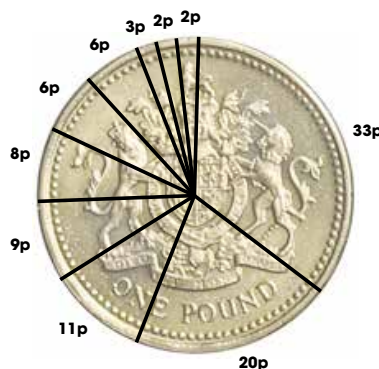
The Localism Act requires all local authorities to pay the government an amount equal to their share of the national housing debt. A £149m loan 'bought us out' from the previous housing subsidy system,

in line with government reforms to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

When explaining self-financing Alyson a tenant said: **“Self-financing is more beneficial than the previous system where the council had no choice but to pay money to the government. The council can now choose how to spend money where it previously could not. This does**

**mean, however, the council has taken on additional debt under the terms of the self-financing scheme.”**

How each £1 is spent



- 33p** Maintaining homes
- 20p** Housing management
- 11p** Empty property works
- 9p** Estate management
- 8p** Gas and solid fuel heating and servicing
- 6p** Arrears and rent
- 6p** Sheltered housing service
- 3p** Caretaker service
- 2p** Home ownership
- 2p** Community alarm service

Here is a snapshot of some of the key housing targets and how the service performed against them.

### TENANT INVOLVEMENT, EMPOWERMENT AND CUSTOMER CARE

Average time it takes for housing calls to be answered **1.49 minutes** (better than last year).

NCAS – number of alarm calls received **85,744**.

Number of alarm calls responded to within 60 seconds **97.46 per cent** (better than last year). ☹️

Number of alarm calls responded to within 180 seconds **99.84 per cent** (better than last year). 😊

### MAINTAINING YOUR HOME

Percentage of repairs completed right first time **91 per cent** (better than last year). 😊

Percentage of tenant satisfaction with repairs: **97 per cent**. 😊

Percentage of homes with an up to date gas safety certificate **100 per cent** (better than last year). 😊

**95.3 per cent** of homes met the Norwich Standard. This includes 1,267 new kitchens, 717 new bathrooms, 838 new heating systems and 978 back doors. 😊

Average number of days council homes stood empty between old and new tenants: **15 days** (better than last year). 😊

#### What the symbols mean:

☹️ on target    😊 above target

# Norwich Home Options explained



All social housing and sheltered accommodation available in Norwich is allocated through a service called Norwich Home Options. This is a 'choice based' lettings system, which requires applicants to bid on properties advertised weekly on the Norwich Home Options website and in a newsletter.

The weekly bidding cycle runs from midnight on Wednesdays, and every applicant can make two bids per cycle by internet, telephone, or in person at City Hall. Help is available for anyone who is unable to bid for themselves.

The scheme is designed to give people a choice of where to live and a realistic perspective of their chances of success. Bids are sorted in priority order and the person with the highest banding gets first refusal on a property.

Applicants in the same banding are prioritised by date order, based on who has been waiting the longest, with the top three applicants normally invited to view a property at the same time. If the first person on the list turns an offered property down, the property is offered to the next person on the list, and so on.

## Who gets priority?

Each applicant is awarded a banding based on their level of housing need (emergency, gold, silver, bronze or low need). Examples of housing need include overcrowding, high medical need or homelessness. Therefore if you are already adequately housed, you will generally be placed in the low need band. All applicants

must live in Norwich and cannot be banded above bronze, unless they have lived in the city for at least two years.

The scheme's policy is applied consistently to all applications and is carefully audited to ensure the right people are allocated the available properties.

Applications are rigorously checked and verified through home visits. Where false information has been provided, the application is cancelled and the individual is unable to reapply.

In some cases, applicants with a history of antisocial behaviour or rent arrears may not be allowed to join the scheme or may have their banding downgraded. Applicants can request a review if they feel they've been incorrectly assessed, but the review panel will only ensure the policy has been applied correctly.

To ensure fairness to all applicants, there are no exceptions to the scheme's policy. This prevents external pressure from having any bearing on applications and ensures priority goes to those in the greatest need.

## Transparency and choice

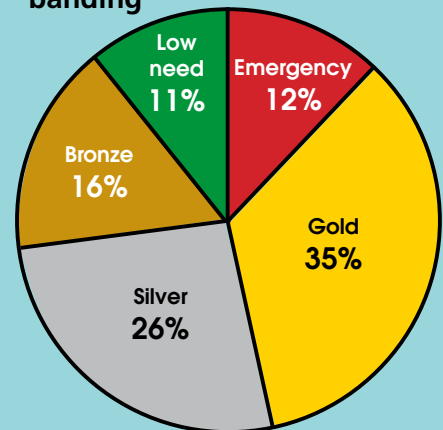
The banding and application date of each successful applicant is shown on the Norwich Home Options website. This helps applicants to work out the areas and property types in highest demand, and to decide which properties they are most likely to be successful bidding for. It is up to the applicant to balance

their desire to move with the properties and areas they are prepared to consider.

