

tlc

Tenants' and leaseholders'
community magazine



NORWICH
City Council

Spring 2014

ie awards
2014

Gold award for
Council of the Year



First council homes since 1992

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Introduction from Bert Bremner

Welcome to the spring issue of *TLC* magazine

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

As someone born and brought up in a Tuckswold council house, I'm delighted to see the building of our first council-owned homes in more than 20 years, as they are much needed.

I'd like to congratulate Terry Adkin for his long-serving commitment to both the council and his local community, and know his award (page five) is well deserved. I would also like to congratulate the latest group of graduates of our new tenant training academy. All tenants and leaseholders who get involved in their communities and work with us to improve our services deserve our thanks.

T.T.f.N

Tenant Training for Norwich



If you're not currently involved and would like to be, you can find out about joining our TalkBack panel on page four. TalkBack surveys are a quick and easy way to let us know what matters to you. Sharing your views has already helped us achieve an award for customer service excellence in landlord services and we want to work with you to make our services better still.

We know many residents are feeling the effects of the recession and the welfare

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE



reform changes, so I would urge you to check out our money matters section on page eight and challenge our new budgeting advisors to see if they can save you money. Go on, give them a try! What have you got to lose?

Our project to transform sheltered housing is progressing well (page six) and I am excited by the possibilities created by the new technologies being piloted in tenants' homes (page 11).

We hope you enjoy this issue of TLC and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our **Easter Funday** in Wensum Park on **Wednesday 16 April, 1pm-4pm**. The Christmas Funday in West Earham was amazing!

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.

How are we doing?

Our housing service's performance from April to December 2013

REPAIRS	COMPARED TO TARGET	HOMES	COMPARED TO TARGET
93% of our customers are satisfied with the quality of repairs.	😊	Out of the planned upgrades to complete by the end of December 2013, we have achieved:	😊
99% of our repairs appointments are kept by our contractors.	😊	98% of kitchen upgrades	
97% of repairs are completed right first time.	😊	99% of bathroom upgrades	
		100% of heating system upgrades	
		98% of electrical system upgrades	
		100% of front and back door upgrades	
		14 is the average number of days	😊



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

Cover main image (pictured left to right): Chris Dove (Dove Jeffery Homes), Wendy Evans-Hendrick (Orwell Housing Association) and council leader Brenda Arthur at the Pointers Field site event.

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@EventsNorwich
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Norwich City Council events

First council-built homes for more than 20 years

Construction has begun at a site in north Norwich on the first affordable homes to be built by the city council for more than two decades.



Council leader Brenda Arthur joined building workers at Pointers Field last month to help secure the timber base plates of the first council-owned homes to be commissioned since 1992, when Singer Court sheltered housing complex opened its doors.

Our house-building ground to a halt, largely due to 'Right to Buy' legislation introduced in the early 1980s and subsequent housing act reforms involving the transfer of funding to housing associations and restrictions imposed by central government on the use of income generated from housing rents.

These homes are therefore of huge significance. Not only are they the first to be built for more than two decades, but they represent the first milestone in our commitment to build 250 more over the next five years.

The development comprises eight one-bedroom flats that will be owned and managed by us and let for social rent through the Norwich Home Options scheme.

A further four, two-bedroom properties will be available to

purchase on a shared ownership basis through Orwell Housing Association, who are working in partnership with us to deliver the scheme.

A new concept known as 'self-build' is being piloted in Norwich for the first time in the construction of the shared ownership properties.

The properties are 90 per cent completed and the buyer is then given the option to finish the kitchen, bathroom, floors and garden themselves or buy building services from the main contractor. This scheme can reduce the overall purchase price of the property and provides a greater level of

personal choice and flexibility.

The finished council-owned properties will feature enhanced eco credentials and the first residents should be able to move into their new homes by September 2014.

Councillor Arthur, said: "It's fantastic to be here today to mark this historic occasion as we begin construction on what we hope will be the first of many much needed, affordable council owned homes for the city.

"The inclusion of one-bedroom flats within the scheme is vital in helping us tackle the impact that welfare reforms are having on those in the greatest hardship across the city."



Council leader Brenda Arthur securing the base plates of the new homes.

In Focus: TalkBack Panel



This instalment of In Focus looks at our TalkBack panel, which is an easy and informal way for you to influence our housing services.

