

# tlc

Tenants' and leaseholders'  
community magazine



ie awards  
2014

Gold award for  
Council of the Year



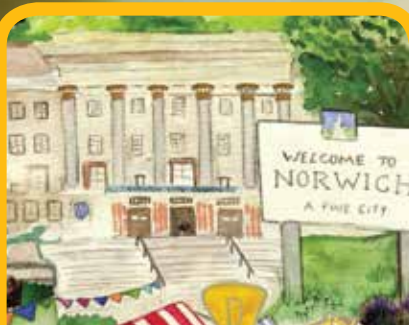
**NORWICH**  
City Council

**Autumn/Winter  
2014**

**Tenant  
approved**



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

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

Congratulations to this year's winners of the Good Neighbour Award and to everyone who was nominated. It's great to see there is no shortage of community spirit in our neighbourhoods.

As we move into the winter months I ask you all to look out for your neighbours as this is a time when people can become quite isolated.

It's fantastic to see the progress we're making as a housing service, detailed in this year's annual report, and I would encourage you to have a look at the full version online, or request a copy if you're interested to know more.

The recent ARCH (Association of Retained Council Housing) award gives us something to celebrate, but we must not become complacent. Our review of our Local Offers has given us a new set of priorities to work towards, and we need your help in order for that to be successful.

I invite you to request a patch panel in your local area, so we can discuss ways we can work together to improve your environment. There are funds available for estate improvements, so please do make use of them.

There are also funds available to help those hardest hit by Welfare

Reforms, so don't forget to make an application for Discretionary Housing Payments if this applies to you, or speak to one of our budgeting advisors.

I am delighted to see the formation of the new sheltered housing improvement panel, which will help guide the development of the service, and I look forward to working with them in the future.

We hope you enjoy this last issue of *TLC* for 2014 and wish you all a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the Christmas funday.

## 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](http://www.norwich.gov.uk)** or call **0344 980 3333** to request a copy.



*TLC magazine* is recorded by Norwich CHATTERBOX and is available on CD. If you require this magazine in another language or format eg large print, audio cassette, CD or Braille please phone **0344 980 3333** or email **[info@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:info@norwich.gov.uk)**

*Cover image: Mr & Mrs Newman, this year's good neighbour winners.*

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Norwich City Council events

# Good neighbour awards 2014

**On 25 September, this year's good neighbour finalists attended a tea party in the Lord Mayor's parlour in celebration of their achievements.**

After speeches from the Lord Mayor and tenant judges, Mr and Mrs Newman (pictured on the cover) were crowned this year's winners for the many years of support shown to their neighbour, Mrs Ashford.

Mrs Ashford, who nominated the Newmans, was very touched to see them win the award and said: "They are absolutely

marvellous. My neighbours are so helpful and friendly. Without them these past nine years, my life would have been horrendous. I wish I could give them a pair of wings, they are my angels."

The Lord Mayor congratulated every neighbour nominated for making a positive impact in our communities and making our fine city an even finer place to live.

She said: "The competition is about recognising selfless people, who in their everyday acts, without seeking recognition for themselves, make such a difference to the lives of others.

"The appreciation for these good neighbours is evident from all the heartfelt entries we receive and it's fantastic to be able to acknowledge the wealth of help and support so generously given and so gratefully received."

*The Lord Mayor and this year's good neighbour finalists.*



## Putting tenants first

At the annual ARCH (Association of Retained Council Housing) awards held in Birmingham, in September, we claimed top honours for 'Putting Tenants First'. We were awarded the accolade for being the council that has done the most to encourage and support tenant empowerment.

The ARCH ceremony brings together tenants and officers from councils across the country which all still own and manage

their council homes (of which there are about 100).

Tenant involvement panel member, Cym Cant, accompanied by two of our tenant involvement officers, attended the ceremony to receive the award on behalf of the council.