For example, bungalows are in short supply and demand is extremely high, but flats and maisonettes are advertised every week, so applicants have a far greater chance of success. Naturally we understand some applicants will need certain property types but, wherever possible, the more areas and property types an applicant is able to consider, the more likely they are to be successful.

## Who gets housed?

### Successful applicants by banding



The chart above shows that even those with a low priority are able to access social housing, although this may generally be in 'low demand' properties such as maisonettes or upper floor flats.

## How to apply

You can contact the Home Options team on **0344 980 3333**, or visit them in person at City Hall (closed Wednesday mornings). Further information is available online at **[www.norwichhomeoptions.org.uk](http://www.norwichhomeoptions.org.uk)**.



# In Focus: Tenant scrutiny panel



In future issues of *TLC*, we will be looking at different ways you can get involved, in a new feature called 'In Focus'.

In this edition, we explore the work of the tenant scrutiny panel (TSP) and find out more about its members.

The TSP is a group of tenants who scrutinise the performance of housing services within the council, and work with staff to make improvements that will benefit all tenants. We meet Gypsy and Christine to find out more:

## What made you get involved in tenant scrutiny?

**Gypsy:** I wanted to learn how the council operates and I like the challenge of trying to improve services. It is also nice to meet like-minded people and make new friends.

**Christine:** I have always been interested in tenant involvement

and feel it's important to ensure the council is aware of problems facing ordinary tenants.

## What particular subjects are you interested in?

**Gypsy:** I am interested in improving areas that lack community spirit or have problems with antisocial behaviour. I am also interested in the quality of the homes the council provides.

**Christine:** Housing rents, repairs and property upgrades.

## How do you see your role as a scrutiny member?

**Christine:** Our role is to represent the views of tenants and work with the council to find solutions to problems.

## What do you think are important skills to have to fulfil the role?

**Gypsy:** Not necessarily a skill, but a real must – you need to be willing to give up some spare

time to attend courses and meetings, and be wholeheartedly committed. You need to work well in a team, have good communication skills and the ability to listen to other people's points of view. An ability to analyse information is also useful.

## What skills have you gained from being involved?

**Gypsy:** I have gained skills in negotiation, presentation and public speaking.

**Christine:** I have gained the confidence to stand up and voice my opinion.



Gypsy (pictured left).

# First tenant summit a big success

Tenant representatives from across the city came together at Blackfriars' Hall in September for Norwich City Council's first tenant summit.

The summit showcased the various ways tenants can get involved under our new involvement framework, bringing together representatives from different tenant groups to share ideas and successes, and to discuss priorities for the year ahead.

Delegates were able to browse a series of stalls, each one

representing a different form of involvement, such as the tenant scrutiny panel (explored above); the tenant involvement panel; tenant training; the sheltered housing tenants' forum; patch panels; and tenant inspectors, to name but a few.

Both tenants and officers were on hand to answer questions and provide information about the various activities. The summit also celebrated our successful series of housing fundays and gave tenants a chance to make suggestions for future events

and offer content ideas for *TLC magazine*. Feedback from those who attended was extremely positive and there are plans to hold more of these events in the future for a much wider audience.



Christine at the tenant summit.



# Housing contracts, repairs and maintenance update

## Help keep your home healthy this winter



The clash of hot and cold air, combined with a lack of ventilation in winter months, can generate higher levels of condensation, leading to mould growth in your home.

### This can be avoided by following these simple steps:

- keep lids on pans when cooking and use your extractor fan
- shut the kitchen door when cooking
- shut the bathroom door when showering or bathing
- leave extractor fans on, particularly in bathrooms
- request that an extractor fan be fitted, if you don't already have one
- wipe moisture from windows and sills with a cloth each day

- ensure tumble dryers are vented to the outside
- empty water reservoirs on condensing dryers after each load
- leave space between your furniture and walls
- don't overfill cupboards and wardrobes
- leave window vents open and clean them regularly
- don't dry damp clothes on radiators.

### If you must dry clothes indoors:

- keep them in one room
- use a clothes airer in the bath
- open the bathroom window
- close the bathroom door to minimise heat loss and increase ventilation.

### Heating your home:

- keep your home at a steady temperature, typically between 18°C and 21°C
- keep your radiators clear
- don't put furniture in front of radiators or let curtains hang over the top of them
- close your curtains at night
- leave your central heating turned on at a very low level if you go away.