More than 1,200 tenants and leaseholders currently share their views with us on a variety of topics via TalkBack panel surveys. We use this feedback, together with individual customer satisfaction surveys for specific service areas, to give us a full understanding of how you feel we are performing.

In a TalkBack survey in August 2013, some of you said you don't feel we act on what you say, so this is a perfect opportunity to explain how we use the information you give us.

You said we did

TalkBack panel members didn't feel our repairs survey was capturing the right information, and also didn't like that all the surveys were being given out

and collected by the operatives themselves, making it uncomfortable for customers to share their views openly.

Most surveys can now be returned independently by post and those that can't can be completed online. We've set up new surveys across 17 areas of the housing service, to which repairs satisfaction forms are key.

The new survey examines the whole process from beginning to end. It asks how easy it was to report the repair, the contractor performance and satisfaction with the service overall.

What we've done with your feedback:

- Shared information with our contractor Norse to ensure issues are picked up.
- Ensured a better customer service is provided by our operatives, which has led to higher satisfaction levels.
- Addressed feedback about the poor condition of external

doors through our replacement door programme running through to March 2017.

- Developed a new appointment slot system for repairs to speed up our response times – launching May 2014.

Get involved

Your feedback really does make a difference and we're currently looking for more tenants and leaseholders to join the Talkback panel. Each survey is very quick to complete and is done by independent market researchers, Red Quadrant, to allow your answers to remain completely impartial and anonymous.

The next planned TalkBack survey will ask for feedback on our approach to the welfare reform changes. So, if you would like to share your views and play a valuable role in improving our services, email involvement@norwich.gov.uk or call us on **0344 980 3333**.

Get rewarded!

All tenants who get involved are entered into an annual prize draw to win a festive hamper. Our most recent winner Ms Ena Holmes said the hamper came in very handy with her two sons and grandson coming for Christmas.

Ena was happy to spare us 10 minutes of her time to complete a survey every now and then. She feels that it's important people share their views, as it stands to benefit all tenants.

So what are you waiting for...?



Ms Holmes pictured with Councillor Bert Bremner after receiving her prize.

Royal recognition for dedicated tenant volunteer



Terry Adkin pictured at City Hall following the announcement of his award.

Terry Adkin (a city council tenant) was recognised in this year's Honours list with a British Empire Medal for his services to fellow tenants in West Pottergate and across the city.

The 73-year-old from Paragon Place was nominated for the

award by tenant involvement manager Sandra Franklin, for his tireless efforts as a tenant representative over the past 12 years.

He began working with us in 2001 to establish a Tenants' and Residents' Association in his local area (the West Pottergate Action Group), which he still chairs to this day.

Terry went on to represent his community on the former CityWide Tenants' Board for a number of years, before becoming the vice-chair, and eventually chairman in 2012, helping to establish our new

tenant involvement framework.

An excellent ambassador for the council and the city, he regularly represents Norwich tenants at both local and national events.

"It was a big surprise and an honour to receive the medal," says Terry.

He has no intention of stopping and will continue working with us to improve services for tenants, both as an estate auditor and in his role on the tenant scrutiny panel.

City tenants show other housing providers how it's done

Members of our tenant scrutiny panel joined our senior housing staff team to deliver a presentation to housing professionals from across the region at the Chartered Institute of Housing's (CIH) Eastern Conference.

The presentation showcased the variety of ways city tenants can get involved in developing their housing services and celebrated the work carried out with tenants over the past three years.

Following the main presentation, tenants and staff jointly led an interactive workshop which explored



Pictured from left to right – Anna Clarke, tenancy services manager, Liz Browning (tenant presenter), Sandra Franklin, tenant involvement manager, Sarah Loades, service development manager, Gypsy Hamimi (tenant presenter), Tracy John, head of housing.

the setting up and running of tenant scrutiny panels.

Anna Clarke, tenancy services manager, says: "Being asked to present by the CIH is real

testament to the work of the team and for our tenants to want to be involved is just fantastic. The more tenants we can involve in our services, the better they will become."

Sheltered housing transformation

Our refurbishment of St James House is well underway and we can now reveal the future plans for the scheme.

Following extensive consultation with residents, we plan to create a new front entrance and reception area that will transform the look and feel of the communal space. Residents were shown what is possible and they particularly liked the design of Orwell Housing Association's Wenham View scheme, on which the new space will be modelled.