Our Local Offer pledges (described overleaf in our annual report summary) play a major role in our tenant

involvement activities. Based on your feedback we have set new priorities for the coming year, which include increasing opportunities for you to speak face-to-face with housing staff on your doorstep and have greater involvement in improving your own neighbourhoods.

**The full survey results and action plan can be viewed under 'Local Offers' on the A to Z of our website [www.norwich.gov.uk](http://www.norwich.gov.uk)**

# Annual report summary 2013-14



Annual report focus group – left to right: Alyson, Peter, Eunice, Nick Downes (tenant involvement officer), Vic, Gypsy and Chris.

**The following pages give a brief overview of our latest annual report to tenants. Tenants and council officers work together to produce this report, which we hope you will find of interest.**

You can view the full-length version by visiting [www.norwich.gov.uk/annualreport](http://www.norwich.gov.uk/annualreport) or call us on the number below to request an alternative format.

If you have any comments about the report or would like to be involved in producing next year's publication, please email [involvement@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:involvement@norwich.gov.uk) or call the involvement team on 0344 980 3333.

## **Tenant involvement, empowerment and customer care**

Local Offers are a set of pledges we have made that are based on what you've said is important to you. In December 2013 we reviewed our pledges to see if you felt our services had improved. Over 550 tenants responded to the survey and key results indicate that our Local Offers have been successfully delivered.

### **Local Offers pledges:**

1. We will provide a variety of opportunities for you to get involved in shaping the service you receive.
2. We will improve the way we communicate with you.
3. We will work with you to make your neighbourhood cleaner and safer.
4. We will offer you more chances to be involved in the delivery and monitoring of the repairs and maintenance service.



### **We have achieved our Local Offers pledges by:**

- developing an email-based readers' panel
- using tenant inspectors to inspect home upgrades
- providing training and shadowing opportunities for our involved tenants

- organising fundays and walkabouts for tenants to talk to staff face-to-face
- using the tenant involvement panel to award the tenant tick to our literature
- discussing performance information at various focus groups and tenant scrutiny meetings
- implementing estate audits, estate management improvements and assisting tenants' and residents' associations with garden projects
- providing tenancy awareness sessions and welfare reform events to give you up to date information on important issues
- maintenance target monitoring being carried out by the tenant scrutiny panel
- celebrating your achievements through training graduations and tenant events
- 28 tenants completing our tenant training programme.



James Ellis from Foster Property Maintenance Ltd giving Mia her prize.

## Customer Service Excellence (CSE)

We have retained our CSE accreditation for the next three years and our landlord services are compliant across all 57 elements of the accreditation. In addition we have been awarded 'Compliance Plus', for what the assessors described as an "outstanding multi-level approach to customer consultation."

staff training and also put up new signs to make it more visible when floor cleaning is taking place. This has now been implemented in all tower blocks.

- A complaint was received about the changing of shed locks when properties are re-let. We now only change locks on sheds that are aligned to a specific property.

## Events and fundays 2013-14

Support from our contractors enabled us to provide residents with a variety of events and fundays, incorporating free entertainment for all the family, with opportunities for tenants to engage with staff members.

*"A very well organised event. All the staff were happy and friendly. Thank you."*

## Listening to your views

As a housing service, we learn from your complaints. For example:

- Complaints about pigeon mess on the balconies of Seaman Tower led to us placing a kite on the top of the tower to act as a deterrent to the pigeons.
- A resident slipping due to a wet floor sign not being visible near the lift led us to carry out

## Sheltered housing

Following extensive consultation with residents, the refurbishment of St James sheltered housing scheme will take place. A new front entrance and reception area will transform the look and feel of the communal space, and each individual flat will be converted from having a separate kitchen and lounge into a more light and functional open plan living area.

# Your home

## Upgrades, adaptations and improvements

We have completed the second year of our five year programme to deliver the Norwich Standard to all homes by 2017. So far we have:

- Installed over 2,174 kitchens, 1,188 bathrooms, 1,857 composite doors, 1,794 new boilers and 515 re-wires.
- Completed a range of external works such as door canopies, boundary walls, footpaths and fences as part of the estate aesthetics programme.