### If mould has already developed:

- do not disturb it by vacuuming or brushing it off
- use a fungicidal wash/spray
- dry clean any mildewed clothes
- shampoo any affected carpets
- redecorate with a fungicidal paint after treatment.

## Be rewarded for sharing your views

Your feedback plays an important role in helping us shape the services you receive.

Make sure you return your completed satisfaction forms, and don't miss your chance to win a £50 cheque or shopping voucher, in the monthly prize draws run by Norse and Gasway.



*Mrs Wildgoose – Norse survey winner (August).*

**Did you know?** You can help save the environment by completing your Gasway surveys online. Just go to the web address on your form!

## Window replacement update

We have now replaced 98 per cent of all council property windows with PVCu double glazing. The remaining properties due for upgrade will be completed over the next 8 to 12 months.



## Do you need help making ends meet?



The introduction of welfare reforms last April has made it even harder for some tenants to pay their bills. If you have lost housing benefit as a result of under occupancy and need help making ends meet, you can apply for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to help you cover the extra cost.

You can receive DHP for up to 13 weeks while we help you find other solutions. There is a limited amount of money available for this,

so please apply today by visiting the housing benefit page of our website, or call us on **0344 980 3333**.

We also have a dedicated money advice service available to all council tenants, where you can receive assistance with budgeting and debt management from our specialist advisers. Call us for more information or to make an appointment.

## Got it covered?

What would you do if there was a leak in the flat above you, which damaged your furniture and belongings? Could you afford to replace everything you own?

Your possessions are your responsibility and the council will not compensate you for them. However, we do offer a contents insurance scheme for under £1 a week, giving you peace of mind that you're covered, should the unthinkable happen.

Payments are made with your rent and there is no excess to pay on claims. You are even covered for most forms of accidental damage.

Call us on **0344 980 3333** to sign up and sleep easy, knowing you've got it covered.

# Information for leaseholders

### Are you Gas Safe?

As a leaseholder, you are responsible for ensuring all of your gas appliances, including gas cookers, fittings and flues, are checked annually by a Gas Safe registered engineer. Neglecting gas safety can put lives at risk.

### Getting your appliances checked regularly will:

- help keep you, your neighbours and your tenants safe
- reduce the risk of your appliances breaking down
- ensure your appliances work safely and efficiently

- help to reduce the running costs of appliances
- give you peace of mind
- help you to avoid potential legal action or costs, should any damage or injury be caused by a faulty gas appliance you are responsible for.

Norwich City Council's gas contractor, Gasway, offers our leaseholders extremely competitive rates for annual gas safety inspections, as well as large discounts on a range of boiler cover plans. A one-off annual safety inspection will cost you only **£35.78\***.

If you would like to take advantage of these competitive prices, please call Gasway on **0800 0743030** and tell them you are a Norwich City Council leaseholder. Gasway will check your property is an eligible leasehold property with us, but we will not share any personal information about you with Gasway without your permission.



\*Prices are subject to change.

# Contacting Norwich City Council



[www.norwich.gov.uk](http://www.norwich.gov.uk)

**ONLINE** You can now report repairs, access council services and make online payments.

**EMAIL** You can email your enquiry to Norwich City Council by sending it to [info@norwich.gov.uk](mailto: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, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and 1pm to 5pm on Wednesdays.

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

**Out of hours emergencies:**  
01603 412180.

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

**Money advisers:**  
0344 980 3333 or email  
[moneyadvisers@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:moneyadvisers@norwich.gov.uk).

**Report antisocial behaviour:**  
01603 212100 (24 hour).

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

**Social housing fraud hotline:**  
0800 731 4515.

**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](mailto:homeownership@norwich.gov.uk).

## Christmas funday

FREE winter fun for the whole family

Thursday 12 December  
4pm to 8pm

West Earlham Community Centre,  
Wilberforce Road, NR5 8ND

- meet real reindeer and their elves (4pm to 6pm)
- visit Santa's grotto and get a **FREE** gift
- Marlpit Community Choir
- Christmas decoration making
- festive games
- refreshments
- face painting

**PRIZES** to be won for all ages:

- Signed Norwich City football and shirt
- Sky+ HD 1TB box
- Christmas hamper

If you have any unwanted toys and/or unopened tinned and dried food, bring them to donate on the day to help local people in need.



Contact the tenant involvement team on **0344 980 3333** for more information, or email [involvement@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:involvement@norwich.gov.uk).

## More ways to win

Win  
£50

Pay your rent by direct debit and after three payments you will be entered into a draw to win £50. Save yourself time paying your bills and switch today by calling our direct debit hotline on **01603 212399**.

We are also running a quarterly prize draw for all customers who keep their rent account free from arrears, so keep your account up to date for another chance to win £50!

## 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](mailto:involvement@norwich.gov.uk).