The layouts of the individual flats are also being converted from the separate kitchen and lounge (pictured on the opposite page) into a more light and functional open plan space.

From tenants feedback two prototype flats were built to give residents a feel for how the space could be used. They chose a combination of the two, which incorporates the open-plan kitchen and lounge with a mid-level partition wall (pictured overleaf).

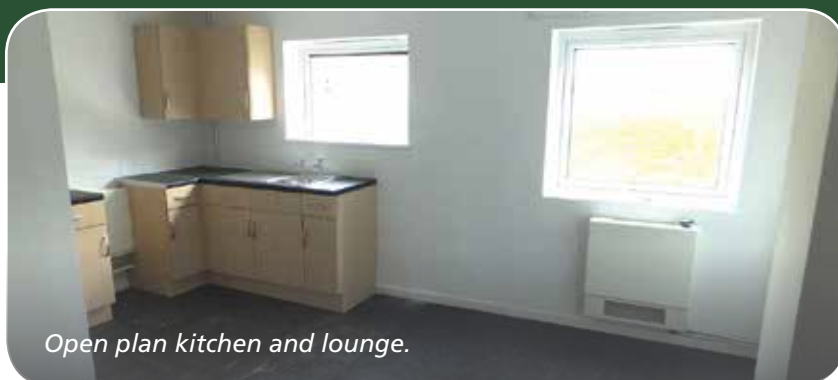
Moving on to pastures new

The extent of work that needs to take place has made it necessary for the current residents to move out of the scheme. This is also the case at Britannia Court and Lakenfields, which will also be refurbished. We hope to report on our future plans for these schemes in a future edition of *TLC magazine*.





Old kitchen.



Open plan kitchen and lounge.



Old lounge.



Partition wall.

In the meantime, we've visited some of the residents who have moved to see how they're getting on.

George moved from Lakenfields to Ryrie Court in December and says although he misses his friends at Lakenfields, they still get together and everyone at Ryrie Court is "really nice". George adds: "It was a blessing really and I feel that I've come out on top.



George's room with a view.

I've got everything I want and more, and can't wait to get outside and enjoy the garden in summer."

Dorothy Canham recently moved to Alnwick Court from Britannia Court and really likes her new home. She was initially worried about where she would be moving to, but is glad to still be near her family and close to the shops.

Her daughter Julie said: "I was worried about how the move would affect her, but the support from the council throughout the process has been great".

Tenancy support services manager Nigel Andrews said: "We appreciate moving home at any time can be a daunting prospect which is why we have supported residents every step

of the way. The majority of tenants have benefited from new kitchens, bathrooms, carpets and white goods in their new homes as part of our enhanced void standard, as well as help with moving costs and a one-off compensation payment. We hope this has gone some way to making it easier on the tenants who are moving and we're glad to see they're happy in their new homes."

We will continue to review the sheltered housing service and will be setting up focus groups with residents to explore this in more detail. If you would like to be involved in the next phase of the project, please speak to your sheltered housing support worker or call the support team on 01603 213711 to register your interest.

Money matters

Challenge our advisers to save you a few pounds each week?



BUDGETING
advice service

"I saved £190 on bank charges, just by speaking to a budgeting adviser."

"Fab service, thanks!"

"I just wish I had spoken to them earlier."

We have two new budgeting advisers in post to support tenants with money worries and we urge you to challenge them to save you money.

Our budgeting advice service is for tenants who would like helpful advice on maximising their income, saving money on everyday bills, or running a household budget.

Whether you are a first-time tenant with little experience of budgeting, or a budget savvy tenant who would like guidance on the benefits of water meters or switching energy providers, our advisers are here to help. They offer a free financial health check to all tenants as part of the service.

Email housingincome@norwich.gov.uk or call the customer centre and start saving money today!

New ways to claim housing benefit and council tax reduction

You can now make claims for housing benefit or council tax reduction using our new online form.

This gives you the freedom to make your claim when and where you choose, either from home or on the move. Or you can use one of the terminals in our customer contact centre in City Hall. If you need to bring in any documents associated with your claim, you can go straight to a designated customer adviser at our dedicated benefit proofs service area.

Look out for more 'do it online' opportunities on our website, coming soon.



Look out for texts too!

We're also currently piloting text messaging as an additional means of communicating with you.