- Carried out external wall insulation (EWI) and associated thermal comfort measures to nearly 60 properties.

## CASE STUDY

Neil recently had his kitchen upgraded by Foster Property Maintenance Ltd. He was able to choose the units and materials. Neil commented on how the work has transformed the kitchen and made it a pleasure to cook in.



Leader of the council, Cllr Brenda Arthur, at the Pointers Field site where new homes are being built.

## New homes

In February, at Pointers Field in Catton, construction began on the first Norwich City council-owned homes to be commissioned since 1992. The council is committed to building 250 more over the next five years.

# Your tenancy



*Cym, a tenant panel member shadowing the home options team.*

## Housing options

It's been another busy year for the housing options team, with an increase in customers approaching us for advice. Housing options is a service focused on providing specialist housing advice at the first point of contact. In an average month we will take 1,500 phone calls, see 1,000 customers in person, give specialist housing advice to 200 households threatened with homelessness, investigate 50 homeless applications and carry out 150 home visits.

We have also extended our housing advice drop-in sessions to make them more accessible.

### *Cym commented:*

"I found the home options shadowing session very informative. I was also impressed with the information staff had to hand and how they dealt with each individual in a personable manner."

## Responding to Welfare Reform

The housing income team has employed two budget advisers to help council tenants manage their household budgets under the challenges being brought about by welfare reform.

Nearly 500 people came to the 'Take care of your welfare' event at The Halls last April, where information was on offer about the effect of benefit changes. In March 2014 'Ready for Work?' another free public event was jointly hosted by Norwich City Council and

Norwich Jobcentre Plus to help local people looking for work and new opportunities.

We have amended procedures to make it easier for people affected by welfare reform to move to more suitable homes, in certain circumstances, even if they have accumulated rent arrears. We are also publicising water meters as a good way to save money on household bills and providing Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to those hit the hardest, with income officers helping claimants complete the forms.



*The Welfare Reform event which took place at The Halls.*

## CASE STUDY

Our budget adviser, Darren, spoke to a tenant as he helped her complete an application for Discretionary Housing Payment. They discussed ways of reducing her bills, which included savings of £5-£6 per week by switching to a water meter, a dual discount deal from British Gas, saving £150 per annum, Warm Home discounts saving her over £135. She was also put in touch with Age UK for support.

# Your neighbourhood

## Neighbourhood agreement

Working with council officers, the Catton Grove Rising resident group surveyed 1,000 local homes and identified six key issues, which were; fly tipping, litter/rubbish, speeding, antisocial behaviour/crime, inconsiderate parking and dog fouling. Residents and local groups pledged to tackle these issues together by signing up to a neighbourhood agreement.

## Antisocial behaviour

This year the Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 was enacted by parliament, making some changes to the powers available to us, along with some victim focused provisions. The council is currently consulting



Catton Grove Rising group

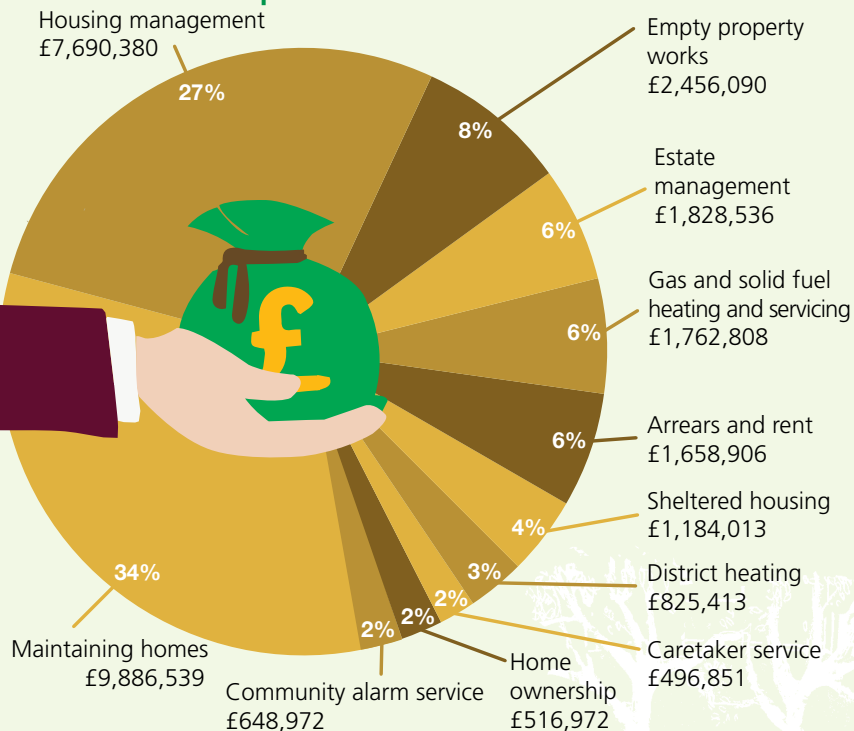
with the police and other local authorities in Norfolk regarding these changes, and more information will be available in due course.



# Value for money

## What we have spent

Housing management  
£7,690,380



## Key achievements

1. Customer Service Excellence Accreditation for our landlord services with 'Compliance Plus' in consultation.
2. Building work underway on the first new council houses to be built in Norwich since 1992.
3. All properties prepared for re-let within a target time of just 16 days.
4. LetNCC (our private sector leasing scheme) will shortly celebrate its 1000th let to someone in housing need.
5. The housing service has performed well in comparison with other councils with housing stock of 10,000 or more.
6. We have made savings of £1.7 million in 2013/14.
7. Estate Management Improvements (EMI) projects have increased confidence in the council.

## Help us stop tenancy fraud



Council housing is a valuable asset. Because of this, we all have a duty to make the best use of public resources in order to ensure homes go to the people who need them most.

### What is tenancy fraud?

It is estimated that at least one council home out of every 100 is being illegally sublet, or the keys sold, by the tenant, to another person or family. This means that at least 150 council homes in Norwich are potentially being illegally occupied.

### What are we doing to prevent this?

Our housing officers carry out regular home visits to check the stated tenant is in residence. During the visit you will be asked to prove your identity and allow us to inspect your home, while also having the opportunity to raise any issues you may have about your home or tenancy. Going forward, all new tenants are being photographed at sign-up to provide another layer against tenancy fraud.

We also run checks against national databases that reveal where an individual is living at more than one address and carry out

further investigations where necessary.

### What you can do to help

If you know someone who sub-lets their council home, lives in a property they shouldn't or has lied to obtain housing, please speak to your housing officer or call the dedicated fraud hotline on **0800 055 6242**.

You can also use the 'Contact us' form to report this under the 'Forms' section within the 'A to Z of services' via **www.norwich.gov.uk**. We will then check who is living in the property and take the appropriate action.

### What happens when tenancy fraud is discovered?

Tenancy fraud is a criminal offence and can result in a prison sentence and recovery of rent from those found guilty. But importantly, it means a home will become available for someone who genuinely needs it.



## Improving services through surveys and personal data

When you complete one of our satisfaction surveys we record your name and address and may also use personal information we already hold about you when we analyse the results. Linking the results to information on gender or age, for example, enables us to know whether or not men rate our services higher than women, or if there is a common point of view among a certain age group.

We only ever publish the collective results and everything is done in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Understanding data in this way helps us to improve services and better serve the needs of all our customers.

**If you would like to know more about how we store and use your personal information, please refer to the guide that's published under 'Surveys and personal data' on the A to Z of our website [www.norwich.gov.uk](http://www.norwich.gov.uk) or speak to a member of staff.**

# Sheltered housing update

## Tenants living in our sheltered housing schemes now have a new and exciting way to influence the service they receive.

Tenant representatives have worked hard with us to redesign the way we consult with older tenants who live in the 26 sheltered housing schemes across the city. Tenants agreed that a more focused approach was needed and, following a very successful recruitment process, the Sheltered Housing Involvement Panel (SHIP) was created.