As part of the pilot we are texting reminders when rent payments are due and giving you the ability to arrange appointments with our new budgeting advisers via text.

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for housing, says: "This is a great new service, which is free, quick and easy for tenants to use. We hope this will become a popular method of engaging with the council going forward."



It pays to pay by direct debit!

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!

Feeling the pinch of welfare reform?

If you've seen a reduction in your housing benefit as a result of last April's welfare reform changes, you may be able to 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 apply today by visiting the housing benefit page of our website www.norwich.gov.uk or call the customer centre.

Mediation can bring a happy ending

Loud music, door banging, swearing, fly-tipping and verbal abuse are just some of the antisocial behaviour issues successfully dealt with by our independent, impartial and confidential mediation service last year.

If you have a dispute with a neighbour that you are finding difficult to resolve the mediation service may be able to help.

Mediation is voluntary, and is a 'no blame' process. The mediators are not there to judge who is right or wrong but to enable participants

to put what has happened behind them and move forward in a positive way.

If all sides agree to go ahead with mediation, meetings are held at a mutually acceptable, neutral venue. Ground rules are agreed to ensure safety, and everyone is given a chance to have their say without interruption. If an agreement is reached, participants sign their acceptance (this agreement is not a legal document).

Mediation is confidential, and your information would not be shared without your permission. However, the

mediator would have to report any concerns raised about the safety of a child or vulnerable adult. Agencies with an interest in the disagreement will be told what has been agreed but only if the participants give their consent.

If you have a problem and think mediation could help, please speak to your neighbourhood warden or neighbourhood housing officer and they will help you with the next step.



Your questions answered

In the last issue we explained how the Norwich Home Options scheme works to answer some of the common questions that crop up. Here we explore a common question around medical needs and bandings.

Q Does having a disability or medical need increase your priority banding and what information is required?

A In certain circumstances, priority banding can be awarded on medical grounds. If an applicant has a medical issue

made worse by their housing, and where a move would improve this, they should complete a medical assessment form. It is up to the applicant whether or not they provide supporting information. A review panel will then assess their circumstances and review their banding.

The role of the review panel is to assess the degree of medical need relating to an applicant's current accommodation and whether or not this merits additional priority to move to a more suitable property. Medical priority is only awarded where an applicant needs re-housing due to a strongly evidenced, serious and enduring medical condition or disability which is being permanently affected by their housing.

Where an applicant has a disability or requires an adapted

property, the review panel can also amend their application to ensure additional priority is awarded when bidding for a property which has already been adapted and would meet the applicant's requirements. Examples of adaptations can include wheelchair ramps, wet-rooms and stair-lifts.

Wherever possible, the council makes sure an occupational therapist attends any viewings of adapted properties so we are satisfied it is suitable for the applicant's specific requirements.

If you would like to discuss your housing options please contact the Home Options team by calling **0344 980 3333**, or visit us in person at City Hall (closed Wednesday mornings). More information is available at **www.norwichhomeoptions.org.uk**.



Housing contracts, repairs and maintenance update

Help us improve more homes

Our surveyors at NPS Norwich are currently looking at the condition of homes (inside and out) in the Fiddlewood and Old Catton areas of the city. These surveys should be completed shortly. So if you received a letter, but your survey has not yet been carried out: please contact the surveyor directly using the details on the letter or call us on **0344 980 3333** to arrange for a survey of your home.

We will be carrying out surveys in the Mile Cross area between May and July and letters will be sent to all affected tenants shortly.

The information we gather is used to plan our work for the next financial year, which includes new kitchens,

bathrooms, electrical upgrades and heating installations. Last year's surveys resulted in the programmed replacement of more than 1,400 kitchens and 1,100 bathrooms.

Our surveys are a very important part of maintaining and improving your home and many tenants are currently enjoying new kitchens and bathrooms which, without a survey, they would not have received.

Some tenants have had to wait an additional year or more before receiving their upgrades because the surveyor was not able to gain access, so please help us to improve your home by arranging for your survey to take place.

New Right to Buy rules

Buying your home is more affordable than ever thanks to changes to the Right To Buy scheme.

As a result, the maximum discount has increased from 60 to 70 per cent of the property's value, and the £75,000 discount cap will also go up in line with the consumer price index rate

of inflation, making buying your home now more affordable than ever.