The SHIP is made up of seven tenant panel members and meets every two months. Its role is to review policies and procedures for the sheltered housing service, as well as looking at improvements such as upgrading warden call systems, scrutinising how sheltered housing communal areas are used and the continuous improvement

of sheltered housing for current and future tenants.

One of the new panel members, Jenny, says: "It is important the views of sheltered housing residents are represented by tenants who live in sheltered housing, who understand it, and can ensure the views of all residents are taken into consideration."

Although the SHIP is now in operation, it is equally important that

*Members of the new panel starting their tenant training.*



we develop and sustain tenant involvement at individual schemes. Tenants are encouraged to attend their scheme meetings where various issues as well as wider council issues can be discussed. All meeting dates and times are displayed on the tenants' notice boards in each scheme and are attended by the designated sheltered housing officer.

If you would like to know more about the work of the panel, please contact the tenant involvement team:

**e: [involvement@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:involvement@norwich.gov.uk)**  
**t: 01603 212829**

## Improve your neighbourhood



*Patch panel at Sleaford Green.*

We held two patch panel events at Sleaford Green in September, to talk to residents about what

improvements they would like to see in the area.

As a result of these we are now currently looking at installing new benches and clothes drying areas, as well as making improvements to pathways, barriers, and fencing around the site.

Neighbourhood housing team leader, Richard Dunsire, says: "We have recently carried out successful estate improvement projects at St Stephens and St James Close and we have funds available to do more.

"Patch panels are a great way to meet informally with housing staff and your neighbours to discuss issues affecting your local community, and can act as a great first step in making real improvements to an area."

**If you would like a patch panel where you live, email [involvement@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:involvement@norwich.gov.uk) or speak to your neighbourhood housing officer on 0344 980 3333.**



# Housing contracts, repairs and maintenance update

## Fuel burners and open fires

The number of tenants installing their own solid fuel burners, or opening up previously blocked fireplaces is on the increase. This trend has greatly increased the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning caused by a faulty appliance or open fire (either through poor installation or lack of maintenance).



Your tenancy agreement states that you must get our written permission before you carry out any improvements or alterations to your home. We do not generally give permission for fuel burners or open fires, due to the significant health and safety risks and potential additional costs to the council.

If you install a solid fuel burning appliance or open up a fire when you have not been given permission to do so, you are in breach of your tenancy agreement and we will take steps to ensure your property is made safe. The cost of this work will be charged to you.

For homes with pre-existing appliances that are maintained by us, please ensure you:

- check the appropriate fuel to burn
- allow an adequate supply of air in the room for the fuel to burn correctly
- do not seal up any air bricks or grilles
- remove any ash before filling up with new fuel
- have chimneys swept once a year by a HETAS registered engineer (please ensure you allow us access for this inspection and that your appliance or open fire is not lit, and is cold).

## General home improvements

Other improvements you will need our written permission for include satellite dishes, kitchen or bathroom fittings, conservatories, or any work that may require planning permission or building control approval.

We will only refuse permission for an improvement with good reason, such as if the work would interfere with maintenance to the property.

The installation of laminated flooring to a property is an example of an improvement that could potentially interfere with maintenance, such as if you have a leak to an under-floor water pipe. In these cases we would expect you to arrange for the flooring to be lifted yourself. Laminate flooring is notoriously difficult to re-lay once it has been lifted, hence the placement of this type of flooring should be

considered carefully before you request permission.

If we have to lift laminate flooring in the event of an emergency repair, we will not be responsible for the cost of any damage, or the replacement of the flooring.

Please see our leaflet **'Tenant's own improvements to council homes: A guide for tenants'** for further information.

## Tackling damp this winter

As we head into the winter months, condensation within our homes will start to increase. To help prevent it, we need to understand how it occurs.

### Why do I get condensation?

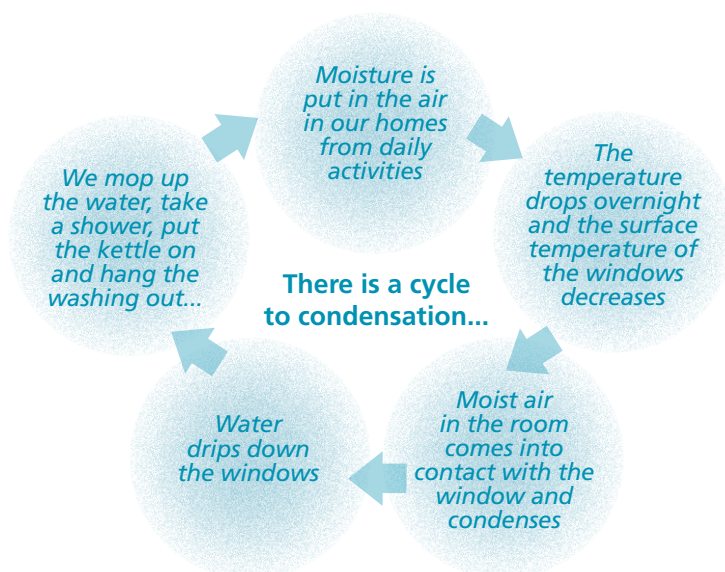
There are three main factors that decide whether or not you get condensation:

- The level of moisture in the air.
- The air temperature of the room.
- The surface temperature of the windows.

Moisture in the air comes from things such as drying clothes inside, boiling water, bathing, showering, open flame gas style heating, even your breath!

The warmer you keep the air in the room the more moisture the air can hold. And the greater the difference is likely to be, between the air temperature in the room and the surface temperature of the windows, particularly as they cool overnight.

The colder the windows, the more likely it is that condensation will occur. And the condensation can form with even less moisture in the air. This is why we see more condensation in the winter and less in the summer.



### What should I do?

Look at where you are creating moisture in your home and see what can be done to prevent it getting into the air. For example:

- put lids on boiling saucepans
- shut the kitchen door when cooking
- use the extractor fan when taking a bath or shower
- don't dry washing on the radiators.

A dehumidifier can provide a great cost-effective solution to removing the excess moisture from the air and will make your home feel warmer by removing the 'damp chill'. This in turn will mean that you can turn your

thermostat down and potentially reduce your heating bill.

Please remember to wipe off any water that has condensed on surfaces as soon as it appears because this will prevent mould from forming and spreading.

If you don't currently have extractor fans fitted in your kitchen and bathroom, please report it via the 'do it online' button on the homepage of our website **[www.norwich.gov.uk](http://www.norwich.gov.uk)** and we will arrange for one to be fitted, where it is possible to do so. Alternatively, you can report this via our customer contact centre on **0344 980 3333**.

## Winter gritting

When temperatures are set to reach zero degrees or below, our contractors will be out gritting the main footpaths and car parking areas of all sheltered housing schemes. Instances of heavy snowfall will be cleared from

these same areas, the following working day. Any issues around gritting or snow clearing should be reported to the sheltered housing officer for your scheme in the first instance. There are over 300 grit bins on the streets

throughout Norwich for tenants and leaseholders to use.

For a map of the city's grit bins, as well as advice on how they should be used, please visit **[www.norwich.gov.uk/gritting](http://www.norwich.gov.uk/gritting)**

# 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)

Join our housing team for our  
annual Christmas funday!

FREE

PRIZES

Thursday 11 December  
3.30pm to 7pm

Harford Community Centre, Peterkin Road, Norwich NR4 6LQ



- ★ visit Santa's grotto and get a FREE gift
- ★ Christmas card making
- ★ festive games
- ★ Tuckwood Primary School Choir
- ★ refreshments
- ★ face painting
- ★ children's entertainment
- ★ **FREE EVENT**

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)

## Loss of gas or electricity?

If you have lost your gas or electricity supply you should contact your energy supplier directly in the first instance.

## 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)