The changes are due to come into effect in late spring, pending a change in the law.

For more information on Right to Buy, visit **www.norwich.gov.uk** or call the customer centre.

Share your views and win

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 Walker of Whitebeam Court was the winner of Gasway's January prize draw. Mrs Walker says she was "very happy with the man who came to fix her boiler and took the time to explain everything to her. She was delighted to win the draw as a result of sharing her feedback."

Did you know you can also return your Gasway surveys by completing them online? Just go to the web address on your form!

Greener homes, smaller bills

NPS Norwich Ltd have been piloting new green technology and making energy efficiency improvements to a selection of council homes across the city.

Thermodynamics

The Lawrence family were the second to benefit from a new thermodynamic hot water system that heats the water via a roof-mounted panel. This technology doesn't rely on the sun. So the water is heated all-year-round and saves the household money in gas and electricity bills.

The hot water is stored in a larger than average cylinder to ensure nothing is wasted. Since moving in mid-December, the Lawrences have only used electricity to heat the water on one occasion – an impressive feat considering there are eight people living in the property!

They were still waiting for their first energy bill at the time of going to print, but the new system should generate significant savings compared to their previous homes bills.

Mrs Lawrence says: "We are very impressed with the system and the engineers have been really helpful in explaining everything to us.

"We feel very lucky and would definitely recommend the council put these in more homes."

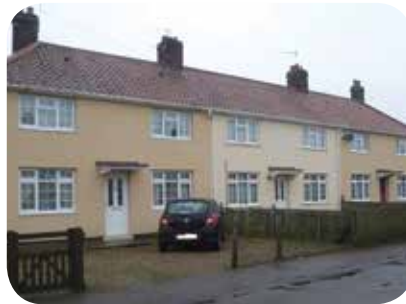
External wall insulation (EWI)

With the help of ECO funding from energy companies we have installed EWI to 68 homes that were unable to benefit from internal cavity wall insulation.



The Lawrences and their six children are delighted with their new boiler system (from left to right); Cambell, Lewis, Jack, Ethan, Curtis and Georgia.

EWI wraps around the outside of the property making the home warmer and cheaper to heat by reducing heat loss. As well as improving energy efficiency the coloured render used also gives the properties a great new look, as can be seen below at Blomefield Road.



Internal wall insulation (IWI)

This has been trialled on eight flats at Suffolk Square that were suffering from high energy bills and problems with damp and condensation caused by the building's construction. The installation of insulated panels to reduce heat loss in rooms with external facing walls has

resulted in residents reporting greatly reduced energy bills. IWI also reduces noise within the home and so is ideal for flats and homes near busy roads.

Boiler with flue heat recovery

We've successfully carried out a trial installation of a new gas boiler that recovers waste heat from gases ordinarily lost along the flue.

The boiler was installed at a property where the tenant was struggling with high energy bills due to a very inefficient boiler. Now the tenant is seeing reductions in the gas bill of up to £20 per month.

Next steps

Chris Rayner, head of service at NPS Norwich Ltd, explains: "External wall insulation is planned for a further 96 homes in the coming financial year. We look forward to delivering more energy efficiency improvements to tenants' homes following full analysis of these trials."

Contacting Norwich City Council



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.

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.

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.

Do you have a good neighbour?

Win
£100

- Is there an unsung hero in your neighbourhood who deserves to be recognised?
- Do you know someone who helps others with shopping or gardening?
- Perhaps your neighbour is a great listener and a good support to you?

a winner, who will receive a £100 prize.

The person you put forward must be a Norwich City Council tenant and will not be eligible if in breach of their tenancy agreement.

You have until **Friday 30 May** to make your nomination.

We'd like you to tell us!

Fill in the form below and post it to service development team, Norwich City Council, City Hall, Norwich NR2 1NH, or take it to City Hall. Or send an email to involvement@norwich.gov.uk with all the details asked for on the entry form below.

A panel made up of Norwich City Council tenants will select



Last year's winner – Fay Wales (pictured right)

Your name:

Your address:

Name of good neighbour:

Address of good neighbour:

Reason for nominating:

Please use a separate sheet and give as much information as possible.



Join us in Wensum Park for our
FREE Easter funday.

Easter treasure hunt, face painting
and fun games for all the family.

Wednesday 16 April 1pm – 4pm

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.